Expanding Notions of Home: Conceptualizing and Representing Global Consciousness in Vancouver

Victor Li, a Canadian citizen and son of Vancouver's largest 'home-makers' Li Ka-Shing, likes to tell people "my home is Cathay Pacific Airlines, seat 1A."[1] Li's family company, Concord Pacific Developments, has been responsible for the creation of over 15,000 new homes in downtown Vancouver in the past twenty years. On a Cathay Pacific airplane, Victor Li luxuriates in the great expanse of airspace in a place between countries, continents and the cities of Vancouver and Hong Kong. That the notion of home has expanded its meaning to include a first class seat on an international flight signals a disruption to prior connotations of home.

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Li is part of what geographer Katharyne Mitchell has described as the "transnational elite ... professionals and business people living and working in several global sites and involved in the control of capital and information between these sites" as they "negotiate the spaces of late capitalism to their supreme advantage."[2] Most Vancouverites are not as mobile as Victor Li. And yet the influence of Li (and the likes of Li) is leaving a profound mark on Vancouver's local landscape.

GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS

According to official reports and rankings, Vancouver is not an important global city. It is neither a significant node in the global economic system, nor is it an important centre for international policy; it is not a platform city, a media city or even a particularly open city.[3] And yet, many of the most distinctive characteristics of Vancouver – its multi-ethnic diaspora, the presence of off-shore developers, and its brand recognition – are the result of a high level of interactivity with other places and networks in the world. The sociologist Roland Robertson described globalization as "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole."[4] The notion of consciousness is an interesting one because it draws focus to social aspects of globalization. And it raises the following question about Vancouver, a culturally diverse city whose metropolitan region is home to over two million people[5]: is a greater Global Consciousness changing the nature of home?

While consciousness may be a slippery thing to quantify, what *is* quantifiable in Vancouver is the rise of immigration to the city as well as the rise of condominium development within the city. From 1981 to 2006, the immigrant population in Vancouver grew from 29% to 39%. (The City of Vancouver website uses a different calculation from the 2006 census and claims that in this year the total immigrant population in Vancouver was 45.6%.[6]) In that same time period, the share of condos in the owner-occupied dwelling calculation for Vancouver rose from 5% to 31%.[7] While these rises may appear to be unrelated, scholars have twinned the phenomenon through their observations of immigration patterns and globalization in the past 15 years. According to the geographers Gillad Rosen and Alan Walks, "immigration and globalization in combination help foster demand for downtown residential space in affected cities … in addition to the high number of immigrants, there are also substantial numbers of non-permanent residents that settle in the city-region for work or study purposes."[8] Other scholars have also written about this twin phenomenon, notably Allen Scott in his 2011 article "Emerging Cities in the Third Wave." Scott theorizes that a new logic of city building has emerged that derives from a city in which the economy is governed by flow rather than production. This flow includes information, ideas, finance, trade and people.[9] Under third-wave urbanism, suburbanization is eclipsed by centralization and the intensification of the city core as well as gentrification.

Vancouver is a textbook example of third-wave urbanism. The condo-ization that is part and parcel to third-wave urbanization is the result of a change in the legal framework governing urban space. Condo development has exploded in Vancouver (as well as Toronto) since the statute was introduced in the late 1960's. From 1981 to 2011, the number of owner-occupied condominiums in Canada increased from about 171,000 to 1,154,000. Fundamental to condo-ization is the creation of a form of "double" ownership in which individual units are owned and these same buyers share ownership of common spaces in the building.[10] The manifold and three-dimensional inscriptions of ownership lines in the condo are incongruous and misaligned with the translocal space of the immigrant. Translocality, theorized by Michael Peter Smith, is the "criss-crossing transnational circuits of communication and cross-cutting local, translocal, and transnational social practices that come together in particular places at particular times and enter into the contested politics of place-making."[11] The space of the condo is bounded and finite while the translocal spaces created by immigrants is unbounded, multi-scalar and 'criss-crossing'. This paper will query the incongruous yet twinned condition of the immigrant and the condo in order to explore how contemporary notions of home have (or have not) expanded.

Figure 1: *Vancouver False Creek 1978 and 2003,* photo from the City of Vancouver

Table 6
Population and immigrant population in Canada's MTV CMAs, 1981–2006.

Variable	Year	Toronto	Montreal	Vancouver	Canada
Population	1981	2,998,947	2,828,349	1,268,183	24,343,180
	1991	3,893,046	3,127,242	1,602,502	27,296,860
	2001	4,682,897	3,426,350	1,986,965	30,007,094
	2006	5,113,149	3,635,571	2,116,581	31,612,897
Share of condos from total owner-occupied dwellings	1981	6%	1%	5%	2%
	1991	8%	4%	10%	4%
	2001	10%	5%	17%	6%
	2006	19%	13%	31%	11%
Percent immigrants of total population	1981	38%	16%	29%	16%
	1991	38%	17%	30%	16%
	2001	43%	18%	37%	18%
	2006	45%	20%	39%	20%
Condo dwellings, percent immigrant (primary maintainer)	1981	55%	39%	38%	38%
	1991	51%	21%	34%	32%
	2001	58%	18%	39%	33%
Share of female household of total population (primary maintainer)	1981	29%	30%	30%	25%
	1991	32%	35%	33%	30%
	2001	35%	41%	37%	36%
Condo dwellings, female household (primary maintainer)	1981	28%	27%	42%	32%
	1991	37%	39%	44%	40%
	2001	43%	48%	46%	46%
Share of one person households	1981	22%	24%	27%	20%
	1991	22%	27%	27%	23%
	2001	22%	31%	28%	26%
Condo dwellings, one person households	1981	12%	19%	27%	15%
	1991	19%	19%	28%	22%
	2001	21%	25%	25%	26%

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census Profile Series, 20% Sample Data; Statistics Canada, Census Public Use Microdata, Individuals File and Households Files (samples vary by year and file from 1% to 3%) and Statistics Canada, Census Custom Tabulations, E985, 20% sample data.

THE CONDOMINIUM

The first strata title building (or condominium) in Vancouver was erected in Port Moody in 1968. Since 1968, the condominium has become the fastest growing home type in Vancouver, increasing in number nine times faster than any other type of home.[12] The double ownership model of a condominium enables owners to privately own a unit and also have an undivided share in the common property of the building. Prior to 1968, land in Vancouver could not be subdivided vertically. The UBC Law Professor Douglas Harris describes the condo-ization of Vancouver as: "a legal innovation without peer in its capacity to increase the density of private ownership in land, has provided the legal architecture of ownership for the remaking of Vancouver."[13]

Condominiums have playfully been called: "Land without Earth" (Pitman 1962); "A Hybrid Castle in the Sky" (Schwartz 1964); "The Flying Fee" (Shiff 1970); and "Property in Thin Air" (Gray 1991).[14] Less playfully, scholars are finding the condominium to be the site of neoliberal subjectivities. According to Rosen and Walks, "the condo is a key component of a privatized, neoliberal metropolitan habitus, as demonstrated by the associations between condo living and support for privatization, as well as the re-conceptualization of the home as investment."[15]
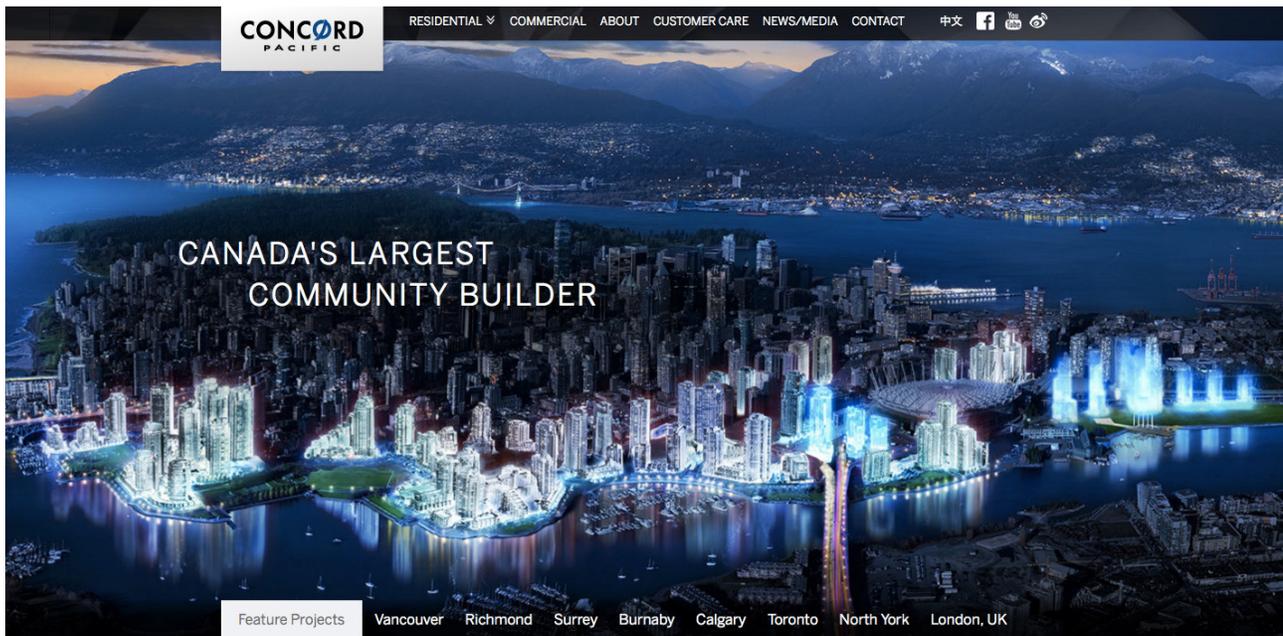
The key components to the condo as neoliberal metropolitan habitus include ownership as investment and speculation, and the privatization of the collective. The collective is responsible for security, upkeep, infrastructure, and tenant–landlord relations – jobs that used to be the purview of the City.[16]

The ownership that that individuals experience is absolute. Entering into a secured lobby exposes the owner to the shared common space and all of its delights: a concierge sometimes, shiny mailboxes, a gym, industrial-size garbage dumpsters, etc. Enter the owner into his or her own unit and a experiences a sense of boundedness and control over ones domain. The political positioning amongst members within a strata can therefore be trying because each owner experiences an equal sense of entitlement and control.

PLURALITY AND TRANSLOCALITY

In his paper "The Question of Cultural Identity," cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes globalization as an uneven process through which cultural identities are becoming more and more relativized: "The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self.' Within

Figure 2: *Population and Immigration Population in Canada's CMA's 1981-2006,* table from Rosen and Walks 2013
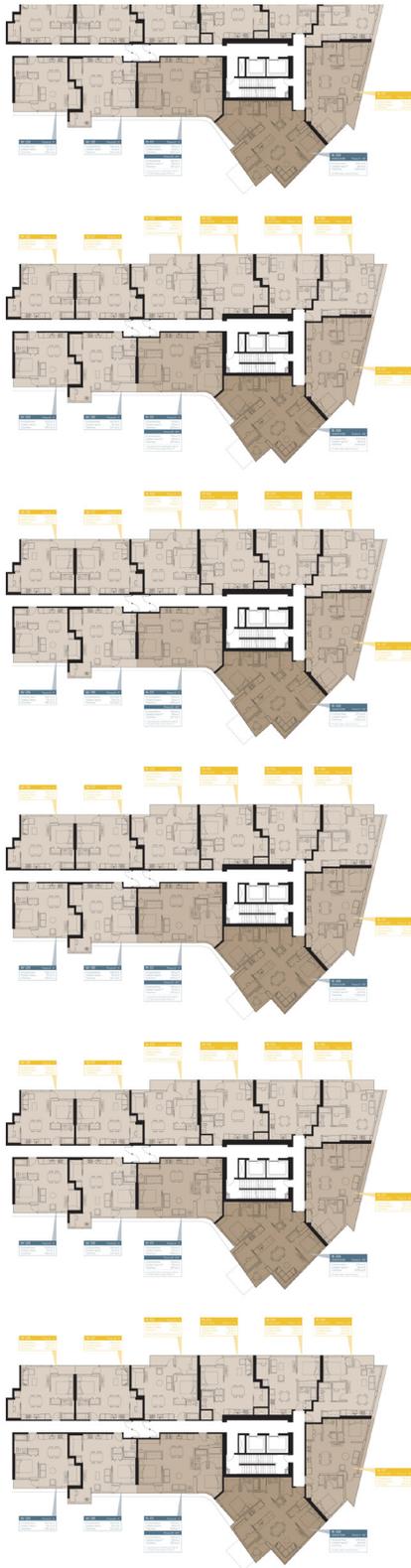
The Expanding Periphery and the Migrating Center

us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions so that our identi-fications are continuously being shifted about. … The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy"[17] (or perhaps just an outmoded ideal). Within the field of linguistics, the possibility that an individual can assume differ-ent identities at different times is well established. The term "bidialectalism" was coined in the 1950s to describe individuals who have "command of two regional or social dialects of a language."[18] Linguists found that, for example, an individual with Indian parents can speak to friends at school in a Canadian English accent, and to family in an Indian accent without even noticing the switch.

Despite his own interaction with and occupation of different time zones and spaces, Victor Li's influence on the creation of real spaces in Vancouver persists. Concord Pacific Place, Concord Pacific's largest development in Vancouver, has been touted as the first fully wired fibre-optic community in North America. Concord Pacific's Digital Neighbourhood connects residents to the world of digi-tal communications with high-speed modemless internet access. The integration of communication technology within these new homes aims to allow residents to connect more easily with family and friends across the globe despite differences in time and space.

The presence of many recent immigrants in Vancouver illustrates the phenom-enon of time-space dislocation in perhaps more palpable terms. According to the City of Vancouver website, the 2006 census showed that "45.6% of the total population were immigrants (defined as people who were not born in Canada)." The largest groups of recent immigrants, those who immigrated within the past 5 years, include people of Chinese, Hong Kong, Filipino, UK and Indian origin.[19] Often with strong ties to recent homelands, these Vancouverites participate in social communities as well as media and cultural phenomena that extend beyond the physical boundaries of the city. Thinkers such as Arjun Appadurai and Homi Bhaba would agree with sociologist Martin Albrow and others who argue that the construction of place in a specific location cannot be analyzed on the assump-tion that the local is prior, primordial or more real"[20] Movies from Bollywood, fashion magazines from Hong Kong, and the TV shows from China, all available in

Figure 3: *Concord Pacific Homepage, Concord Pacific Website*

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Figure 4: *Stacked Condos in Concord Pacific Place "One Pacific" Development*, Concord Pacific Website

Vancouver, are important ways to connect with 'home.' Home is a plural concept, one that does not rely on a singular and static notion of place. Appadurai labels the production of transposed localities translocalities.[21] He argues that people's tendency is to produce localities. Because people are increasingly moving across a more porous set of places that cross borders, the result are translocalities that may coincide and overlap within a given place.
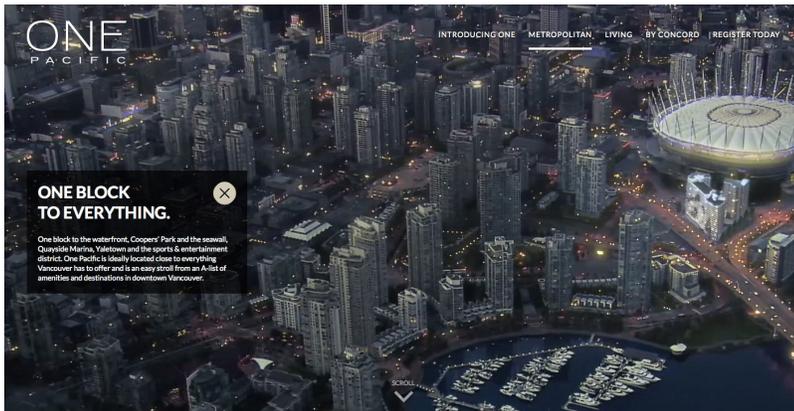
CONCLUSION

The conceptualization of Vancouver as globally conscious, as a site of coincident and overlapping translocalities has thus far elided representation. And with this, the changing nature of home in the city has been barely acknowledged in architectural form.

In a city composed of translocalities in which home is a plural concept, how is the landscape of cookie cutter floor plans that are stacked and repeated upon one another (as well as repeated from plans built in Hong Kong, Toronto and elsewhere), contributing to the formation of a relativized and possibly bidialectal subject. And how do these same cookie-citter floor plans engender plurality and difference?

When considering the twin phenomenon of the condominium development and the translocal spaces of the immigrant, one might ask if one exacerbates the other. Might the compact and tightly defined "double ownership" scheme of the condo with all of its rules and security systems push residents to imagine worlds that transcend (or violate) the lines of ownership and control? Another consideration is: can translocality be bundled and commoditised? One may bring to mind new developments outside of Vancouver such as Thames Town in Shanghai, China that sells buyers the experience of Olde England. Is a place like Thames Town actually a translocality in its entirety or is this an absurd concept?

Vancouver has been a city that resists new representations. Within the realm of built-form, the market is perpetuated by an attitude of playing it safe and repeating what has worked before. Repeat-repeat is the strategy of the cookie-cutter developments that Victor Li and his family company know so well. According to Architect and Professor Stephen Cairns, "Under a multicultural conception of national or metropolitan life, the split loyalties that accompany migrant dislocation are given public expression. Architecture and migrancy accommodate each other in an altered way in this context."[22] While the potential for architecture to play an active role in the expanding notion of home in Vancouver exists, its proponents are yet to emerge. In the meantime, may Victor Li, as he looks down from his home in the clouds, be inspired to consider a broader set of possibilities for the city.

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ENDNOTES

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Figure 5: *"One Pacific" Development*, *Concord*

Pacific Website