

Specters of Douglas

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— Enter the Ghost, Exit the Ghost, Enter the Ghost, as before¹⁾



“The time is out of joint. The world *is going* badly: ... it wears as it grows,” in the *becoming* world.²⁾ This bleak image, evoked by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* in reference to two works by Shakespeare, implies a double turn. It points against modernity’s unshakeable belief in progress, which culminates in “singing the triumph of capitalism or of economic and political liberalism.”³⁾ At the same time, it is directed toward a different reckoning of time, a spectral time, a time out of joint, where the linear construction of past, present, and future as well as the separation between being and nonbeing is suspended. In approaching the specter, Derrida fathoms the cerebration potential of a porous being: a “non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present.” It pertains to a way of thinking in which the question of the future—“where? where tomorrow? whither?”—is related to a responsibility concerning “those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*.”⁴⁾ In general, specters mark the return of a suppressed guilt, of the deceased, the mourning of whom has failed, with whose return a past present does not want to cease subsisting, as we are not able to properly bury, to immobilize it/him. Instead of (or as) the work of mourning, Derrida suggests speaking to and with the specter: showing *responsibility* thereto. Speaking with and to the specter would mean acknowledging the absence in the presence, connecting being with what no longer is and has yet to be. It assumes the thinking of the specter as a potentiality: as the potentiality of a radical anachronism, of a time that is radically out of joint, of an *other* time or of an *other* per se.

One could say that Stan Douglas’s work—continually circling around that which is not there, not wanting to cease evoking the imperfect past, the *past imperfect* of modernism—speaks to and with its specters. He thereby subjects not only history and its “grand narratives” to a process of radical anachronization but its narrative techniques and storage media as well, known to be teeming with ghosts and revenants: in historical documents, literature, photography, film and television, music, and architecture. The work of mourning is inscribed in all of them, for they retain something of the deceased, which should at the same time guarantee that they will not return, will not stir, but remain embedded within history’s flow.⁵⁾ These technologies sublimate the specters they are constantly conjuring—not to speak with

1) William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1603), quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, 1994), p. 11.

2) Here, Derrida mingles two quotes from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (“The time is out of joint”) and *Timon of Athens* (“How goes the world?—It wears, sir, as it grows.”); see *ibid.*, pp. 77–8.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 78.

4) *Ibid.*, p. xix.

5) See, for instance, Karl-Josef Pazzini, “Reliquie—ein Aufzeichnungsmedium?” in Erik Porath, ed., *Aufzeichnung und Analyse. Theorien und Techniken des Gedächtnisses* (Würzburg, 1995), pp. 159–70.

them but to banish them for all eternity in books, on rolls of film, computer chips, in partituras, or masonry. Yet the protection they offer is porous, for the processes of aging and replacement have always been precursory to the promise of perpetuity these technologies hold. Douglas approaches these porous places, where the unfinished, suppressed, and failed, the blunder, or an unpaid debt percolates a narrative convention that has become fragile—the places where the specter “sees us”:⁶⁾ these shadowy creatures that haunt the modern subject, constituted in the nullification of the “other” and imagined as white, male, and identical to itself.

Douglas treats the porous spots and blunders within the “great narratives” both exemplarily and specifically: by reenacting obsolete media; in fantasies of omnipotence and impotence that are repressed but not dealt with (*Der Sandmann*, *Nu•tka•*); in the closed files of unsolved cases (*Pursuit*, *Fear*, *Catastrophe: Ruskin B.C.*, *Klatsassin*, *Vidéo*); in modernist housing projects, which exist in design but have never been realized (*Win*, *Place or Show*); in the ruins of a failed capitalism (*Le Détroit*) or a Communism postponed (*Inconsolable Memories*); or in the perpetual bartering, already corrupt in structure, which marks the actual porous places in the system, from the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales to the capital markets of the information society (*Suspiria*, *Journey into Fear*). The oppression, dispossession, and destruction of the “other,” the “stranger,” and his territories is a recurrent motif in Douglas’s narrations, and he relates it as *the* recurrent motif of the modern era: from the conquest and colonization of the “New World” to industrialization and to the neoliberal, globalized present.

When, in *Der Sandmann*, Douglas entangles a Gothic novel (E.T.A. Hoffmann, 1816) and a social utopia (Moritz Schreber, eighteen-sixties) of the nineteenth-century with Sigmund Freud’s theories of the uncanny (1919) and of paranoia (1911) as well as with the collapse of Communism and the uninhibited expansion of capitalism (nineteen-nineties to the present day), referring to the history of the Potsdam *Schrebergärten* (garden allotments) (nineteen-seventies) and to the Babelsberg film studios (nineteen-twenties), he is not arbitrarily mingling any eras or evidence. Rather, Douglas takes up interwoven relationships⁷⁾ and launches their recombinations along the fragility of modern constructs of progress: where that unceasingly recurring tandem between omnipotence fantasies and aggrieved self-experience, guilt and repression, upsurge and decline engenders revenant upon revenant. Reading Douglas’s *Sandmann* in a “time-lapse,” one might say that, with industrialization, automatons began competing with human bodies—not only deficient but above all mortal—their tortured souls escaping into novels and physical exercise, to be ultimately (re)generated by the sciences: where novel doppelgängers, mechanical brides,⁸⁾ or physical discipline fail, driving the self straight into madness, a new machine appears on the scene, wanting to transform Id into Ego and to harness evil spirits. Yet this plan fails since fantasies of omnipotence as well as the magic for transmuting paper into gold⁹⁾ and gold into immaterial financial currents are more attractive. And once the “Specter of Communism” has been dispelled, it is possible to turn even *Schrebergärten* into blooming landscapes. Doppelgängers, after all, are also those gentlemen who have always turned up whenever there is something in it for them.

In *Der Sandmann*, Douglas almost literally shows that the specters of a recurrent, repeatedly floundering modernity are linked with their narrative techniques by employing the motif

6) “Ghost or *revenant*, sensuous-non-sensuous, visible-invisible, the specter first of all sees us.” Derrida 1994 (see note 1), p. 101.

7) Thus, *Der Sandmann* and the *Schrebergarten* (garden allotment)—named after Moritz Schreber, who, for his part, tortured his son Paul with prosthetics to correct body alignment—are, in a certain way, interrelated via Freud. After all, we know that Freud not only referenced Hoffmann’s novella for his theories but also Paul Schreber’s *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* (published in English as *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*).

8) From Hoffmann’s *Olimpia* to Auguste Comte de Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s *L’Eve future* (1886).

9) “When the State emits paper money at a fixed rate, its intervention is compared to ‘magic’ (*Magie*) that transmutes paper into gold,” writes Derrida in reference to Karl Marx. Derrida 1994 (see note 1), p. 45.

of the doppelgänger, that uncanny phantom of the ego, which, according to Friedrich Kittler, was banished from the novel to celluloid by psychoanalysis. While doppelgängers in the time of Hoffmann—when due to increased literacy in Central Europe readers started believing “that the printed words refer to them[selves]”¹⁰—were not only popular characters in novels but also plainly the representatives of the reader’s successful identification with literature, they had disappeared from books by 1900. “Freund translates the uncanny of the Romantic period into science, Méliès, into mass entertainment. It is precisely this fantasizing, anatomized by psychoanalysis, that film implements with powerful effect. This bilateral assault dispels doppelgängers from their books, which become devoid of pictures. On-screen, however, doppelgängers or their iterations celebrate the theory of the unconscious as the technology of cinematic cutting, and vice versa.”¹¹ Against the overwhelming power of technologies that reproduce that which is real, conveying it onto mobile mirrors, mere letters that at best allure the self prove to be an insufficient competitor. Thus, literature “hands its enchanted mirror over to the machines”—at the clear cost of the fragmentation of “the narcissism of one’s own conception of the body.”¹²

Douglas takes up exactly at those thresholds between the narrative techniques of novel, psychoanalysis, and machine. He is not reverting to just any Gothic doppelgänger but rather to the famous one transferred by Freud to science, and he does not render it as any filmic doppelgänger but refers to the very first doppelgängers in the history of film—that is, to the first one and its revenant, also known as the remake¹³—which are “conjured up” by a split-screen vignette and multiple exposures. Yet Douglas does not simply employ similar and other “tricks”; he also turns them radically against themselves according to the standards set by an illusionary coherence of space and time.¹⁴ A temporal gap runs right through the middle of the image, along which the two different times permeate each other, like in a *Wunderblock*. In the setting of the new *Schrebergarten*, the old one resounds, or as one might say, the first film in its remake. The protagonist is a bisected doppelgänger, whose two halves, being temporarily shifted, generate neither a whole nor a double presence but instead—along the narrow seam of their permanent mutual overwriting—establish a specter between the individual and the divided selves. While the classic film doppelgängers did nothing more than film filming itself,¹⁵ Douglas simultaneously reverses this process, leaving behind traces that are far more disturbing than the doublets of a certain student from Prague.

Comparably, Douglas introduces another time as well as the “other” into the order of things, not least by also inverting the borrowed hero’s skin color to its opposite. This stand-in for the stranger is surrounded by three voices, one of which he calls his own, yet this voice is constantly speaking him from the past, as if his echo had been sold. Silently, the “new” gesticulates after the “old” Nathanael-half. Disembodied, the other voices, which are always elsewhere, answer. Hence, the previously written word of the novel breaks into the film, once again as speech,¹⁶ but without ever arriving. “This voice does not describe, what it says certifies nothing; its words *cause* something to [arrive].”¹⁷ These words of Derrida’s, revolving around the notion of “conjunction,” could probably be applied to discussing not only *Der Sandmann* but also in speaking on and with all of Douglas’s work: an oeuvre that certifies nothing but

10) Friedrich Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film: A History of the Double” in *Literature, Media, Information Systems: Essays (Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture)*, trans. Stefanie Harris (Amsterdam, 1997), p. 91.

11) Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, 1999), p. 153.

12) Kittler 1997 (see note 10), pp. 92–3.

13) Film’s first doppelgänger appeared in 1913 in *Der Student von Prag (The Student of Prague)*, directed by Stellan Rye); the first remake, by Henrik Galeen, followed in 1926.

14) *Der Sandmann* is based on two 360-degree pans across the backdrop of a *Schrebergarten* and the film studio. The first pan shows a *Schrebergarten* from the nineteen-seventies. For the second rotation, elements of a contemporary *Schrebergarten* were added to the set. Both films were spliced together and duplicated. They are projected by two projectors—with half of each concealed—onto the screen, one film lagging behind the other at a rate of one full rotation.

15) Kittler 1999 (see note 11), p. 149.

16) The voices of Nathanael (Frank Odjidja), Klara (Adelheit Kleineidam), and Lothar (Thomas Marquard) are reading the first three letters (edited by Douglas) of Hoffmann’s novella, in English, with noticeable German accents.

17) Derrida 1994 (see note 1), p. 41; author’s emphasis. The English edition of the book says here, “its words cause something to happen,” whereas the original French text as well as the German version say, “its words cause

whose consistently unfinished process causes something to arrive through the “incalculable chance of the performative.”¹⁸ His “recombinant narratives,” in which the montage of individual fragments of sound and image controlled by a “live algorithm”¹⁹ create a seemingly incomprehensible number of variations, might highlight this “causing something to arrive” without arriving. However, the sheer number of references, allusions, and shifts inherent in all of his works do not precisely certify anything but instead liberate interpretation, thus producing a recombinant narrative that always permits—if not demands—new and contradictory varieties of readings and conclusions: as a performative interpretation, which not only “transforms what it interprets”²⁰ but also places this transmutability at the disposal of the viewer.

“When they become obsolete, forms of communication become an index of an understanding of the world lost to us.”²¹ These obsolete forms of communication and media are those that Douglas persistently brings into play. They emerge as equally uncanny and strange passages of time in his works: both in the form of references—like the dilapidated Ufa Studios, with its hopelessly outmoded equipment, in *Der Sandmann*²²—and in the form of appropriations respecting the standards of early cinema as well as of cinema and television aesthetics from the nineteen-sixties and seventies. Perhaps it is in *Suspiria* that Douglas most clearly demonstrates that the past is inherent in the standards of the media era. Here, he traces the North American color television system NTSC²³ back to what it actually is: “a system of ghosts.”²⁴ This video installation cross-references the horror film of the same name by Dario Argento (1977), one of the last movies to be filmed in Technicolor.²⁵ The installation takes the film and mingles it with plots and characters from the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales as well as with passages from the first volume of Karl Marx’s *Capital* (1867), which is permeated with allusions to literature, vampirism, sorcery, and occultism. Here, the specters of Marx²⁶ are at work, conjuring the end of those sorcerers, hoarders, and alchemists of modern bourgeois society, whose victors transform money into even more money, while the losers can do nothing but sell their own skin, since they have frittered away “everything they had and more,” as in the tale of *Hans in Luck*.²⁷ However, following capitalism’s incessant song of triumph, it ought to be the Specter of Communism that has been vanquished once and for all; the sole endeavor of this maniacally jubilant song is to deny that “never, never in history, has the horizon of the thing whose survival is being celebrated ... been as dark, threatening, and threatened.”²⁸

Drawing on obsolete technologies and visual communication forms and rekindling them through “new technologies,” Douglas transposes those lost worlds into a disturbing closeness to this life, while at the same time conveying a multiplicity of these worlds into a coevality of the non-coeval. Sixty-three years later, Douglas delivers with *Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin B.C.* the black-and-white silent film pertaining to Arnold Schönberg’s score *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene* from 1930.²⁹ This “ensuing” film compounds two events having taken place at the same time but in two very distant locations: the creation of this particular score in Berlin and the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in a West Canadian province, named in the nineteenth century for theorist John Ruskin, a conservative socialist.

something to arrive” (“sa parol fait arriver” and “ihr Sprechen macht ankommen”). In the following, I will take up the notion of “causing something to arrive.” See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris, 1993), p. 74 and Jacques Derrida, *Marx’ Gespenster* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), p. 64.

18) Derrida 1994 (see note 1), p. 44.

19) George E. Lewis, “Stan Douglas’s *Suspiria*: Genealogies of Recombinant Narrativity,” in this publication.

20) Derrida 1994 (see note 1), p. 51.

21) Stan Douglas, “Diana Thater in Conversation with Stan Douglas,” in Scott Watson et al., *Stan Douglas* (London, 1998), p. 9; quoted by Philip Monk in “Discordant Absences,” Philip Monk, *Stan Douglas*, ed. Friedrich Christian Flick Collection (Cologne, 2006), p. 15.

22) Not least, the letter in *Der Sandmann* is a reference to outdated communications technology.

23) In NTSC, the North American color television system, it is the black-and-white picture information (luminance) that is the actual signal carrier, while the separate color information (chrominance) is superimposed thereon. For *Suspiria*, Douglas switched luminance and chrominance components, making the over-saturated figures in the scenes (mixed live by computer with black-and-white images of the Herkules Oktogon in Kassel) seem eerily disembodied.

24) Stan Douglas, “*Suspiria*,” in this publication.

25) And only because it was just possible to postpone dismantling the respective equipment, which had already been

Both projects were started in 1929, at the beginning of the Great Depression. Referring to a revolutionary figure in music history, who wrote what was, for his standards, a remarkably “obsolete film score,”³⁰⁾ one project marked the beginning of the talkie era, which, in its own revolutionary way, was meant to make live music or player piano accompaniment to silent films superfluous. The other project heralded a “milestone” in the roller coaster industrialization of a Canadian region whose affairs have apparently been of little global interest. Douglas’s work not only refers to this moment in time, but also behind it and beyond it. While the plot revolves around the “new” hydroelectric plant, the cineastic references integrated here³¹⁾—culminating in the piano situated in the room, automatically accompanying the film—were already obsolete by 1930. Penetrating the film’s historical context, even the contemporary police car and the trailer courts seem like objects from old times. The piano playing Douglas’s newly arranged version of Schönberg’s *Begleitmusik*, in turn, is quite obviously not a relict of that era. It is a kind of present-day curiosity. The *Ruskin Photographs* albeit illustrate the contemporary, museum-like status of the once auspicious cathedral of industry, whose glamorous era already seems like an outdated world in Douglas’s “*Lichtspiel*”—a world to which this film, in turn, has already belonged.³²⁾ It circles around a disappeared person, who, not coincidentally, belongs to the ethnic group of Japanese Canadians who represented a majority of the population of Ruskin in the nineteen-thirties. A mere ten years later, however, in the context of World War II, they had become the “alien enemy,” dispossessed, interned, or driven away.³³⁾ Three years after *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene* appeared, Schönberg fled the persecution of Jews in Germany, where the infamous extermination of the other was carried out in concentration camps, in a way never before known.

In its multifaceted, divergent references, the installation *Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin B.C.* always alludes equally to something that is no more and *not yet* no more. The fact that losses are inscribed in the euphoria of modern progress is not merely told through the (sooner or later superfluous) achievements of the resources industry and entertainment industry or through the collapse of intangible financial markets, whose fragility was to be proven, for neither the first nor last time, by the global financial crisis of 1929. In the gestalt of the absent, this work focuses on that ousting of the other accompanying the hegemonic structures of modernity—its phantasms of threat and revenge—as the real catastrophes resulting from uninterrupted euphorias of progress. “Old” industries, markets, and ideologies are supplanted by “new” industries, markets, and ideologies, thus by and for themselves, without taking responsibility for those who are no more and are not yet, and most especially not when they count for nothing.³⁴⁾

Douglas’s works not only present a world—one whose spatial and time structures are out of joint, suspended in constant oscillation between stabilization and destabilization—but also simultaneously enact it: with him always disarranging and unhinging the stabilizing narrative techniques of this world anew. And this is not simply due to Douglas bringing obsolete technologies into play or to him thwarting the chronological narrative order in an extreme manner, leaping between times and contexts. Rather, it is because he abandons the commonplace cineastic attitude toward the nonlinear, which still celebrates the notion that every film

sold to Communist China. See Stan Douglas, “*Suspiria*,” in Monk 2006 (see note 21), p. 135.

26) Derrida differentiates between “the specters of Marx”—such as the specter of Communism, for instance, against which old Europe had conspired and whose future reality Marx had evoked in his writings—and “the specters of Marx” as a hypothesis for dealing with the legacy of Marxism. See Derrida 1994 (see note 1), pp. 98–9.

27) “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 on riotous living . . . Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell but their skins.” This citation of Marx’s *Capital*, which in turn refers to Adam Smith, is used in *Suspiria*, amongst other passages. See Stan Douglas, “*Suspiria*,” in Monk 2006 (see note 21), p. 136.

28) Derrida 1994 (see note 1), p. 52.

29) The first film adaptation of Schönberg’s *Begleitmusik* was produced by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet in 1972, with their *Einleitung zu Arnold Schönbergs “Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene.”*

30) See Stan Douglas, “*Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin B.C.*,” in this publication.

31) Douglas adapted the gestures of silent film, which seem exaggerated today, as well as dialogue splitters reduced to intertitles and “awkward” color filters.

32) At least as far as his aesthetic references are concerned.

33) Following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and the United

consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end, although not necessarily in that order: Douglas's films quite simply do not have a beginning, a middle, or an end. In his works, the loop does not generate a mere transition to the next repetition. Rather, it creates the crucial inflection point of a "causing something to arrive." In *Overture*, repetition is shifted between the levels of image and sound. In *Der Sandmann*, both halves of two studio pans, delayed by exactly one rotation, meet on a screen where various repetitions, split between horizontal and vertical movements, cross in a veritable visual wipe. In his recombinant narratives, repetition is thus ultimately saturated—almost haunted—with ramifications and permutations, becoming an endless performative act of the different inside the identical, of the simultaneous in the nonsimultaneous.³⁵⁾

Douglas also divides his narratives according to space, for instance by organizing them across several screens, as is the case in *Win, Place or Show*, where he retranslates the illusory coherence of opposing camera perspectives back into the space.³⁶⁾ Or, as with *Evening*, he suspends the news anchors of three fictional television stations between homophone and polyphone sound structures. In *Hors-champs* and *Le Détroit*, on the other hand, different views of the same situation are seen on each side of a single screen: in *Hors-champs* this is accomplished by projecting against each other images of a studio concert shot from two different camera positions; in *Le Détroit* by superimposing a black-and-white film and its negative on a semitransparent screen with a minimal temporal delay.

For Douglas, who prefers leaving coincidences to the machines, in all of his works the viewer comprises—in presence, in perceptual abilities and limitations—a consciously calculated amplitude. Douglas conveys this most perspicuously in *Le Détroit*, however, since the viewer inevitably steps into the projection beam and hence into the story. The viewer's shadow—perhaps a doppelgänger—is transferred to the screen, creating spots that cause what is occurring on the other side of the screen to appear as if in a magical mirror. The specter is, Derrida writes, "as its name indicates ... the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible," just as "a screen always has ... a structure of disappearing apparition."³⁷⁾ The viewers, by *frequenting* the screen in *Le Détroit*, become the uncanny accomplices of the specters, already at work here, that "cause something to arrive." They dissolve within the "structure of disappearing apparition," until they themselves disappear again until nothing is left of them, least of all a "scratch on the film."³⁸⁾ In an uncanny way, the viewers are thus turned into an analogy of the oppressive narrative, falling into its time trap.

In *Le Détroit*, Douglas refers to Shirley Jackson's novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*, published in 1959, at a time when Detroit's automobile era was beginning to collapse; he also alludes to Marie Hamlin's *Legends of Le Détroit*. By 1883, these legends—all literary sublimations of a repressed colonial history—evoked Detroit as a ghost town, because a curse had been laid upon it. Likewise cursed is Eleanore, the protagonist borrowed from Jackson, who while inspecting a house in *Le Détroit* not only carries out repeated actions but, in doing so, also continually undoes her actions and their consequences: she picks up a sheet of paper, opens up a cupboard door, and wipes away a footprint that she herself leaves over and over in exactly the same spot, just as she closes the cupboard door and lets the paper fall back

States' entry into World War II, Japanese throughout Canada were persecuted as "enemy aliens."

34) The moving history of the Ruskin-region industrialization is shaped by a permanent dissolution of social structures. See Stan Douglas, "Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin B.C.," in this publication.

35) See also Katrin Mundt, "Inconsolable Memories," in this publication.

36) For more on this, see Ivone Margulies, "Stan Douglas's Clear and Present Strangeness," and Hans D. Christ, "At the Right Place," in this publication.

37) Derrida 1994 (see note 1), pp. 100–101.

38) Frank Wagner, "'Le Détroit' – Eine an Grauwerten reiche Erfahrung," in *Kunst/Kino*, ed. Gregor Stemmerich (Cologne, 2001), p. 245.

to its original place as she leaves. She comes as she goes, and her coming and going remains completely trackless and without consequence, especially by her leaving traces. "The gathering of clues," as Kittler sums up this technique originated in criminology, film, and psychoanalysis, "guarantees above all that certain clues, never before present, suddenly appear."³⁹⁾ In *Le Détroit* the process of the gathering of clues becomes the uncanny trap, a story that has no beginning but rather, like the specter, like the revenant itself, begins with its repetition, by coming back.⁴⁰⁾ For Eleanore, there is no first and hence no last time: she will invariably have left her clues behind and will invariably have forgotten, never aware that they were already there. Viewing Douglas's photographs of Detroit, the magnitude of what economies have wreaked there is clear to see—where, in greedy, inconsiderate, and thoughtless pursuit of profit, they collapse and vanish, at the mercy of market laws. They not only leave nothing but ruins behind but also erase histories, as if they had never existed. In cities like Detroit, there are no longer even any ghosts.

"One has to reconcile oneself to what is past, arrange things accordingly. At least, one cannot undo what has been done. This is true most of the time, though not always."⁴¹⁾ It is in this space of contingency—as seductive as it is frightening—that Eleanore, like most figures in Douglas's works, circulates. Intervening in the past, conceivably changing it for the better, is one thing; accepting the "now" as something that will already have been extinguished by the "later," is something else. Thus, the notion of time travel has also evoked the revenants moving in reversed direction to the "grandfather complex":⁴²⁾ someone traveling backward in time in order to avenge a wrong. He kills his grandfather before the grandfather has a chance to conceive his father. Since he annihilates himself this way, it follows that he cannot travel back in time to kill his grandfather, who then conceives his father, who moreover conceives the avenger, who, in turn, travels back in time to kill the grandfather ... Thus time travel turns into a horror trip, a time loop of patriarchal relationships that "equate the Just (das Gerechte) with the Avenged (das Gerächte)."⁴³⁾

The earliest time machine per se emerged through this confusion of revenge and justice: the guillotine, making the transition—in three-quarters of a second—from life to death visible—invisible and, at the beginning of modern democracy, repeatedly merging being and nonbeing. In its metabolical fall, the guillotine generated an uncanny portrait machine to which photography around forty years later could only attest. Seventy years thereafter—as 18 (and then 24) images per second were set in motion—film would assuage the traces of horror left on the undead and decapitated by the guillotine and photography.⁴⁴⁾ Yet the first transatlantic live broadcast of a television image in 1928 featured the decapitated head of a ventriloquist's dummy, so that nothing but a ghost was received at the other end of the media connection.⁴⁵⁾ Decapitated heads and ventriloquism have always been inscribed in media, as Douglas exemplifies, for instance, in *Evening*, through the powerful tautologies employed by the stylishly trimmed "talking heads" of news anchors; or as staged by Douglas in *Journey into Fear*, when he, thwarting the principle of synchronization, endows the speakers with ever differing verbal articulations.

Douglas's journeys into the past are neither campaigns of vengeance nor murder of grandfathers. They are journeys into a fear that should remain hidden, journeys into the potentiality

39) Friedrich Kittler, "Dracula's Legacy," in *Literature, Media, Information Systems: Essays (Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture)*, trans. William Stephen Davis (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 68–9.

40) See Derrida 1994 (see note 1), pp. 10–11.

41) Quoted from Eva Meyer and Eran Schaerf, *Flashforward*, video essay (2004).

42) See Werner Oder, "Die wirklich erste Zeitmaschine. Erkundigungen zu H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*," in *Zeitreise. Bilder/Maschinen/Strategien/Rätsel*, ed. G.C. Tholen, M. Scholl, and M. Heller (Zurich, 1993), p. 45.

43) Martin Heidegger, "Der Spruch des Anaximander," *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main, 1950), p. 328; quoted in Derrida 1994 (see note 1), pp. 25–6.

44) For more on this see, Iris Därmann, "Noch einmal: ¾ Sekunde, aber schnell," in Tholen 1993 (see note 42), pp. 189–206.

45) Only a dolt could stand the heat from the spotlight. For more on this, see I.M.A.G.E., "Die TV-Show als orbitale Bild- und Zeitreise," in Tholen 1993 (see note 42), pp. 355–60.

spaces of the other, into another time, a time out of joint. His recombinant time and narration machines play through all possible combinations of a particular number of image and sound elements over the course of hours, months, and years—always until the exhaustion of the respectively preset, the preprogrammed possibilities. Time thus falls out of joint with and as a system. Approximately seventy hours pass before a single combination variant is to repeat itself in the video installation *Klatsassin*. Here, six points in time revolve around a diffuse Day X in the year 1864, on which—in the thickets of the Cariboo forests in Western Canada during the second gold rush era—a deputy is killed who had ostensibly towed his murderer behind him on a rope. Numerous conflicts and unresolved questions overlap in this “western ‘in dub’,” as Douglas calls it, which has a historical base in the fate of the Tsilhqot’in chief Klatsassin. On the Chilcotin Plateau in 1864, Klatsassin and a group of warriors resisted the takeover of land by whites, who wanted to profit from the monopolization of gold rush traffic in and out of Cariboo. Klatsassin and four of his companions were arrested and “legally” sentenced to hang. Another prisoner, who was to be transferred to a neighboring court for trial and was able to flee on the journey, was never captured; and thus, as a quasi-revenant in the story, he becomes the “corpus delicti” in Douglas’s work. He returns and remains as a fugitive. However, he is not the only one with a motive for killing the deputy, who is meant to bring him before a “proper” court, which can naturally only signify his death. For, as always, the magic of gold conjures a series of frustrated and envious failures, “stupid white men.” Counting among these is first and foremost the deputy himself—after all, he calls himself that while supposedly addressing his prisoner, whose name he doesn’t know⁴⁶⁾ (but believes to know without understanding), upon which he receives a bitter lesson in language.⁴⁷⁾ Circumstances in Nootka Sound have been reversed: the misunderstanding no longer describes the misunderstood but rather those who misunderstand.⁴⁸⁾ Furthermore, other “stupid white men” and potential murderers, accomplices, or abettors appear: a thief, rarely sober, who has already committed murder; a British innkeeper, who tolerates “even” Indians in his inn for monetary gain; a German miner, who wants nothing more than to go home, would probably step over a few dead bodies to get there, and, like the innkeeper, probably knows more than he’s telling;⁴⁹⁾ and finally, a modestly competent Scottish constable, who, in turn, says more than he comprehends and virtually inherits the prisoner, only to lose him again right away. The narrative’s six threads of time framing Day X are structured around the evening before the murder (suspects and victims meet at the roadhouse), Day X (the deputy gets killed and the court proceedings take place), the ensuing morning and afternoon (“someone” is hanged and the prospector arrives at the roadhouse), as well as several days five years later. Three flashforwards introduce the afternoon after the murder into three segments of the evening before. The course of Day X itself is lost, breached by three flashbacks affecting the prisoner, the thief, and the miner, in three contradictory variations of his “*it having been as such*.” Here, Douglas references Akira Kurosawa’s classic film, *Rashômon* (1950), which tells the story of a murder from different, contradictory perspectives. In addition to the narrative structure, numerous direct quotations are borrowed from this film as well.⁵⁰⁾

46) “We do not know his name” is the meaning of “Klatsassin.”

47) “Deputy: The papers say his name is Chilcotin George, but I think his Indian name is Midugh-lha Gwetah-hilih. Innkeeper: Why would an Indian be called ‘stupid white man’?” Douglas refers here to Jim Jarmusch’s film *Dead Man* (1998). “The Indian, Nobody, leads a man named William Blake, whom he mistakes for the English poet, to his final resting place all the while calling him ‘stupid white man’ because he can’t remember any of ‘his’ poems.” Stan Douglas, e-mail message to the author, October 10, 2007.

48) Nootka Sound, to which Douglas refers in *Nu•tka•* (1996), came by its name through a misunderstanding on the part of James Cook; see Charlotte Townsend-Gault, “History Art: *Nu•tka•*, 1996,” in this publication.

49) In a variation of Day X, the German observes the thief shooting the deputy and then steals his watch, the deputy already being dead and having not exactly been his best friend anyway. In court, he has good reason for keeping silent about what he has seen. “The man [prisoner] was a known criminal and it was sure he was going to hang, so why bother?” he says later. The innkeeper notices that the miner has a new watch, but he also remains silent.

50) For instance, in *Rashômon* the court can neither be seen nor heard. The veiled wife of the samurai being killed corresponds to the prisoner in *Klatsassin*, who is temporarily roped and dragged with a sack over his head by the deputy. The logger in *Rashômon*, a possible witness, pilfers the dagger of the seemingly dead samurai. Sentences such as “I don’t care if it’s a lie just as long as it’s a good one” (prospector) or “All I learned that people will lie just to make

Using the different narrative elements, the randomly controlled engine creates—constantly advancing and retreating, repeating, and shifting—840 variations of a story, not only offering more than three eventualities of events for Day X but also weaving an anachronistic labyrinth, out of which one will hardly find the out.

The prospector and his partner—two apparently marginal characters,⁵¹⁾ who traverse this story in constant circles and who, by constantly missing their destination, have long lost sight of the “whither,”⁵²⁾—represent as it were the structure of this narrative, which does not foster arrival anywhere and which certifies nothing. The prospector vagabonds back and forth between the day after Day X and its flashforwards on the previous evening as well as those days five years later when he and his partner meander across the landscape. As yet another revenant between times and spaces, he is condemned to be the key figure in a narrative without a key, a narrative always moving from the thicket of its potentialities to different clearings, which do not, however, bring enlightenment besides the realization that one has already been there and not further. If *Klatsassin* with its exaggerations of the western genre were not one of the most comical, it would probably be one of Douglas’s most eerie works. In platitudes that could be poetry, if they weren’t that frightening,⁵³⁾ its protagonists prompt the less sublime morals of a narrative in which the stranger is always the murderer, gold justifies the means, and both justice and truth are corruptible leading lights.⁵⁴⁾ The court, neither heard nor seen here, settles only those discourses which are self-generated and that it causes to be declared, not only before the law: “Someone got murdered yesterday, and today they hanged someone else.”⁵⁵⁾ Whatever cannot be represented before the law remains a translation problem, as *Klatsassin* literally demonstrates. Justice adjudicates blindly. Like a card player, she doesn’t have to be able to see in order to—following the logic of the game—add one plus one.⁵⁶⁾ However, *Klatsassin* does not come down on the side of what might be actual justice. Not the question of what really happened is of relevance here but rather that it might have been thus *and simultaneously* different, that justice implies injustice, and that it very probably is forced to imply the possibility thereof: for without the “opening of this possibility [for evil], there remains, perhaps, beyond good and evil, only the necessity of the worst.”⁵⁷⁾

Douglas’s recombinant narratives—which can extend over approximately seventy hours, as in *Klatsassin*, or over an endless period, as in *Suspiria*—are deliberately conceived to resist complete ascertainability. Yet even if the chains of variation repeat after a good hour and a half, as is the case in *Inconsolable Memories*, it is unlikely that even a persevering viewer will remember having already seen one of the variations. If anything, it is a déjà vu sensation constantly accompanying us here—and equally slipping away—triggering a distrust of our own perception, our capacity for remembrance. Film was the first medium to implement the human perceptual apparatus and to reconfirm it by translating perceptual selection to close-ups, memories in flashbacks, associations through editing, and so forth.⁵⁸⁾ However, Douglas’s works, especially the recombinant narratives, unhinge this implementation in order to thwart the perceptual apparatus. They thwart it solely because Douglas’s technical apparatuses and the viewer’s perceptual apparatuses are linked via two ways of reckoning time, equally determining and excluding each other. While the machine perpetually generates, with the

themselves look good” (miner) are direct quotations from Karusawa’s film. A further film quoted is *The Misfits* (John Huston, 1961).

51) They take on the function of the chorus in ancient Greek tragedies.

52) The prospector pinpoints it: “How can you think we’re lost when you don’t know where the hell you’re going?”

53) In a nice bit of self-referentiality in one spot: “Partner: My father always said, ‘Each fire is all fires.’ Prospector: Why, that’d be poetry if it weren’t so damn frightening.” The phrase about the fire stems from the novel *Bloody Meridian* (1985) by Cormac McCarthy, a drastic narrative of the campaign against the Indians in the southwestern United States in the nineteenth century: “. . . and they watched the fire which does contain within it something of men themselves inasmuch as they are less without it and are divided from their origins and are exiles. For each fire is all fires, the first fire and the last ever to be.” Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (New York, 1985), p. 244.

54) Clearly, as the prospector says, “common sense is you don’t tell a judge what he doesn’t ask and you don’t tell a stranger what he doesn’t need to know.”

55) Thus sums up the innkeeper the events on the next day, according to the logic of justice (vengeance).

56) “You don’t have to see to be able to count cards,” the innkeeper had commented the night before to a blind card player, who had won, to everyone’s astonishment.

57) Derrida 1994 (see note 1), p. 29.

58) See Kittler 1999 (see note 11), pp. 159–63.

exception of it being turned off, narratives mired in themselves—independently from and completely indifferent to the viewer—the recipient, as yet another recombinant of the narrative, sets their respective beginning and end: simply by entering the story at a certain point and departing at another, regardless of what has happened or will happen, knowing full well that something has been and will be missed. The narrative, its potentials designated by Douglas and exhausted by the machine, is carried away again—in illimitable, unassimilable fragments—with the viewers' coming and going. Enter the ghost. Exit the ghost. Enter the ghost, as before. In order to speak to and with the specters, one must approach them.