Collage and Photography late 60’s Vancouver

In the late 60’s and early 70’s collage and photography coexisted without a hierarchy of distinction. Young artists took on these secondary pursuits to undermine painting and search for a personal authenticity. Both Collage and Conceptual photography became a counter tradition to painting and sculpture. To many young artists at the time, painting had already established too many determinates and limited arrangements. The awareness of Conceptual art with photography and collage was an attractive cosmopolitan alternative.

Collage was a cameraless practice of cutting up, collapsing and dismembering available magazines, pictures, text and various materials. The opposite of photography, collage has a disregard to the conventional objective representation of reality and allows the reconfiguration and an “editorializing” of subject matter. Traditionally collage was seen as a means of producing a ‘new’ reality with alienated elements. In my case both collage and photography were not to be concerned with building a ‘new’ (aesthetic) unity. Instead these two differing practices were put to task to play a role in the dialectical critique and the cognition and questioning of the real world. Collage with photography could also be blown up and enlarged to even a billboard size and produce provocative to subversive pictures of photos, text and material. Both practices provided a direction of discovery in a time of a rapidly changing contemporary culture and social change.

In photography the urban typologies and serial imagery that revealed Vancouver as a non place were lessons learned by my correspondence and working with Smithson and Ruscha. The pictures in this show provide an existential rhythm of life and the city appears objective or neutral with a frozen topography of urban sameness. The idea was to see the city as both forming and in a state of disillusionment. I have provided a number of black and white pictures taken in 1969 within a few blocks of the Apartment gallery space. The prosaic aspirations of these pictures with their contemplative intent were produced while driving in a car as the camera and the windshield as the lens.

Forty years later and especially when one looks at old photos they seem to become even more interesting in the future. They are a record of history, esp. of a past urban topography with all its regional articulations. These pictures taken forty years ago were meant to orientate the artist /viewer as mobile pictures in the new urban metropolis. The idea of history here is actually treated as a verb from the Greek ‘Istorin’ meaning to ‘find out for oneself’. The early pictures are the location scouting in the land tracts of the city a developing photography of ‘Vancouverism’.

August 15th 2009.