

Radiant City

Jesse Colin Jackson

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Pari Nadimi Gallery
September 18 – November 1, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Pari Nadimi Gallery is pleased to present *Radiant City*, a solo exhibition by Los Angeles-based Canadian artist Jesse Colin Jackson. Focused on Toronto's tower apartment neighbourhoods, *Radiant City* invites us to consider these conflicted sites and their evolving presence and status in our collective consciousness. Titled after Le Corbusier's "The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to Be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization," first published in English in 1964 and the origin of many of the design principles that characterize these neighbourhoods, *Radiant City* catalogues the towers at a pivotal moment in their history, and engenders new conversations about their visibility and vitality.

Jackson has been generating representations of tower apartment neighbourhoods since 2006. *Radiant City* is his most ambitious extension of this body of work to date. Through this new series of large-format still images, Jackson evokes the designed and lived intensities of Toronto's tower apartments, and their ubiquity and significance to the city. Frequently employed by policy makers and design professionals, Jackson's images are integral to ongoing efforts to revitalize these buildings. Close examination of Jackson's work, however, reveals ambivalence towards this progressive project in the face of the complexities these structures embody: arrival destinations for incoming immigrant populations, essential housing for one quarter of the city's population, the decaying location of much of Toronto's urban poverty, products of modern ideologies gone awry, and locations of past glory, current dynamism, and future potential.

PARI NADIMI GALLERY
254 Niagara Street, Toronto, Canada
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ESSAY BY GRAEME STEWART

Radiant City: The Future of Toronto's Tower Neighbourhoods

1. Radiant City : Foreword

In the mid 2000s, Jesse Jackson and I began to collaborate on a project that has since come to influence much of our work over the last decade. As graduate students at the University of Toronto, our interests converged on the topic of urban Canada's mid-century developer-driven mass housing. Jesse's documentation of these buildings and their landscapes (as displayed in the photos in this catalogue), have been instrumental in framing a new conception of Toronto and facilitating a dialogue about the future of our city, now evolving into a nationwide discussion.

Largely deemed "unfashionable" since the rejection of modernism in the 1970s, Toronto's two thousand some tower apartments buildings have been remarkable in their collective invisibility. At the time of our initial work, these buildings and the various issues surrounding them were nearly absent from urban discourse.

As we looked into these towers, our curiosity deepened. Quickly it became clear that our task was to make seen the unseen: to ensure that these towers and the extensive communities that call them home became central to emerging conversations about Toronto's urban future.

My interest in these towers was architectural and historical; where did these towers come from? What is their lived experience? And what is their place in 21st century urbanism? This line of inquiry has resulted in the emerging Tower Renewal initiative, described in more detail below in part two.

Jesse's interest, on the other hand, was more vesical. A native of Canada's west coast, Ontario's industrial, post-industrial and modern landscapes presented a fascinating and unfamiliar territory for discovery. Perhaps in search for a topography to fill the void of the west coast sublime, Jesse gravitated to the vast urban landscapes and verticality of towers and slabs in open space, bounded by ravines, highway interchanges, and rolling bungalow suburbia. The images that emerged brought to life scenes that, while capturing the ubiquitous, were completely unfamiliar to many.

During the years since Jesse began this documentation, these images have become fundamental to Toronto's nascent understanding of its broader self, a city more akin in many respects to post-Soviet landscapes than to the Jane Jacobs Victoriana upon which it has rested much of its self-conception. Jesse's images reveal more sides of Toronto's identity while avoiding the 'poverty tourism' usually associated with documenting such landscapes as bleak failures of planning. Jesse images frame these landscapes as dignified, intentional and considered, while showcasing their age and at times, incongruity.

Tower neighbourhoods are part of everyday Toronto: our arrival cities, our most diverse neighbourhood, and remarkable expressions of aging mid-century optimism. Jesse's documentary brings care and respect to these neighbourhoods.

I have used Jesse's images in my own work in books, web material for various Tower Renewal

initiatives, in resident engagements, and in hundreds of presentations at home and abroad. Recently, in a presentation at the Architecture Centre in New York, the images elicited comments about a “considered modernism” in Toronto’s towers, in contrast to the “bulk mass housing” that frame much of Moses’ New York. In a presentation in Finland, Toronto towers’ similarity to Helsinki post-war ‘forest tower modernism’ was celebrated. At home, residents from all neighbourhoods, including the towers themselves, see the city anew. Without these images, new understandings and new exchanges would not be possible.

Despite their ubiquity, these thousands of buildings have for too long been absent from Toronto’s public imagination. Jesse’s photos make them present, and through doing so, our understanding of our city if forever changed.

2. The modern slab and Toronto’s urban future

Toronto is a city of high-rises. With the introduction of planning policies in 2005 that supported intensification, hundreds of sparkling glass towers sprouted up and continue to rise in what was, for over a decade, North America’s largest high-rise housing boom¹ (this year, Toronto was over-taken by a resurgent New York). Yet the bulk of Toronto’s high-rise housing is actually the legacy of an earlier period of rapid growth: a post-war era defined by a startlingly different stylistic preference, namely brutalist architecture,

characterized by concrete towers.

Toronto’s Tower Renewal program is an emergent initiative placing these older towers and their communities at the centre of a conversation about Toronto’s urban future. As the city’s concrete towers reach half a century of service life, it is time to give them a second look. The photographs presented here give vivid focus to this conversation.

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Largely decentralized, these towers define the urban landscapes of suburban communities across the region. They create a carpet of slab buildings, about twenty storeys each, as much as twenty kilometers from the central city². Reminiscent of European modern mass housing found at the edges of Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Amsterdam and elsewhere, Toronto’s pattern runs counter to the North American tradition, rendering the city somewhat of an anomaly among its continental peers. While in San Francisco, Washington, Dallas, Boston and Chicago, dense city centres very quickly dissipating into low-density and often very low-rise ‘sprawl’, for the majority of Torontonians, high-density enclaves of modern towers began to typify the suburban experience, either directly or indirectly.

Recent accounting has identified just shy of 2,000 towers throughout Greater Toronto, housing roughly one million people³. While not part of the post-card image of the city—nor polite discourse related to ‘good’ urban planning—it is clear that this is a housing stock of regional, if not national significance.

¹ A record 147 towers were under construction in January 2014. Today the number sits at 107. (www.emporis.com)

² More than 80% of Toronto’s high-rise rental housing is located outside of downtown, often organized in grouped clusters forming high residential densities.

³ Stewart, Graeme. Jason Throne. *Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. Toronto: Ontario Growth Secretariat, 2010.

The origin of this planning can be traced to Toronto's being situated between the gravitational poles of the US and the UK in the 1950s. Many of Toronto's ideas of urban form, growth and aesthetics were a result of an influx of European émigrés—particularly UK expats doing a “stint in the colonies.” Attracted by Toronto's booming growth⁴ and the newly created Metropolitan Government tasked with planning the city's expansion, these expats and their local counterparts shaped the region into a thoroughly modern mould in the post-war years.

Yet, while stylistically similar to European models, Toronto's towers and post-war planning existed in a thoroughly North American property system: the towers in question were largely privately financed and developed as rental housing (with Government-supportive tax incentive and insurance schemes), and they were located within a typically North American “bungalow” suburbia. They represented a hybrid form of suburbanization, incorporating neighbourhood unit master planning with “New Town” high-rise models directly influenced by Stockholm's Vallingby, Helsinki's Tapiola and London's Roehampton. Primarily built in greenfields at the edge of the city, lush landscapes and heroic modern towers converged to make Toronto a thoroughly modern landscape.

The tower boom also targeted a new form of city resident: the apartment dweller. Prior to the Second World War, Toronto lacked a large volume of purpose-built apartment housing⁵. The post-war boom brought with it new values,

a new confidence, and the possibility of new lifestyles. The pull of these cultural shifts was not lost on developers; advertisements for the era proclaimed the new freedom and chic lifestyles of modern apartment living. Modern towers included underground parking, indoor pools, saunas and, of course, panoramic views of the expanding City. The future had arrived in Toronto.

By the boom's end, nearly half a million apartment units had been erected, primarily as a tool of outward expansion. This incredible volume of housing rendered 1950s Toronto unrecognizable, and represents the bulk of the region's purpose built rental housing stock to the present day.

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Half a century since their construction, Toronto's legacy towers play a very different role in the City than originally conceived. By the middle 1970s, the original target demographic for these towers—young professional singles and couples—had moved on. Shifting focus, towers began to be positioned as key affordable housing for the city's newcomers—a position that continues today. Tower neighbourhoods have become what researcher and journalist Doug Saunders has dubbed “Arrival Cities”: the towers are often the first home for New Canadians⁶. The Cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism for which Toronto is known (and to which much of its local identity is based), is most potent not in the themed neighbourhoods of the gentrified center, but the post-war modern

⁴ Toronto grew from under 1 million to over 3 in the immediate post war years. Today greater Toronto is roughly 6.5 million.

⁵ The model of Victorian values, apartments were in fact actively discouraged in Interwar Toronto as potential hot beds of immorality.

⁶ Tower Neighbourhoods are home to a range of demographics: Some home to one arrival group, Somali, Caribbean, Afghan, Russian, others a dense mix of new comers and more established populations.

landscapes of the suburban edge.

The remarkable shift in the demographics of the towers has brought growing challenges. Private owners, responding to concerns of latent liability issues, have introduced miles of chained link fencing into tower landscapes, delineating individual properties to prevent injury and trespassing, while removing designed or informal links between towers and from towers to neighbourhood amenities. Under the heavy sway of the North American legal and insurance systems, open plan modernism has evolved into cordoned-off and fragmented dormitories. Tower residents find themselves in a frozen and unresponsive urban landscape, specifically when it comes to their needs for access to amenities like family supports, newcomer settlement services, fresh food, shops, direct walking connections, and opportunities for entrepreneurs. While communities do thrive here, it is in spite of, not because of, these barriers.

And as these buildings have aged, they have also emerged as the most affordable private housing available, operating as a form of “shadow” social housing, providing homes to those with the least means. While this is a crucial role in the housing market, affordability is also a direct function of quality: isolated towers with maintenance backlogs, broken elevators and aging mechanical equipment are fetching the most affordable rents.

Not all is well in Toronto’s former utopias.

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Among housing forms, the tower block is a particularly emotional subject.

In discussions about the future of this housing stock, a debate rages in almost every country about its viability; those who advocate for demolition and replacement represent a powerful voice. When replacement does occur (typically in grand demolition ceremonies), it is generally public housing that goes, and often as political theatre—a poignant end for what is felt to be failed housing policies; a reboot of yesterday’s ‘slum’s with today’s housing vogue.

Yet the evidence in support of replacement is less than clear. Economic analysis generally indicates that full refurbishment can be achieved at half to a third of the cost of demolition and replacement. Moreover, when environmental costs are weighed (embedded energy in mid-century concrete is rather high), the argument weakens still. When social costs are examined, issues of displacement, fractured communities, and enterprise make the argument more questionable. In many cases, the great cost of replacement of these building has been felt justified for sincere quality of life issues; however, as a strategy, demolition should be used sparingly and pragmatically, not ideologically.

In Toronto, while a small number of public sector towers have come down, vast majority private ownership has rendered most tower buildings commodities and assets. Their removal is less likely, remaining at present uneconomic. The 1,800-odd towers in private hands appear to be staying for the long haul. A small number have even been listed as heritage buildings—as what is defined as “contributing

architectural cultural value” has expanded from the Victorian to mid-century and late modern.

Therefore, housing policies that work with existing tower urbanism to achieve quality of life, housing, and sustainability goals, are a local imperative.

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Initiated by a group of Toronto architects, community organizations, academics and policy makers, Tower Renewal is a response to growing challenges. The initiative has led to a series of linked efforts with the combined goals of expanding opportunities for community-led economic diversification, social infrastructure and cultural production in apartment neighbourhoods; and linking Toronto’s legacy of modern, planned tower urbanism to current projects of regional growth, sustainability and transit planning. Made into official policy by former Mayor David Miller⁷, Tower Renewal has set an ambitious agenda to place these aging towers as central to Toronto’s urban future.

The key premise of Tower Renewal places focus on the continued viability of the tower housing stock over the long term (with investment, this housing can last several more life cycles), and that existing tower landscapes provide a foundation on which a diverse range of uses, amenities, housing forms and infrastructures can be added. At its core, this urban initiative suggests that the legacy of modern planning that led to these neighbourhoods has resulted in a host of advantages to frame the next generation of regional investment and growth.

Most promisingly, with a relatively young and incredibly diverse population—many risk takers having travelled halfway around the world to get here—these communities are poised to become significant generators of economic, social and cultural production⁸. We just need to let it happen.

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In the decades following Toronto’s rejection of modernism—largely owing to the arrival of the late Jane Jacobs in the 1970s—modern towers did not fit into Toronto’s urban narrative. They were, in fact, antithetical to it. Today, they are emerging as central to a conversation about our urban future. One way or another, these aging buildings will define Toronto’s future as one in which these communities are leveraged to thrive, or one in which managed neglect leads to an inevitable and disastrous conclusion. The photographs presented in Radiant City capture these buildings at a pivotal crossroads. They are indeed worthy of a careful look.

Graeme Stewart is a Principal of Toronto based ERA Architects and a Director of the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal. He is a key initiator of the Tower Renewal Project in Toronto, and the co-editor of *Concrete Toronto: A Guidebook to Concrete Architecture from the Fifties to the Seventies*.

Graeme and Jesse have been collaborating in matters related to Toronto’s tower blocks since 2006.

⁷ Mayor’s Tower Renewal Opportunity Book. Ed: Graeme Stewart. Toronto: City of Toronto, 2008. www.towerrenewal.com/?p=164

⁸ See *Toward Healthy Apartment Neighbourhoods*. Toronto Public Health, 2012. www.cugr.ca/than

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3151 Bridletown Circle, Toronto



170 Chalkfarm Drive, Toronto (The Oaks)



190 Exbury Road and 2269 Jane Street, Toronto



75, 100, and 150 Graydon Hall Drive, Toronto



2737 and 2757 Kipling Avenue, Toronto (Riverside Apartments)



240, 260, and 270 Scarlett Road, Toronto (Lambton Square)



85 and 95 Thorncliffe Park Drive, Toronto (Leaside Towers)



1850 Victoria Park Avenue, Toronto (Greenbrier North)



714 and 716 The West Mall, Toronto (The Buckingham)



511 The West Mall, Toronto (Bransfield House)











Precursor projects

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Figure Ground

West Lodge

Landmarks and Monuments

Figure Ground
Gladstone Gallery
May 5 – 22, 2011

655 Broadview Avenue and 10 Hogarth
Avenue, Toronto (Montcrest Apartments)

7 and 9 Crescent Place, and 102, 104, 106,
and 108 Godwood Park Court, Toronto
(Crescent Town)

2600 Don Mills Road, Toronto
(Hunter's Lodge)

10 Edgecliff Golfway, Toronto

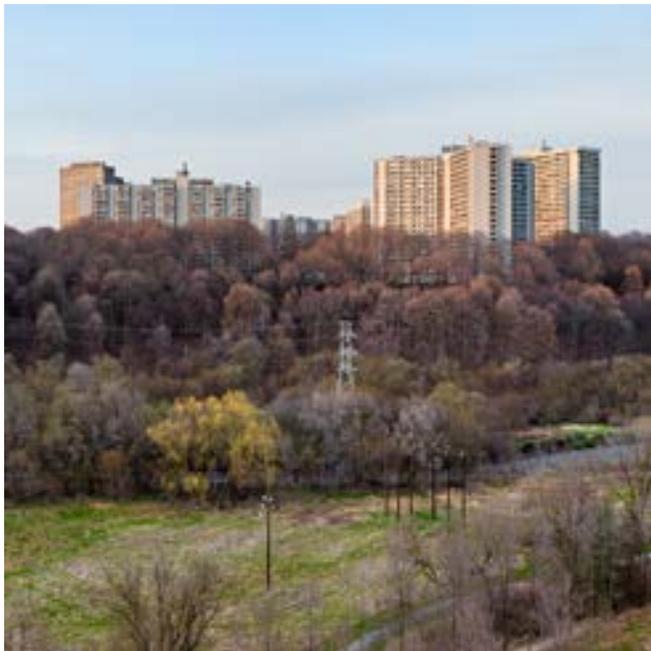


40 Godstone Road, Toronto

75, 100, and 150 Graydon Hall Drive, Toronto

35, 43, and 47 Thorncliffe Park Drive, Toronto
(Rideau Towers)

110 and 130 York Mills Road, Toronto



West Lodge
Convenience Gallery
February 25 – March 25, 2009

103 and 105 West Lodge, Toronto



Landmarks and Monuments
Larry Wayne Richards Gallery
May 10 – 31, 2007

10, 15 and 25 Martha Eaton Drive, Toronto

20, 30 and 40 Falstaff Avenue, Toronto

55, 65, 75 and 85 Emmett Avenue, Toronto

46 and 50 Panorama Court, Toronto

2415 and 2425 Jane Street, and 190, 195 and 200
Exbury Road, Toronto

234 and 245 Albion Road, Toronto



260, 270 and 280 Scarlett Road, Toronto

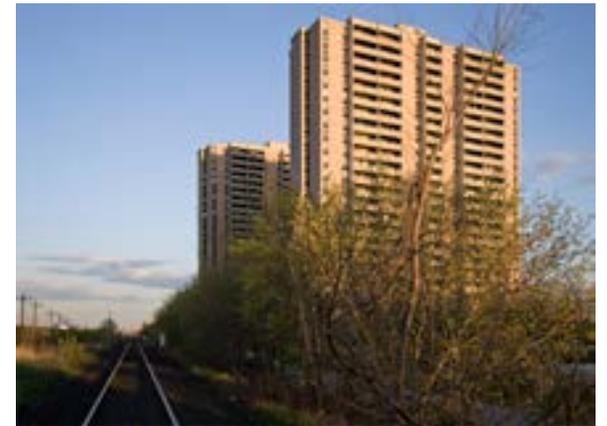
320, 240, 270 and 390 Dixon Road, Toronto

1440 and 1442 Lawrence Avenue West, Toronto

1765 and 1775 Weston Road, Toronto

2737 and 2757 Kipling Avenue, Toronto

3370, 3380 and 3390 Weston Road, Toronto



BIO

Jesse Colin Jackson's research practice is focused on object and image-making as alternative modes of architectural production, manipulating forms and ideas found in virtual and built environments through the use of digital fabrication and visualization technologies. Jackson seeks to make notable and visible contributions to interdisciplinary knowledge in the form of autonomous creative products. To this end, his process is propelled by collaborative engagement with allied intellectual frameworks, including anthropology, ethnography, informatics, speculative design, and urban studies. The objects and images that result embody knowledge that inhabits the space between disciplines, while also creating novel opportunities for meaning.

Jackson's solo exhibitions include *Marching Cubes* (Pari Nadimi Gallery and the Experimental Media Performance Lab, 2016), *Radiant City* (Pari Nadimi Gallery, 2014), *Automatic/Revisited* (Latitude 44 Gallery, 2013), and *Usonia Road* (Larry Wayne Richards Gallery, 2009). Jackson has received project funding from the Ontario Arts Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology, the Centre for Innovation in Information Visualization and Data Driven Design, and the Digital Media Research and Innovation Institute. Jackson was a 2014-2015 Hellman Fellow at the University of California, a 2008-2010 Howarth-Wright Fellow at the University of Toronto, and a 2009 nominee for the Canada Council for the Arts Prix de Rome for Emerging Practitioners. Jackson is an assistant professor in the Department of Art at the University of California, Irvine. He taught previously at OCAD University and the University of Toronto.

DISSEMINATION

- 2015: *Toronto 2020*
 WORKShop, Toronto, July 28 – November 28, 2015.
 Group exhibition. One image from *Radiant City*, and
 one image from *Figure Ground*.
- Radiant City, Twice Removed: Toronto's Tower
 Neighborhoods, Aesthetically Considered*
 Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard
 University, April 22, 2015. Public talk featuring images
 from *Radiant City*, *Figure Ground*, *West Lodge*, and
Landmarks and Monuments.
- Birch, Eugenie et al. "The World's Most Livable
 Cities." *Metropolis* (July – August 2015). Front cover,
 104 – 105. Three images from *Radiant City*.
- Cizek, Katarina. *HIGHRISE: Universe Within*. Multi-
 media documentary. National Film Board of Canada,
 2015. highrise.nfb.ca. Five images from *Figure
 Ground* and *Radiant City*.
- Jackson, Jesse, Roderick Grant, and Patricio Davila,
 eds. *Urban Ecologies 2013*. Toronto: OCAD
 University, 2015. 2 – 3, 360 – 361. One image from
Radiant City.
- 2014: *Pari Nadimi Gallery*
 Metro Convention Centre, Toronto, October 23 – 27,
 2014. Part of Art Toronto 2014. One image from
Radiant City.
- Mays, John Bentley. "The Building, Through a
 Rose-coloured Lens: A Photographic Show
 Celebrates the Postwar High-rise in a Way Le
 Corbusier May Have Envisaged – Verdant, Sunlit, and
 Full of Promise." *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto,
 Canada), October 3, 2014. G1 – G2. Also online
 as "Photos Uncover the Everyday Beauty of Toronto's
 Post-war High-rises," October 2, 2014. Review of
Radiant City.
- Blackett, Matthew. "Photo Exhibit opens Thursday
 on Toronto's Tower Neighbourhoods." *Spacing
 Toronto*, September 17, 2014. spacing.ca. Coverage
 of *Radiant City*.
- "Photos Uncover the Everyday Beauty of Toronto's
 Post-War High-Rises." *Docomomo Ontario*,
 October 2, 2014. docomomo-ontario.ca. Coverage of
Radiant City.
- "Radiant City: Photo Exhibition of Toronto Towers."
Toronto Tower Renewal, September 16, 2014.
 towerrenewal.com. Coverage of *Radiant City*.
- 2013: *Tectonic Echoes in the Age of Information*
 Department of Design, Ohio State University, February
 4, 2013. Public talk featuring images from *Figure
 Ground*, *West Lodge*, and *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- Tectonic Echoes in the Age of Information*
 Department of Art, University of California, Irvine,
 January 24, 2013. Public talk featuring images from
Figure Ground, *West Lodge*, and *Landmarks and
 Monuments*.
- 2012: *Photorama 2012*
 Gallery TPW, Toronto, November 30 – December
 8, 2012. Group exhibition. One image from *Figure
 Ground*.
- Urban Ecologies: Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in
 Toronto*
 Department of Anthropology. University of Toronto.
 November 22, 2012. Talk for the course *Political
 Ecology* featuring images from *Figure Ground*, *West
 Lodge*, and *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- Petricone, Pina, ed. *Concrete Ideas: Material to Shape
 a City*. Philadelphia: Oscar Riera Ojeda, 2012. 158 –
 159. One image from *Landmarks and Monuments*.

- Stewart, Graeme et al. Towards Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods. Toronto: City of Toronto, 2012. 2 – 3. Two images from *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- Bush, Catherine, and Michelle Elleray, eds. *The Parkdale Project 2012*. Toronto: Toronto District School Board, 2012. Front cover. One image from *West Lodge*.
- 2011: Lorinc, John. “Prioritized: City Hall Has a Responsibility to Help Toronto’s Neighbourhoods in Need Succeed.” *Spacing* 22 (Fall 2011). 35. One image from *Figure Ground*.
- Tower Neighbourhood Renewal Symposium* University of Toronto, May 12, 2011. Poster presentation featuring images from *Figure Ground*, *West Lodge*, and *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- Canadian Housing Observer 2011*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2011. 142. One image from *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- 2010: Cizek, Katarina. *HIGHRISE: One Millionth Tower* Multi-media documentary. National Film Board of Canada, 2010. highrise.nfb.ca. Two images from *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- Hulchanski, David. *The Three Cities Within Toronto: Income Polarization Among Toronto’s Neighbourhoods*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010. 13. One image from *West Lodge*.
- Stewart, Graeme, and Jason Thorne. *Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2010. 1, 2, 5. Three images from *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- 2009: Malczewski, Ian. “Towers of Power: Can New Thinking for High Rises Revitalize a Priority Neighbourhood?” *Spacing* 15 (Fall 2009). 56 – 57. One image from *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- Gamulin, Emina. “West Side Story: A Q&A With Local Artist Gene Mastrangeli on His Latest Project.” *The Liberty Gleaner*, May 2009. 11. Coverage of *West Lodge*.
- “Must-See Shows.” *NOW Magazine*, March 5 – 11, 2009. 48. Coverage of *West Lodge*.
- Kesik, Ted, and Ivan Saleff. *Tower Renewal Guidelines: Comprehensive Retrofit of Multi-Unit Residential Buildings in Cold Climates*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009. Front cover, vi, 3, 25, 42, 55, 134, 168, A-70, B-4, back cover. Ten images from *Landmarks and Monuments* and *West Lodge*.
- 2008: *Mayor’s Tower Renewal: Opportunities Book*. Toronto: City of Toronto, 2008. Front cover, 3, 5, 17, 22 – 23, 42 – 43, 99, 106 – 107, back cover. Nine images from *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- 2007: Stewart, Graeme. “Toronto’s Modern Suburbs and the Concrete High-Rise.” In *Concrete Toronto: a Guidebook to Concrete Architecture*, edited by Michael McLelland and Graeme Stewart. Toronto: Coach House, 2007. 216 – 217. One image from *Landmarks and Monuments*.
- Stewart, Graeme. “The Suburban Slab: Retrofitting our Concrete Legacy for a Sustainable Future.” In *greenTopia: Towards a Sustainable Toronto*, edited by Alanna Wilcox, Christina Palassio, and Jonny Dovercourt. Toronto: Coach House, 2007. 136. One image from *Landmarks and Monuments*.



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