Stan Douglas

Television Spots

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Contemporary Art Gallery

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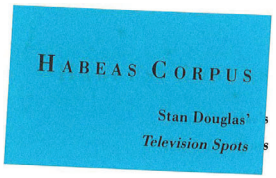

OVER THE PAST six years, Stan Douglas has been documenting the effects of technological mediation on culture and consciousness. Through his resurrection of such dinosaur technologies as the nineteenth-century panorama (*Panoramic Rotunda*), the player piano (*Onomatopoeia*), or turn-of-the century film footage (*Overture*), Douglas re-presents a critical history of the media-saturated 1980's. With the *TV Spots*, he moves forward to address contemporary modes of representation common to television advertising and melodrama.

In "The Ecstasy of Communication," Jean Baudrillard predicts the demise of a human geography (body, landscape, time) with the apotheosis of the new, soft technology. Television, he says, is "the ultimate and perfect object for this new era —our own body and the whole surrounding universe become a control screen" (127). The media dematerializes: consciousness becomes a determinate series of functions, and the commodified object an abstraction. The essence of the thing is its price (131). Drawing on Baudrillard's conclusions in her recent "All That Television Allows: TV Melodrama, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture," Lynne Joyrich argues that melodrama is the dominant form of the popular media.[1] The melodramatic narrative answers anxiety about the meaninglessness of contemporary culture with simplified, paradigmatic stories that reduce complex social and political problems to the level of interpersonal conflict. Even on this level, she says, "the psychological dimension has given way to the 'forced extroversion of all interiority, this forced injection of exteriority' "—a play of surfaces that are formally homogeneous (139).

As Baudrillard and Joyrich imply, television meets our desire for meaning with simulacra that are as removed from materiality and contingency as is Plato's world of forms. In this desacrilized age, there are yet two worlds, and the difference and distance between them is perhaps as great as it ever was. The priests of the media, however, need no longer solicit literal belief in the superiority of their sponsor's products, nor even in such conceptual pillars of official North American ideology as law and order, free enterprise, or family life. Television merely has to disseminate a basic working premise of capitalism: the exchangeability not just of things, but of feelings, ideas, and meaning itself. It isn't the particular commodity that matters—the car, the woman, the piece of real estate, the dish detergent, the name of the murderer—but the ability to possess and to be possessed. Even individual media stars can be reduced to what Baudrillard calls the "potentialities" of "mastery, control, command" (127).

However various the scenarios or the products, television advertising repeatedly demonstrates the conquest of the material world through narrative. This process places matter at the command not of a particular subject, but of a dispersed and omniscient will—a subject-function. When the Voice speaks, dirt vanishes, furniture moves, and the various food groups sing and dance with an abandon that would have startled Orpheus. A disembodied hand snaps its fingers and Del Monico pineapple slices dress up as hors d'oeuvres. In a recent ad (1988) that juxtaposes images of an airplane and a rocket, British Airways takes its passengers not just around the world, but out of it too, placing the entire globe at the traveller's disposal. A Chanel production featuring an exotic woman, a fast car, a desert landscape, and various boyfriends invites the viewer to "share the fantasy." In this fantasy, the pricey commodities merely set the stage for the choreographing of reality: an airplane deposits a handsome man in the desert at the precise moment that Chanel Woman arrives in her car. Or in a commercial that deserves a prize for blatancy, we are informed that Chrysler's "front-wheel-drive technology" is "changing the landscape." Even in a good-will ad, such as MacMillan Bloedel's demonstration of the company's reforestation program ("Forests Forever"), small seedlings turn into "harvestable" forests before our eyes.

McDonald's piano-playing, moon-faced Mac summarizes the effects of these alchemical operations. The tune of the Mac commercial and the character of the singer come from Brecht's *Threepenny Opera;* the ad turns on the visual and phonic pun between Brecht's "Mack the Knife" and the cartoon gangster who urges us to "make it Mac tonight." Brecht's gangster was human, tricky perhaps, but apprehendable. His victims could be found someday, half-rotten, floating in a river, or face-down in a ditch. The McDonald's criminal is far more sophisticated. Weightless, unreal, incapable of remorse, and quite untouchable, he celebrates his transcendence by floating over a cityscape on a cloud. There is no gravity in his world, no death, no corpses, nothing to obstruct the fantasy. In such a place we, who are earthbound, cannot be represented. Mac has hidden our bodies.

The *TV Spots* return us to the scene of the crime, where, like Alice falling into technological wonderland, the body begins to disappear. This is the site where the individual enters the narrative, the site of the suture. Since Jean-Pierre Oudart's application of this Lacanian concept to classical cinema in his article "La Suture" (1969), suture has had a history in film criticism.[2] Most commonly, however, the term denotes

a shot—reverse shot sequence that closes the cinematic narrative by inviting the viewer to fill in the fourth field, the camera's field, with an imaginary, all-seeing subject. "Theological cinema," as Oudart calls it, promotes misrecognition of itself as discourse (as a chain of signifiers), even as it seduces the viewer with the offer of a transcendent subjectivity.

Television, too, holds a theological appeal, but its "sutures" stitch together more than a single narrative and involve more than one particular technical strategy. The brevity of the programs, the commercial breaks, the availability of more than one channel (facilitated by remote-control units), offer the viewer a number of rapidly shifting and apparently discontinuous surfaces. Yet ads, sitcoms, soaps, and cop shows alike leave the subject-function undisturbed, the possessability of matter and information unquestioned. And as Joyrich says, "As images and narratives become fragmented and spectatorship more and more dispersed, we begin to inhabit 'the synchronic rather than the diachronic' . . . "(140). We lose historical specificity to media space where all times and places may be continuously present and have been made formally continuous. It is this network of invisible seams that Douglas seeks to undo—seams between times, spaces, programs, and ads, and seams between cinema and television, for television has consumed its own prehistory. The *TV Spots*, designed to be broadcast repeatedly like commercials, propose a "parallel discourse" (Fischer 20) that both evokes and denies narrativization.

Still from MAC TONIGHT. 30-second television advertisement for McDonald's Restaurants, 1987.

In "Notes on Suture," Stephen Heath remarks that "[t]he system of suture . . . breaks as soon as the time of the shot hesitates beyond the time of its narrative specifications"(76). Such is Douglas's technique in *Musical Vendor*. He follows an overly long opening shot of a residential street with a long reverse, backward tracking shot of an ice-cream man driving his wagon. The camera work refers to the cinematic history of television, and to such "classic" strategies as the point-of-view shot. However, the length of the shots and the absence of a compelling narrative point to the presence of the camera. In that our view of the man is obstructed by the glass

windshield of his wagon, we are again reminded of the glass lens of the camera and the glass screen of the television set. *Musical Vendor* thus directs our attention toward the mediating codes (technical and ideological) which produce the vendor of narrative that the media has become. Moveover, the ice-cream man himself supplies an oblique commentary on the subject-function. Unlike the musical salesman of the McDonald's ad, this ordinary fellow making his rounds to the jingly repetitions of "Camptown Races" brings us down to earth. We are permitted a limited view of a small-"s" subject.

The relationship between vision and subjectivity, the eye and the ego, is one that cinema and television have not failed to exploit. As Peter Wollen puts it, "The eye of the camera is still assimilated to the human eye, an eye whose imaginary is constructed around a range of differences within a basic unity . . . " (21). In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey suggests that film appeals to that pleasure in looking which comes from "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (8). Commenting on this article in "White Privilege and Looking Relations," Jane Gaines notes that Mulvey's argument implies "only an incremental difference between voyeurism . . . and the supreme violation—murder" (71). Such considerations inform Douglas's references to the scene of the crime. In *Sneeze*, a young woman walks toward the exit of a deserted, underground parking lot. The camera tracks her from behind, as does the absent assailant the scene evokes. Something should happen in a situation like this. Someone, some man, ought to come out from behind one of the cement pillars and attack this vulnerable woman. Change the costume to a pair of heels and a short black evening dress and we're watching a rerun. *Belle-dame*, murderer-rapist-kidnapper, and the inevitable private dick who catches the miscreant —but only after we have had the pleasure of devouring the woman with our eyes, complicit in our looking with the criminal, whose punishment (we know in advance) will absolve our guilt. This scenario need no longer be acted out, but merely evoked like the memory of a ritual, or perhaps just an idea, that can serve to stimulate a corresponding idea of pleasure, leaves us drooling like Pavlov's dog. And if we resist this particular opportunity to indulge the scopic drive,can we resist the absent narrative that the scene conjures up?

Sneeze not only refuses such expectations, but the piece also leaves us with a body on our hands. What do we do with this woman who isn't going to be murdered or even raped, who bundles up in a bulky coat and slacks so we can't get a good look at her legs.

She sneezes. A cold maybe, viral, or dust tickling the nose hairs. Dirt and germs. This body can die and decay. It has weight and substance, and it holds its secrets. The woman has little value as a commodity because she satisfies neither our scopophilia, nor our desire for narrative. Yet if we decide that *Sneeze* has no meaning, we side with the networks that equate meaning with possessability.

This refusal of narrative, characteristic of the *Spots*, finds its most explicit manifestation in *No Problem*. This piece plays off the conventions of the kind of melodrama that exposes feelings only a lover usually sees. Accompanied by tinned traffic noises, a couple walks away from the camera down a deserted street in an early evening twilight. Twice the woman asks, "What's the matter?" twice the man replies, "Nothing." Again we are cheated of the show-and-tell that television is so quick to provide. The interiority of these two, the intimate details of their relationship, remains private, and not for public consumption.

Yet *No Problem* does tell a story. What I find most interesting about this piece, and about the *Spots* generally, is not only Douglas's decoding of media-produced "reality," but also the "parallel discourse" his work proposes. Were the *TV Spots* to be broadcast on network TV as "ads,"[3] they might indeed counterpoint the syntax of television. In an art gallery, however, this contrapuntal function is suspended. The *Spots*, bracketed in such a context as "art," address an audience already practiced in laying bare the device. For such an audience, perhaps the primary interest of these pieces lies in the specifics of the discourse that Douglas proposes. As Andreas Huyssen says, if we discard the subject entirely in hopes of ridding ourselves of the imaginary, do we not "jettison the chance of challenging the *ideology of the subject* (as male, white, and middle-class) by developing alternative and different notions of subjectivity?" (213).

I am suggesting that Douglas moves toward "alternative . . . notions of subjectivity" which involve a stitching together of the minutiae of experience: material, symbolic, and ideological. The texture of *No Problem*—the traffic sounds, the clothing, the uncertain light, the terse dialogue—does not permit us to read the scene emblematically. The man and the woman do not exemplify an idea or deliver a message, and yet neither are they free of the ideological. Why is it the woman who solicits the confidence of her male companion? Has she a "feminine" need to be recognized, loved, or valorized by a male partner? Why does the man refuse? Male stoicism? What we see in *No Problem* is not just a neutral non-event that negates the

melodramatic scene. The title of this piece becomes ironic if we consider the gender pressures that operate within male-female relationships.

One of Douglas's most complex presentations of sexual and cultural difference comes in *Box Office*. Shot from the interior of a box office, the piece opens with a long look at the face of an attractive black woman, reflected in the window of the office. She is staring at herself in the glass, and this self-reflexive gesture (a reflection of a reflection) draws attention to the camera's looking, our looking, and the act of looking itself. The mirror-window offers a mirage of availability; the woman's face and her economic position (she is stuck there, on the job) are on display. The implications of this apparent availability are obvious, and the arrival of a customer makes them explicit. As the customer steps up to the wicket, his body blots out the reflected face; we see, *from the woman's perspective*, a man's midriff and a white male hand passing a twenty-dollar bill through the wicket. The woman's hand closes on the twenty.

Still from BOX OFFICE. 30-second television spot, 1988.

The three major images which compose *Box Office* —the woman's face, the man's body, and the currency that passes between them—speak of a general cultural economy in which prostitution is merely the most literal means of commodifying women. As Jane Gaines says, however, feminist readings of classical cinema have focused on sexual difference to the exclusion of class and race (60). *Box Office* invites analysis of the latter, the more so because Douglas has taken the soundtrack for this piece from *Marnie*, a Hitchcock classic that seems to lend itself to feminist psychoanalytic interpretation. Thief, liar, and mistress of many disguises, Marnie is pursued by a man intent on forcing her into a role he can understand. Mark buys Marnie both by marrying her against her will, and by paying back the money she has stolen. The woman is thus made legitimate before the law of land, the laws of reason, and the law of the Father. Yet while problems of class and gender overlap in *Marnie* (Marnie steals her money, Mark inherits his wealth), the film operates within a white world. By introducing the question of race, *Box Office* brackets that world.

This reference to *Marnie* should serve as a cautionary notice to the viewer and critic. While "race, class, and gender oppression" may interlock (Gaines 67), as indeed they seem to do in *Box Office*, Gaines notes that "[b]lack women's sexuality represents a special threat to white patriarchy; the possibility of its 'eruption' stands for the aspirations of the Black race as a whole" (70). The woman in *Box Office* sells her customer a ticket to see a movie, perhaps just the kind of movie that will allow the man, should he be so inclined, to place himself in the masculine role of the master-spectator. Perhaps he is going to see *Marnie*. But as Douglas's camera work implies, the woman's glance hits her customer (and us too) below the belt, relegating such belt-level fantasies or misrecognitions to the imaginary realm of the mirror stage. The chimerical face—the unary subject that is also an object of desire—vanishes as the customer approaches. Unlike Marnie, this woman has made her escape. Moreover, the box office itself separates the ticket seller from the cinematic narrative that is about to begin in the theatre, metaphorically placing her beyond the reach of a cultural imaginary that has historically seen nothing but her skin (surface, window-mirror), or of those contemporary analyses which, as Gaines complains, cannot see it at all.

If *Box Office* raises the issue of cultural relativity, *Slap Happy* develops a complementary concern with the contextual nature of meaning. This piece records a gestural language, the meaning of which is tied to the event that engenders it. (No master texts, then, no *pure* abstractions.) Meaning thus becomes more of a production, less of a product. Presented in slow motion, *Slap Happy* follows a line of four young men stepping out past a set of railway containers to the opening bars of the pop tune, "Stand By Me." One fellow pushes another, and when the line reforms, the feet of the men are moving synchronically. This scenario invites decoding as a parody of the male ego, or rather of the uniformity and control that narrativization imposes in the interests of the Male Ego. The self-important strut of the four men turns into comedy when we realize that they are all marching to the same tune. The "slap," however, creates a break both in the formation and in the information the piece conveys. Whether the gesture be friendly or aggressive, the synchronicity imposed or invited, we cannot tell. The context determines the meaning, just as the industrial site and the clothing of the men connote a social and economic particularity in excess of any general denotational legibility.

Like *Slap Happy*, *Funny Bus* plays with a gestural language. Filmed in a B.C. Hydro

bus, this *Spot* shows us a number of passengers rubbernecking in response to a woman's laugh that seems to be coming from the back of the bus. Yet since we never see the laugher, and since the sound itself seems canned, we may just as easily assume that the passengers are gawking at the camera. The camera's eye, the passengers' eyes, and the soundtrack pose a series of fluid and indeterminate relationships that turn on the act of looking. People like to look, and at the very least, looking may signal appropriation or conciliation, recognition or identification. In *Funny Bus*, the looks that pass between the passengers, the camera, and us, the viewers, are problematized by the laughter. The laugh functions like a gesture that draws attention to the contextual nature of subject-object relationships. If we choose to imagine that someone is in the back of the bus laughing, then the laugher is at once subject in relation to the source of merriment, and object in relation to the passengers whose curiosity she arouses. If we take the object of the passengers' gaze to be the camera, the tinned laughter then provides an eloquent comment on the omniscience of the camera's eye. When that which regards is regarded, the former loses its privileged position as a controlling subject and arbiter of meaning.

By dissociating the camera from the subject-function, and the *Spots* from the process of narrativization, Douglas begins to uncover the bodies the media has hidden, and to return to the commodified object its opacity. *Answering Machine* opens with a slow pan of a kitchen in comfortable domestic disarray. Pots, dishes, plants, and whatnots. The camera comes to rest on a table with a telephone, an answering machine, and a half-filled ashtray. A woman is seated at the table, smoking, but we are permitted only a partial view of her upper body. The answering machine intercepts the ringing telephone as the woman slowly smokes her cigarette. Between the caller and the woman (between two human voices) is the mechanical message, the technological mediator. More striking than this allegorical advent of the machine, however, is the room itself and the mood of the woman. Unlike the carefully arranged stage settings of television (settings that assist a messsage), this room belongs to someone. It is private in a way that makes an intruder of the ringing telephone. The woman seems meditative, and she lets the answering machine take care of what another machine has brought into the room. Marked with living, the objects around her repeat that determined privacy. Nothing is shiny or new or exquisitely saleable, nor does the meaning of these things reduce to a dollar value; they have become opaque with use, filmed with (as they are

filmed through) cigarette smoke. In *Answering Machine*, it is a patina, rather than a Benjaminian aura, that gives these common, mass-produced objects their density and their use value.

Such signs of use or signs of mortality are repressed in television narratives that make of matter a cipher, and yet the Other of television, oozing from every circuit, is death. The disposable product or the exchangeable body are props in a story that simply goes on. *Spectated Man* has to do with looking and the commodification that looking may imply, but the piece also makes visible the effects of time. Standing beside a pole on a deserted city sidewalk, a man displays his awareness of being looked at with evasive head and eye movements, and nervous, rustling adjustments of his clothes. The predatory camera eye has descended upon this small, squirming human with all the nasty omniscience of the Paternal Ultimate. The difference between that deathless Eye and its quivering object is figured on the painted cement wall back of the man. The light green paint has peeled, the graffiti has accumulated, and the result is a textured surface (a writing on the wall) that tells its own allegory.

Still from ANSWERING MACHINE. 30-second television spot, 1988.

Like the other *Spots*, *Spectated Man* brings forward the decaying surfaces of Vancouver's East Side, a neighbourhood that is home to light industry and the working class. We can identify the economic marginality of Douglas's subjects either by their occupations (box-office worker, ice-cream man), their activities (riding buses), or by the sites in which they are placed. These people are just the sort who do not fit into the mainstream of consumer society, and who therefore have been most thoroughly expunged from the dominant mode of representation. (Compare the "average" person in the *Spots* with the "average" character in a television commercial.) The people of the *Spots* are part of a growing number of invisibles, the anonymous ones of North American society who have been left out in the cold. The *TV Spots* demonstrate the possibility of representing them, and not through political sloganeering (slogans are tailor-made for television), but through a language of detail that figures a life in all its particularity. *Lit Lot* takes us

to a dreary, nearly deserted late-night parking lot and the lone attendant who waits in his glass booth (small glass box-office, small ice-cream wagon, small niches carved in the margins of the system). The attendant is reading a newspaper and the soundtrack (foley) allows us to follow the smallest twitches of the man's hands as he adjusts his paper. The exaggerated closeness of these sounds contrasts with the long shot of the man: he is as visually endistanced from us as he is socially invisible to his customers. The sounds, however, record the minute adjustments that punctuate the time that the attendant must spend in his booth. Here in this car lot, at the shrine and boneyard of capitalist enterprise, Douglas uncovers the real time of a life in the details that give it substance.

In *Reading in Detail*, a commentary on the aesthetics of detail in literature and painting, Naomi Schor argues that detail is "the bearer of contingency and death" (81), and a subversion of idealized forms. In that *My Attention* takes up the question of detail explicitly, the piece provides an oblique commentary on all the *Spots*. In place of the confessional commercial which informs us that the nicest people do get headaches and hemorrhoids, an earnest young man confides his inability to block out even the "silliest things" so that he may "concentrate on what [he is] now saying." As the man informs us, the sounds and voices that distract him are not particularly interesting; they are simply there. There is nothing particularly interesting about the scenarios of the *TV Spots* either, no esoteric meanings or hidden agendas, unless the fact that Douglas has taken the *Spots* from his own neighbourhood be considered as such. Rather, the texture of the *Spots* undermines the marketable event and the packageable meaning to bring forward that which television elides; Douglas's subjects enter the field of the camera trailing the diachronic tendrils of a life.

Such detail stains and tears the fabric of a television narrative that has been stitched to resemble a "reality" of whole cloth. Spots on television, spots on the faultless shroud that covers our bodies. The out-of-sync lip movements of the man in *My Attention* figure these rendings, while the iris that opens and closes each *Spot* like a blinking eye admits that other world which goes on beneath the representations of the media. The *TV Spots* suggest that this local world can be represented, that while the symbolic is never free of the ideological, neither is it reducible to a particular ideology (Heath 73). As the male and female naysayers tell us, we can say something, beginning with "no."

Miriam Nichols

NOTES

1 Joyrich argues that "melodramatic form" is representative of "contemporary media culture," and not simply confined to the soaps:

> The made-for-TV movie, for example, is often marketed as a form particularly suited for dealing with contemporary social issues. Yet like the fifties film melodrama, it manages these issues by inserting them into a domestic framework in which the family functions as the sole referent. Police and detective dramas also purportedly deal with the social issues of crime, drugs, prostitution, and so on, yet even while their emphasis on action seems to remove them from the domain of melodrama, they exhibit many of its characteristics . . . . As the focus shifts from problems of crime to questions of identity within familial and social roles, these television series move into the realm of melodrama.
>
> Like the cop-detective show, news stories are often framed in personal terms as a way of avoiding the larger institutional, political and ideological issues they raise. By employing conventions taken from narrative TV melodrama . . . news programs can achieve the emotional intensification and moral polarization associated with dramatic serials. (132-133)

2 The term "suture" comes from Jacques-Alain Miller's "*La Suture (elements de la logique du signifiant)*," a paper delivered on the 24th of February, 1965, to the seminar of Jacques Lacan. As Miller defines it, "[s]uture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse" (25). *Screen* 18:4 (Winter 1977-78) offers a "Dossier on Suture" that includes a reprint of Miller's paper and of key articles by Jean-Pierre Oudart and Stephen Heath. The latter supply further references.

3 In conjunction with Douglas's exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1987, the *TV Spots* were aired for two weeks on CHCH in Hamilton, a channel available on cable in Toronto.

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Television Spots

Original Location Shots and Scenarios.
(scenarios and locations are not necessarily identical
to those of the completed spots)

Musical Vendor

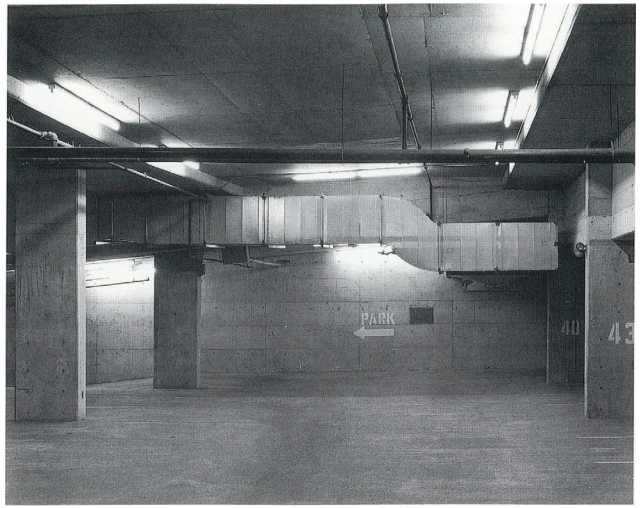
A young man drives his ice-cream wagon beside a park in a light-industrial area. The camera moves backward at the same rate as the wagon, providing a view of the headlight, windshield, and roof-mounted loudspeaker.

1. Iris out to the medium shot of the vendor in his wagon, driving and looking for customers.
2. The entire melody of "Camptown Races" performed by an amplified music box.
3. The melody heard again.
4. Iris in to black with end of music.

Spectated Man

A man displays himself from a street corner at a not-busy intersection. He fusses with the fading creases in his pants and the hem of his jacket: making sure that they are straight and maintaining a pose that will not interrupt their perfection. His eyes are partially cast down as they monitor the state of his attire, but on occasion they look up and around to 'confirm' that he is 'being watched.'

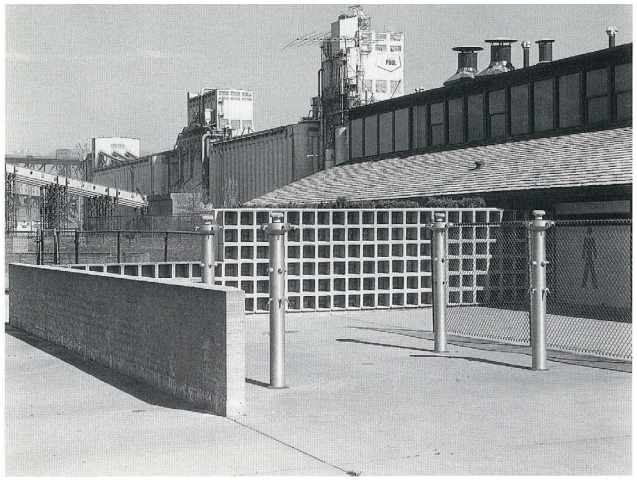
1. Iris out to a long shot of the man fidgeting. Crescendo of street sounds and shifting feet simultaneous with Iris.
2. After a pause, iris out to a close shot (head and shoulders) of the man as he looks about.
3. Iris in, back to the long shot.
4. Iris in to black and decrescendo of sound with iris.



Sneeze

A woman walks alone in an underground parking lot, passing rows of vacant car stalls. Suddenly she stops and sneezes. After this pause she resumes her stride and soon turns, following the path of an exit ramp which spirals downward. Apart from the sneeze, the only sound is that of footsteps in a cavernous space.

1. Iris open to a tracking shot of the woman walking. The camera follows her from behind, slightly to her right.
2. The woman pauses and the camera stops abruptly as she sneezes.
3. She turns her head, as if to better hear the echo she has caused, and then walks on.
4. Iris in to black as she approaches the exit ramp.



Male Naysayer

Near the showers of an outdoor pool a lifeguard stands with extraordinarily good posture. To someone off-screen he utters the "no" that will cause the flight of his eyes—pretending to look away from, but constantly returning to, the person who had spoken to him. This "no" bears the faint trace of a question.

1. Iris out to a general view with the lifeguard in the centre of the screen. He looks slightly to the left, listening to someone speak.
2. With a motion of his hand and a twitch of his head "no"—and ambient sound (showers) is heard for the first time.
3. Flight of eyes.
4. Iris in to black.

Female Naysayer

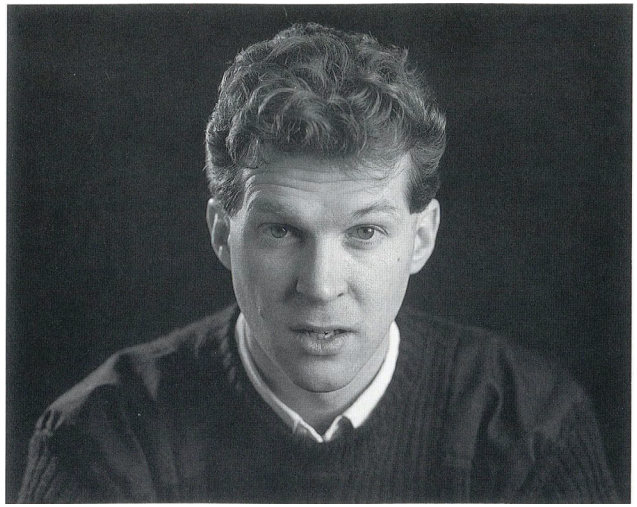
A woman stands toward the front of an unidentified car lot, apparently being interviewed by the hand-held camera and its crew. She is not seen to speak and her gestures have an aspect of reticence neither malicious nor coy. There is no sound, indicating a 'technical problem.'

1. Iris out to a medium shot of the woman, nodding her head, et cetera, listening to an off-screen speaker.
2. The interviewer has finished speaking and the woman considers a question.
3. She is about to speak, but quickly arrests her mouth. She shakes her head, pauses, then reconsiders.
4. With something too faint to be a smile, she shakes her head once more.
5. That look again as she returns the gaze of her questioner. Iris in to black.

LitLot

In the close shot a pair of outdoor lighting fixtures fill the screen. The wide shot reveals an outdoor parking lot—an attendant's booth and the two lighting fixtures. A lone parking attendant sits in the booth reading a newspaper.

1. Iris out to the close shot. The lights are both on; electrical buzzing producing a chord is heard.
2. The left-hand light goes out with a crackle. Then the creaking sound of a cooling lamp housing accompanies the slow decay of red in the lamp's filament. There is now only one tone of buzzing.
3. Cut to the wide view of the parking lot: attendant with head down, reading.
4. A sudden flash from the darkened light.
5. That missing light fully on, issuing a crackle then a steady tone. One halfsecond later the attendant looks up—pauses—and returns to reading.
6. Iris in to black.



My Attention

A man speaks directly to the camera with the confessional tone of voice peculiar to television actors. He appears in a close shot (head and shoulders) under dim, soft lighting.

"Everything seems to catch my attention. Even though I'm not particularly interested in anything. I'm speaking to you right now, but I can still hear voices going on next door and in the corridor . . . I find it difficult to shut these things out. And it's even more difficult for me to concentrate on what I am now saying to you . . . often the silliest things seem to interest me. No, that's not true, they don't interest me, but I find myself attending to them anyway."

Answering Machine

A woman returns home to the sound of her telephone ringing. She rushes to get through her two front doors, but once inside seems somewhat more relaxed. She sits down and listens to her caller.

1. Iris open to a medium shot as the woman arrives at the front door of her house. As she finds her keys, a telephone is heard to ring.
2. Cut to an interior view: another door, and beside it a window through which the woman is seen entering the first door. She unlocks and finally enters the second door.
3. The camera follows the woman as she walks into the room, puts down her bag, and sits down next to the still-ringing telephone. She lights a cigarette and waits.
4. Lights flash on the telephone's answering machine, which clicks then says, "For your convenience, our telephone is being answered automatically. Please leave the date and time of your call along with a brief message, and we'll get back to you as soon as possible." The woman inhales deeply on her cigarette. As she exhales, the caller is heard: "Ah . . . hello. Ah . . ." Iris in to black.

No Problem

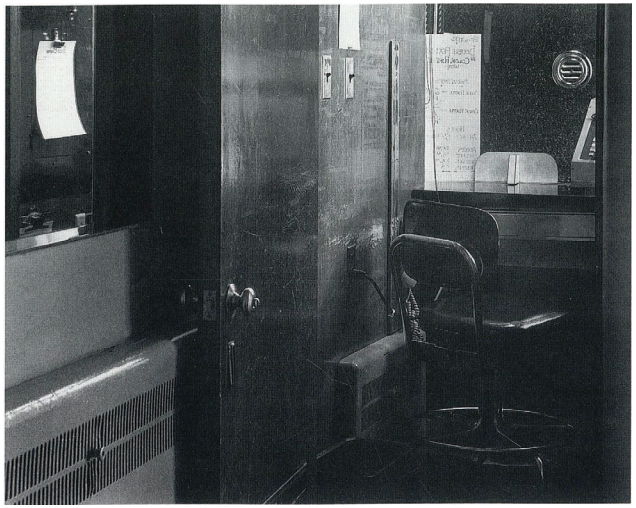
Below a twilight blue sky, an alley enframed by commercial buildings on one side and residential housing on the other. As the camera slowly tracks forward a couple appears, passing on the right, and quickly proceeding down the alley. After their brief exchange of words, they suddenly turn left and disappear behind a building.

1. Iris out to the general view with the camera moving. The couple appears at right, along with the sound of footsteps on gravel.
2. There is a movement of her head: "What's the matter?" He answers, "Nothing." They continue down the alley.
3. She turns to him: "What's the matter?" He shrugs, "Nothing." They continue.
4. With the camera still moving, iris in to black as the couple exits.

Funny Bus

A view from the back of a bus. The forward seats are occupied: two people on the right and one on the left. The laugh belongs to a middle-aged man and bears an aspect of drunken confidence.

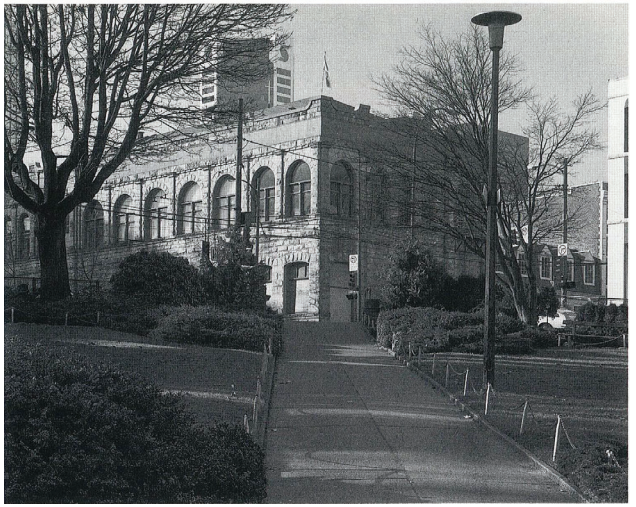
1. Iris open to a close shot of the bus driver's interior rear-view mirror. A short burst of laughter. The driver's eyes look into the camera, then away—into the camera, then away.
2. Cut to the long shot. Appropriate engine and street sounds are audible.
3. After a long pause there is another burst of laughter. The passenger seated alone casts a timid glance toward the camera.
4. A shorter pause and then a muffled chortle. All three passengers look back simultaneously. Iris in to black.



Box Office

A ticket seller is seen from behind working in a cramped ticket booth. As it is night, the box-office window acts as a mirror. When the ghostly reflection of the woman's face is visible, she is seen staring at herself. In addition to foley, muffled movie dialogue is heard.

1. Iris open to a close shot of the woman's hands placing money into a cash drawer. She closes the drawer, and the camera follows her hands as they come to rest on a small tabletop.
2. The camera moves slowly upward revealing the woman's reflection in the box-office window; her virtual image is in the centre of the screen and traces of her arm and shoulder are visible at left. The camera stops once it finds the woman's reflected face and meets her gaze. Long pause.
3. Her eyes change focus and look right.
4. Cut to a long shot of the woman in her ticket booth. The camera tracks backward as she receives some money and rips a ticket from a roll. All that is seen of her patron is (perhaps) a hand.



Slap Happy

The camera follows from behind as three blue-suited men walk together in an orderly row. The pace of their feet is synchronized so that as the men on either end of the row raise their left feet, the man in the centre raises his right foot. After the slap, all left feet leave the ground simultaneously, as do all right feet in their turn. The soundtrack consists of the introductory bars of "Stand By Me" (Ben E. King version) played twice, with a three-beat gap in between.

1. Iris open with the camera moving and the three men walking. Occasional nods of consent and brief demonstrative gestures convey that they are talking. The first bars of "Stand By Me" are heard.
2. The man on the right turns left and slaps the man beside him: whether this is an act of aggression or one of camarderie is not clear. In either case, the man on the left doesn't seem to notice.
3. As the music begins again, the man who was struck pauses to compose himself, and is soon back in step with his companions.
4. Iris in to black with end of music.

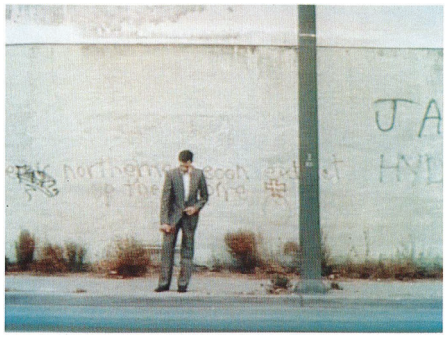
Television Spots

Colour Stills and Production Credits.

Musical Vendor

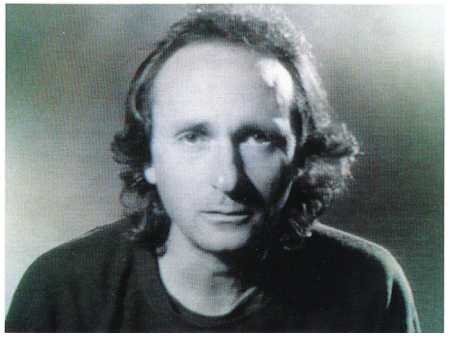
(30 seconds) — *ice-cream vendor* Dean Schutz

Spectated Man



(30 seconds) — *man in suit* Gerald Creede

My Attention



(37 seconds) — *confessor* Frank Totino

Answering Machine

(30 seconds) — *smoker* Mina Totino

SESSION I, SEPTEMBER 1987

Musical Vendor, *Spectated Man*, *Sneeze*, *Male Naysayer*, *Female Naysayer*, *Lit Lot*, *My Attention*.

cinematographer Kevin Hall

lighting Dave Goyer

electrician Steve McGrath

camera assistant Greg Middleton

stylist Lori Hinton

sound Steve McGrath, Susan Lord

sound recording and rough edit Western Front

post-production and 1" mastering Gastown Productions

SESSION II, OCTOBER 1988

Answering Machine, *No Problem*, *Funny Bus*, *Box Office*, *Slap Happy*.

cinematographer Greg Middleton

camera assistant Dave Taylor

driver Judy Radul

grip James Bugara

sound Iain Macanulty

sound recording and rough edit Western Front

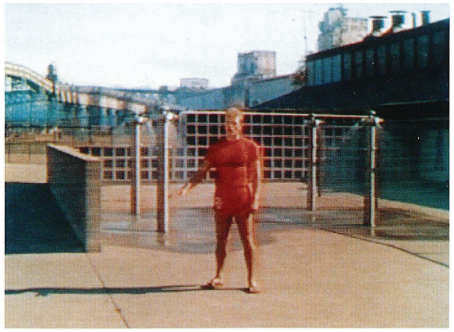
post-production and 1" mastering Gastown Productions

Thanks to the Canada Council for production assistance and the National Film Board of Canada for 16mm film stock. SESSION II produced with the Western Front.

Sneeze

(15 seconds) — *sneezing woman* Jan Coyle

Male Naysayer



(10 seconds) — *lifeguard* Scott Marshall

Female Naysayer

(15 seconds) — *interviewee* Erin O'Brien

Lit Lot

(15 seconds) — *parking-lot attendant* Stan Douglas

No Problem

(15 seconds) — *she* Donna Clark, *he* William Wood

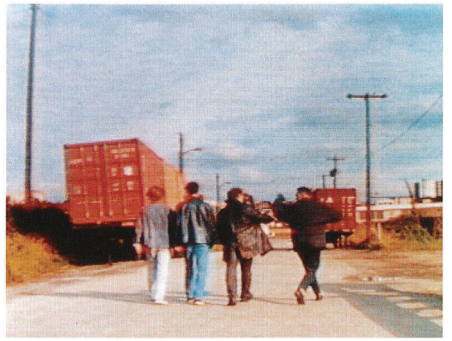
Funny Bus

(15 seconds) — *passengers* Bill Jeffries, Reid Shier, Cate Rimmer, *laugh* Susi Milne

Box Office

(30 seconds) — *ticket seller* Delia Douglas, *first customer* Judy Radul, *second customer* James Bugara

Slap Happy



(30 seconds) — *the four fellows* Kevin Davies, Jeff Derksen, Phil McCrum, Peter Cummings

Stan Douglas

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1983 *Slide Works* Ridge Theatre, Vancouver

1985 *Panoramic Rotunda* Or Gallery, Vancouver

1986 *Onomatopoeia* Western Front, Vancouver

1987 *Stan Douglas: Perspective '87* Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

1988 *Television Spots* Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver

Television Spots/Overture Galerie Optica, Montreal

Samuel Beckett: Teleplays curated for the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver

Television Spots/Subject to a Film Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver

1989 *Subject to a Film/Television Spots* YYZ Gallery, Toronto

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1983 *PST: Pacific Standard Time* (organized by YYZ) Funnel Film Theatre, Toronto; Western Front, Vancouver

Vancouver Art and Artists: 1931 -1983 Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver

1986 *Mechanics of Memory: Marion Penner Bancroft and Stan Douglas* Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey

Songs of Experience National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Broken Muse Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver

Camera Works Or Gallery, Vancouver

1988 *Behind the Sign* Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver

Made in Camera VAVD Editions, Stockholm, Sweden

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WOOD, William. "Skinjobs."*C Magazine 11* (Fall 1986): 78 - 87, ill.

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This exhibition of two major pieces by Stan Douglas marks a turning point in the history of the Contemporary Art Gallery. There have been exhibitions held here at 555 Hamilton Street, Vancouver, since 1965. First as the home of the Bau-Xi Gallery, then the Artists Gallery, and eventually the CAG. For twenty-three years artists have had to contend with the narrow 'entry way' that was always part of the gallery proper but always part of the problem of showing here. Stan Douglas has dealt with the problem of the entry gallery in admirable fashion by dividing the exhibition into two totally separate works, but he will be the last artist to grapple with the idiosyncrasies of the space, as the CAG will close for seven weeks following his show to carry out the first phase of a renovation which will give us a single gallery sixty feet by twenty feet for our main exhibition area.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the CAG, I would like to thank Stan Douglas for the time and energy he has put into bringing this exhibition together. Thanks are also due to Merike Talve, who initiated the show while she was curator of the CAG; Kristin Fredrickson as exhibition co-ordinator; and Lorna Brown for her assistance with all aspects of the CAG's program. I am grateful to Miriam Nichols for her insightful essay, and to Greg Bellerby who, as outgoing Director of the CAG, has been wonderfully generous with his time. Last but certainly not least, our thanks to David Clausen for his patience with everyone during the production of the catalogue. I know it hasn't always been easy, but we all know that it has been worth every second that it took.

The Board of Directors of the Contemporary Art Gallery appreciates the support of the Canada Council, who funded the catalogue, and the Province of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver for their ongoing support of our program.

Bill Jeffries