

Speech for “The Mayor of Vancouver”
271 Union St. Vancouver, BC, Canada
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Written/Directed by Lauren Marsden
Performed by Jesse Malakoe

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Welcome, everybody, to “*Adjacencies*,” a one-night celebration of the transformation of this plot of land—*this* lot that we are standing on. I have been invited here tonight, as your mayor, to enact, to officiate, to proclaim, to validate, to make this transformation real... because that’s my job.

Of course, this is not the first time that this land has been *re-occupied* and I have to acknowledge that we are standing on unceded and traditional First Nations territory and that the City of Vancouver was founded and continues to prosper and expand on land that was not willingly relinquished by the Musqueam, Squamish or Tsleil-Waututh nations.

Tonight is a very special occasion—one that marks the transition of this land from private to public to a semi-public space and it is a bold step forward, one of many that have been taken in this neighbourhood in the past 100 years or more. Since the early 1900s, this property was called home by several generations. In the early days, it was the residence of at least one logger, one pipefitter, a night watchman, their families and...others who we don’t know anything about... but, as little as we may know about who settled here and what memories hide in the shadows of these buildings, we can feel the presence of another time, a time that saw the demolition of a minority neighbourhood to pave the way for the stunted construction of an urban freeway, just across the street.

I am not proud of this particular anecdote in the city’s history. You know, it always makes me nervous when I have to get up here and talk about progress and development, when I’m not even entirely sure that we’re doing the right thing...

But tonight! Tonight we will honour the past and emancipate the future! I have a vision for what we’re going to do tonight. We are going to do a little time travelling. I was thinking... how about we start from the future and travel backwards...

In several years, this empty lot will hold some kind of building again. In a few months, it will be a space for public artworks. In a few days, it will be an empty

gravel lot. Right now is... right now. A few weeks ago, it was a sprawling blackberry bush against a backdrop of graffiti. Several years ago, it was someone's private residence. Before that, to be totally honest, I have no idea what it was.

What's incredible is that we are standing here, temporarily suspended in a speculative moment. And these are my favourite moments because anything can happen! We are witnessing an instant of flux—a moment that allows for new identities and new intentions to penetrate the land. This...this is what I call progress. And I have hope for the future.

Ok so let me get this straight. We are all here, standing in a vacant lot. And we have this beautiful cake, which is a meticulous and lovingly made replica of the house the once stood here—one that was demolished several years ago... It is a hard job, you know, I'm supposed to be eradicating homelessness. I'm supposed to be building a city of hope, not a city of fear. But then I find myself standing here... I feel a bit like Godzilla, towering over this house, and I am expected to destroy it.

But without destruction how can there be rebirth? Without demolition, how can we begin fresh and new? You know, my vision does get a little blurry from time to time but one thing I can see clearly is that, by the end of the night, this house will have disappeared... for the second time.

This building is a dedication to change and growth in our city and we will fuel our desires for the future with the sweetness of its many layers. It is my hope that we can all take responsibility for what we are about to consume...

So, as your Mayor, I will take the first step in tearing down the past, in order to carve out a new space for the future! Ok so... I have something to ask of you... I need you to join me in this destruction, because I'm not sure I can do it all on my own.

(The mayor dramatically makes the first cut in the cake).