notes

1. Both, for example, have drawn on the works of Alfred Hitchcock, as well as on early documentaries. Most of Douglas's work in other media consists of series of photographs, which relate to the sites of his installation projects. Gordon's, by contrast, ranges more broadly in type and medium.
2. See George Wagner, "Discounted Blights and Historical Evasions," in *Stan Douglas* (Vancouver: Art Gallery, 1999), p. 89.
3. Stan Douglas, conversation with Diana Thater, in *Stan Douglas* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), pp. 28–29.
4. Stan Douglas, project proposal, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 1998.
5. See Douglas Gordon and Liam Gillick, "Sailing Alone Around the World," *Parkett*, no. 49 (1997), p. 74.

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site map and checklist
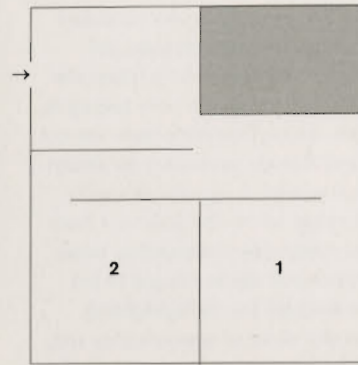
1. **Stan Douglas**
   Win, Place, or Show, 1998
   two-channel video projection
   200,000 variations of an average duration
   of 6 minutes each
   Collection of the artist

2. **Douglas Gordon**
   left is right and right is wrong and left is wrong and right is right, 1999
   video installation
   97 minutes
   Collection of the artist

Stan Douglas was born in 1960 in Vancouver, where he currently lives and works. Educated at the Emily Carr College of Art in Vancouver, Douglas has exhibited widely since his first solo show in 1981. Among numerous group exhibitions, he was included in the 1995 Carnegie International, the 1995 Whitney Biennial, and the 1997 SkulpturProjekte in Münster, and Documenta X in Kassel. The retrospective that opened in February 1999 at the Vancouver Art Gallery will travel to Toronto, Tilburg (The Netherlands), and Los Angeles.

Douglas Gordon was born in 1966 in Glasgow, where, in addition to Cologne, he continues to live and work. After studying at the Glasgow School of Art from 1984 to 1988, Gordon undertook a graduate program at the Slade School of Art in London from 1988 to 1990. Since his first solo show in 1986, Gordon has exhibited extensively. He was the 1996 recipient of Britain's Turner Prize, and in 1997 was awarded Premio 2000 at the Venice Biennial. He was also included in the SkulpturProjekte in Münster in 1997.

Cover Photos: top, Stan Douglas; bottom, Douglas Gordon

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Stan Douglas and Douglas Gordon Double Vision

Very different in crucial respects, the oeuvres of the Canadian Stan Douglas and the Scot Douglas Gordon nonetheless betray telling parallels and shared interests. Both artists work primarily with film and video, generally presenting these media in the form of installations. Both use found footage—documentary and fictional—as well as directing and producing their own material. Both have focused on sound in its own right, on music and on film scores. Both have frequently employed techniques involving bifurcation, doubling, and inversion for structural and thematic ends. And, for both, time, in its manifold guises, plays a critical role.[1] In addition, both have taken on the role of curator: Douglas orchestrated a touring show of Samuel Beckett's Teleplays in the late 1980s, while Gordon has compiled programs of films formerly banned in the countries where his screenings took place.

In part, these parallels might be attributed to the related circumstances that surround their formations. Growing up in British or former British societies during the 1970s and 1980s, these two young artists were subject to similar cultural imprinting. Moreover, as students, they located their artistic heritages in Conceptual Art of the sixties and seventies, as well as in film and video histories. Subsequently, they have been drawn to popular genres for much of their source material, and, to somewhat different degrees, each has engaged with new technological developments in order to effect an idea or a concept, though Gordon generally prefers his work to appear immediate, simple to realize, and transparent in its mechanics.

"Double Vision" is comprised of two new installations, both of which utilize dual projection. Although it has previously appeared in their respective oeuvres, that structure reappears here fortuitously, for these works were conceived independently, without consultation. Each artist has, however, been keenly aware of the other's practice, not least because they have often found themselves participating in the same group shows. When juxtaposed, Win, Place, or Show (1998) and left is right and right is wrong and left is wrong and right is right (1999) reveal additional, if somewhat serendipitous, correspondences: more importantly, comparison may permit the singular concerns informing and governing each to emerge sharply.

Win, Place, or Show takes as its point of departure the fundamental transformation of civic space that occurred in North America during the postwar era, initiated at an institutional level under the rubric of "urban renewal." In Vancouver, the campaign against "urban blight" began in 1950 when the city commissioned a plan for the redevelopment of one of its poorest neighborhoods, Strathcona. In this proposal, all existing structures were to be demolished in favor of a dense grid comprised of apartment towers, row housing, and a pair of dormitories for retired seasonal laborers. In Win, Place, or Show two dock workers share a tenth-floor, one-bedroom apartment in one of those planned, but never constructed, dormitories. The continually looping, six-minute work chronicles an antagonistic conversation that flares up on a wet day off. After erupting into physical violence, it then lapses into weary irritation, only to be rekindled into a smoldering verbal friction.

Douglas shot his scene in the gritty realist style of The Clients, a Vancouver-produced CBC television series, which aired briefly in 1968 and whose concise parables did not abide by conventional rules of television drama: the employment of long takes, the absence of master shots, and the inarticulateness of leading characters were among its signature features. Filmed from twelve separate camera angles, Douglas's takes are cut together in real time by a computer during the exhibition, thereby generating an almost endless series of montages, since every time the scene repeats, it repeats differently. The fractured and fissured representations that result range across the spectrum, from an almost seamless illusion to a doubled image, to two completely contradictory views. In this way Douglas not only deconstructs the conventions and values integral to the style, the genre, the medium, and even the art form he employs but, by highlighting devices of disidentification, foregrounds the conditions and terms of spectatorship and, by extension, indicts as false any encompassing ideology.

Read metaphorically and metonymically as an investigation into larger issues concerning the control of social space, both in its private and public guises, Win, Place, or Show fits within an ongoing thematic in Douglas's oeuvre in which he skeptically probes the legacy of modernism, cauterizing its obsolete or unrealizable utopian dreams. "The memory of a history that never transpired," in effect, it also completes a trilogy with Nu•tka• (1993) and Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin, B.C. (1996), which, respectively, draw on the colonial and postcolonial history of British Columbia in order to examine issues of territoriality and the political relations based in class, race, and economics that subtend and sustain it.[2] A liminal space suspended precariously in time lies at the core, not only of this series, but of many of his projects: "I'm always looking for this nexus point, the middle ground of some kind of transformation," Douglas avers, adding "I guess this accounts for the embarrassingly consistent binary constructions in my work. Almost all of the works, especially the ones that look at specific historical events, address moments when history could have gone one way or another. We live in the residue of such moments," he contends, "and for better or worse their potential is not yet spent."[3]

Yet this intricately layered work is equally open to psychoanalytical readings, as the artist himself readily acknowledges: "[it] is less concerned with the narration of the event than with the space of its unfolding, like the obsessive remembrance and reconsideration of a traumatic incident in one's life that cannot be resolved because its true cause was elsewhere, and remains unavailable to the space of memory."[4]

left is right and right is wrong and left is wrong and right is right appropriates a little-known film made in Hollywood in 1949 by Otto Preminger titled Whirlpool. Gordon has edited this generic film noir so that all the odd-numbered frames are placed onto one video disk, the even on another: black leader occupies the space of the missing frames on each. When the two are projected side by side, the one on the left is reversed. The original soundtrack has been similarly treated.

Preminger's plot centers on two principals: Ann Sutton, the wife of a wealthy psychiatrist who suffers from insomnia and kleptomania, and David Korvo, a hypnotist who persuades her to undergo his treatment after saving her from being charged with theft. In order to cover up his murder of socialite Theresa Randolph, from whom he had extorted large sums of money before she threatened him with exposure, Korvo plans to hypnotize Ann and send her to Randolph's house where she will be arrested for the crime. Although he had initially and falsely suspected his wife of having an affair with Korvo, Ann's husband comes to believe that Korvo actually committed the murder under the influence of hypnosis, which gave him the strength to leave his hospital bed where he was recovering from an operation (the source of his perfect alibi). The police take Ann to the scene of the crime so that her husband can attempt to reconstruct the event. Realizing that incriminating evidence remains there that would reveal him to be the real killer, Korvo once again returns under hypnosis to the house, where he finally succumbs.

The stroboscopic flicker in Gordon's installation engenders a strong visceral impact, mimicking the act of hypnosis on which the film's plot turns, while the jarring, rending rhythm of its address conjures that required to effect a violent abreaction. The reflected symmetries of the double projection similarly serve to restructure vision; for the flow of enantiomorphic images constantly oscillates, sometimes splitting apart to insist on dual contradictory points of view, sometimes dissolving into a fully coherent if illogical space, or a single, unified entity. Often a new reality supervenes over the inverted pair of images, a reality that metamorphoses out of the seam, the junction between the two frames, and conjures yet a third vantage point: elusive, fluctuating, subliminal, it evokes a consciousness resistant to the twin claims of hypnosis and psychoanalysis.

Psychic disorder is at once the key to this narrative and a subject at the heart of Gordon's art, since it provides the occasion, in works based sometimes in fact, sometimes in fiction, for a study of fundamental existential dilemmas: between good and evil; freedom and necessity; existence and nonexistence. Gordon has variously instantiated this dialectical tension, manifesting it by slowing down the projection, doubling, inverting, repeating, or subjecting it to more complex techniques, as found here. And, although his subjects frequently include split personalities, doppelgängers, and twins, he claims that he doesn't believe in dichotomies, even if he is obsessed by them.[5] Nonetheless, through recourse to such motifs and means, he gives incisive, aphoristic form to altered states, which imprint themselves on the body or manifest themselves in abnormal behavior, and which have been labeled diversely, depending on the discourses used in their analysis: madness, demonic possession, trauma, psychosis, moral turpitude, hysteria, euphoria, trance, mystical transport, and hallucination, for example.

L.C.