

STEPHEN COLLIS / DEAR COMMON: VANCOUVER ALIGHTS

for George Stanley

We are everywhere
in flight
annihilating space one
digital widget at a time—
is this how we
want it to be?
Made a city
out of quotations
other voices
lived there too
I caught glimpses of them
in all that glass
their eyes
were neon races
I whispered the names
of bars and restaurants
that no longer exist
as they steered towards
uncertain markets
their boat in the street
a barricade we
could assemble ourselves

This was sort of dreamy
the city throbbing
gulped seajet years
primal terror
of spatial edges
the Marine Building

appears an idiosyncratic
émigré outside time
the fog of Kodachrome
shuttling clicks along
the pier where
changeless nothing pulses
against our fragile
beleaguered real estate bubble

We must speak
our little world
conjured flames sparks
made and unmade
swooning jetty gulls
my little sprocket of love
turning into species being
becoming bees
six-dimensional flag manifolds
houses of uncommons
polluting their lined pockets
these green brown
orange houses uniform
fitting close to the
contour of hill beneath
mountains beside sea
a new Pontiac parked
by a shingle-shod shack
and Buddha smiling
over Hastings Street

Thus we contrived power
electric sign illuminations
geographic billboard space
but that blast
of uneven developments
snuffed our dwarfdom
left us rafts
a nude beach
glaring Hollywood northern
lights of Plutonian
descendants stretching night
to canvas crests
and gabled gateways
to imagined orients east

The impact
on our bottom line
glows in the dark
lighting the dream world
of the collective
its lost halo
of sign culture
consuming sublime objects
Buckingham cigarettes
above Elysium Cleaners
watching and walking
like narrative it
threads us into
seductive structures one
neon tube at a time

Discordant vitality, will
the soft porn of windows
allow us to imagine
other Vancouvers to
alight on? Paris
Café (“chines dishes”
and cheap “meal
tickets”) or White Lunch
(who’s *that* meant for?)—
cars race in reflection
everywhere red is
advertising itself a
young asian boy
drives a pretend shiv
into another’s willing
abdomen—it’s all
good fun—immigration
exclusion head taxes
pomade for the PNE
house after house
confiscated for security’s
racialized insecurity

Dear glittering ghost
to be watching
all this fading
around us—
that old fart’s memories
this fence that once
formed a surface
for postering—

is to watch a
geographical transformation
(oiled by flowing
electronic accounts)
from mill-town glow
to metropolitan glare—
millwrights to lumpen extras
milling around the city set

Are these second
hand shovels good
for disposing of hope?
And these politicians—
were they really
for rent all this time?
The Talk of the Nation indeed
almost naked to seduction
or crowding the windows
of the empire outside
while one's own year
turns another cramped corner
(my Canada is easily
as cruel as yours
with or without
compradors)

Mirror mirror under
Kuo Kong Silk
are those red mountie hats
or new liberty caps?
Nonconforming curios

excite the sidewalk
(now a city scrubbed raw
the sign above you
sells wear and decay)—
New World Confection
whose eyes see this anyway?
what is clean
what is well-lit
this urban desert
a car sits sunk in
after the water has dried up
(Strathcona circa 1967)
or the shark on the marquee
(billboard of the Queen
butterfly bow celebrity
trading cards radios
and new towers
raining down wealth
on the deserted streets)

Dear common, cross
Powell at night
(you are never
really alone like
bees we swarm
our intellectual optimism)—
this is a love story
a recycled badge
used vacuum cleaner
punks outside the wig shop
shadows walking south—

the masters have no
mercy and the
TV is growing arms

Helpless puppets
I've googled your
ideal locations
the land you own
is unownable
magnetic ropes connect
earth's upper atmosphere
with the sun
(now that's a sign!)—
can't we give this
a good solid pull?
The body is porous
what is said seeps
into the skin
we absorb ideology
one camera click
at a time—
clerk waiter usher thief—
the colony dismantled
its neon and shipped
out with the containers
crowding the pier
into unlit "vacant"
space it erased—
boundary fixity surface—
for a moment
let us learn this

then put it in the pocket
of our endless open projects
engaging with closure
one back-lit dance
at a spatio-temporal time