

# STAN DOUGLAS

PHILIP MONK



Friedrich Christian FLICK COLLECTION

DUMONT

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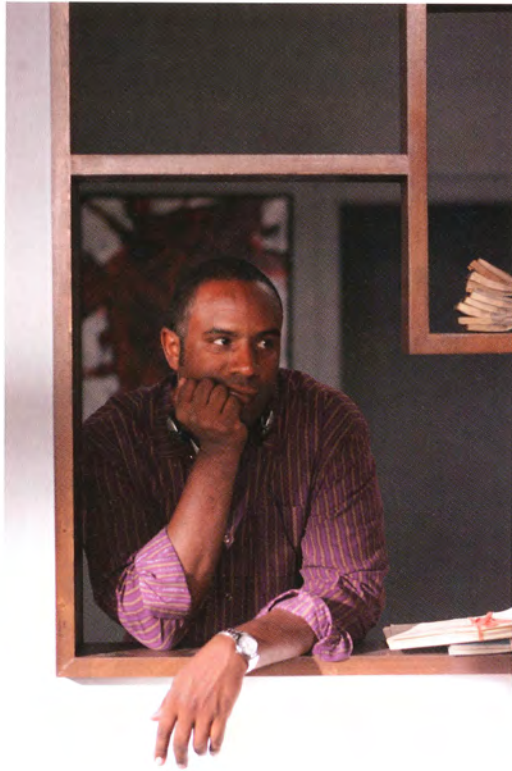
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Philip Monk

*Dissonant Absences*

1. *Overture*

*Forget Postmodernism:* Born in 1960 and beginning to exhibit in the mid-1980s, Canadian artist Stan Douglas was on the cusp of a long wave of theory that swept artistic practice, with its rhetoric of the death of the author lodging practice firmly in reproduction lacking any place for expression; with its indictment of the individual subject and inflection of the optic of the Other toward the pole of identity politics. Can we retrospectively judge the arc of his career by the era's applied tools of deconstructive philosophy, postcolonial discourse, and femi-



*Monodramas: "I'm not Gary" 1991*  
Still  
Cat. 8.4

nist film theory *when*, for instance, Douglas has criticized his early appropriative interventions into broadcast television, to use the language of the period? *When*, in the meantime, he apprenticed himself to practice so as not to judge but to analyze effects to which he too was subject?

*Forget art history:* We allocate Stan Douglas a place within a medium's history from which he inherits and to which his own innovations set pace. To what medium or tradition do we assign him *when* he absents himself in gaps between media; *when* his own art allegorizes obsol-

escence and failure: the obsolescence of dominating technologies and the failures of modernist utopias? To what secure progress do we affiliate him *when* failure and obsolescence reappear as spectral visitations, *when* tradition is more likely an unconscious transmission, *when* the chronological gives way to the archaeological, but also to the unearthed return of the repressed?

*Forget the Vancouver School:* We refer Stan Douglas to his birthplace and residence in the rainforest settlement of Vancouver, British Columbia, terminal city of the westerly impulse, resource hinterland to the rough capitalism of a distant imperial metropole with its surrounding sublime (though at least second-growth) forests disguising the “decrepitude of the British Empire,” and now — in an exchange of economic masters, from backwoods to back lot — outsourcing branch plant to Hollywood productions. If Douglas springs from the spirit of this place, it is a poisoned well-spring indeed, haunted by transgressions of past contact between whites and natives and other races. Yet, in the eyes of the world, this poison is charmed, or at least images of it, which circulate in export as so many spiritualized products depicting damaged goods: the magically realized photographs, some backlit like advertising, of the so-called Vancouver School. Douglas stakes his claim apart from this bonanza of attention, which admittedly marks the birth of a remarkable art community. Could he originate from the melancholy rhetoric of this school to which his photographs affiliate him *when*...

## II. *Lost Worlds*

We all begin *in medias res* — in the middle of things. But what if the middle is not the entitlement of cultural inheritance, especially for those of us in remote North America who arrive historically late? Reception here only repeats the distance of periphery from the commerce of traditional art metropolises. With what voice could an artist articulate his place within art history at this receiving end?

Cat. 1

*Deux Devises: Breath and Mime*, an early black-and-white slide dissolve work from 1983, hesitantly sounds Douglas’ answer. As rehearsal of the artist’s inaugural dilemma, his performance is an admission of handicap. In a work “about” music, silent divisions prepare the artist in advance to fail. The problem is already posted in the odds on his performance, announced in the divided-in-two title with secondary “mime” supplementing originating “breath.” *Breath* offers the fullness of culture in its rendition of Charles Gounod’s Second Empire

museum-piece art song *O ma belle rebelle*. So mysterious is this cult of performance, in its spiritualizing of the cult of distant love, that no image of the singer appears, only a vocal transmission. Still, our reception is hampered by our need for English subtitles. When Douglas, inheriting second, submits his performance, which we now see, he is constrained by the primitive mechanics through which he responds. The machine, not Douglas, renders his performance through a shuffling shuttle of images. Lip-synching Robert Johnson's 1936 *Preachin' Blues*, the artist's faltering repetitions are approximated by a limited stock of slide images and



*Deux Devises: Breath and Mime*  
1983  
Still of *Mime*  
Cat. 1.

not by his own proper verbal articulation. Without benefit of Johnson's reputed Faustian crossroads pact with the devil, Douglas flunks his performance and falls short in his presumed identity as a black man, the place where he is allocated cultural proficiency. Failing so early, Douglas effaced himself from his future art, from the performance of his work.

*Overture* (1986) reiterates *Deux Devises'* dilemma as if passively acquiring the masochistic habit of a theme. No competition here: The mechanical iterations of an idiom submit to a culture of expression. Turn-of-the-twentieth-century film footage retailed by the Edison Film Company of railway panoramas of the Canadian Rockies contrasts with a voice-over plucked from the organic swell of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Mundanely registering a painter's otherwise sublime landscape, the unadorned handiwork of a machine is hardly challenge to this multi-volume flowering of European sensitivity. As if economizing word count to synch sound to film sold by the foot, Douglas edited Proust's writing, reducing it, but also shunting sentences here and there as if it were spliced film, outside of respect for the unity and chronology of the author's original medium. Prose is handled as so many like frag-

Cat. 2



ments repeated in sequence to film footage. I doubt that sound and image combine here only to refer the spectator back to the original media of the novel and moving pictures, as Scott Watson seemed to suggest when he wrote that, “*Overture* is, as in *Onomatopoeia*, a confluence of mechanical time, which proceeds through repetition, and human time, which is known through memory.”<sup>1</sup> Consciousness is already habituated to repetition from the beginning. No more than the narrator can “isolate the successive positions of a [horse running] as they appear upon a bioscope” can we distinguish, when the camera-train enters darkened tunnels, that Douglas,



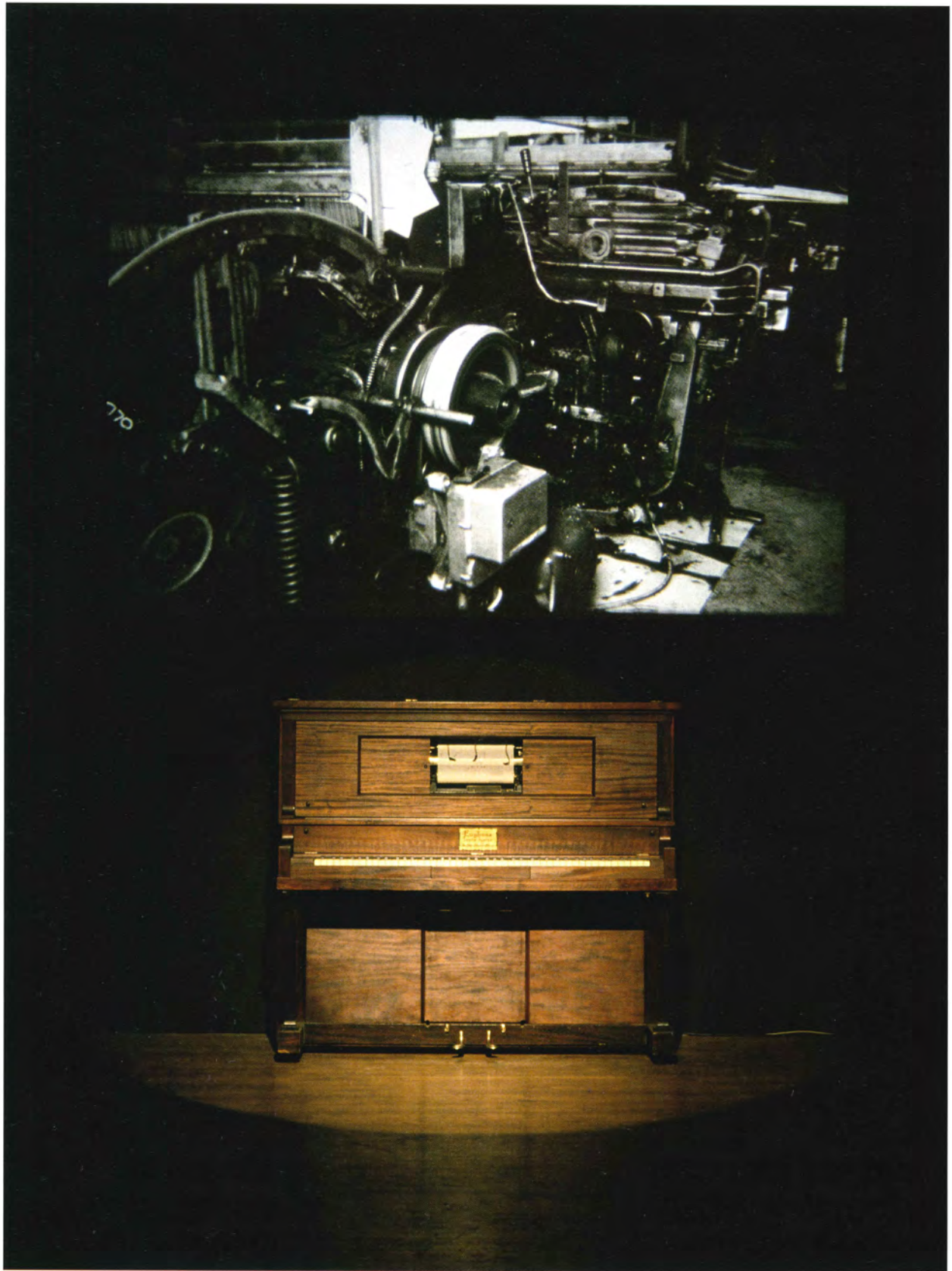
*Overture* 1986  
Installation at the exhibition  
“Ghost Story”, Künstlerhaus  
Vienna 1998  
Cat. 2

in opposition to contracting text, had extended footage by black leader. In the tunnel, when did our perception end and mechanical iterations of a medium with which perception imperceptibly melds begin? Were we in a waking sleep already induced by passage to cinematic space and time? This obscure editing exposes the lie of individuated consciousness passing serenely and securely from sleeping to waking, as if transiting simply from darkness of tunnel — through the overture of an aperture — to bright light of perceptual identity. Furthermore, Douglas edited and repeated sequences of different films, giving the impression of temporal and spatial continuum to images that are radically disjointed and displaced temporally and spa-

tially. Even so, looking back, there seems to be more of *real* time than mechanical time in the Edison footage. Or is it that there is more of *mechanical* time in real time than we think? Already subject to this inversion by Proust, *Overture's* narrator must recite his words to temporal recurrences ever present, not past. He must endure his passage West through a machine that equally quantifies language and images as a mechanical passage of time.

Might Europe catch sight of a New World artist by some anomaly reflecting temporary transit here? The importation of Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno a half century later from wartime exile in Hollywood north to Brollywood, as Vancouver is known in the film industry, might serve to transcend a legacy of colonial decrepitude by heroically assuming “a rhetorical self through which [to] speak as the last instance of a subjectivity soon to be extinct.”<sup>2</sup> As a young artist, Douglas did not option this advantage. His *Onomatopoeia* (1985–86) is a cruel joke played on Adorno — unless it was made for local consumption, in one of those returns for which history is known, reprising comedy for tragedy. Adorno’s comments on jazz as an “assembly-line procedure that is standardized down to its most minute deviations” come back to haunt.<sup>3</sup> Beneath slide images of abandoned textile machines once operated by perforated scrolls without laborers, a player piano rolls out a long section of Adorno’s beloved *C Minor Sonata, Opus 111*. When an advisor in Los Angeles to the writing of Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, Adorno often played Ludwig van Beethoven’s piece to his fellow exile. Ironically, the sonata now uncannily resembles the rhythms of ragtime, as if mechanical accompaniment to silent film. Automatons are uncanny when they perform in the absence of a creator, without the breath of artistry. If Beethoven could not hear the resemblance that now marks his music, no more can we restore a lost world of bourgeois plenitude and hear his music *originally*. In Los Angeles, Vancouver, or at its source in Europe, “modernist nostalgia” is a form of forgetting that is scored to the repeating beats of repression. “Male melancholy,” Douglas wrote in 1988, “fetishizes its past, though, as a means to *self-aggrandizement* — of the melancholic as an authority, as the one who ‘still remembers.’ But it does so with a degree of amnesia that makes abundantly clear exactly what has been absented from its history — given that the heroic (if melancholy) identity is always gendered male, classed bourgeois, and of European descent.”<sup>4</sup>

By what means might an artist communicate within a field already foreclosed by his systemic absence, a field where he automatically is *hors-champs*? How might he manipulate its codes in order to signify, other than by repeating his dilemma of reception and failed performance in the primitive mechanics of contraptions such as *Deux Devises* whose faltering approximations of the industrial achievements of film suggest that divisions are transmitted even by



joining sound and image? Divided then, he would not lament but apprentice himself to this knowledge. It would be his recurrent theme. His performance would submit to it. He would reiterate iterations; he would repeat divisions.

Absence, of course, is more than the convenience of amnesia or the exclusions of dominant representations. Do we know that in Hollywood films we are implicated by identifying with a protagonist through a simple succession of shots? The clumsy filter of an era's archived technology cannot animate its *lived* experience. Silent film's slapstick automatons are fossilized by the projector's jerky sixteen or eighteen frames per second as opposed to our "natural" twenty-four. Would that the absence of point-of-view and reverse-angle shots — the lack that would haunt silent film's demise — made these images real for us. Douglas suggests, "When they become obsolete, forms of communication become an index of an understanding of a world lost to us," but only an index.<sup>5</sup> There is no possibility of Proustian *recherche* in the field of these images. Though it may have been only too recently part of our cultural inheritance, this world is permanently lost to us. We are closed to it precisely because of the obsolete technologies that pictured it. Period point of view is also closed; it, too, is technological closure. Technology encloses a subject in its point of view as subject to its techniques and representations, which are, as well, constitutive of identity. Within this regime, seeing *and* being are one with technology.

Dilemma on dilemma. The question of the subject is a question of the machine. In this far place of reception, captive to the iterations of technology, all too absent from both creation *and* representation, unable even to comprehend a lost world of images distantly transmitted, an artist is condemned from the start — unless he naïvely or cynically recycles these images in pastiche homage, as in the sorry story of the period's neo-isms. An artist from the New World is like any other damaged subject residing here. His art is no more than repeating machines, no more than the calculating machines America is so adept at inventing for its business culture. Failure repeats in their rote mechanics. Failure is their mechanism. Machines only work by breaking down, sustaining their performances in an illusion of functionality. No wonder that obsolete technologies aligned to doomed social projects or failed utopias became the subject of so many of Douglas' subsequent artworks as an interminable work of historical mourning — but also as allegories of his New World predicament.

*Automatopoeia* 1985–86  
Slide installation  
(b/w, sound)  
154 slides, 88-note player piano,  
music roll, screen  
6 mins. each rotation  
Dimensions variable  
Installation at the Western Front,  
Vancouver 1986  
Collection Vancouver Art Gallery

### iii. *Old and New Worlds*

Being subject to it from the start of their settlement, New World inhabitants tell tall tales of the machine. They tell of repetition, but also of circuits and returns. “Free men,” immigrants to the New World counter reception with counter-invention. Although admittedly not of the genius, genus, or genre of art of the European people, their products display mechanical wizardry in the patented perfection, for instance, of movie technology or player pianos. Though the

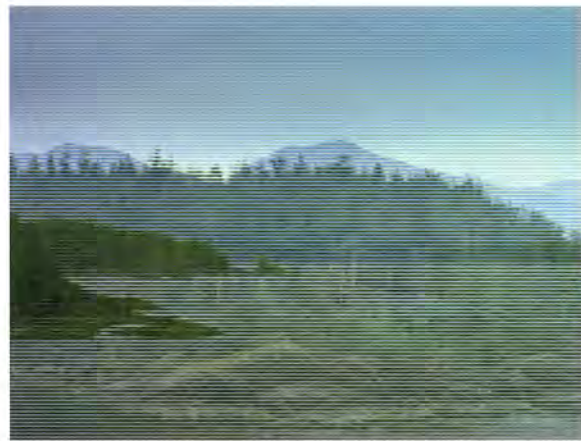


machine ventriloquizes a subject within them, they intimately know its regulating mechanics, even if this knowledge is repressed. At heart we know that the machine in the garden of the New World is already a haunting, which, in turn, reverts to haunt its distant transmitting source. From the start, we know what is already circulating.

Even before the start, from initial mercantile contact of European traders with America's first peoples, a circuit was in place that would persist in transgression to our day. Douglas' 1996 *Nu-tka* sets itself in one of those determining encounters, in Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island in 1789, when competing European empires collided through their imperial agents and trade delegates. Conflict takes the diffusive shape of an unresolved video projection. Shifting images of this sublime, pristine landscape, whose outlines dissolve in mist, disorienting winds, and contrary tides, are divided between the odd and even raster lines of a video projection. Distinct images align six times, precisely when the two voices of the soundtrack — those of the Spanish and English ship captains confessing their derangement and aggrieved

authority, voices that have been drifting throughout the installation like insane mutterings obscuring or overlapping each other — also reconcile by speaking like phrases. The polyphonic script is derived from historical documents and journals, but the reconciling phrases are taken from period literature. Conflict and agreement exclude the native Other who has no say in this imperial colloquy; yet this was an absence that disturbed and set in motion the slip-pages of consciousness waywardly veering towards madness.

Although the English and Spanish captains represented the certainty of competing imperial claims (by standing for the symbolic person of the crown), their own persons were under-



mined in this unstable locale from which even their staple of native contact eventually dissipated. While remote from the world-historical events unfolding in Europe, with the French Revolution ground zero of a new foundation of subject and society, in reality, Nootka Sound was testing ground for the individual unhinged from tradition and authority. Corresponding to that of reason alone, the new measure of law was contrarily the measureless sublime confronting this imperial avant-garde at the edge of the world. Douglas' photographs capture the *terribilita* of this groundless encounter of reason on the threshold of madness, which was, as well, a border facing the uncanny Other — who yet was *at home*. Sublime's terror tests the individual; failure leads to madness.

*Nu·tka·* is no historical romance imitating period genres. *Nu·tka·*'s rudimentary trade routes and colonial contacts are only different in degree from the globalized circuits and swindling schemes of Douglas' *Journey into Fear* set two hundred years later. Not merely implicitly economic in their analyses, *Nu·tka·* and the photographic series *Nootka Sound* are founded on

*Nu·tka·* 1996  
Video stills  
Single-channel video,  
quadraphonic soundtrack  
6:50 mins. loop

Cat. 14

Cat. 11

the idea that genres persist over time. Not just sublimations of anxiety but symptoms of transgressions, genres entwine the modern subject in a madness circulating beyond its control. Capital's unappeased ghosts linger in various guises as the Gothic morphs over time into horror or noir. Ghosts transmit both haunting and crime's anxiety from one genre to another. Genres bridge past and present but also near and far. "The Gothic romance was typically characterized by a return of the repressed: some past transgression haunts, then destroys, the



*Der Sandmann:*  
1970s set 1994  
DOKFILM Studios,  
Potsdam, Babelsberg

culpable person, family or social order. It's no surprise that these narratives flourished during the era of high imperialism, when remote and exotic areas of the world were being drawn into the European orbit and providing, if not the *mise en scène*, then at least the sublimated object of Gothic anxiety. What would contact and mingling with radically foreign cultures bring?"<sup>6</sup> A Canadian Gothic, *Nu-tka* restored only the *mise en scène*, not the anxious objects: absent natives, dissolving landscapes, and disembodied voices.

Gothic genres were, then, the receipts of colonial trade. Return on capital was unexpected revenue of the repressed. An uncanny import from trade's remove disturbed consciousness, even in the entitlement of its entertainments. Retreating from a guilty present, genres displaced their stage settings to an antique past where horror was comfortably restrained in medieval castles in order that guilt was *inherited*, not perpetuated. In the Old World, I suspect,

returns were already cached — to the profit of encryption. Though appearing to be rusty shackling irons, a golden chain binds the fate of Old and New Worlds to the criminal machinery of capital.

The revenant always returns when it is a “question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.”<sup>7</sup> Since first contact, the misty rainforests of Canada’s West Coast and the dark European woods were



in direct communication. Haunting is secret communication of what was hid (or stolen) in commerce between them. What a surprise that Stan Douglas charts this coming and going and coming back! It is no surprise that this contaminating revisitation only sends back what was already haunted by the machine at its source. If “haunting mark[s] the very existence of Europe,” then it is to Europe that we must retrace our immigrant steps.<sup>8</sup> We follow the golden chain that guided the artist to Germany to take lodging with one of its resident spooks: the Sandman. When a guest in residency in the DAAD program in Berlin in 1994–95, Douglas lodged his own guest-work, *Der Sandmann*, under his host’s title to test his welcome there.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and reunification of Germany a few years before Douglas’ residency had opened the former GDR to speculative redevelopment, which included the legendary, defunct Ufa film studios in Potsdam-Babelsberg, a suburb of Berlin. Douglas

*Der Sandmann:*  
*Contemporary Set* 1994  
DOKFILM Studios,  
Potsdam, Babelsberg

Cat.10



*Der Sandmann* 1995  
Still of Sandman/Coppelius,  
Still of Nathanael  
Cat. 10



filmed *Der Sandmann* there in a 1920s vintage Ufa studio. The history of Weimar film in the 1920s is synonymous with Ufa. Directors, film theorists, and propagandists from both left and right had an astute understanding of the utopian or political potential of radio and film during a period when history could have gone one way or another, for better or worse. Invested moments, they were calculated by politics and economy for division and returns. This forgotten, suppressed, or repressed history was a lost world, which an artist from Vancouver, having no allegiance to the formalist trajectories of New York, could seek out. In this divisive, liminal space, Douglas would fabricate a *thing*, a machine really. It too would calculate, divide, and return, even to separate his art into the different mediums of photography and film.

Cat. 9 Douglas' residency was the first of successive projects to combine film or video projection with series of photographs functioning other than location shots. The *Potsdamer Schrebergärten* strangely destine *Der Sandmann* and its photographs to each other. Confined to waste spaces and historically allotted to the poor, these now-valued properties exuded their multi-colored impressionistic charm in photographs before their gardens were simulated in indoor film sets, where registration in antiquated black-and-white film drained life from them. What has each to do with the other, with portioning waste space and re-portioning profits?

In an abandoned studio so redolent of film history and technical innovation, Douglas layered one and the same garden in successive shooting. The first recreated a garden plot in the former GDR during the mid-1970s while the second incorporated residential encroachment, such as shown in his photographs. These images tell nothing of what motivates *Der Sandmann*. A photograph only shows whatever objectively is within its image. It reveals nothing of the history of the *Schrebergärten*, which Douglas described so well in writing. Though empty as a "lodging that has not yet found new tenants," these homey photographs lack evidence as

“scenes of crime.”<sup>9</sup> For illumination of the motive, we turn to the political motivations of film, in particular to its allegorical fictions, which Douglas called to the witness stand. Film illuminates by fixating fantasy. The trouble with fixation is its contrary contagion: its evidence is serial witness to serial crimes.

Suspended in and supplanting each other over their fictional duration, two gardens hardly comprise a series, let alone a contagious one, only a closed set. The garden grounds of this luckless inventor, however, quickly dissolve into an *abgrund* from which spring a proliferation of associations. Like Lucky Hans from the Brothers Grimm tales, Douglas invents from what is there for the taking. What he invented persists as his itinerant method. Douglas’ research envelops two strands. His residency in Berlin localizes the *context*. From research, a complex of *references* knot together, which then unravel to form serial chains. These chains link the local to larger economic and technological circuits, which frequently revisit these gardens not to enrich, but to deposit residue of their repressed history.

Fact and fiction conveniently converge in the *Schrebergärten* through the adjacency created by the studio fantasy’s substitutive sets. The ruin of the film studio renders the relic of its obsolescent technology as the stylistic look of Douglas’ film. Twenties film-style production, however, is subject to iteration in Douglas’ double projection. Fiction recapitulates fact as the studio’s ruin commemorates Ufa’s rise and fall entangled in and compromised by Germany’s economic and political history. Tragedy turns to comedy in the coincidence of the studio’s hapless location, rooted physically as a garden is to its soil: before, during, and after the divide of the Berlin wall.

Then, the *Potsdamer Schrebergärten* set off another chain enmeshing history and literary genres. What a fortunate find that the *Schrebergärten* are named posthumously after Moritz Schreber. His son, Daniel Paul Schreber, or, rather, his son’s book — *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903) — was subjected by Freud to his 1911 case study on paranoia. Then, in 1919, Freud retold E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story, “The Sandman,” in his essay “The Uncanny,” making the word “uncanny” a shibboleth for critical entry.

Douglas adopted the epistolary structure of Hoffmann’s tale but updated it to a twenty-year period between the 1970s and 1990s, before and after the reunification of Germany. Two dates recursively align to replace each other. But these dates are only a doubling and return of others. The troubling return or, more particularly, the recursive structure of the double defines every element and mechanism of this uncanny projection. Dates mobilize complex chains of references; the commemorative image’s conjuration of one date only sets off others divided, disguised, discriminated, or suppressed in the conflict of its fantasy image.

Douglas contrived his concoction from the many communicating specters of mid-twenties German film. He filmed his script varying a special effect from Henrik Galeen's 1926 *The Student of Prague* where double exposure assisted an actor to play two roles, not two differing, but, nonetheless, opposing characters: "self" and doppelgänger. *Der Sandmann's* "trick" is realized by two projections — but not seamlessly. A division appears on the screen where each "masked" half meets and into which the Coppélius/Sandman character is occasionally engulfed. As the image simultaneously combines two 360-degree pans of old and new gardens, doubling is temporal rather than psychic. Dividing time, the seam offers the illusion of a temporal wipe dissolving the wall between isolated historical periods, with old displaced by new and new absorbed contrarily by old.

When rotating shots pan past each set, they seamlessly break fiction and, seemingly in one deadpan shot, disclose the unemployed studio with its antique equipment. But the cameras keep rolling so that the studio and gardens become part of a more encompassing set. As if rehearsing his lines, the actor playing Nathanael reads his letter from this "off-set" location. Set off, he is still within the circuits of the film apparatus and the fiction of its scenario; his is no materialist reading *à la* Godard. Unlike the student of Prague, he is not troubled by his doppelgänger but by an uncanny return *we* witness in the images of Coppélius/Sandman's temporal doubling. *Der Sandmann* is a reciprocating machine: It fabricates doubles by temporal returns. But before the film loop itself repeats, the pan rotates twice, with Nathanael reading once in synch and then again out. Perhaps misregistration subtly recalls Ufa's first failures in sound synchronization in the 1920s, when commercial pressure to produce talkies forged large-scale industrial and financial reorganization of the industry. The obsolete studio unavoidably drags history with it, even if technological advance has wiped it away. Whenever Douglas joins sound to image — especially sound to silent footage as in *Overture*, *Der Sandmann*, and *Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin, BC* (1993) — he invokes this history of capitalist enterprise as a condition of perceiving his media works.

*Der Student von Prag* was a silent film. Thus, Nathanael's synch-sound reading is anomalous to *Der Sandmann's* authentic twenties remake, as are the other two epistolary voice-overs by Klara and Lothar. So too — unless casting was color-blind — is the black actor playing Nathanael. As much as an anomaly is a deviation, it is also an uncanny, that is to say uncomfortable, reminder of what we might prefer to remain forgotten, obscured, or repressed — a telling residue perhaps of past life. Nathanael's trouble finding the familiar old newly sinister is not his alone. At least for those in the former GDR, the reappearance of this young man, offspring of third-world exchanges, might be an ambivalent herald from the future past of an

ideal lost in the embrace of capitalism or a restored racial fear suppressed by communism's ideological interval. Straying disoriented, feeling out of place and not at all at home, Nathanael is not himself, but no doppelgänger either: He is a sinister image for *others*, out of synch with his surroundings, like his father punished before him for this difference. The uncanny is the lack of synchrony in what returns as an anomaly. "The quality of the uncanny can only come from the circumstance of the 'double'," Freud reminds us, which the ego projects "as something foreign to itself."<sup>10</sup>

Nathanael is no stranger to us. Remember, he is our agreeable, postcolonial stand-in. Nothing is uncanny for us here, unless it is the notion of the uncanny with which we are already familiar. The "uncanny" no more foregrounds itself in Douglas' self-conscious version than in the original, but we are prepared, through Freud's intercession, to receive its unstated effects. Freud conjectured that the *secret* nature of the uncanny disguised "something repressed which *recurs*."<sup>11</sup> The uncanny's secret already lodges itself within the common linguistic slippage between divided and opposing meanings of "familiar" ("*das Heimliche*") and "uncanny" ("*das Unheimliche*"). Our agreement that nothing is uncanny here belies the divisions secretly lodged within these images. Nathanael reads his letter twice, as if one time each for its two readers. His letter was destined to the wrong addressee, intended for his childhood friend Lothar, but received and read by his sister Klara. Their responding letters successively settle the mystery of Nathanael's anxiety within the parameters of Hoffmann's story deviating through Douglas' skillful updating. Rotation posts Nathanael's letter twice, the second out of synch, as if already ordained for the wrong destination — that is, as if not for our reading, indeed, as if not for reading at all. Do not look to the content of these letters for what we already know, for what is spelled out in front of us, destined to us: not the image of the letter but the letter of the image purloined within our sight.

Already divided at its source, the revenant comes back to divide the present. The image of returning in the recurring image is the unsettling image of the haunting revenant.<sup>12</sup> We must always return to the encrypted source, even to the secret of ourselves, if we *deny* that the familiar is not strange or vice versa.

In that there are already so many, the gardens are not what they seem. As Nathanael projects his Sandman delusions stemming from his childhood onto the puttering gardener, so *Der Sandmann* is a hallucinated doubling of *Potsdamer Schrebergärten*, the fantasy of a collective delusion. It would take an uncanny film to make the transition between familiar and uncanny gardens allegorical. A visit by a foreign artist might exhume the studio's buried history, not unearth dross from its adjacent gardens. If the celluloid ghosts of past class conflicts

allegorized in films such as Fritz Lang's 1926 *Metropolis* were resident there, Douglas could film his multiplying allegory only in their resurrected images. Every source for *Der Sandmann* is pretense for recurrence — a rotation to cancel a revolution. Each is an allegory of another in a proliferating contagion of doubles. Hoffmann's story was refashioned in the technical guise of *The Student of Prague*, itself a remake and a film of doubles and, moreover, a ready substitute for "The Sandman" as it was set in 1820. Surprisingly, all were assembled and housed in Freud's essay "The Uncanny," where we learned the strange synchronicity of a secret being both familiar and uncanny. So many coincidences must be secret communication between all these remakes.

So many transmissions across time and between media could only be an open secret. This culture talked to itself through doubles; it invented doubles for veiled disclosure. The automaton was invented for this entertainment. Recurrent, always current, it would have legs, as they say in New York or Hollywood, offering box-office returns. The automaton's long run was more than box-office pandering to popular taste. The automaton's compulsive repetitions have the inflated currency of myth. Its invention is a German *thing* — a Faustian pact or patent. Two Ufa films released in 1926 along with *The Student of Prague*, Murnau's *Faust* and Lang's *Metropolis*, sealed this pact in images which were more than symbolic expenditures of capital: Their fantastic extravagance doomed Ufa to financial crisis.

Myth's specters permeate every transaction and transmission, even to the technology that circulated the *thing* by means of the automaton that was the projector. The automaton was a perfect excuse when a doppelgänger could be blamed for one's own actions or crimes, when it already collectively was a sign of fear of the *foreign* thing: the other as double within the self. A sorcerer's apprentice or even a skilled machinist could not always calculate division when the thing itself was not substance but division. Invited to Berlin, Douglas could only return a doubly uncanny automaton. (Was he, as well, this *thing*?) The reciprocity of his time machine permits familiar but unwelcome guests to revisit what may once have been their own lodging. Germany's welcome of the Vancouver School would lead to this ungenerous restitution!

Can we know this intention any more than we suspect that Douglas' *Der Sandmann* is an uncanny title the sounding of which resonates deeply in Germany? Not just appropriated, the title is invisibly divided by Douglas' reprise. (Is this disguised repetition a counter theft or restitution as reminder of what was stolen?) Douglas encrypts the welcome of his invitation in this title, in the title's privilege, which Douglas was invited to share. The secret openly lodged in *his* title is one of hosts and guests, of reciprocal welcome and unwelcome, of the familiarity and strangeness of being there — of being there where it *was* divided, once (*once?*) was divided.

Genre was revenue of colonial trade, with the exotic yet absent Other circulated as a “sublimated object of Gothic anxiety.” Two hundred years after the encounter at Nootka Sound where Europe addressed itself in the absence of the native residents, would this absence be restituted in the welcome accorded the Vancouver visitor Stan Douglas? By whom would welcome be recognized as restitution? Or would welcome uncannily be split between welcome and its unwelcome other? Could this secret be known? Known to be in the invitation? Could welcome only address the image of itself (the European self) in images Douglas was obligated to return?



*Hors-champs* 1992  
Video installation  
(b/w, sound)  
13:40 mins. loop  
Dimensions variable  
Installation at the Marstall, Berlin  
1995 (DAAD exhibition)

Douglas accommodated by RSVP'ing in the divided image of his welcome. The revenant of Douglas' welcome is the welcome accorded before his invitation. Douglas did not divide himself in this image, if you think that I am suggesting Nathanael is his stand-in. Nathanael is not the privileged term in a series of student exchanges in Prague, Berlin, or Vancouver, the products of which rebound strangely again and again to Berlin. *Der Sandmann* is only a fiction of what already exists. Douglas returns only what was sent and received.

After all, this was not Douglas' first invitation to Europe. In 1992, he made *Hors-champs* at Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris at the invitation of the Musée national d'art moderne. Douglas assembled four American musicians who were then still resident or who had lived in France during the Free Jazz movement of the 1960s. Even its name was different in America where it was called “the New Thing,” and where the movement was identified by its black nation-

alism rather than musical style. The quartet's performance of Albert Ayler's 1965 anthem *Spirits Rejoice* is visually split between two sides of a free-hanging screen. One side mimics the period *en direct* style of ORTF musical television productions; the other registers pauses, gaps, and suspensions that are off-screen and "out of field" of performing. Douglas called this counter-rhythm a "counter-narrative of editing out". Referring to the *mise en scène* of his mimicking modernist art directing, Douglas oddly used the language of film noir to describe its "rough chiaroscuro and abstract placelessness."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this contaminating trace is a rebounding representation. In the criss-cross emigration canceling an earlier middle passage that saw Josephine Baker and Sidney Bechet land and be lauded in Paris, Weimar émigrés in flight to Hollywood smuggled more than their expressionist past into film noir. In appreciation of welcoming harbor and professional employment, they composed a fanfare of gifts of images for America, returning what they believed they had received: images of black performance as animated ensembles of "assembly-line deviations." These vignettes momentarily suspend the plot (from which players are absent) at the same time that they ambivalently express noir protagonists' unmoored predicaments in their newfound worlds. Free Jazz émigrés in Europe already were the recoiling ghosts of animated representations imported long before they arrived.

#### IV. *Persistence of Genre*

... less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph about the Krupp works or the A.E.G. tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations — the factory, say — means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built* up, something artificial, posed.

—Bertolt Brecht<sup>14</sup>

Photography's objectivity is no aid to history if the index, which becomes documentary record, is not of its moment. Retrospectively photographing a site, say the wall of the Communards in Père Lachaise Cemetery, commemorates a date rather than reflects history. Unless it wishes to compete by imitating painting's artificial constructions, which, problematically, are

those of the studio, photography usually concedes to history painting the syntheses of past events. What history remains or returns in photography's citation of past paintings if not divisions of its own making? Detached from the historical record that its references cannot restore, photography brings ready-made judgments and those of art history with it, artificially posing them as a mode of irony. Contradiction is construed as irony. This is one response to Brecht's call, but these fabrications only say something about the present, not the past, as all revivalist practices do in their conformity to taste. How *can* the past be represented, as determined from



*Potsdamer Schrebergärten:  
Two Lauben and Transmission  
Towers, "Uns genügt's," Nuthe-  
strand I, Babelsberg 1994–95  
Cat. 9.12*

the present, in a photograph? History would be as invisible as the social relations Brecht decried.

Without manipulating an image, a photographer could discover evidence of history's unspoken residues, as an "illumination of detail," in juxtapositions in the landscape. The period between erection of the garden cottages and transmission tower of *Two Lauben and Transmission Towers, "Uns genügt's," Nuthestrand I, Babelsberg* relocate these charming garden retreats to their origin in waste spaces. Such guileless discovery, though, maintains the illusion of transparency of a medium itself spared history. Photography only situates *Nu·tka*'s story in what



Potsdamer Schrebergärten:  
Sanssouci Gardeners at the  
Teehaus, Brandenburger  
Vorstadt 1994–95  
Cat. 9.2



we see of its site today. We are justified in thinking that the elaborate artificiality of Douglas' projections is a *riposte* to the insufficiency of photography to convey the complexities of its historical moment. At least the filter of obsolete technologies enmeshes us, whereas photography keeps us at an aesthetic distance. Aesthetic distance, however, is a historical construct, originating, moreover, from the culture of *Nu·tka·*'s time.

Cat. 11 History persists more in what is *of* the image than in it as trace of prior contact: History *frames* these photographs. Douglas composed these images according to genres and aesthetics of landscape painting: romantic or realist, picturesque or sublime. Since its invention, photography has subscribed to painting's conventions to free its artistry from sullied origins as technical craft. *Nootka Sound* recalls this history, especially as it influenced the early photography of the American West. The time frame of *Nu·tka·* rather places Douglas' photographs at the colloquy of landscape painting and aesthetics at their European source so distant from Vancouver Island. So distant, we wonder or worry? How did Douglas answer his question, "What would contact and mingling with radically foreign cultures bring?" Typically, he let a *medium* respond. "Gothic tales answer: a decrepit clan wallows in decadence awaiting its final annihilation (*The Fall of the House of Usher*); a monster appears, threatening to infect the whole of

the social and natural order (*Frankenstein*); the bourgeois individual himself might become infected and begin to display mortally morbid symptoms (*Dracula*).”<sup>15</sup>

Even entertainment is not free; it incurs the wounds of conflicts near and far, in the homeland and imperial colonies. Its invention is symptomatic, as well. Genre is an invention. While an author like Horace Walpole, whose *Castle of Otranto* started the Gothic genre, believed that his story arose as a pure product of fantasy free of all rules of convention but those of nature he groomed on his Strawberry Hill estate, there is no other literary form which so owes its dodges and guises, its comings and goings to the artificiality of its scenic machinery. Genres communicate beyond their fanciful inventions; something from afar was communicating through them, haunting the privilege of their profitable invention. Paintings participated in this commerce even if they only depicted scenes of pastoral or sublime nature far from industry’s hubbub or the crowd’s swirl. If not the painters themselves, the patrons of this genre, at least, had an interest in obscuring the foreshadowing realities outside the garden confines of



*Nootka Sound: Gold River Mill*  
1996  
Cat. 11.27



*Nootka Sound: The Spanish Well  
at Yuquot* 1996  
Cat. 11.4

*Nootka Sound: Humingbird/  
Cormorant at Hanna Channel*  
1996  
Cat. 11.1

*Detroit Photos: Home beside  
Jefferson Junior High 1998  
Cat. 12.19*



their sunny estates. A diversion meant for private possession and delectation is social still. An image diverts; it shields the view from conflict it cannot, nonetheless, escape within its comfortable aesthetic.

We remain as unconscious of the aesthetic “frame” through which we see as of that which is obscured in its image. We can say, “Look, here are native petroglyphs; here is the Spanish well.” But we cannot point and say, “Here is the framework through which you are looking.” Even before we recognize a scene, we see through a framework invisible to seeing. The frame houses the image, but its inside-out division infiltrates the interior to inhabit the image. The cipher of the frame encrypts its secret there. While silently denying it, genre trespasses on the image it creates in its own likeness. Through genre, we too trespass in what seems natural to sight.

An aesthetic is no different, after all, than the obsolete technologies of Douglas’ media projections. As immediately seduced as we are by moving images, we recognize a dated technology: The image stamps itself defunct. With the photographs, we believe, rather, that our seeing is unimpeded by the past’s point of view. The intertwining of past and present points of view in Douglas’ photographs is altogether different from the historical residues they register within their images. The relation of the present to the past is the persistence of the encumbered genres of the past in the present.

The artist's task is not to appropriate a genre or aesthetic merely by historical association: for instance, *heimlich* realism for *Potsdamer Schrebergärten* or romantic sublime for *Nootka Sound*. Not immediately visible, a genre aesthetic both reveals and conceals what is in its images at the same time. Sometimes, though, a minor artist cannot disguise the artificiality that transparently discloses a distressed class interest, which views its decline not as the end of its own self-interest but of Civilization. The fantasies of destruction of John Martin's nineteenth-century panoramic paintings of the cataclysmic fall of city civilizations display a class's death drive exacerbated to sublime proportions.

Cat. 9, 11

Completing a Gothic trilogy following *Der Sandmann* and *Nu-tka*, Douglas' Detroit project carried out from 1997 to 1999 presents more than an epic urban myth: It pictures the real destruction of the core of America's fourth largest city. By whatever name, Motor City or Motown, Detroit is emblematic of the spark of industrial and popular culture and the modernizing optimism of the American dream. Yet its city center is in ruin, a result of the race riots and white flight of 1967. What explains this strange abandonment or expulsion as if from a haunted site, which left Detroit a city of haunted houses? Like Hawthorne's *House of Seven Gables*, built on the ground of some grievous wrong, Detroit — the city of Marie Hamlin's 1883 chronicle *Legends of Le Détroit* — pays for the crimes of dispossession of its founding.

Cat. 10

As with Douglas' complementary project where class supplants race (*Win, Place or Show* and related *Strathcona*, both 1998), *Le Détroit* and *Detroit Photos* share a view of urban renewal as an abject failure of modernist utopianism. Here, the ruin of utopia is in reverse. *Collapsed*

Cat. 12



*Le Détroit* 2000  
Film installation with two  
synchronized 35 mm-projectors  
and one semitransparent screen  
6 mins. loop  
Installation at the Winnipeg Art  
Gallery, Winnipeg 2001



*Le Détroit 2000*  
Stills

*House and Home beside Jefferson Junior High* are uncanny retreats to a pastoral past: Victorian houses occupy sparse village grounds that were once jostling urban grids. Entropy and aesthetics ally in a temporal regression where architectural ruins are now at home in a landscape more consistent with their era of building. Or, in isolation, they stand congruent with our imagination of the American Gothic.

If we could divorce these pictures from their context, we might take them as idealized images of an American past simulated today by gated communities in their reverse segregation of the rich. (Urban renewal once hid the poor; it now hides the rich.) Nostalgic images, though, are no protection. The grounds they depict are palimpsests from which to read legends of expulsion; the borders they capture in breach (*Eastern Border of Indian Village*) are liminal zones fraught with conflict. Defense is difficult when even the past lingers within a spatial boundary as a memorial of past transgressions.

Collectively, the photographs depict the scope of disaster hitherto shielded from view. Individual photographs, however, are haunted by knowledge of epic ruin that they themselves cannot picture as a totality. The sublime is a threshold experience. To maintain oneself fearlessly there is to poise oneself divided on both sides of what is marginal. Disproportionate and immeasurable, the sublime cannot be represented: It is unrepresentable. The sublime is beyond categories, especially those of genre. Not only inadequate to its expression, these pictures repress knowledge of disaster. Denial leads to gaps in the unconscious and absences in the imagination. Failure in the face of the sublime has two consequences that determined the divide of *Le Détroit*: the unbridgeable strait between photography and film.

From the sublime to genre, picturesque retreat is a sign of repression. Some trace of unsettlement before its madness subsists sideways displaced to a related genre that inoculates, first releasing then containing terror's contagion, which undermines social relations. Douglas exploits the genre devoted to horror in his double-sided 35 mm film projection *Le Détroit*. He set his horror film in the housing project Herman Gardens. Workers' terrace housing in garden tracts is a legacy of the utopian socialism of the nineteenth century in the social engineering of the twentieth. To loose horror in its garden follies is natural, natural enough given our fear that nature is unnatural. In present day Detroit, Douglas' young black female protagonist, Eleanore, is captive to her past, captive to a secret she is in search of behind the walls of an abandoned home, captive even now to repeating her actions cyclically in disorienting *déjà vu*. Projected in positive and negative images slightly out of synch on two sides of a translucent screen, Eleanore's every action leaves a ghostly trail. In this liminal space, made sensible for us by the hovering projection, she is her own ghost.

Ghostly, could she ever be represented? What is flight but terror? Held in the grip of terror, Eleanore cannot flee her trap. Flight has left an abyss of urban blight in Detroit, but it has also left a void that figures in the imagination as an absence. Threat to class privilege can only be exonerated by demonizing the Other. We fear to meet what we cannot put a face to. Is it coincidence that the sublime cannot be represented while the Other is absent from representation? What would *law* have to say about absence?

### v. *Ellipses of Suspension*

Cat. 3–8

We set the machine on pause. We take a hiatus in this narrative to review works we passed over: *Television Spots* (1987–88), *Subject to a Film: Marnie* (1989), and *Monodramas* (1991). We retreat to retrace paths where the artist stopped short. We track these trails to their consequences rather than their destinations. Douglas' short-circuit leaves others lost in the woods. (In Vancouver, especially when it comes to schools, some cannot see the forest for the trees.) What was lost and found in these woods is no fairy-tale hoard of gold — but an *absence*. An absence that is not nothing is hard to speculate on, let alone see. I hope that I am not losing you. We are not talking naught or talking in circles, as the German expression “*auf dem Holzweg sein*” might have it: on the wrong tack or track or barking up the wrong tree. Our hesitancy is not which fork of a wood path to pursue. Between what is undecidable, we must suspend decision. In that postcolonial Douglas declares “absence” to be a constant theme, we expect him to protest it in his art to procure an identity otherwise missing.<sup>16</sup> When Douglas presents absence in his art, it is invisible. How can a theme not appear? This artist's refusal of absence proceeds



contrarily by way of absence. He delegates his absence to a machine. The machine calculates absences and circulates them by repetitions and suspensions in order to put into motion the one and the naught, the one and the not one. Absence is functional.

That which sutures the gaps in the contradictory functioning of the machine, I speculate, is similar to what sutures the subject in its constituting division as a lack in being. We are not about to follow the royal road to the unconscious, but film theorists have already advantageously lifted the Lacanian notion of suture for discussion of classic Hollywood film. Suture accounts — if we are counting — for the unconscious in our reckoning of absences. If the question of the subject is a question of the machine, suture securely tethers a subject outside the apparatus (viewer) to one inside (protagonist). Having by now apprenticed himself to the technical codes of the film industry and the protocols of theory, Douglas could speculate by using one of theory's canonical films to posit a subject otherwise, that is, differing from the subject as constructed by cinematic codes.

For his *Subject to a Film: Marnie*, Douglas appropriated Alfred Hitchcock's 1964 *Marnie*. Our young artist remade Hitchcock only to quote a scene, not to extrapolate a counter-factual situation as postmodernist rampering then allowed, but to suspend the character Marnie from Hitchcock's film. Restaging a pivotal scene, Douglas chose the moment that condemns Marnie by stealing from the man, Mark Rutwell, who knew she was a thief. Douglas suspends her act, just short of theft, in a loop. Repetition infinitely delays narrative closure rather than builds suspense. Within this repeating sequence, however, Douglas altered the cinematic constructions that condemned "Marnie" to her narrative fate. The black-and-white surveillance-type footage cancels effects of several fictional assumptions of cinematic convention. Firstly, in knowing that she is "watched" by a camera, Marnie is resolute in her decision *and* "inso-lent" in her act. She thus suspends the power of its witness while, at the same time, she exposes the proxy role that the camera has for Hitchcock. Secondly, the functional surveillance

*Subject to a Film: Marnie* 1989  
Stills  
Cat. 6





footage obviates the need for an “absent” director, the one who, before and after an actor is positioned in front of a camera, conducts us to the crime and its solution. Reverse-angle shots, one of these tried and true techniques and the suturing device of our incorporation into Hollywood’s believable fictions, are employed only twice by Douglas. They are the exceptions that prove the rule, or law, whose effects are annulled here. They were already partially suspended at law’s source since there is one law for men and another for women. Theory has it that in classical Hollywood film, woman is only an object of the male scopical regime, not a subject herself. She is out of the loop of identity. Thinking back to an earlier scene in the original where Marnie shuffles a deck of social security cards to choose her next name in a chain of possibilities, we join Douglas in thinking that “typical identification” is uncertain here.

Hissing to dust adhering to film stock, the soundtrack is equally intransigent in its materiality as the grainy footage is in its resistance to our pleasure. The “sole aural event” of this silent film is a splice that dramatically clunks when it passes through the projector at the moment, marking it, that Marnie closes a drawer after learning the safe’s combination. We hear what cannot be seen (the splice) in contradistinction to Hitchcock’s film where the camera sees what cannot be heard: the hard-of-hearing cleaning lady who does not respond to the sound of Marnie’s dropped shoe. Seeing what cannot be heard is *internal* to Hitchcock’s film, while hearing what cannot be seen is *external* to our situation as viewers of Douglas’ remake. Both events ambivalently bind us in suspense to the fate of Marnie’s act. But only one really equivocates in Marnie’s guilt by infinitely delaying narrative closure.

The loop condemns Marnie to her noir nightmare. At the same time, it equally rescues her from the legalistic proceedings of narrative resolution. Douglas suspends Marnie in *her* decision: to be a thief and not to be defined by theft. Only a repetition, *Subject to a Film: Marnie* is a diverging, dissenting, and deviant version. The title’s ambiguity makes us hesitate whether we are free — in this moment of suspense suspended — to judge. Who is subject to film; who is free? Is the loop an external judgment of the character’s decision, or a suspension of decision, or suspension even of the question of decision? The loop entangles inside out. It disentangles suture by suspending its technique. Deviating, the loop warrants arrest.

Actually, there are two loops, one “internal” and the other “external” to the film. The first, a long camera take, follows Marnie through the office to the opening of the safe and then sweeps away (as if deviating from the law of the straight and narrow) to arc back to the “beginning” of the shot. If the first loop traces the camera’s Möbius-strip-like route through the scene, the second loop marks the projector’s repeating. After its first repeating, the film loop folds its temporal repetitions into the temporal anomaly of the long take.

Repetition is divergent. Repeating, it diversifies. Entwining inside out and outside in, deviation dissolves discrimination between external judgment and internal witness. The loop is not external to the deviation it creates but internal to what it suspends. Marnie is not suspended *inside* film in a vicious circle, which is the *closed* system of her entrapment (in repeating null time, suspended out of time where her repressed past recurs to control her present actions). She is suspended in a liminal space of *freedom*, whether this space might only be her workday fantasy. *Outside* the film, but subject to it, we are open to divergence, which is resistant to closure but *open* to time. We are free to share two viewpoints inside and outside the cinematic apparatus, subject to *and* divergent from film: Marnie and *me*.

It is strange to model freedom on our relation to a machine and comical if it decides for us. Like the modern concept of law, machines found themselves on absences about which we cannot speculate. In that “THE LAW, as defined by its pure form, without substance or object or any determination whatsoever, is such that no one knows nor can know what it is; [and in that] it operates without making itself known... [and furthermore] defines a realm of transgression where one is already guilty,” it would seem to be, supplanting the suggestion of the unconscious earlier, the operative model of Douglas’ machines.<sup>17</sup> It would be, if it were not for suspension of judgment, suspension and absence being different operations.

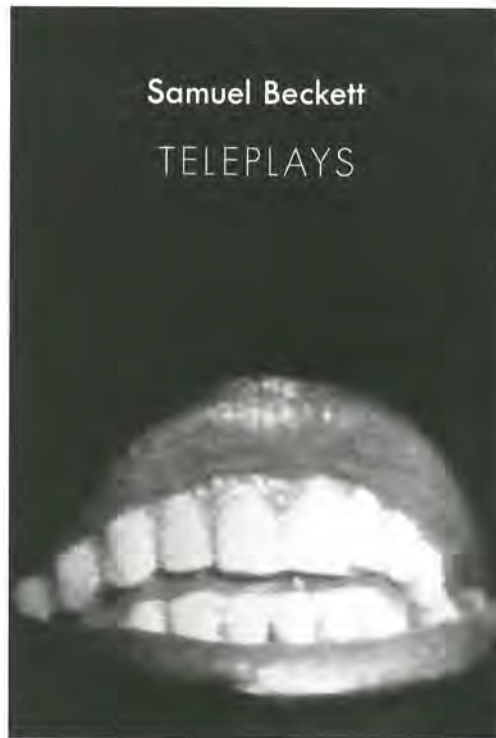
What right had Douglas to suspend judgment, to tamper with another artist’s film (one as logical and precise as any of his own), and dissent from a clinical decision of Marnie’s case? Marnie is not the masochist Hitchcock thinks she is; she is the masochist *Subject to a Film* frees her to be. “The masochist is insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission; in short he is a humorist, a logician of consequences, just as the sadist is a logician of principles,” Gilles Deleuze wrote in a text Douglas thought worthy enough to reprint as his *artist’s choice* in his 1998 Phaidon monograph.<sup>18</sup> A comic combination of irony and humor, Deleuze believed, was the only rejoinder to the law.

As Douglas had back then, let us pair Gilles Deleuze and Samuel Beckett as their own Laurel and Hardy comic team. We will tail Douglas on the downward path of humor’s subversive submissions and not the upward pursuits of irony’s transcendence of law’s principles. A logician of consequences, Beckett subjects the law — say, the Cartesian cogito — to *reductio ad absurdum*. Unlike Deleuze’s, Beckett’s options are one-sided, though divided into his comic double: his “I” and “not-I” suspended in their looping logorrhea. Speaking ten years after he curated *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays* for the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1988, Douglas characterized the “protagonist” of Beckett’s *Not I* as “Mouth’s endless task: trying to discover whether or not self-representation or autonomy are possible through a mendacious and corrupt language.”

When an artist says that “this ‘linguistic’ problem’ is the starting point of all my work,” we take him at his word. Douglas’ words, however, appear nowhere in his products to speak for him. Continuing, he clarified: “not only in the sense of spoken or written language but also in terms of different media and idioms of knowledge.”<sup>19</sup>

Law operates in media and idioms as their codes. Even before a narrative unfolds, even before film conducts us into its perceptual apparatus, an industry’s technical codes and generic products already position us. (Yet law operates where desire is. Law and desire are negotiated

*Samuel Beckett: Teleplays* 1988  
Catalogue of exhibition  
curated by the artist  
at the Vancouver Art Gallery  
24 x 16.5 cm



through film’s spectacle, in both its conflicted images and equally divisive production processes.) Douglas inducted himself into film and television production, but from its margins. He staged for himself every aspect of a medium’s technical procedures. *Television Spots, Subject to a Film: Marnie*, and *Monodramas* were the first products of this industry. Like *Marnie*, Douglas implicated himself as subject to law’s demands and effects. He apprenticed himself to codes more than to signs. (Codes cut more than do allaying seductive signs.) Trespassing from the field of art did not secure him mastery to judge. He was already a double subject,

inside and out, and therefore guilty before the law. Retreating to art's privileged domain, he was not exempt from law's effects. He could not summarily judge from this side, to be a theoretician even of effects. He chose humor, not irony, quietly following Beckett (as he put it in his "Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat") "from describing to inhabiting situations [where] both audience and author are asked to admit their complicity in the visibility of the spectacle, and distanced judgment or interpretative 'explanation' becomes an uneasy pretence."<sup>20</sup> For anyone who could read between the lines, Douglas' essay was also a devastatingly critical "goodbye" to the theory *and* irony of both the Frankfurt and Vancouver Schools. Douglas would rather school himself in solidarity with Marnie and Mouth: mastering and submissive, mastering and masochistic, mastering and subversive.

*Television Spots* and *Monodramas* were Douglas' indenture to the system. They were broadcast on television or cable TV, appearing among commercials with no markers as to what they were. Exercises in playing the pathology of everyday life against the medium and its habits of viewing, these shorts might irritate television to expose the unconscious of its contradictory constructions. Increasingly sophisticated, both were dutiful exercises, intelligent and funny, in the subversion of the law by means of art-world strategies of appropriation and inhabitation. They did not survive Douglas' retrospective judgment: They were as "tautological" as formalist art and as "inherently cynical" in their self-reference. "Ethics is a form of representation that can never be tautological," was what he said, inferring that art is an ethical act but that ethics is not judgment. When discussing *his* judgment of *Television Spots* and *Monodramas*, Douglas said, "you cannot devise an ethical world unless you are free; when you are not free whatever restricts you also restricts and determines your choices," we cannot presume that, free of television, he was speaking from a position of freedom.<sup>21</sup>

Car. 4, 8

We are back at Douglas' inaugural dilemma of repeating machines, machines that in principle demonstrate tautology. Even now with his new technical expertise, Douglas persisted in making machines from which he was absent. Was he free? Had he nothing to say or to express — to appropriate, pastiche, parody, or *critique*? Would he never figure in his work even by absence, not by taking up the salutary slogan of "the death of the author," but perhaps by a system or machinery of quotation, which authorized, after all, his new competence? His absence now figures as his submission to the law. Is this a dilemma or a device? Is an ethics of representation devious or divisive?

Taciturn, stone-faced Douglas had nothing of his own to say, but quotation too, you would think, would be tautological. It would be rote; repetition conforms. Repeating images to the letter of the law iterates its omissions. Iterating absences is strange submission where a

machine performs, not the artist. A machine “quotes” itself. But diversifying repetition produces ever-differing relations of images in a continuing montage: a montage *of* montage. Machines invent nothing, only re-circulate all relations, absences too, which would be nothing if not sustained by montage and vice versa. Montage’s absence is absence’s strategy.

Such a machine could not be tautological. Quotation would be an understatement, “set off” in an elliptical manner between itself, that is, between itself and what it quotes. Twice said? A machine modeled on an ellipse rather than a circle has two foci, two points of view varying in relation to each other over time: a double view, a two-faced view. Between two or more views, where would the artist *present* himself absent? He would not let another, Nathanael for instance, represent him. Cunningly, he appears in what is divided and effaced at the same time, as in blackface, which he himself cannot mime (can he?). What a shock to see the cover of his *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays* with its blackface Billie Whitelaw from Beckett’s 1977 television version of *Not I*. With only Whitelaw’s lubricious lips and teeth visible, spot lit as if an iris shot, this image uncannily resembles his own from *Mime*. Is he present *or* absent in this image, whose publication he controlled? Does he perform through it? Or does he perform a critique? I think he identified with this flawed and faltering subject split in uncertain slippage between “I” and “not-I.” He identified with what was non-tautological, but he would not be these *unruly* enunciations.

## vi. *Two Concepts*

If Douglas reflects on “law,” “freedom,” and the “sublime,” these concepts are not the content of his art. They are concepts whose contents cannot be represented. We know by now never to look for what we cannot find, realizing that absence is different from invisibility. So it is not for nothing that absence, being neither content nor concept, prepares us to think what a concept *of* but not *in* the work might be, that is, a concept by which Douglas’ machines operate. The machine’s concepts put absence to work.

Cat. 10      Concurrence on contradiction — for instance, recurrence and convergence leading to contradiction in *Nu-tka* and *Der Sandmann* — would not make it a concept. Never appearing in what it joins together, contradiction seems to motor machines, but only as a relational effect of preceding divisions. As division doubles iterating images before they either converge or recur, a concept must account for divergence, not convergence, for diversity, not equiva-

lency. At the same time, this concept diverges and diversifies in diverging and diversifying repetition. (Supposedly, concepts should be identical to themselves over time.) In that it divides, repetition is inaugural. Repetition appears first (or, then again, second) as an original iteration. *Repetition* is the first concept.

Repetition needs no examples, even in Douglas' case where music and Beckett served as exemplars. Repetition is as different as it is similar or singular. There is no certainty in repetition's return or certainty of return in repetition. It is uncanny that a recurrence can be different — and different, as well, from recurrence as contradiction. At once *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, like the title's reprise, it marks coming back, divergently. The reprising interval divides a title that no longer is originally the same. Like the monster's stereotypical, autonomic revival at the end of horror flicks, Douglas comes back to haunt again and again. He returns in *Suspiria* in re-gendered confusion of genres. No genre is safe from his sequel's contaminating admixture. Remaking others' artifacts, Douglas has nothing original to say; yet what he adds is fictional.

Cat. 16

Nothing is as predictable as the closed system of a machine or the repeat screening of a movie. Once seen, images succeed each other as mechanically as habit in the strict order of their celluloid indifference. Habit is the sum and accumulated substance of *Overture*. The rhythm of its repetitions, however, staggers sequences so that the mechanical or arithmetic series of voice-over (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and twice-repeating images (1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3) now perform the limited variation of a musical score, "overture" also being a musical form. No longer automatic in habitual response, we realize the distracted insufficiency of our knowledge. Exact repeating disorders expectations and continually varies our point of view.

In the divisions it repeats, at once identical and different, repetition accounts for: habit; the automatism of the machine; the doppelgänger's doubling; divided inhabitation and haunting by a revenant; circulating reception and return; serial recurrence, convergence and divergence; contradiction and difference; anomalies recurring out of synch; open and closed systems; etc. . .

Repetition, however, cannot fully explain suspension's effects in *Subject to a Film: Marnie*. Only suspension's inauguration derives from repeating. It is true that repetition suspends; looping interrupts the logic of temporal succession. But suspension suspends *and* prolongs. It prolongs past into present as memory and habit. The past persists in the minor pathologies of habit or major occlusions of repression. Turning on the wheel of itself, suspension still anticipates the future. Suspense is the precarious hinge between the past of guilt and the future of punishment. While looping suspends one scene from the narrative pull of *Marnie*, the orig-

Cat. 6

Cat. 2 inal persists in memory, the two films temporally intertwined like *Overture's* rhythmic series. Our judgment contracts the two.

Although repetition portions the machine's divisive effects, suspension renders time as memory or anticipation. Suspension accounts for: recurrence of repression's haunting; the receipt of perceptual effects of obsolescent technologies; absence; montage; liminality; etc... *Suspension* is the other concept, the second to appear. Coming second, it is a more complex temporal concept.

In music, suspension provokes the discordant persistence of the past in the present by prolonging one note of a chord to create a discord with the chord following. *Subject to a Film's* looping is *discordant* to *Marnie's* ongoing narrative. The persistent return of the repressed is *discordant* for both individual and society. Montage *is* discord.

Each discord is a perspective; each disjunctive conjunction of montage is a point of view. When the machine diversifies variations, it also changes points of view. The machine constructs all the contradictions of its limited schema, one after another. It tries all possibilities, but lets us value. Suspension suspends judgment, but also renders discord: Suspension is an ethical concept. Suspension *yet* anticipates justice. Not justice as agreement or accord, but sundering discord: judgment's discord. Failed utopias persist in memory, suspended in their potential to come again.<sup>22</sup> In the end, we return to the beginning, to the question of beginning, to the concepts at the opening of this chapter — to law, freedom, and the sublime. The diversifying repetitions of Douglas' machines suspend us in liminal uncertainty before their constituting and reconstituting gaps.

## vii. *Value Machines*

Although there is no certainty in repetition's reprisals, capital expects a return on its money as a mysterious increase in value, mysterious since it does not labor to create it. At the same time, capital denies unexpected returns in the mysterious appearance of a revenant. Either way, capital has a say in the running of these machines, which are the apparent mechanisms of its contrary reversions.

Cat. 14, 10 *Journey into Fear* introduced a Capital trilogy in the manner that *Nu-tka*, *Der Sandmann*,  
Cat. 16 and *Le Détroit* comprised a Gothic trilogy, although *Suspiria*, as well, reprised the Gothic. If

Douglas always retails retold and retread technologies, recombinants are top of the line machines. In fact, *Journey into Fear* (2001), *Suspiria* (2003), and *Inconsolable Memories* (2005) were unprecedented inventions, although foreseen in Douglas' earlier devices. They are repetition's generation.

Cat. 18

Like *Der Sandmann*, *Journey into Fear* assembled its references from its context, with its starting point in 1975, the year of Vancouver's first locally produced major motion picture (typically, with Hollywood leads and American director). Douglas' title lagged third in a series behind Daniel Mann's *Journey into Fear* remake of Norman Foster's 1942 film production of



Eric Ambler's 1940 topical novel of the same name. Douglas isolated a critical scene set in the protagonist's cabin on a combined cargo/passenger boat, a "two-hander" that is a decidedly one-sided negotiation of compromised choice: death or dishonor for the hero. The scene reveals the machinations behind the plot (the film plot and the character's scheme) in exposing its behind-the-scenes author, Möller. Möller sets the options for ensuing action; he options the action for his return profit. Graham can choose to be killed or participate in a plot to delay delivery of either armaments (1940/1942) or information from which profit would be engineered (1975). From Douglas' 2001 vantage point, the 1975 version (set after the 1973 oil crisis) falls halfway "in the transition from internationalism to globalism: the passage from a world in which power is brokered by politics to one in which finance is the preferred medium

*Win, Place or Show* 1998  
 Stills  
 Two-channel video projection  
 Four-channel soundtrack  
 204,023 variations with an average  
 duration of 6 mins. each  
 Dimensions variable



of influence.”<sup>23</sup> In the Pacific port city of Vancouver, we have come full circle from *Nu·tka*’s prescient global cycles.

Selectively remaking one scene mutates into all the film’s scenes. Looping turns *action* on itself. The ship never reaches its destination. Suspended on the ocean, Möller and Graham ceaselessly engage in an ongoing repartee of a limited repertoire. In Douglas’ version, plot and scheme are one, with the ship itself part of the fiduciary scam. The scheme now permutes options and perpetually delays action. Whereas Graham had two options in all earlier versions, she (Douglas changed genders) now has countless ones. Earlier, Graham’s actions were delayed to



*Journey into Fear:*  
*Pilot's Quarters 1, 2* 2001  
C-Prints  
each 71 x 89 cm

further them otherwise; now, the machine suspends all action. At the precise moment of crisis, the limited scope of the film medium’s scheme must make visible what hitherto lay hidden behind or invisible in its plot(s). As the author of the scheme who has directed all of Graham’s actions, Möller must expose himself in order that plot machinations continue: so that Graham is forced to choose *the* option (which is not the wager Möller proposed) that makes him the original story’s hero by disposing of his now functionary other. As the fabricator of the schema where the machine is the author of all options, Douglas need not expose its mechanisms. Operations stay invisible since they only determine effects. Action is displaced to the functional system.

Making mockery of protagonists in their permuting verbal agon, dialogue replaces action. Where a fifteen-minute image track loops while the sound track permutes, *Journey into Fear* is the revenge of the sound track. The input of five parallel dialogue tracks, which branch at four points in their timelines, has the potential output of 625 dialogue permutations over 157 hours. (Following a set of rules, a computer links a completed track segment to the next in proper temporal order of any of the five dialogue streams.) A common occurrence in “foreign” films, mouths and issuing words mismatch. Dubbing compromises between the option of meaning or vocalization — in English, too! No “original” appears to synch sound to image or our hearing to seeing.

Once the predictable product of Hollywood script factories where words came first (but were valued second to the appearance of images), now, the script is measured to the machine’s mechanisms. For the purposes of permuting dialogue, scriptwriters Douglas and Vancouver novelist Michael Turner quantified language to match some “mythical” original dialogue, which never appears — a daunting task! Permutation is only possible on the basis of quantification and exchange. Transformed into like units, words are exchanged as commodities independently of any “meaning” of their own. Our natural *trust* in the secure value of language is shaken when actors merely mouth words or when words falsify characters’ intentions (or fail to “speak” for the author or artist as the meaning of his or her art, presuming, that is, that meaning exists apart from a work’s operations).

Where words are merely ciphers exchanged in accordance with undisclosed standards, linguistics is no aid to understanding the machine’s falsifying fabrications. However, the quasi-syllogistic schema of Möller’s rationale is: “Oil is money. Money is politics. I work for money.” Total exchangeability illustrates the logic operating here. Not only words exchange in dubbing’s “lip-flap”; units of dialogue substitute along segmented chains. Only one timeline sets out the original negotiation. Four others randomly shuffle episodes drawn from Hermann Melville’s 1857 novel, *The Confidence Man*. The Mississippi steamboat, *Fidèle* (after which Douglas commemoratively baptizes his container ship), is the setting for a day and night of confidence swindling. In a series of conversations where deception is in the open, money is exchanged for words on trust.

All exchanges are based on trust in commonly accepted conventions; otherwise, we have no assurance of the conveyance of meaning of any type. Monetary exchanges, narratives, and film codes are all secured by convention; each has its own gold standard. *Journey into Fear*’s exterior timeline (1940/42, 1975, 2001) charts crises of confidence in monetary standards: from the 1944 abandonment of the gold standard, to the breakdown of the U.S. dollar standard in

the 1970s, in part precipitated by the 1973 oil crisis, to today's global movement of capital that creates profit, as Douglas wrote, from "minute shifts in the relative value of — not things and commodities — but of value itself."<sup>24</sup>

Against conventions or, at least, against his dupes' expectations, the Mississippi River confidence man floats all standards. His sleight-of-hand convertibility aims to exchange words for money by only the labor, or performance, of talk. The con man succeeds since he operates the system as a *whole*. Whether scams fail or not, he is a change agent; every conversation reprises varying confidence's terms until the journey's end. When money passes hands, the con man wins by his own rules — totally *within* the closed system of his falsifying narrative.

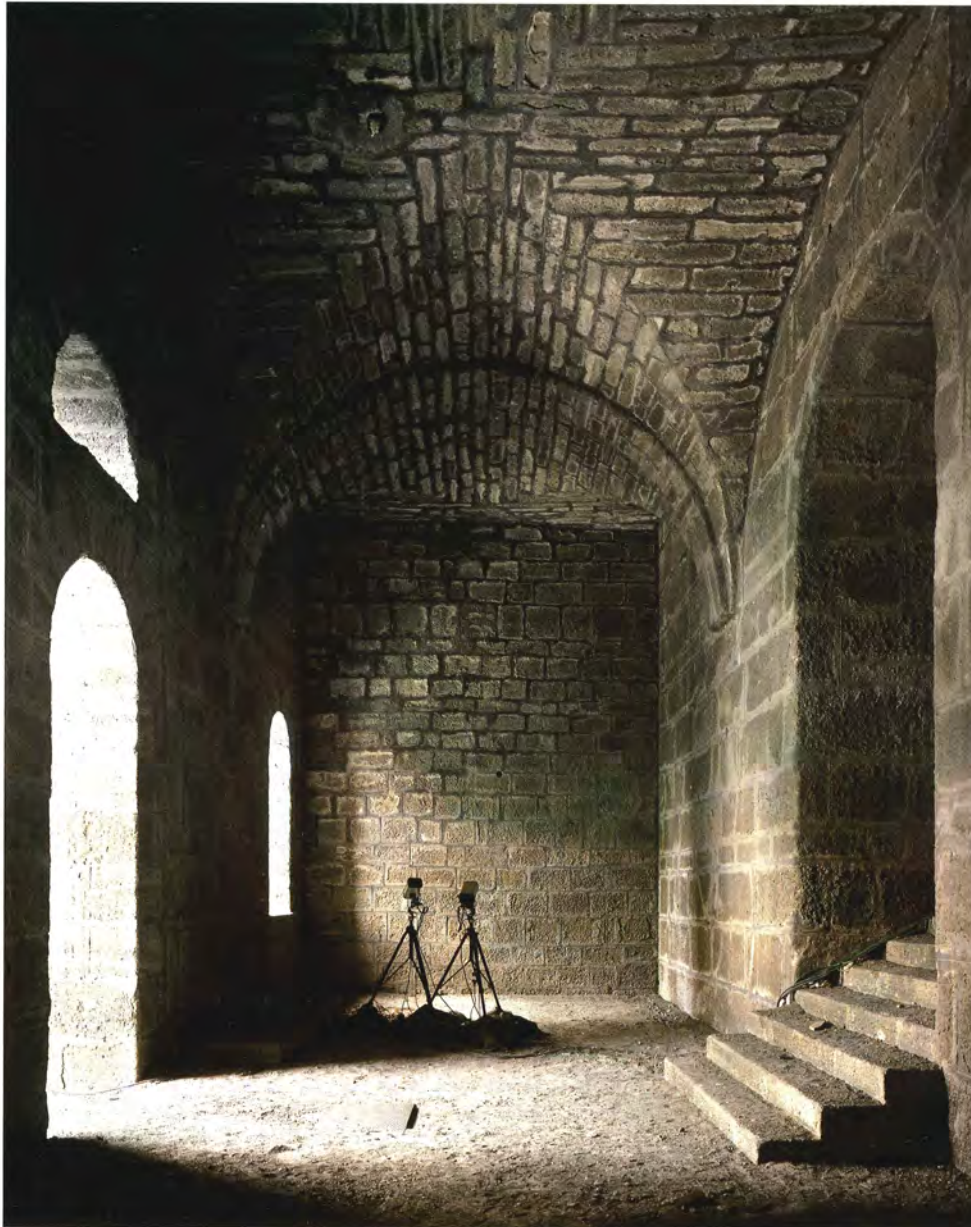
Douglas' *Fidèle* is a vehicle for exchange through *value* itself. Although necessary to the plot's monetary scheme, Graham and Möller are mere functionaries. They "appear on the economic stage [as] personifications of economic relations," who yet believe in capital's various representations, appearances, or fetishes.<sup>25</sup> The latter are no more than falsifying values that the machine, *Journey into Fear*, sends into circulation. The machine distributes roles and regulates and permutes exchanges as functions of its system. It is not, trust me, a confidence man.

Through its diversifying repetitions, the machine continually re-orders every order and association of its constituent elements. Creating all variation and value, all value by variation, the machine is "author." Every diversification of montage is a differing *relation* of value. Differing, the machine states no value. Dialogue is only one of its products or effects. Agents "mouth" machine words. With no subjectivity but a machine's, which is to say, no subjectivity at all, all rules or standards of traditional or organic narrative break down.

Car. 14, 16, 18

*Journey into Fear*, *Suspiria*, and *Inconsolable Memories* are three versions or models of capital machines. They are *value* machines. Douglas calls them recombinant; I call them permuting narrative machines. They are Douglas' *singular* invention. Before a machine is put on the market to perform, it must be designed, engineered, and fabricated. Enter the artist. As for the machine's input (which is not the work's content), a pre-existent "text" (which is never one — say, *Journey into Fear*) is broken apart. Its components are analyzed and quantified. Combinatory operational rules are then re-invented (another analysis). As for output (which is not the work's form), the machine does the rest. Its permuting performances are yet other, multiple real-time analyses.

Each model works to different effect. Complex variations make *Suspiria* the most dazzling. Each machine models its workings on different stages of capital. Machines work to capital's *values*, which we cannot know or see since they are invisible. Values do not appear; value is what does not appear in a relation. Confidence tricks distract our look from what is visibly



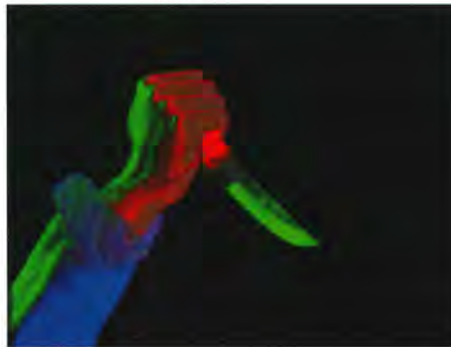
*Suspiria: Camera 1 and 2* 2002  
Cat. 15.5

before us. The machine, however, is not a confidence man, but neither is the con man a wizard *behind* the machine.

*Journey into Fear* demonstrates what lacks in its dialogues. The machine is more master of Möller than his own bosses, but, at the same time, it realizes the market values his employers exploit. Everything is open and visible in machine presentation, including the invisible, falsifying workings of value. Not the *visible* values the machine circulates through its differentiating, diversifying repetitions, but the *invisible* value of capital's *perpetuum mobile*. *Journey into*

*Fear's* machinery draws its resources from capital's self-valorization, its secret, uncanny power to add value to value without laboring or exchanging goods.<sup>26</sup> Created out of nothing, indeed self-created, capital is a monster: an autonomous automaton. Long cycles yet are subject to stasis and suspension on the sea, an unforeseen crisis or invisible critique that Douglas silently presents as capital's own functioning.

*Suspiria* was not a popular reprise, neither at its source nor reception. Returning a second time to Germany's fairy-tale woods, Douglas was rebuffed. Described as "doing Stan Douglas by numbers," *Suspiria* was not welcome.<sup>27</sup> Strange that with practice in *Der Sandmann*, his work



*Suspiria* 2003  
Stills  
Cat. 16

was rote. Strange that his most brilliant and culminating work, destined to be one of our era's few signposts — *our* haunting transmission to the future — was so resisted when the divisive *Der Sandmann* was not. But then, his audience, too, had time to practice resistance.

He went deep this time. He went deeper into the dark woods. He went to the heart, to the heart's treasure, to deliver a blow, a return blow, blow for blow, a blow in return.

He brought America along in his carpetbag of tricks to plant something of the New World there — some *thing* there where Gertrude Stein said there was no there *there*. Back home, visiting Europeans planted flags to camouflage their theft. Were he to emblazon what he came to redress, it would only be a placeholder rather than a place marker — a cipher, really. Splitting his signals, Douglas came in disguise to divert genres. He planted a stake in the heart, however divided he was between a rock and a hard place: in the grottoes of Kassel's Baroque Herkules folly and on the platform of his vaunted invitation to prestigious *documenta 11*, Germany's commanding showcase to the contemporary art world.

*Suspiria* communicated from a distance, from distances, although it was conjured in the Museum Fridericianum by converging two video signals. This was the *first* haunting by the ghostly misregistrations of television technology. Color arrived in North America through the spooking of a medium that haunted itself. The North American television standard (NTSC), which Douglas implemented in Kassel, supplemented its original black-and-white signals by superimposing chrominance signals. You can toy with signals. Douglas fed live black-and-white signals from four camera positions in the corridors of the Herkules Oktagon to a computer in the Museum that mixed them with pre-recorded scenes playing from DVD. Before our eyes, this hybrid projection conjured fantastic scenes. Its characters' disincarnate appearances were carefully planned. Positions and props were blocked out in a Vancouver studio to coincide with camera views in the Oktagon's dungeon-like vaults. Loud costumes and bright makeup transformed the actors into ghostly apparitions uncannily floating there. As if garish cartoons, these animations divert us, though Vancouver actors clumsily played truncated versions of Brother Grimm fairy tales. If they did not distract us instead, spectral effects were chroma-keys to unlocking treasure chests.

Haunting by divergent signals diverts us from a *second* haunting. If the first haunting is a return, the second is its source. Converging frequencies from two distances leads us nowhere but to some fantastic place. We follow these beckoning images with their glitter that is not gold, drawn by fairy tales into dark woods. Once there, we obliviously follow a chain of language only to become ensnared in folktales' logic. Other explorers, like the Brothers Grimm, retired rich in folk treasure to Kassel to publish what always hitherto was transmitted invisibly, that is, orally. "The [Grimm] brothers' folklore and philology were ultimately educational, intended to instruct a bourgeois subject who — through a combination of guile and good fortune — could defeat a giant, outwit a gnome, marry a princess, or build a modern nation."<sup>28</sup> Nation building through linguistic unity had no room for the uncanny. Freud, too, believed that the uncanny failed to inhabit fairy tales the way it did haunted houses. Through spooking technology, actors now wander the pseudo-Gothic corridors of the Herkules Oktogon as if lost on labyrinthine wood paths.

But from off-stage, a caricature comes knocking. Inviting an unwelcome guest into the inn opens these tales to haunting by a specter. Douglas and fellow scriptwriter Michael Turner deftly substituted literary allusions from Marx's *Das Kapital* — the capital compilation of the Brothers' younger German counterpart — for the Brothers' moral aphorisms. Not just rhetorical flourishes, these off-stage quotations were displaced from his text to haunt the fairy tales. Additionally, the off-stage machinery of his spectro-poetics was placed center stage. The phan-







tasmagoric nature of the commodity is a model for all that is visible and audible in *Suspiria's* theatrical machinery and invisible, too. Famed specter hunter Karl Marx joined Stan Douglas in a search for a magical agent that lays golden eggs.

The scriptwriters followed the footsteps of other folklorists, notably Vladimir Propp, who organized tales by identical actions or functions of various characters. In folktales, diverse characters are interchangeable among a small number of functions. "This explains the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and color, and ... its no less striking uniformity, its repetition."<sup>29</sup> Getting to the root in their analytical deconstruction and re-assembly of narrative elements and functions, Douglas and Turner radically rewrote all the rules to reduce the number of characters and functions. Interchangeable, characters cannot really act for themselves. They are products of narrative functions by which a story unfolds in order to fulfill its structure. With the help of a computer and Marx's analysis of the commodity's phantasmagoric nature, our Vancouver scriptwriters stood things on their heads.

We hunt for what fairy-tale characters luckily find through no wit of their own. For a hundred days, we wandered these woods. For the hundred days of *documenta*, the length of *Suspiria's* permutations, this tale-analytic-machine deviously misled us back to the center of the woods. In every appearance misleading in appearance, another tale drew us to the middle again, to a fork in the path of folktales' dilemma: the crisis of exchange. Of course in *Suspiria*, exchange is the motor of exchange. All its story elements and segment variations are linked according to strict rules (some of which are random) of segmentation, branching, and variation. Every story circulation winds us through these woods on different paths. From ever varying encounters, it always deposits us nowhere *where* the machine reduces all tales: *exchange*. In tales, exchange purely fulfills a narratological function. But then, tales are devious too, and so is exchange. Tales summon "magical helpers" or "magical agents," either the service of an animal (gold-shitting donkey) or the power of an object (magic table cloth), to make themselves work. In order to fulfill their terminal function of reward, tales (or, rather, the "magical agent") spontaneously create wealth for their "lazy rascal" heroes. *Presto!* Alleviated of the misfortune that enforced their wandering or exile, the lazy or lucky hero retreats from the woods to be richly rewarded by wealth and marriage, when she was already rewarded from wandering, rewarded for not working. She was just a function; someone else did the work.

It is preferable to fall upon a pile of gold rather than a cipher or a flight of empty phantasmagoria. Through spontaneous transformation of wealth from dross, fairy tales solved fantasy's real-life dilemma of lack. By means of an abstraction, which was the fantasy of the same "magical agent," folklorists spirited away their problem of the commodity's contamination of

folktales' formal structure. Like the "magical agent," capital has "occult ability." It, too, is a magical agent: It can add value to itself and lay "golden eggs."<sup>30</sup> The commodity haunts the "magical agent" by haunting itself at its source in these woods. If commodity exchange is lacking in folktales, it is only because gold has been removed from circulation there to be "petrified into a hoard" buried in the heart of the woods.<sup>31</sup>

When we finally stumble on a backpack of gold in the corridors of the Herkules Oktagon, we hesitate and wonder whether we have not found, instead, some miser's hoard. Enter the miser to recover his loot! Hoarding's obsessive fantasies propel the contradictory mobility of *Suspiria's* folktale machine. The dizzying contrariness of limited gold holdings and gold's unlimited convertibility into any and all commodities twists the miser round and round between frugal hoarding and lazy waste, the poor soul now weighed down by withdrawing gold from circulation, then spiriting back to accumulate it again. The "amazing multiformity" yet "striking uniformity" of phantasmagoria arrest us by their magical arrest of capital in its first transformative act. When the commodity assumes the "gold chrysalis" of its money form, phantasmagoria seduce us into the woods.<sup>32</sup>

We would never be out of the woods with their "frugal elite" and "lazy rascals."<sup>33</sup> All the way from Vancouver, naïve Elsa went into these woods. Thanks to Douglas' re-gendering, she upended Lucky Hans on the way. From home, another had armed her for these dark, entangling woods as he had repeatedly warned and forewarned us all as New World children. A master, a maker of automatons, a master animator of multicolored fantasies, he intimately knew these forests. Walt Disney also inspired *Suspiria's* maker... that is, rather, the Italian director Dario Argento, whose super-saturated Technicolor horror film *Suspiria* lent Douglas' *Suspiria* its look, title, sound... and motive:

"In the film, a young American woman travels to Germany in order to experience European high culture first hand, by studying ballet at an old, highly-respected dance academy. The school turns out to be the front for a witches' coven that terrorizes and murders its students until the girl from the New World uncovers and kills its centuries-old head witch."<sup>34</sup>

Or should I say, Argento's *Suspiria* lent Douglas' *motive* its look, title, and sound?

Horror need not obey fairy-tale rules. Circumstances of villainy or lack do not terminate in wealth or marriage as they do in folktales, but, perhaps, only in receipt of our skins. Folktales' terminal rewards are impossible when reducing the stories from ends (marriage and wealth) to means (economic exchange), as Douglas has done, re-orienting the tales' ending to ceaseless circulation in these woods. What was Douglas killing that was such a capital crime?

*Suspiria*'s young American women went for the heart. They went to the heart of fantasy woods to discover why and what they were returning to deposit.

Wandering in woods with no exit would mean endless scenarios of new moves and removes. "Each new act of villainy, each new lack creates a new move."<sup>35</sup> Returned to North America, Douglas did not think himself heroic. Recalling previous excursions into television land, he cautioned himself. Having inherited, we are hardly stainless here in America, free of home-grown crimes. His third capital excursion was not a stage in capitalism as were the previous two. He retreated to a *moment*, actually two moments, in capitalism's criminal encounters with socialism.

With *Inconsolable Memories*, Douglas remade Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1968 Cuban film *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* was set in the early years of the Cuban Revolution, culminating in the Bay of Pigs invasion. Douglas set his remake in 1980 during the Mariel Boat Lift. No socialist realist harangue, Alea's film proceeded through montage to alter the spectator-spectacle relationship, varying the formal associations of sound and images to disengage viewers dialectically from any residual bourgeois identification that they may have had at the start of the story in order by the end to have firmly chosen the revolution. Douglas radicalized all of Alea's procedures, but by means of a machine. At first appearance, this was not noticeable. On further viewing, what we took to be a 16mm film projection, we realize, is actually two projections whose meshing edits scenes from their two film loops in real time. Since one loop is shorter than the other, its scenes reappear in different configurations in relation to those of the longer film loop. On the analogy of Alea, what choice does Douglas leave for the viewer when, on the one hand, the permuting machine makes all the decisions and, on the other hand, permuting variations make the machine the market's decision?<sup>36</sup> How could an artist from the capitalist system be more radical than a revolutionary socialist unless capital was more radical?<sup>37</sup> If *Journey into Fear* and *Suspiria* model their fabrications on different stages of capital, *Inconsolable Memories*' contradictory machine functioning does not represent a stage of socialism but, rather, the conflict between capitalism and socialism occurring in the American embargo of Cuba.

Hints in Alea's film of ideological repurposing of buildings and institutions and the practical repurposing necessitated by the United States' embargo of Cuba, where goods or parts could not be supplied, are reproduced in different ways in Douglas' project. In *Inconsolable Memories*, the former provides a clue to the function of permuting montage. The latter determines the functioning of *Inconsolable Memories*' machine, so much more rudimentary than the advanced technologies of *Journey into Fear* and *Suspiria*. The former situation is reflected

in the *Cuba Photographs*, whose titles designate buildings' past and present purposes, e.g., *Print Shop / Auto Shop*, *Habana Vieja*, and whose images retain the traces of this transition: for instance, in this photograph, pre-revolution Detroit cars and post-revolution Ladas. The effect of the latter is obvious in *Quarry, Vedado*, where the city and its buildings make up a machine that circulates the raw materials of itself to keep functioning.

On his way back from European woods, Douglas rerouted himself to an island marginal to America but at the center of the storm system of its obsession. In *Inconsolable Memories*, Douglas analyzed a complex machine, or, rather, two machines: one encircling the other, which therefore had to encircle and circulate itself. One machine encircling another meant that the former was larger. The larger loop captivated some while capturing all others. The spell cast with these forged rings *surely* meant that the one was stronger than the other. Stronger *and* freer! It was *the* image of freedom. It was the *image* of freedom. The stronger one encircled the weaker in the annulus of its embargo. Year after year, decade after decade, it repeated the tourniquet of its compassion, reiterating the passion of the strong and the free in this tortuous rondo.

The genus, genre, or genius there where it was not free would of *need* invent from what was already there. Imprisoned in its embargo, it would circulate and repeat itself diversely, freely, in the fugato of its variational genius.

- 1 SCOTT WATSON, "Against the Habitual," in Scott Watson, Diana Thater, and Carol J. Clover, *Stan Douglas* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), p. 44.
- 2 STAN DOUGLAS, "Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat," *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988), p. 12. [Reprinted in Scott Watson et al., *Stan Douglas*, p. 93.]
- 3 THEODOR W. ADORNO, "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p. 124.
- 4 DOUGLAS, "Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat," p. 17. [Scott Watson et al., *Stan Douglas*, 98]
- 5 DIANA THATER, "Diana Thater in conversation with Stan Douglas," *Stan Douglas*, p. 9.
- 6 STAN DOUGLAS, "*Nu-tka*: Historical Background," in DAINA AUGAITIS, *Stan Douglas* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1999), p. 43.
- 7 JACQUES DERRIDA, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), p. 11.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 9 In 1931, Walter Benjamin wrote of urban photography where people were absent that it "sets the scene for a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings. It gives free play to the politically educated eye, under whose gaze all intimacies are sacrificed to the illumination of detail." Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), p. 251.
- 10 SIGMUND FREUD, "The Uncanny," *Collected Papers* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), IV, p. 389.
- 11 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 394.
- 12 *Der Sandmann's* double projection and *Nu-tka's* split signals show their divided images contradicting their respective voice-overs. *Nu-tka's* conflict is signaled by images split between odd and even raster lines. The hitherto troubling landscape comes into convergence when the two captains align their world-views through the language of colonial literature. (Douglas had used this device in *Evening*, 1994.) Convergence, however, is contrarily contradiction. The Old World is still out of joint with this landscape and the inhabitants its allied representatives cannot frame. (Calling us to attention in a moment of recognition, convergence only obscures film's fundamental separation of sound and image.) In *Der Sandmann*, division is assembled in a hovering illusion within a single frame, when actually this seam is sustained in real time by the continuous "recurrence" of two temporal rotations. Convergence and recurrence are the contradictory means by which these machines contrarily maintain their motion.
- 13 STAN DOUGLAS, "Hors-champs," in CHRISTINE VAN ASSCHE, *Stan Douglas* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1994), p. 127.
- 14 Found in WALTER BENJAMIN, "A Small History of Photography," *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979).
- 15 DOUGLAS, "*Nu-tka*: Historical Background," in AUGAITIS, *Stan Douglas*, p. 43.
- 16 "Absence is often the focus of my work. Even if I am resurrecting these obsolete forms of representation, I'm always indicating their inability to represent the real subject of the work. It's always something that is outside the system. The hugest absence in *Nu-tka* is the natives." THATER, "Diana Thater in conversation with Stan Douglas," p. 16.
- 17 GILLES DELEUZE, *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation*, trans. Jean McNeil (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 73.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 78. [Reprinted as "Humour, Irony and the Law" in Scott Watson, et al., *Stan Douglas*, p. 86.]
- 19 THATER, "Diana Thater in conversation with Stan Douglas," p. 8.
- 20 DOUGLAS, "Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat," p. 12. [Scott Watson et al., *Stan Douglas*, p. 93]
- 21 THATER, "Diana Thater in conversation with Stan Douglas," p. 20.
- 22 Within all the dissolving rotations and supplanting revolutions, would the possibility of utopia reappear (as the utopia to come) in one of the combinations of montage, as if constellated by a throw of the dice? Any liminal suspension might be a minor utopia. Every instance of suspension in Douglas' works carries this possibility. Technological obsolescence leads to the possibility of perceptual utopias. Any resistance to closure, convergence, equivalence, or agreement would open us — in the perpetual, permuting, per-

- ceptual moment, which these machines present — to freedom, a freedom “constrained” inside and outside limits in the suspended, liminal space of the sublime.
- 23 STAN DOUGLAS, “Journey into Fear,” *Journey into Fear* (London: Serpentine Gallery; Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), p. 136.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 25 KARL MARX, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), I, p. 179.
- 26 When capital is taken as an end in itself, two operations mesh to provide the machine’s value momentum: renewed movement resulting from capital’s limitless global circulation and incessant transformation as capital changes itself from money to commodities without losing itself in any of these transformations. See, MARX, “The General Formula for Capital,” *Capital*, I, pp. 247–57. Capital is not a concept of these works. A concept does not disappear behind its staging but appears in presentation.
- 27 “But despite the erudite research, it felt as though the artist was doing Stan Douglas by numbers. Indeed, some of the artists associated with the art world’s gradual embrace of globalism during the 1990’s appear to be a bit stuck.” Kobena Mercer, “D11: Kobena Mercer,” *Frieze*, no. 69 (September 2002), pp.86–89.
- 28 STAN DOUGLAS, “Suspiria,” *Documenta 11\_platform 5: Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), p. 557.
- 29 VLADIMIR PROPP, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd ed. (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 20–21.
- 30 MARX, *Capital*, I, p. 255.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 228.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 227. *Journey into Fear* and *Suspiria* picture different stages of capital, although the earlier miser or hoarder is ancestor to the global capitalist: “This boundless drive for enrichment, this passionate chase after value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational miser.” *Ibid.*, p. 254.
- 33 One of *Suspiria*’s story introductions is lifted from Marx’s chapter on “The Primitive Accumulation of Value”: “Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance and more in riotous living. ...Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins.” Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 873.
- 34 DOUGLAS, “Suspiria,” p. 557.
- 35 PROPP, *Morphology of the Folktale*, p. 93.
- 36 “What is the variable repetition of permutation other than a description of the capitalist economy of production and consumption? What is political choice now, after all, other than market determination? In 2005, and not 1980 or 1961–1962, this issue is not individual choice, but a question as to whether it is the destiny of one system to be absorbed into the other: insoluble memories of underdevelopment?” PHILIP MONK, “Fugue Encryptions,” *Stan Douglas: Insoluble Memories* (Omaha: Joslyn Art Museum; Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2005), p. 144.
- 37 “That the viewers of *Insoluble Memories* seem to enjoy some of the same dialectical privileges as the spectators of *Memories of Underdevelopment* does not mean that the two works instantiate the contradictions of the spectator-spectacle relationship in the same way. We have to wonder whether these machines not only represent socialism in discrepant ways, but also manufacture its image practices differently. Or is the difference between these two works that one is necessarily socialist and the other unavoidably capitalist?” *Ibid.*, p. 143.