

Uncanny Memories: Stan Douglas, Subjectivity and Cinema

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Usually viewed in terms of the Vancouver School of photoconceptualism, visual artist Stan Douglas's work extends beyond the photographic to engage with not just the moving image as a medium but with the objects, histories and products of cinema itself. More than the other artists in the loosely and contentiously grouped "School" (Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Roy Arden, Rodney Graham and Ken Lum), Douglas's art tends to fall outside the confines of photography or video art in both its material and thematic concerns. Working not just in photography or video but in film and television as well, his art moves beyond the precision, intensity and complexity usually associated with the ideologically and socially engaged work of Graham, Lum or Wall to explicitly address cinematic objects, history and culture. Douglas's films and videos thus trouble the material and spatial boundaries of the cinema and museum (for instance, his recent *Klatsassin* premiered at the 2006 Vancouver International Film Festival and then in 2007 played at the Secession Gallery in Vienna) and, perhaps more importantly, thematically disturb these distinctions as his art occupies a transitional zone that interrogates perception, narrative comprehension and modes of visual and aural storytelling. In this way, although predominantly approached within the purview of fine arts, Douglas's work invites interrogation from film studies insofar as it not only utilizes the medium but also actively modifies and references the canonical texts, orientations and histories of cinema.

Indicative of this engagement, Douglas's reworkings of films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964), Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and Orson Welles's *Journey into Fear* (1943) explore the parameters, functions and limits of cinematic adaptation. In these intertextual remakes, his works echo the originals but also defamiliarize these source texts through quotation, manipulation and material disturbances to the film viewing process (split or two-sided screens, layered images, film loops, variable editing or soundscapes). It is this defamiliarization that I want to analyze in more detail here as it relates to Douglas's recent installation *Inconsolable Memories* (2005), a work that seems to have a closer, more explicit relationship to its source texts than many of Douglas's other projects, but which, because of this, makes the gaps between source and referent, original and copy, more significant. Specifically, in the reworking of a canonical text, *Inconsolable Memories* interrogates the historiographic, political, thematic and aesthetic significance and persistence of its source film in ways that render its relation to the original uncannily strange.

Based on Tomas Gutierrez Alea's 1968 film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*), Douglas's *Inconsolable Memories* consists of a 16mm film accompanied by a series of photographs from Havana, Cuba. In keeping with Douglas's engagement with cognitive, epistemological and perceptual modes and impressions, this installation offers a double form -- photographs and film loop. This repetition (the film and the photographs share spaces and themes) means that more than merely working from the Alea film, the installation plays with a layering of source texts: some of the photographs interact directly with the film by displaying still images of the cinematic locales and the film portion itself offers a reworking at a double remove (Alea's film is itself already an adaptation of Edmundo

Desnoes's 1962 novel). Moreover, this layering is intricately tied to the themes of both the source texts and this installation: the problematic relation among history, memory, experience and subjectivity. Although the particular history of revolutionary Cuba is the principle and explicit focus of the work (updating *Memories of Underdevelopment*, Douglas's film installation shifts the focus to the Mariel boatlift of 1980), the more diffuse and underlying theme is the relation between subjectivity and historical event. By examining the utopic potential of the Cuban revolution in its decline, Douglas reworks the promise of revolution and impending danger of the Cuban missile crisis examined in Alea's film in order to interrogate more recent political and economic events and emigrations; and also, like Alea, Douglas yokes these events to the exploration of the place of the subject in the action and aftermath of historical crises.

Although this attention to the failures of utopic potential and promise is found throughout Douglas's work (in his thematic interest in transformative or transitional historical moments like modernism or revolution and his use of archival film footage, reworking narrative scenes or stories or mixing materials), this latest installation has a more precise dialectical and dialogic relation to its source film than is evident in Douglas's previous work in film and video. Not merely a remake or film inspired by its source, *Inconsolable Memories* puts itself in dialogue with *Memories of Underdevelopment* and, in doing so, puts into play all the vicissitudes of memory, subjectivity and the impact and imagined futures of historical events that the original film addresses diegetically and inspires in its afterlife as canonized cultural icon. In this correspondence and confluence, the relation between the texts becomes destabilized as the distinctions among authentic original, degraded copy, celebratory homage and artistic inspiration become uncertain.

For those familiar with Douglas's work, this focus on the hauntings and traces of lost potential, past encounters and missed futures is unsurprising and in order to examine the significance of the intertextual and formal manipulations of *Inconsolable Memories*, it is useful to consider it within the frame of Douglas's film and video work more generally. In particular, it is important to place this recent installation within the context of Douglas's recombinant works, pieces that explicitly engage with, mix and remake source texts: *Journey into Fear* (2001), *Suspiria* (2003), *Le Detroit* (1999), *Win, Place or Show* (1998), *Nu.tka* (1996), *Subject to a Film: Marnie* (1995), *Der Sandmann* (1995). Each of these works uses film, television or literature as inspiration and foundation; but more than merely using cinematic style for specific effect or interweaving sometimes contradictory material, the recombinant pieces literally reiterate. That is to say, these works take a source text as a starting point but use it to create new material that emerges from the confrontation and combination of texts, styles, cultures and histories. These works are not mere remakes and are not primarily about the source text, but at the same time they are not empty pastiche either; instead, these recombinant pieces take the thematics and stylistics of a source and transform the original emphases, themes, formal characteristics in ways that invite the viewer to think of the intertextual relation dialectically.

For example, watching Douglas's *Suspiria* with Dario Argento's 1977 horror film *Suspiria* in mind clearly invites a contemplation of the Gothic as both a tradition and contemporary sensation; but it also insists on a consideration of colour, technology and space and the relation of these technical aspects to past and present moments (whether that moment be the historical past of castle architecture, Argento's 1970s, or the present moment that will soon be past). This temporal layering is encouraged by the mixing of space and time in the art work itself: *Suspiria* is a video installation that superimposes scenes of actors filmed in

oversaturated colour on a closed set in Canada onto live black and white footage from thirteen cameras positioned in the interior of the Herkules monument in Kassel, Germany. The intensely coloured human figures thus ghost across the background but also imbue the dreary settings with a kind of glow as they drift on top of the *mise en scene*. Further, their presence is a disorienting one as their place within the set literally shifts: the different scenes and shots of castle interiors are selected by a computer to offer a myriad of combinations (over the installation's run of 100 days at Documenta 11, the same permutation is never repeated).

The disorienting combination of live space and filmed actors and disjunction between figure and background is intensified by the narrative material of the scenes, as well by the references to Argento. The text is a combination of Grimm fairytales that become political through a kind of Marxist rewriting (signifying power struggles based in exploitation and class oppression), and absurd through a disruptive lack of causality created by the random combinations and looping, while the imagistic model is Argento's film with its luscious technicolour, gothic castle, horrific hauntings and soundtrack by prog rock group Goblin (repeated in Douglas's piece). In these repetitions, intertextual play is not, however, explanatory: knowing Argento or Grimm does not give us an automatic interpretive frame for Douglas's video installation. Rather, the effect is interrogative as the viewer tries to fit him or herself in the gaps and absences that move the works so far apart. Douglas's piece is clearly not a remake of Argento or an adaptation of Grimm and, as a result, the viewer needs to work to try to find coincidences and convergences. This struggle is reiterated in the material form of the video itself where characters seem to struggle to find a story (without clear causality, the characters and events are fragmented, and unlike Grimm there is no reward for clever thinking or luck, there are merely more pointless events) and a space (they float on top of the space, not in it), but are at the same time entrapped by both. There is no end to the story, no climax or resolution, nor is there any exterior space to the castle; like ghosts, the characters do not leave their surroundings and are destined to replay the same actions and endure the same fates.

Similarly imprisoning characters within a closed space and story, *Journey into Fear* repeatedly replays the same scene (two characters talking in a room on a boat) with variations on the soundtrack. Combining Orson Welles's (Norman Foster finished the film) 1942 *Journey into Fear*, Daniel Mann's 1975 remake of the same film and Hermann Melville's *The Confidence Man*, the piece uses stylistic, temporal and spatial characteristics reminiscent of each but not locatable in any one text. Taking characters, situations and spatial cues from the films, Douglas creates a looped film that replays a discussion between two characters (Graham -- in Welles and Mann a man but here a woman -- and Muller) in a private room on a cargo ship making underhanded and mysterious deals. Combining this with phrases and lines from *The Confidence Man*, Douglas's *Journey* is a 15-minute loop with a soundtrack of 625 permutations that takes 157 hours to play in completion. The characters speak non-synchronized dialogue that seems at times to have no causal or logical connections; statement and reaction are disconnected, dislodged in often funny and disturbing ways, and throughout, the interlocutors are trapped in the same deadlocks and the same dead space (a closed room on a ship at sea). The dubbed quality of the dialogue (because the sound is looped and varied, the words emanating from the actors never quite match their lip movements) and its occasional absurdity give the piece a Beckettian feel of entrapment. There are strange dealings and subterfuge but these acts are not specified or clarified. Suspense becomes absurdity as the dialogue lacks associations, logical cause and effect or exchange; one senses an atmosphere of dramatic potential but not development, explication or culmination.

Negotiation (and double dealing) has here become a deadlock in a closed space; there is anticipation built up but no release as the characters journey *into* fear but never quite reach nor resolve it.

This anticipated but thwarted climax is characteristic of most of Douglas's film and video installations and, in the same way that the two characters on the boat and the castle ghosts are always journeying, always caught in the same but different events and dialogue, the two men in Douglas's *Win, Place or Show* repeatedly argue and fight, with no resolution. Playing off a scene from the 1960s CBC series *The Clients* where two men fight on ship, *Win, Place or Show* transplants the action into a utopic worker's highrise that was intended to be built (but never was) in the Strathcona area of Vancouver. Stylistically, the original CBC series is significant for the way in which it uses aspects of discontinuity editing for a mainstream television fight scene. Like the playing with colour of *Suspiria*, *Win, Place or Show* moves beyond the breaks in the 180-degree rule found in its source text to offer a total disruption of editing as a construction of a cohesive space and consecutive temporality. A two-channel video projection with a four channel soundtrack, *Win, Place or Show* replays combinations of a scene shot from a number of camera positions to give a total of 204,023 variations of approximately six minutes each. The multiple cameras, split screen and random combinations mean that screen direction is radically inconsistent as characters appear on different sides of the frame moving towards themselves, movement is doubled across the gap between the screens or actions become incomplete. In each combination though the fundamental action is the same: two men talk, argue, fight and stop fighting, only to repeat these same actions again. The action is always different yet always the same and, like *Suspiria*, action has a complex relation to space as the characters occupy the setting in *Win, Place or Show* in uncomfortable ways. Characterized by a high design style, the setting of the piece is at odds with the working class attitudes and concerns of the men and there is no clear sense of a world or space outside of this closed room and story. The cyclical events and sparse set create a sense of absurd and futuristic angst, a feeling exacerbated by the endless, nonsensical repeated action. In the same way that the dialogue and action point to a completion that is never achieved, the multiple permutations offer infinite outcomes that lead the viewer to hope for a resolution that seems within reach (the variations will eventually repeat but no single viewer is likely to witness them all) whilst simultaneously negating any such promise.

As even the brief descriptions of these few works indicate, it is clear that Douglas's film and video installations are not remakes but pieces that modify and engage with source materials thematically and formally. Combining unrealized utopic futures, haunted pasts, critiques of market capitalism (the mercenary deals in *Journey into Fear*, the Marxist underpinnings of *Suspiria*) with source texts spanning high and low culture (and popular and obscure), these works are similarly materially complex in their shifting and layered soundtracks, use of computer technology to randomize combinations or transpose images, manipulation of film and video effects and editing, and looping of events or scenes. [1] Like these works, *Inconsolable Memories* does not merely rework original material (in this instance a seminal film text), but transforms this material, adding layers, recombining material, subtracting and excising. A composite rewriting and resituating of Alea's film adaptation of Desnoes's novel, the film portion of *Inconsolable Memories* is not merely a remake or a formal restructuring of *Memories of Underdevelopment* but a modification of the thematic, ideological and political systems of the original referent's form and narration. It thus effectively engages in a kind of intertextual rewrite, renegotiating the presences and absences in the original work and redistributing the stresses and emphases of that work.

This destabilization is equally evident in the photographic portion of the exhibit: past and present interact and co-exist and the viewer is invited to interrogate the relationship between the photographs and film loop. Lushly coloured, the photographs feature brightly, uniformly lit and carefully framed shots of empty architectural, scenic and interior spaces that emphasize the impact of time on space and the role of sight: we see landscapes through holes in walls, empty theatres with windows of light, architectural spaces with cutaways, rooms decorated as if for a museum or frozen in time. In combination with these photographs and occupying a focalizing role in the exhibition, the film portion of the installation consists of two uneven loops (one is 28:15 minutes, the other 15:57 minutes) of 16mm black-and-white footage that are played simultaneously so that the ordering of segments alters in the projection. Both parts of the exhibit take post-revolutionary Cuba as the focus (and there is some direct doubling of locales that appear in both) and both engage with the vicissitudes of the experience and documentation of memory and history.

While the photographs of the exhibit stress the significance of place and space in historical events and their commemoration or erasure (they offer locations absent of present action but redolent with past and future activity), the film loop foregrounds the shifting and complex nature of subjectivity itself and together they suggest an interplay of place and persons that is as potentially arbitrary and changeable as memory itself.

A landmark in Cuban and world cinemas, Alea's film adapts art cinema's modes of narration for political purposes as it documents the hauntings and regrets of the main character Sergio and his decision to remain in Cuba after the mass exodus of (mostly wealthy and bourgeois) Cubans after the Castro revolution. The film focuses on Sergio's subjective thoughts, memories (flashbacks) and musings but this focalization is presented as a critique of a national consciousness that is unaware of its own complicity, apathy and selfishness in the face of revolution. An allegory for national cycles of destructive repetition, Sergio's failed romances in the film are the result of his own seduction by, and loathing for, bourgeois and Western ways. By paralleling gender and national politics, the film offers an exploration of the solipsism, self-absorption and, most importantly, self-loathing, that are the potential obverse of any coherent construction of individual or national identity.

In its most explicit form, this allegoric structure of *Underdevelopment* sets up a parallel between political and sexual seduction as it depicts Sergio's affair with a young girl of sixteen as a pointless conquest and rejection. Disgusted by his wife's exodus and adherence to European and American modes of behaviour and dress, Sergio seduces what he sees as a more innocent, unspoiled and authentically "Cuban" girl; but yet, it is this same girl that he can't help but "ruin." Attracted to what he sees as her natural and virginal state, he pursues her, dresses her in the clothes his wife left behind, tries to educate her in American literature (Hemingway) and then is repulsed by her failure to become a good copy. In the end he rejects her as embodying the qualities of "underdevelopment" to which he unconsciously adheres himself but of which he is so condemnatory.

Moreover, an example of the psychological complexity and loosened causal narration of European art cinema, Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment*, like Douglas's reworking, foregrounds stylistic complexity, intensified subjectivity and a fractured temporality. Beginning with a frenetic crowd scene of music and dancing (which is replayed later in the film), *Memories* makes the viewer immediately aware of temporality, continuity and spatial orientation -- the music and action continue uninterrupted (at the same volume and intensity) over what appears to be a climactic event (the shooting of someone in the crowd and the

removal of the body) and the shots continue after this event only to end in freeze frame on a randomly chosen woman's face. What is presumed to be a narrationally significant occurrence -- a shooting which is arguably the focus of the scene -- is undermined by the continuance of action and sound and absence of dialogue, while the seemingly insignificant is heightened by the frozen image that allows the viewer to stop and contemplate. Not only operating to disorient the viewer in his or her relation to the story material (this is the beginning of the film so the viewer is actively asking him or herself what is significant in the image? Who are the main characters? What do these events mean? Where is our attention supposed to be focused? Will we find out what leads to these events?), this opening sequence suspends the viewer's interpretive habits as they relate to style so that he or she is forced to ask what is the meaning of the active, fluid framing? The close-up? The freeze frame? The relation between non-diegetic sound and dialogue? Are these formal choices meant to punctuate the events, focus the viewer's attention or are they instead emphasizing the arbitrariness of attention at moments of crisis?

This opening sequence thus anticipates the structure of the film as a whole, which frequently replays scenes, downplays or mutes dialogue, engages in temporal ellipses that are not clearly motivated or contextualized (through coded stylistic signs such as sound bridges, dissolves, close-ups on main characters who are deep in thought, for example) and ends mid-action (the future is suspended as we see the tanks rolling in, significant events at the brink of occurring). In combination with the unanticipated flashbacks, overlapping narrational structure and frequent use of intrusive non-simultaneous and non-diegetic sound, this formal fragmentation of the film draws attention to the failures, haunting, ruins and remnants of memory and history. Sergio's experiences and voice-overs reiterate the importance of recognizing that world and personal events are interpreted as significant only retroactively, that we have only a partial understanding and experience of the events we live through and the acts we perpetrate and that we cannot anticipate the future anymore than we can change (or even accurately recall) the past.

Taking the formal and thematic complex treatment of history and memory found in Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* (and shifting the topical focus to the Mariel boatlift of 1980), the film portion of Douglas's *Inconsolable Memories* materially reflects the disorder of memory and time. Offering a series of scenes shot and projected in black and white cinematography that are edited in the process of projection (through the simultaneous and alternating play of two film loops of unequal length), Douglas's installation adds to the static photographs a film loop that emphasizes continuous and (somewhat) arbitrary action. We see fragments of the character Sergio's story (his wife's departure, a prison scene, driving in a car with a friend, walking the streets) and only slowly are able to piece them together into a rough narrative. The loop throws narration back onto the viewer who is forced into a position of trying to make sense of individuated, fractured yet connected scenes: for those familiar with Desnoes's novel and Alea's film, Douglas's film manipulates and makes us aware of our own impulse to narrativize, to impose order on disorder; for those unfamiliar with these core texts, there is a greater disorientation and struggle for narrative coherence. For both, there is a sense of absence, of a story only half told, of incomplete and latent action.

Moreover, the replayed situations in Douglas's film are brief and partial scenes (for example, the prison sequence that in Alea is linked to courtroom scenes and the ongoing lawsuit against him for the rape of the sixteen year old Elena, in Douglas is reduced to an episode of the distribution of cigarettes), so that even if there is some recognition for viewers familiar with *Memories of Underdevelopment*, the significance of the scenes, their place in the

narrational structure, their function as punctuation or as part of a chronological narrative structure are not clear. The shifting nature of the combinations ensures this. This is not to say that the film loop is totally random or infinitely changing. There are a limited number of variations and order is certainly evident; but it is a resistant order, one that demands active cognitive effort. This effort required by the perpetual and performative montage is further enhanced by the lack of insight offered by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène: lighting and acting are not revelatory but operate to hide, block or obfuscate knowledge or identificatory access; scenes are in darkness, acting is flat, voice-overs are unrevealing and unstable as they shift with loop changes, thus pointing to the fiction of access to the internal thoughts of others. We are not invited to share Sergio's journey or frustration, but are offered it as a puzzle for observation.

In frustrating the spectator's access to any notion of narrative truth or coherence, *Inconsolable Memories*, like Douglas's other film and video works, explores through material form (in this instance film loops) the structures of narration (narrative causality, economy and efficiency, resolution, theatricality and totality) and their relations to epistemological and ideological configurations of belonging, identity, memory and the situatedness and dislocation of the subject in time and space. Fracturing but not eradicating causal narration, this active montage makes the shifting of time and place explicit to the viewer in ways that accentuate the blending and mutating of past and present, reality and fantasy and history and memory. Heightening artifice (flattened acting style, obvious back-projection and constructed sets) to emphasize the disjunction between characters and their settings, the film also accents the dislocation of the main character from others, from himself and from causality. Alienated and apart, the protagonist of the film is not so much a reflection of place (Cuba) and situation (revolution, emigration, political struggle), as he is the site where the inconsistency and irresolution of these events and movements opens up. The film thus offers a formal allegory for the politics and history it addresses: in making narrative scenes isolated objects that can be re-ordered and revised with sound, the film's looping scenes ask us to question what the role of radical acts and events (such as revolution, or on a personal level, divorce, abandonment, imprisonment, violence) is when the consequences of apparent radical change are so indeterminable, mutable, palimpsestic, unfixed? If narrative becomes random, disjoined and continuous and absences or fissures become foregrounded rather than muted, as they do in Douglas's work, where do we place the subject of narration and enunciation and his or her relation to historical, geographical and phenomenological time and space?

This dislocation and structural absenting of causal narration and fixed order is equally evident in the photographs of the exhibit which I would argue offer not an addendum, elaboration or enhancement to the film projection but another mode of fissuring and separation. Throughout the photographs our attention is drawn to the layers of time: the once elegant home, the graffiti on the walls, the rebirth of the theatre as parking garage, the emptied out panoptic prison. In this architectural and spatial play of past and present usage, as well as in the images' frontal compositions and absence of human action (there is only one shot of human activity, a marketplace), the photographs exude a kind of touristic gaze, an exaggerated visibility and clarity that seems to offer these images to the spectator for consumption. Each image brings the consciousness of visibility to mind as we look through windows, around corners, over banisters; views are partial and layered but limpid, concise, almost obvious. The obscure and frustrating complexity of the film loop is reversed here into images that offer a clarity of vision. For instance, in one image our eye is drawn to the foreground graffiti on an old prison wall but the empty space where a window used to be simultaneously draws the viewer into the landscape in the distance. In this split visibility, the photographs are

transparent (the lighting, the frontal composition makes it clear what we are looking at) but in a way that emphasizes the absences in what we are shown: the empty space in the wall that allows the view of the landscape is thus a kind of absence, a vacant hole; similarly the spaces, emptied of action and use, insist on absent persons, actions, events.

Offering the dichotomy of architectural empty stillness and animated human action, the relationship between the photographs and film loop appears at first uncertain; the one is characterized by saturated colours and shots of empty spaces (landscapes, rooms, buildings) and the other by dialogue and dramatic action, black-and-white 16mm, back projection, constructed sets. Although these oppositions might invite an interpretation of cross-pollinating complementary supplementation (the photographs providing the real settings that are absent from the film, the character action of the film filling in the human absence of the photographs), I would argue that the final result is more akin to that of magnetic forces pushing the interaction apart and opening a void; the relation between photographs and film does not fill in the space but constructs it as structural gap, one not easily resolved by an interpolation of people and place. The people and places do not cross over and both offer equally disorienting visions of the split between identity and location.

This structural gap that pulls apart human interaction from historiographical and geographic place and space is significant in light of the way in which *Inconsolable Memories* addresses the fundamental irresolutions of history, memory or identity; past and present are continuous, like the film loop, and not resolved, finalized or hypostatized by the changes of place, politics or departure. We are not shaped or determined by our surroundings but occupy them in fractional, complex and shifting ways. Thus, the installation suggests that these more aporetic dislocations and outcomes are not linear, determined or even logically contextualized retroactively. The constant and continual temporal reorganization of the film loop reorients causal understandings of events and actions: whether individual or national, historical causality and linearity are exposed as retroactive structural impositions. We are presented with a series of "could haves" that emphasize potentiality, arbitrariness, chance and constant change. Douglas thus offers us a vision of the jarring confrontations of memory and history, self and other and past and present in these images of post-revolutionary Cuba, confrontations that are, like the active montage of the film loop, still in play, still indeterminate.

As this revisiting of Cuban emigration indicates, *Inconsolable Memories* points to the repressions and repetitions occasioned by revolutionary moments but also stresses the problematic relations between subject, space and memory in any given moment, whether revolutionary, incidental or quotidian. Douglas's work is frequently analyzed in terms of its concerns with the failed utopias, the lost potential or alternate futures, of the modernist era, and, linked to this, with a (sometimes didactic) critique of global capitalism, imperialism and cultural erasure. But to frame Douglas's works only in these terms of didactic contemplations is somewhat facile. For example, in almost every analysis or review of Douglas's monodrama *I'm not Gary*, race becomes the primary interpretive framework: the piece is described with reference to the race of the characters involved and the interpretation follows from this. In these responses, *I'm not Gary*, is about the erasure of character in discourses of race (for the white man, his interlocutor is simply a black man, interchangeable with any other for example and clearly interchangeable with Gary). While this is a valid interpretation (it is clear that Douglas's work does engage in a critique of racism, imperialism, cultural invisibility), the uniformity of response (and the lack of mention of race in scenes featuring only white characters) is troubling; once interpreted in this way there is, it seems, nothing left

to say and the opportunity to engage with the larger issues of subjectivity, identification or alienation is missed.

This problematic identification is equally evident in the responses to the problems of character and acting style in Douglas's film and video works. Despite the formal complexities and extratextual designations of these pieces as art installations and not narrative films, reviewers note the lack of empathy or identification they feel for Douglas's characters. For example, in his review of *Win, Place or Show*, Max Henry comments that "it's hard to work up much interest in the characters. Douglas simply doesn't provide enough information about the relationship between the two men. Are they supposed to be friends, roommates or lovers?" (Henry, 1999: 20). What these approaches miss is the fundamental problematic of subjectivity that I would argue is at the heart of Douglas's work, a focus that is as evident in his reworked film narratives with characters as it is in his unpeopled landscape and city photographs. Sergio, Marnie, the men from *Win, Place or Show*, Graham from *Journey into Fear*, Eleanore from *Le Detroit* are not characters so much as figures carrying out actions, sometime repetitive, pointless actions without final effect or outcome. Dislodged from narrational and temporal causality these "characters" are equally alienated from psychologizing. They occupy scenarios, places, are inside events but are not distinct as individuals; there is no development or desire in Douglas's film or video characters: these human figures act, are acted upon without intent, purpose or even effect. They are merely destined to repeat and become their acts: Marnie will rob, Eleanore will explore, the men will argue and fight.

But one should work against the impulse to approach this alienated subjectivity only as the effect of modernism, the failures of urban life, global capitalism or technological society; rather, I suggest that in Douglas, it is the fragmented nature of subjectivity as such that is at the heart of his portraits of alienation. There are no depictions of coherent subjectivity in Douglas: his works cannot be reduced to studies of characters shaped by their surroundings or their pasts. Characters act and respond but with each action there is an emptiness of thought, desire or impulse and a mindless repetition enforced by the action of a film loop: the men trapped in the apartment will argue and fight, repeatedly and without effect; Sergio wanders but arrives back in the prison, back in the same situations again; despite their wit, spells or charms, the characters of *Suspiria* will never escape the confines of the castle or the fairytales in which they dwell.

Douglas's characters are defined by their actions and enunciations but are in essence empty; they are flattened ciphers, figures alienated from their environments (the ghostings of *Suspiria*, the back projected landscapes of *Inconsolable Memories*), from their enunciations (the unsynchronized speech of *Journey into Fear*) or from the spatial parameters of the image itself (the walking into an abyss that occurs with the split screen of *Win, Place or Show*). Further, a stress on alienated subjectivity helps to explain the *I'm not Gary* episode in a way that moves beyond simplistic liberal humanist platitudes about the invisibility of "visible" minorities and pushes it towards an analyses of identity as such: what does it mean to assert that one is, or is not, Gary? What failures of intersubjective communication are indicated by the facile and pointless greetings of human interaction ("Hey Gary, How are you doing?")? How do we stabilize, circumscribe our own and other's identities through naming (what makes Gary a cohesive and identifiable object in the first place?)? In asking these questions, we can recognize that rather than merely an instance of resistance to naming, Althusserian hailing (you become a subject to the law when you perceive yourself as addressed by the law) or a comment on minority labeling, the enunciation "I'm not Gary,"

said after a pause, points to the possible fractures in the stability of identity, perception, language, intersubjectivity or self. And these fractures are equally evident in the interchangeability of the Marnies or Sergios, or the ghostly revisitations of Eleanore, as well as in the partial nature of our viewing experience itself (in film loops such as *Win, Place or Show* for example, it is almost impossible for one viewer to see the over 20,000 different combinations). The past is as partial, uncertain and unapproachable as the future in Douglas's works and the stability assumed by canonical texts or even subjectivity is made difficult and precarious in the acts of repetition.

Moreover, as reworkings, Douglas's films and videos bring to the fore the hauntings of cultural memory, the currency and historical import of art as artifact, product and interventionist or radical statement. Alea's film *Memories of Underdevelopment*, for example, is one of Cuba's most significant modern cultural exports and is a film that has become synonymous with its own failed moment of cultural and artistic history: viewed as a high point of Cuban filmic expression, an example of film modernism comparable to the great European art cinemas of Fellini, Antonioni or early Godard, Alea's *Memories* has become a canonized cinematic icon representative of a certain period of successful Cuban cultural production. It is also an icon of what is in the Western world considered lost after the revolution -- exportable Cuban cinema. A pastiche more than a remake, Douglas's *Memories* exhibits a kind of cultural memory of Alea's *Memories*, bearing its traces but in the distorted, imperfect and renarrativized form of memory itself. The installation bears the traces of the original film in form and content as the black and white cinematography recalls the original film as a visual memory and the characters become reanimated ghosts of the continuous present of filmic projection. Although the events are shifted to a more recent historical exodus, the film loop of *Inconsolable Memories* is not more contemporary, it is not an update but an evocation of a film that will only and always exist simultaneously in the past (its year of production) and in the present of projection and viewing. In this latter way, both films are and are not "now."

This distortion of cultural memory is equally evident in Douglas's other reworkings: diegetically about ghosts, traces, memory and history, these works are also formally haunted themselves and play with this intertextuality in disruptive and dislocating ways. Douglas's remakes are not homages but perverse rewrites, using the style, structure, quotes, characters and scenes from early works to make their own statements, not merely to engage critically with the referent object. *Inconsolable Memories*, *Suspiria*, *Journey into Fear* or *Win, Place or Show* do not inspire us to "rediscover" their core texts anew but to think about the shifting nature of narrative, space, story themselves.

This is where Douglas's *Marnie*, even though it is not strictly recombinant, can perhaps be instructive. *A Subject to a Film: Marnie* replays a sequence from Hitchcock's *Marnie* without significant variation in mise en scene, cinematography, editing or sound: the scene is the "same," but also totally distinct. Vancouver actress Tamsin Kelsey plays Marnie, the set is reconstructed and varied (computers are on desks for example), the lighting is different, the stock is not Technicolor and there are a million other small variations. Added to this, Douglas's installation is only partial; it is not *Marnie*, only a small fragment and, because *Marnie* the film is about Marnie the character, and our Marnie is so clearly a copy, the character itself becomes somewhat unreal and as partial, incomplete, decontextualized and unnarrativized as the segment of the film. This Marnie is not the subject of the film but the subject *to* the film, imprisoned by the confines of the defined segment, trapped in this one action in a way that is both a reference to Hitchcock's psychologized Marnie who is

inexorably determined and defined by her founding trauma and that simultaneously works against character psychology itself, against the very idea of a whole or a complete product.

In its proximity to the original then, Douglas's *Marnie* makes all the more evident its differences, a strategy for remaking Hitchcock which would gain the approval of Lacanian theorist Slavoj Žižek. In criticizing Gus van Sant's remake of *Psycho* (1998), Žižek notes that "the film did not go far enough:" "Ideally, what the film should strive for is to achieve the uncanny effect of the double: in shooting formally the same film, the difference would have become all the more palpable. Everything would have been the same -- same shots, angles, and dialogue -- but nonetheless, on account of this very sameness we would all the more powerfully experience that we are dealing with a totally different film" (Žižek, 2001: 206). Working from Freud's work on the uncanny that emphasizes the disorienting function of the double, Žižek applies the disturbing sense of strange familiarity essential to the *unheimlich* to adaptation: the copy both is and is not the original and it is this doubleness that renders the uncanny potentially traumatizing, horrifying or transgressive. Viewed in this way, Douglas's *Marnie* is reminiscent of just such a copy: it is an utterly different film (its thematic, ideological and libidinal investments are distinct from Hitchcock's film) but, as copy and fractured repetition, it operates as a kind of uncanny double rendering both the original and itself strange. With this *Marnie*, its interior repetitions and extra textual references stress a feeling of having witnessed this action before; we feel at home with the material and yet it is also absolutely and radically mysterious. Indeed it is this status as uncanny double that forms the film's content -- it is an exercise in defamiliarization through mirroring, repetition and fracturing.

This strategy of making the familiar strange is evident throughout Douglas's work in the pervasive sense of fear and mystery, the lurking feeling of threat and danger that is unlocalizable and indirect yet palpable. In this way Douglas's remakes do not merely address the uncanny but are themselves uncanny repetitions: these works are redolent with traces of memory, with the sense of having seen or experienced or heard these elements before, yet this familiarity operates to make the differences all the more disturbing. *Inconsolable Memories* works in a similar manner by constantly calling to memory the original text but then altering temporal, spatial and narrational flow and form so that the similarity is barely recognizable. For instance, in abbreviating the film, reducing it to a number of core scenarios, Douglas shifts the emphases. Sergio is no longer the centre, the point of cohesion or condensation; his character is prominent but it does not serve to stitch the various points together with thematic certainty. The events are not filtered through his subjectivity, his voice over does not orient and direct the viewer's attention in the way we find in Alea's film. Instead, space and time become the main characters of the film, an assertion backed up by the photographs of the exhibition.

In this renegotiation of emphasis, Douglas can be seen engaging in a kind of Deleuzian amputation, where major keys are excised so that minor keys can be stressed. Amputation as it is developed in Gilles Deleuze's essay "One Less Manifesto" asserts the radicality of the act of subtraction in Carmelo Bene's theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare; these performances excise majoritarian discourses (all elements of power and centrality) in order to minorate a text, replacing normalization, hegemony and dogmatism with a kind of active, present and radical becoming. For Deleuze, this kind of modification is a subversive strategy aimed at renegotiating narrational, thematic and stylistic dominance: amputating what is usually designated as most dominant in order to expose and highlight those hidden, de-emphasized elements brings to light the marginal, oppressed and invisible life of a text. In Douglas, this

operation of reversal and modification applies to the functions of space and time themselves; rather than shaping individual subjective memory, space and time become the subjects, bearing the traces and traumas of past, present and future human dramas. The high points of Alea's film, those key markers of narrative progression and climax are removed and we get instead partial and minor scenes, scenes that do not quite fit together but rather point to the parts that are missing. Like with *Journey into Fear*, suspense is created in what is not there, in the massive narrational void that makes understanding and narrative logic absurd and difficult.

The reshaping of the very idea of character is central to this narrational emptiness and indicates that this absence is more than mere formal play. In decentering and flattening character, Douglas can be seen to be emptying the subject both formally (reshaping narrative so that human figures become aspects of *mise-en-scène*, actants in scenarios that are beyond trite psychologizing) and thematically (recognizing the void that is at the centre of subjectivity as such). And it is in this emptying that I think the strength of his film and video work can be found; moving beyond didacticism or postmodern ironic pastiche, Douglas's fragmented and looped reworkings of source texts bring the viewer back to the material aspects of the medium at hand (film, photography, video, sound, editing), the complexity of viewing process and the void at the centre of subjectivity itself.

The pieces thus invite interrogation and this struggle for understanding is key to Douglas's film and video works; the viewer is asked to engage with the spatial and temporal manipulations, iterations and repetitions in order to come to analysis and interpretation but there is also simultaneously the recognition that full knowledge is not available, the puzzle will not be solved. The flattening of character, the shift from cause and effect to circular looping and the technological interventions orchestrating the variations of his image and sound tracks all point to the vacant and empty nature of the subject itself. As Lacan reminds us, the very notion of a subject is a naming of a void, an emptiness that is labeled and retroactively constituted as a cohesive speaking subject. This is central to the concept of the barred subject; we are never accessible to ourselves as the Lacanian revision of the Cartesian cogito as "I am not where I think" indicates. The "thing that thinks" is always anticipated by or missing from the enunciation of "I" as the subject is a void caught in what Žižek calls the "irreducible vicious cycle of subjectivity:" "the subject 'is' the very gap filled in by the gesture of subjectivization" (Žižek, 2000: 158). Like Douglas's *Marnie*, then, we too are subject to a film and are the subjects supposed by the film. As one reviewer noted regarding *Inconsolable Memories*, Sergio's memories become our own: that most subjective and personalized of experiences -- the act of memory -- is quite literally revealed to be the screen that it always already is. As is illustrated in the scene from the 1945 film *Journey into Fear* not referenced by Douglas about the character who pretends to be a socialist and through pretending, actually becomes one, subjectivity is revealed to be separate from itself -- we are never that from where we speak, subjectivity arises to fill the void of the subject.

In this combination of layered intertexts and aporetic subjectivity, we can see the ways in which Douglas's films and videos do not just address the uncanny but embody it. His use of the gothic, supernatural and uncanny has been widely noted but more than this, it is the works themselves that are familiarly strange. Rarely explicitly violent or menacing, pieces like *Journey into Fear*, *Suspiria*, *Le Detroit* and *Inconsolable Memories* nonetheless carry with them a sense of foreboding, haunting and danger: there is a sense of fear but not its explicit identification, an uncanniness felt by the characters (their sense of distance from themselves, their concern, furtive or confrontational gestures or statements) and sensed by the spectator as

he or she experiences the work again, as a looped viewing and as a intertextual, referential cultural artifact. Like the characters, the works are distanced from themselves and in this, the spectator experiences the *unheimlich*; the sense of the homely, the hidden and the comfortable that is simultaneously its opposite. In *Inconsolable Memories*, this uncanny becomes ourselves and history, the memories that are obsessively replayed and inconsolably lost, absent; like Sergio's past, Alea's film, the modernist subjectivity, revolutionary moment and future it anticipated are now the ruins of the past and Douglas's film loop playing repetitively and variantly stresses both the aporias and obsessions of those pasts.

Notes

I would like to thank Jordan Strom and *The Phillip Review*, in which my review of the *Inconsolable Memories* exhibition at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery (Vancouver) appeared in 2006. I would also like to thank Stan Douglas and Linda Chinfen for their generosity and Christine Evans for her help in acquiring the materials necessary for this research.

[1] Although there is not space to discuss them here, Douglas's *Der Sandmann*, *Nut.ka*, *Subject to a Film: Marnie* and *Le Detroit* are all similarly composite and all have complex relations to cultural histories, texts and spaces.

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To browse Academia.edu and the wider internet faster and more securely, please take a few seconds to upgrade your browser. Log In. Sign Up. "The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe Eds. Tanya C. Horeck, Tina Kendall University of Edinburgh Press, 2011". More Info: <http://www.euppublishing.com/book/9780748641604?template=toc>. Further reading Stan Douglas: Inconsolable Memories, exhibition catalogue, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver 2005. Nancy Princenthal, "Stan Douglas's Fugue States", *Art in America*, vol.95, no.4, 2007, pp.108-111. Lisa Coulthard, "Uncanny Memories: Stan Douglas, Subjectivity and Cinema", *Scope: An Online Journal of Film & TV Studies*, no.12, 2008, http://www.academia.edu/306933/Uncanny_Memories_Stan_Douglas_Subjectivity_and_Cinema, accessed 7 October 2014. Natasha Adamou June 2014. Supported by Christie's. Douglas's films and videos thus trouble the material and spatial boundaries of the cinema and museum (for instance, his recent *Klatsassin* premiered at the 2006 Vancouver International Film Festival and then in 2007 played at the Secession Gallery in Vienna) and, perhaps more importantly, thematically disturb these distinctions as his art occupies a transitional zone that interrogates perception, narrative comprehension and modes. of visual and aural storytelling. Based on Tomas Gutierrez Alea's 1968 film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment), Douglas's *Inconsolable Memories* consists of a 16mm film accompanied by a series of photographs from Havana, Cuba.