

Infrastructure Canada (2010–12) marks the conclusion to an ambitious trilogy of film installations by the Canadian artist duo Daniel Young & Christian Giroux that began with *Every Building, or Site, That a Building Permit Was Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006* (2008), followed by *50 Light Fixtures from Home Depot* (2010). For these three installations, a motion picture camera was set on a tripod in a fixed position to frame the unfolding of particular scenes in the artists' investigations. In the first case, Young & Giroux analyzed data on building permits issued by the City of Toronto for buildings that they subsequently filmed. The resulting footage, edited to 8-second clips, is dominated by the uniform urban expansion of chain stores, strip malls and gas stations. In 2010 the artists relied not on municipal statistics but on the light fixture offerings at Home Depot, a hardware store chain. Young & Giroux built a modestly scaled square room with white walls and then recorded the installation of fifty different light fixtures one after the other. The 10-minute production consists of short clips of the luminescent texture produced by each fixture. Significant tonal contrasts—all atmospherically cool, if not cold—between the clips read as a sort of experiment in achieving an austere Minimalist aesthetic through one of that movement's—or at least Donald Judd's—driving principles: the use of factory production akin to any other mass-produced object.

For their most recent project Young & Giroux have left the living room as well as the city to hit the open road. For months, they travelled to remote Canadian landscapes, from the Yukon to Newfoundland. Following their penchant for selecting titles that explain as much as they describe the subject therein, their road trip was made in search of infrastructure—the material structures that have rendered the vast and diversely patterned landscape of this country physically, economically and socially accessible. One hundred examples of Canadian infrastructure are featured in the footage of *Infrastructure Canada* that is exhibited in random sequence over three channels. The resulting film installation represents a broad cross-section of the often overlooked yet substantial forms that have modernized the Canadian landscape. The randomization of the presentation eschews familiar east-west narratives, instead situating each location as a single node in a vast network—one that facilitates transportation and communication across great distances. In this way, *Infrastructure Canada* considers the totality of Canada's infrastructure in a framework that borrows as readily from theoretical architecture as it does from science fiction.

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railway tunnels, and waterway locks. Young & Giroux purchased a used car that was soon filled with film and camera equipment, leaving just enough space for two passengers. (In the end, Dan Young made the trip, accompanied by an assistant.) As an email correspondent with Dan over the course of his three-month journey through cities, towns and countryside, I received hundreds of images: carefully articulated scenes of a solo telecommunications tower in Northern Ontario rising up from rock and a few isolated trees, or cargo ships setting course at a port in Sept-Îles or Prince Rupert. Another subject that appears in a number of instances in the three-channel film installation is the flood-gate of a dam. Sometimes the gate of a dam opens, with the rush of water entering the scene like a thundering crescendo in the otherwise silent and still—in terms of the camera's fixed position—mapping of whatever landscape and structures appear across the three screens.

Young & Giroux's use of the time-based technology of film and video to record examples of architecture shares a precedent with the work of artists such as Tacita Dean and James Benning, to whom the Toronto- and Berlin-based duo acknowledge a debt. Also relevant is the work of German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, who created an exhaustive taxonomy of the menacing beauty of industrial machinery and buildings, from blast furnaces to water towers and even particularly idiosyncratic German vernacular dwellings. The film camera's vantage point in *Infrastructure Canada* is generally more angled and sometimes at a greater distance from its subject than the iconically stiff, square-on and direct framing that characterizes the Bechers' oeuvre. There is also the added element of time, which always stands transfixed, and is very soon historical, in a photograph. Comparisons between the younger artists' latest installation and the work of the Bechers are unavoidable given their mutual interest in the aesthetics of industry and infrastructure; however, it is in contrast that the novelty of Young & Giroux's project becomes more pronounced. For *Infrastructure Canada* is not a conceptual exercise in trying to isolate infrastructure within an empty frame in order to personify or aestheticize the tenets of its fabrication. The film, projected in a darkened gallery, attempts rather to place examples of Canadian infrastructure squarely and irrevocably within the physical and functional parameters for which a particular bridge, tunnel or tower was designed and built.

In many ways this production could read like an homage to engineering in a country as climatically and geographically challenging as Canada. However, acknowledging the technical mastery and aesthetic character of the magnificent structures that appear in *Infrastructure Canada* does not discount questions of administration, history and political economy. Through the seductive representational logic that Young & Giroux have achieved in the final installment of their trilogy, a pointed case is made in *Infrastructure Canada* that matters over land use, sovereignty and—seen here at the Art Gallery of Windsor alongside *Decolonize Me*—colonial histories are not reconcilable through the semiotic or symbolic

without recourse to nuts, bolts, steel, and concrete. The physical, engineered forms created from these building blocks often go critically unexamined in spite of their consequential role as the material basis for the movement of natural resources, radio waves, satellite signals and, indeed, ourselves as roadways lead to the wilderness where, purportedly, we can “leave it all behind.”

Jonathan Shaughnessy, June 2013



Canada Council
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Infrastructure Canada objects/locations:

W.A.C Dennett dam, BC
Outer Cove bridge, NL
Quebec bridge, QC
Confederation bridge, PEI
Mactaquac dam, NB
High Level bridge, AB
Spectra energy, high pressure natural gas pipe line, BC
Mill bridge, NS
Almeda Dam, SK
Kinder Morger oil pipeline, mainline valve, AB
410 highway overpass, ON
Fiber optic cable, NWT
Microwave communication tower, Fogo Island, NL
Military communications antenna, Gander, NL
Penetangore river bridge, ON
Shell Mouth dam, SK
Microwave communication tower, Whitehorse, YK
CP Spiral tunnels, BC
High voltage lines crossing highway 6, MB
CBC short wave broadcast antenna, NB
High voltage lines crossing highway 71, ON
Telesat communications, Iqulet, NU
Goose Bay bridge, NL
Jackfish sub-station, NWT
Wildlife over-pass, AB
CP Windsor international tunnel, ON
Northwest satellite dish, Iqulet, NU
Welland canal, ON
Hydro pole north of dawson, YK
Old Mill subway station, ON
Gaspé rail bridge, QC
Radio broadcast tower, QC
Victoria bridge, QC
Water transportation for hydro electric, NL
Sept-Îles port, QC
Churchhill Falls hydro pylon, NL
Digby warf, NS
Cell phone tower north of Dunvegan, AB
Lower Notch dam, ON
Moose Jaw rail bridge, SK
Long Spruce Dam, MB
Revelstroke dam, BC
Prince Rupert grain terminal, BC
Whitehorse dam, YK
Hardity oil terminal, AB
Manic sub-station, QC
Halifax port, NS
Dunvegan bridge, AB
Teslin bridge alaska hwy, YK

Elbow highway bridge, SK
Quebec bridge, QC
Interprovincial bridge, NB
Peterbrough lift lock, ON
Natural gas pump outside of Montreal, QC
Nipawin bridge, SK
New Denver TV club broadcast tower, BC
Sissiboo HWY bridge, NS
Hydro lines crossing Île d'Orléans, QC
Deh Coh Bridge, NWT
Irving oil terminal, St. John's NL
Broadway bridge, SK
Hay river bridge, NWT
Westridge Kinder Morgen oil terminal, BC
International Highvoltage line, NB
Yarmouth light house, NS
Montreal airport radar station, QC
Canada line bridge, BC
Medicine Hat radar station, AB
Kelowna floating bridge, BC
Lake Geraldine dam, Iqulet, NU
Saint John Harbour bridge, NB
Cisco rail bridge, BC
Permafrost test site, YK
Paterson grain elevators, SK
Bassamo dam, AB
Yale tunnel, BC
Regina substation, SK
Daniel Johnson Dam (Manic 5), QC
Cape Breton causweay bridge, NS
Gatineau sub-station, QC
Hardland coved bridge, NB
Estuary low volume fairy, SK
High voltage hydro Line, off highway 37, BC
Muncho lake microwave tower, BC
'1942' rail bridge beside Highway 16, SK
Gardiner Dam, SK
North shore ferry terminal, QC
Antenna, Broadview SK
Iroquois Dam, ON
Little Pic river bridge, ON
Thunder bay grain terminal, ON
Edmonton suburban bridge, AB
Fort Francis, hydro pylons, ON
Garbage Hill cell phone tower, MB
Winnipeg flood gates, MB
Cell phone tower near pense, SK
Fort Nelson river bridge, BC
Bridge near New Denver, BC
Thompson airport antenna, MB