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## ■ FILM

## New doc looks at life from Parkdale to Sao Paulo

Posted by **JP Larocque** / NOVEMBER 16, 2010
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When Torontonians discuss their city, there is often a tendency to focus on urban space from the ground up – with an emphasis placed on historic tree-lined communities like the Annex, Cabbagetown or Riverdale at the expense of the concrete apartment blocks that came to dominate many areas in the city from the late-1950s onward.

And yet shifts in the socio-economic fabric of the city have not only allowed these high-rise structures to evolve into affordable (if not always ideal) housing for new Canadians, but have also created diverse vertical communities where citizens engage in various forms of cultural exchange and fashion a new form of urban experience.

These communities are the focus of Katerina Cizek's *Out My Window*, the newest chapter in the NFB's increasingly ambitious and ongoing *HIGHRISE* multimedia project about human experience in the global vertical suburbs. Credited as one of the world's first interactive 360° documentaries, the project uses high-end web technologies and innovative photography to create a virtual high-rise dwelling, with each floor corresponding to one of thirteen different global cities.



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Visitors to the site are encouraged to navigate their way through each apartment, clicking on various items and unlocking snippets of footage that give viewers some insight into the lives of the building's inhabitants. In Beirut, an illustrator describes surviving an Israeli bombing in 2006, while a musician in Amsterdam reveals that her father belonged to legendary disco group Boney M. Toronto's floor focuses on Parkdale resident Amchok Gumbo, a musician who owns a stuffed yak and reveals that he escaped Tibet by journeying across a mountain range on foot.

The stories showcased are powerful and often political, exploring social inequalities and the larger effects of globalization while adding a personal dimension to structures and spaces typically regarded as imposing and impersonal.

The result is a fascinating interactive mosaic made up of fragmented and non-linear stories that challenge traditional perceptions of the urban experience. Perhaps most admirable is Cizek's ability to deftly address themes of migration, poverty, and environmentalism without ever losing sight of the lived experience of her film's subjects.

HIGHRISE/Out My Window project is free and ongoing, and is accessible at the following [link](#).



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