

## Notes on Vacancy

The level of vacant office space in the Auckland CBD currently sits at 11.2%. This translates to roughly 120,000m<sup>2</sup>.

Vacancy is a specific kind of absence; a lack of occupants or a lack of meaning. However in the language of commercial real estate, vacancy is not so much considered in terms of absence but rather, as unbrokered stock.

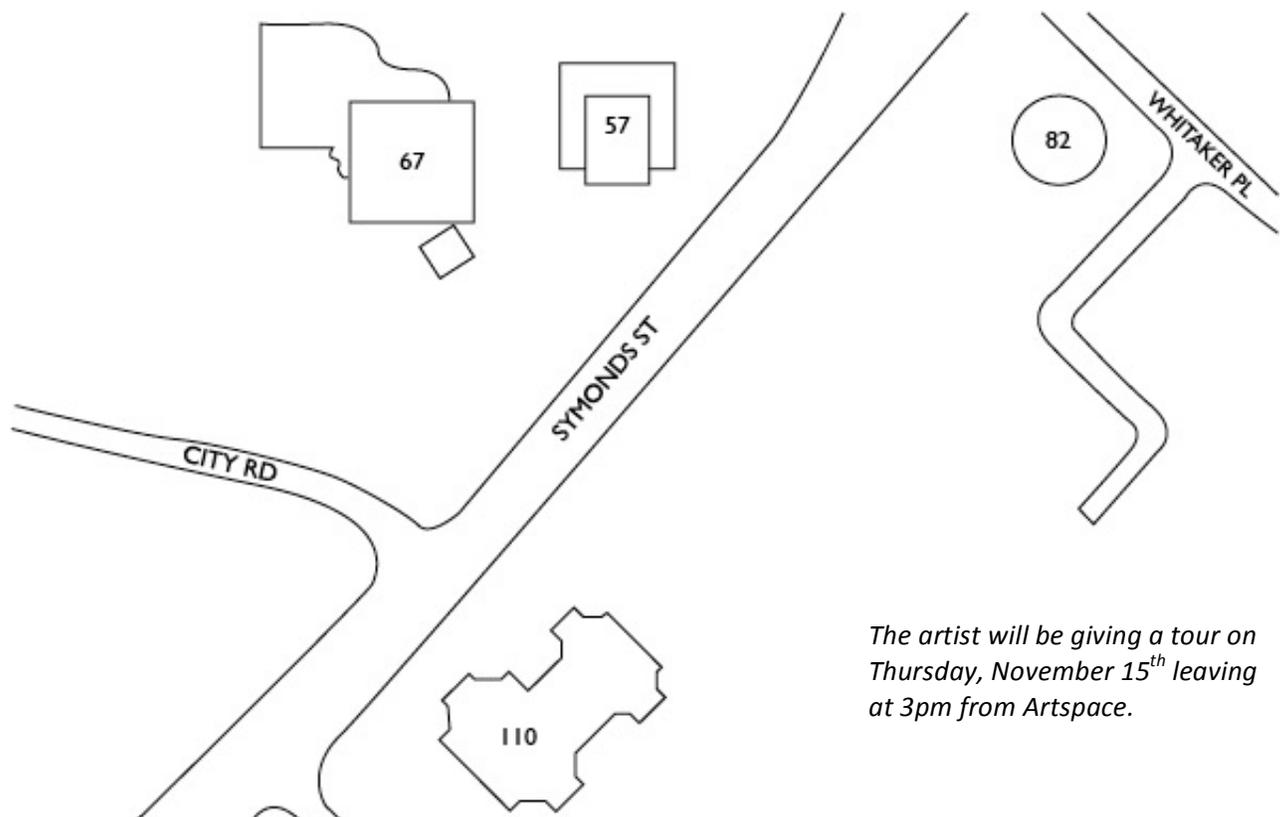
In the case of Auckland's vacant commercial real estate these spaces also stand as monuments to the absence of what stood before: the early colonial buildings that disappeared amidst the building boom of the mid-80s as well as the geography which they in turn replaced, the settlements of displaced Māori, the Waihorotiu stream which was redirected into sewers, the bays which were lost in the process of reclaiming the waterfront, and the bush which was cleared, all demolished by the land grab of the Tāmaki isthmus.

In their unoccupied state, in their transferral to stock, these spaces lose (or have not yet acquired) their status as sites of human endeavor and become regarded solely as consumer goods. Goods whose life span is based not on use, or meaning, but on financial obsolescence – on the point at which land prices rise enough to make their existence uneconomical in the face of new developments with better profit projections, better maximization of space. As such, these buildings are monuments to their own eventual demolition; their own impending absence.

People in this equation are measured in terms of 15 m<sup>2</sup> – the generalized amount of space that an average worker might take up. Sites are quantified in terms of floor area and classified into A, B, and C, premium, prime and secondary, according to desirability and prestige. In the case of large developments the tenants who are to populate these spaces are sought before courting investors – who purchase not only the building, but also the associated leases. So tenants sit dually as both consumers and commodities, and the quality of their existence is mapped and quantified in terms of profit to the investor.

Buildings are sign-posted by for lease signs and vacant floors are marked by blank spaces in the foyer's building directory. From the upper levels of these high-rises the streets below become map-like. They become outside, external to the observer, and flattened into a series of shapes. From these levels, the implications of existing on a vertical plane can be accessed, while the familiar perspective of the horizontal plane is lost. There is no life to observe here, only the traces of use which stand as tiny monuments to absence.

Robin Murphy



*The artist will be giving a tour on Thursday, November 15<sup>th</sup> leaving at 3pm from Artspace.*