

2233

MARCH 16 TO 30, 2011
2233 GRANVILLE STREET
VANCOUVER, CANADA

A boarded-up window is a profile of disinvestment. It is a moment when poverty does for the investor what it alone can accomplish: to serve as a place-holder for maintaining low property values, perhaps while re-zoning hearings drag on into the night. A flowing stream of capital is captured and tightly held together in a vicious collapse. Yet the collapse does not come home to roost because it is *already present*, perched at the site of primitive accumulation gained through simple land-rent. What happens, however, when a short-circuit in the network brings the devaluation back onto its origin? Is there a collapse before the “primitive accumulation” begins – when the detonation is in the home of the bombmaker?

When in 1976 Gordon Matta-Clark, with BB gun in hand, shot at every window at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, the work was removed and the Institute’s windows were boarded up before the exhibition opened. The act was a displaced gesture of anger and social antagonism. As a statement of conviction in the midst of absurd privilege and wealth, it made the connection between urban decay and urban regeneration – it claimed that both were a product of human activity and the decisions of the state, in which regeneration, as quickly as it had been rebuilt, would turn to decay at another site of crisis. Matta-Clark’s piece brought the collapse home, to paraphrase Martha Rosler.

Today, the windows at 2233 Granville are boarded up with rotting plywood, not unlike the Institute’s windows in New York in 1976. Instead of a mark left by institutional disavowal, the eye-level barricade now points to a separate displacement. Taken in from the panorama of Granville Street, the boarded windows are a foil to Balcone’s next-door neighbours: Heffel, Equinox, Monte Clark – the same galleries that contribute to the illusory fictions of capital and its fairy tale commodities. In this incarnation, Balcone has locked its doors and boarded up its windows, making the decision not to comply with the visual logic of the street.

The artist has described the work as the placement of a “void” within the Granville streetscape. In a temporary absence of immaculate surfaces, the passerby is confronted with something that causes the eye to look at angle. The empty space becomes an obtuse blindspot. In the form of an image of urban decay – as a subliminal gesture towards metropolitan death – the void enters into our periphery. We are made to look awry, testifying to the fact that in French “blindspot” is literally *angle mort*.

The daily existence south of the Granville Street Bridge is, by apparent contrast, a zero-level of cultural luster, spectacle, and perpetual design. In drawing attention to itself, Granville Street seems to garner what Adorno once called the

vollkommene Dies da – “perfect ‘look, here!’”¹ According to Adorno, this perfection is the precise site of the blindspot. “The new is a blind spot, as empty as the purely indexical gesture ‘look here.’” An abject visual intervention in the luxury environment represents the impending fate of total design, but it is also therefore the *substitution* of blindspots. In one direction, it is a type of yearning for the clarity promised by the former blindness. In the other direction, however, it exposes the logic of capital at a moment of skewed looking. Peters’ work can be read as a two-way slogan: *look at this perfect dead angle!*

Or rather, 2233 is a blind window, to use a phrase from Jeff Wall. The concept of the blind window plays on the ocular form of the window and the blinding effects of a window-covering (the coverings in Wall’s *Blind Window* series are constructed of makeshift plywood boards, serving as “blinds”). *Blind Window no. 2* is shot from within the building and draws a parallel between architectural dwelling and the human body, each operating as an “evocation of blindness as experienced from within,” as Michael Fried has written. But whereas Wall’s blind spot is attached to dwelling in the form of an invocation, in which the site is an “embodied” site and the building desires to “see,” for Peters it is a question of a body made blind by the site itself. It is the building that teases us with blindness rather than the blind building that desires seeing.

To complicate matters, pinned to the plywood and attached to the door of the gallery is a notice that resembles an application for social housing. The notice states:

A rezoning application has been made in compliance with the C-3A District Schedule for a variance of the property situated at 2233 Granville Street, Vancouver BC V6H 3G1.

The purpose of this application is to develop non-market social housing in compliance with the Single Room Accommodation (SRA) Bylaw with development commencing as of March 31st, 2011.

The words activate a litany of responses: confusion, fear, plausibility, outright negation. Social housing on Granville Street? The idea appears at first utterly impossible. At present, in the middle of a housing crisis, hundreds of units of promised social housing sit empty at the Athletes Village in False Creek. It is the simple premise that “the poor don’t deserve to live in high-end, waterfront property” which maintains this raw injustice. As the history of the twice-closed Granville HEAT shelter testifies, Granville Street is similarly the “wrong” place for social housing, even while the rich cynically funnel loft-capital into the downtown eastside on grounds that poverty must be “deconcentrated.” Is it not plain for everyone to see that deconcentration is the name of a police operation? With poverty exploding in every crack of this province, amidst ongoing neoliberal restructuring, the question becomes, *deconcentrate to where?* 2233 draws us towards the inevitable answer of any wealthy stronghold: *anywhere but here.*

In Vancouver today, there is a relentless drive to make Gore into the new Granville, and push matters all the way along Kingsway in a mobile sweep. This is why city councillor Kerry Jang cynically states that if the poor are given the right to shelter along the Kingsway corridor, it will only be in mobile shelters. As Jang reports to the *Courier*, “The plan is to put

temporary modular units on those sites and then move the units elsewhere if the city or developer wants to build on those properties at a later date, if and when land values rise.”² Social cleansing takes the form of a permanent and mobile crisis. When it is poverty rather than wealth that requires deconcentration, the state is given a new authority and the poor are reduced to naked life, suspended in an open state of exception.

We are disposable, because if the ideal is Granville Street, *we do not exist*. But let us be everything, and let the state be nothing. Granville Street itself is a fiction – an illusory appearance of commerce as though it were not in crisis. In and amidst galleries of polished glass and insolent luxury – in the shadow of abject poverty – the street is imagined in its own short-sightedness: as an exclusive space of pure circulation. Capital has survived, in the words of Henri Lefebvre, by “occupying space,” by continually producing space in its own image.

Yet on the ground there is a simple gutter, a discarded wrapper, a fiery pool of oiled-soaked rainwater, some occurrence to plague the stronghold and remind passers-by of what they already know: the image of capital, with all of its grandeur and opulence, is in reality decided always in advance because it is nothing but a social relation. Capital is plunged face first into its own de-formation and deflagration. Its symptoms are clear: eviction, indignity, precarity. Somewhere, always, at all times, there is a proliferation of morbid symptoms: broken windows, boarded up door fronts, a scrawl of graffiti – all tell tale signs of urban decay.

To the developer, city councillor and planner, these are simply the failures of social policy. An errant administrative rapport becomes an unfortunate moment when the police and its state apparatus attempts to control, survey, secure itself against its own illegitimacy. Profit-making hits a road-block and the social crisis intensifies, yet the barrier is a hurdle, a steeplechase, and moat, all-in-one. There is a leap-over and a wade-through, only to have the players re-emerge fresh-faced and as strong as ever. At a time when wealth is the extraction of a rent value, whether in industry or real-estate, it is crisis alone that drives accumulation. This is the secret formula of gentrification and its “rent gap”: buy low and sell high. In its unquenchable conquest of space through time, buy low means crisis *here*, sell high means crisis *elsewhere*.

By placing the crisis within the heart of Empire, Peters states that “here” and “elsewhere” are one and the same. There is only one world. The art of the impossible uncovers the dominant consensus of fragmented calculations, under the name “critique.” But it also makes a new reality immanently sensible, suddenly accessible to an expanded possibility. It not only matches but mobilizes the inexhaustible motto of potentiality: *to negate what has been and open up the possibility of what never was*.

Andrew Witt + Nathan Crompton

2233 is presented by the Hammock Residency, which is an ongoing project supported by Balcone.

The Hammock Residency is a collaborative art project founded and directed by Vancouver artist Heidi Nagtegaal. Residencies take place in her house and other spaces in East Vancouver made possible through community partnerships. If you are an artist and have an idea for a residency please visit Hammock’s website for more information. Applications are received year round with flexible programming. Hammock focuses on the process of making art. It is a community hub, happenstance event space and good space to let things happen. It’s the spaces between the thoughts that inform the thoughts and ultimately the art object. Applicants from all creative backgrounds are welcome. www.hammockresidency.com

Balcone is a nonprofit society that presents contemporary art projects in a variety of situations and spaces throughout Vancouver. Without a permanent location, we operate with mobile offices and flexible programs that are reactive to social, political and economic challenges within the local arts community. Our mission is to create a unique context – outside of traditional frameworks – for the practice, curation, and exhibition of contemporary art in Vancouver and beyond. Our primary purpose is to advance education by establishing and maintaining artistic programs for the benefit of the community. www.balcone.org

¹ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Continuum, 2002) p. 27

² Michael McCarthy, “Mobile Home,” *Vancouver Courier*, January 20, 2011