cinema & disjunction

Adrian Blackwell's *Night Equals Day* and Daniel Young and Christian Giroux's *Every Building, Or Site, That a Building Permit Has Been Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006* form the first program of the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT)'s Cinema and Disjunction. The initial projects presented under this framework defamiliarize and interrupt everyday experiences of the city through alternative approaches to urban space and cinematic time. The project title is drawn from Bernard Tschumi's book *Architecture and Disjunction*. To express the program's intention in his terms, these films "reinscribe the movement of bodies in space, together with the actions and events that take place within the social and political realm of architecture."

The two films in this programme draw heavily on art historical and urbanist precedents, reflecting the diverse aesthetic and theoretical interests of the three makers. Both works are the product of novice filmmakers and their scale as 35mm films shot under rigorous constraints is ambitious, drawing on their backgrounds in architecture, urban studies and sculpture.

Blackwell's *Night Equals Day* employs complex camera control to record a day at a single point of Toronto's Regent Park Public Housing Project, at the intersection of Sackville and Oak Streets, compressing the twelve daylight hours of the fall equinox into thirty minutes of film time, one frame per second, and one three-hundred-and-sixty degree camera rotation per hour. Throughout the day the camera makes twelve complete rotations, beginning at dawn facing north and ending to the north just after dusk. Aperture adjustments are kept to a minimum, allowing for the changing intensities of light to register on the film as the sun moves through the sky and clouds pass.

By using computerized motion controls, the film maintains an illusion of democratic framing, capturing whatever passes in front of the lens as the camera scans. Scientific films and the structural work of makers like Michael Snow (*La Région Centrale* [1971] and *One Second in Montreal* [1969]) are strongly felt in Blackwell's piece. However, it is the precise computerized motion control that separates *Night Equals Day* from Snow's *La Région Centrale* and other works of the period, which have the appearance of machine control, but were in fact manipulated by hand via remote control. Of course the illusion of scientific objectivity is just that—an illusion. While the structural rigour outlined in the description above was the intent for the shoot, practical considerations changed the final outcome.

The film was shot twice, the final version on 04 October 2008, more than a week after the Fall Equinox due to weather and site complications. The 3000' of film was exactly equal to the half-hour of film time required for the twelve hour day. However the time required for set-up and magazine changes meant that the film had to be sped-up slightly after each thousand-foot roll. While these compromises with reality moved the work away from a perfectly scaled relationship between film time and real time, the intended form of the film was privileged. This discrepancy between the real and the ideal is a dilemma that Blackwell highlights in both his sculpture and urban research.

The intersection of Sackville and Oak Streets in Regent Park is loaded with a web of associations for Torontonians. For the first half of the twentieth century the site was part of the working class neighbourhood known as Cabbagetown. In 1948, the City of Toronto razed the neighbourhood from Gerrard Street, south to Shuter and from Parliament east to River, to build what was Canada's first large-scale public housing project. A mix of low- and high-rise apartment blocks were interspersed with parks and the streets were blocked and replaced by pedestrian walkways. The development attempted to resolve the social and economic issues faced by residents by re-engineering the space. The early optimism that framed this urban experiment to "change behaviour" and reduce economic marginalization was illustrated in the National Film Board's documentary *Farewell to Oak Street* (1953). However over time this propagandistic vision lost its credibility as the neighbourhood slowly regained its reputation as a locus of poverty and violence within inner-city Toronto.

Blackwell's film was shot at the moment of the second redevelopment of Regent Park. With endemic social problems and an average income of less than half the Toronto average, debates about the neighbourhood are ongoing. The construction seen to the southwest in the film is the first in a series of towers that will gradually replace the old low-rise buildings, seen to the north and east. These buildings are slated to be a mixture of market rate and subsidized housing, almost tripling the neighbourhood's population, and changing its demographic mix from 100% rent geared to income units, to 40% subsidized and 60% market units. This encroachment of the private sector into social housing has raised concerns about a reduction in affordable housing in the surrounding neighbourhood and loss of publicly owned land currently used for housing to the private sector.

The picture described above has also been illustrated in the music video for "Born and Raised in the Ghetto" by Regent Park hip hop act Point Blank. The video contrasts archival footage from *Farewell to Oak Street* with contemporary footage of the neighbourhood and the demolition of the buildings at the site shown in *Night Equals Day*. The lessons of the '40s and '50s seem to have been lost on the newest planners and developers while remaining clear to local residents, musicians and artists. Many parallels can be drawn between the current Regent Park redevelopment and that at the Woodward's site in Vancouver where public-private partnerships have raised intense concern for the local residents' continued stake in the downtown eastside.

As an urbanist involved in theoretical and practical approaches to social justice within the city, Blackwell has worked on numerous projects that have set the context for *Night Equals Day*. Especially important is *Ambience for a Future City* (2002), a collaboration with Kika Thorne that involved participants from Regent Park Focus / Catch da Flava, a youth media production centre based in the neighbourhood, to re-imagine their physical space through a conversation and design process. This collaboration was extended on the set of *Night Equals Day* as staff of Regent Park Focus assisted on the first shoot in spring 2008, and a video projection of the film was screened at the Regent Park Film Festival in November 2008. While the political implications surrounding *Night Equals Day* are readily apparent through this description, the work itself remains open. The film presents the day's activities of construction, people and traffic passing, in equal measure with the changing light and sky. By reserving judgment and didactic gestures, Blackwell's film presents the viewer with a field of possible interpretations. This openness is mirrored in Young and Giroux's *Every Building…*, where different orders of time and space present another facet of urban transformation.

In *Every Building, Or Site, That a Building Permit Has Been Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006*, one sees an accelerated Toronto represented by 130 building sites. These highly aestheticized images, shot all over Toronto, develop a time-based response to photoconceptualism's language of architectural photography. This thirteen-minute 35mm film is made up of short (eight second), static shots in contrast to Blackwell's use of duration and continuous pans. The shots also use a number of different focal lengths and lighting conditions, revealing the nature of their fabrication in time and emphasizing Young and Giroux's focus on a workman-like maintenance of the film's conceptual gestures and framing.

Every Building… works to represent the on-going changes in Toronto's landscape. Like *Night Equals Day* it pursues an objective structure, approaching the status of a filmed document, but ordered as a collection of images rather than as a continuous scan. Organized by the chronological sequence in which permit applications for the construction of new commercial buildings were issued in Toronto in 2006, *Every Building…* presents this collection of buildings in its

entirety, both complete and incomplete, along with sites still awaiting construction or those that have been abandoned. In its proposed form as a continuous loop in a gallery installation, the project has no clear beginning or end and the viewer is free to roam in and out at any point. In its current form as a discrete, cinematic work, its structure behaves differently: both the brevity of the shots and the film's function as an inventory are heightened. The structure of the film and the framing of the shots speak to the history of photoconceptualism by consciously evoking Edward Ruscha's books of the mid- to late- '60s, particularly his *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965) which presents a series of 32 post-war Los Angeles apartments, captioned by their addresses.

The reference to Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) is clearly articulated in the title and also echoes Stan Douglas's *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2001). Both of these photographic works present views of a presumed totality, one through an artist book work and the other through a large-scale composite photograph. A distinguishing feature of Young and Giroux's project is its cinematic and sequential form. While Douglas uses distinctly filmic devices in his control and composition, they enter the space of film from photographic referents. Where Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* and Douglas's *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* present representations of singular places, Young and Giroux wander around the city to sites only connected by their entry into the bureaucratic process of permitting.

In the film, the dramatic tension staged by the lighting and scale of Douglas's photograph is replaced with a discrete series of images in motion all shot with available light. Young and Giroux's *Every Building…* brings Ruscha's strategies in *Some Los Angeles Apartments* to the cinema. By focusing on the inventory of buildings without any criteria except their place in a sequence, they follow a greater formal constraint than Ruscha, yet by referencing his framing they maintain a direct link across mediums.

The buildings shown in the film vary widely, from the liquor store recently opened down the street near LIFT's former offices, to schools, condominiums, and a Hindu temple (whose blocks were hand carved and shipped from India), to a disturbing quantity of self-storage units and fast food restaurants. While spread from the inner-city core to the suburban fringes, the buildings represented display a striking uniformity in their design.

Downtown residents may experience an almost visceral reaction to the architecture of the contemporary suburbs everywhere here, yet the artists insist on their interest in the suburbs as the ubiquitous edge condition—the everyday spaces of the working and the middle classes, service workers, and new immigrants. Like Ruscha's books, the film brings to mind a line from Chris Marker's film *Sans Soleil* (1983): "I've been round the world several times and now only banality still interests me. On this trip I've tracked it with the relentlessness of a bounty hunter."

There is a temporal coincidence between this recent film and Young and Giroux's first public sculpture commission, *Reticulated Gambol* (2009), a multiplication and condensation of monochromatic playground equipment built in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough. This concurrence illustrates the connection between their film's interrogation of the city and their sculptural practice, which draws on standardized components and geometric structures. It is this curiosity about the forms of the contemporary urban environment and the ideology and economics underlying its production that they share with Blackwell. These related inquiries reserve judgment, presenting a perspective on the city that is open to the viewer's own experience. The strength of the work lies in revealing, not only a condition of space, but also the location of the viewer within it.

-Ben Donoghue

Adrian Blackwell is a visual artist whose work focuses on forces of uneven development produced by Postfordist urbanization. His sculpture and photography use a minimal vocabulary of forms to propose locations for potential activity and examine separations within urban space. His work has been exhibited at artist-run centres and public galleries across Canada, at the 2005 Shenzhen Biennale and at Toronto's 2006 Nuit Blanche. Blackwell co-edited *Unboxed: Engagements in Social Space* with Jen Budney. In 2008 he screened *Night Equals Day* at the Cinematheque Ontario and had a solo exhibition, Models for Public Spaces, at the Art Gallery of Mississauga.

Daniel Young and Christian Giroux are visual artists based in Toronto. They employ industrial materials and prototyping methodologies to produce works that reflect upon the history of abstraction, and the imbrication of social meaning and phenomenal experience. Although primarily object makers, they also deploy maquettes, drawings and film to explore the structural logic of objects and spaces. Their work has been exhibited at the Power Plant in Toronto, Aceartinc in Winnipeg and their first major public commission, Reticulated Gambol, will be completed at Lee Centre Park in the spring of 2009. They are represented by Diaz Contemporary in Toronto.

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Monday February 9 | 7:30 pm
Pacific Cinemathèque Pacifique
and DIM

1131 Howe St, Vancouver
www.cinematheque.bc.ca

18 years+
$9.50 / $8 students
Cinémathèque membership $3

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Night Equals Day
Director: Adrian Blackwell. Canada 2008. 35mm silent. 30 mins.

Every Building, Or Site, That a Building Permit Has Been Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006
Directors: Daniel Young, Christian Giroux. Canada 2008. 35mm silent. 13 mins.