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Animating Urban Pasts

Stan Douglas and the Animation of Vancouver's Urban Past

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In the introduction to our recently co-edited special issue of *Animation* entitled "Life Remade: Critical Animation in the Digital Age," Esther Leslie and I contemplated the ways in which digital animation had introduced new ways of accessing the past and initiating critical memory practices. We wrote, "through the animated image we recreate past events or bring to life otherwise unavailable histories, often with an explicitly political dimension" (Leslie and McKim 2017, 211). My own contribution to that volume considered the specific use of digital animation by architects, designers, and artists particularly concerned with our contemporary urban situation and our ability to both engage with the urban past and envision new urban futures. In relation to memory and the built environment, I was interested in artists who had attempted to re-potentialize the past in order to contribute to "the development of new urban imaginaries" (McKim 2017, 288). One of the examples I highlighted, only briefly, was the recent digital animation work of the Canadian artist Stan Douglas. His interactive app *Circa 1948* recreates a repressed period of Vancouver's past

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163

(his native city) in a way that both stimulates a form of engaged urban memory and calls into question some of the municipal and planning politics of the contemporary moment. The work is a fascinating example in terms of its quite novel use of digital animation and gaming conventions, but also because it appears, at least initially, to be quite anomalous in relation to Douglas' other works.

Douglas is one of Canada's most respected artists, best known for his highly conceptual work in cinema and photography. The themes, subjects, and locations he explores are often global in scope, and his challenging work is most often firmly situated in a gallery context. This chapter provides a welcome opportunity to explore *Circa 1948* in greater depth in the context of Douglas' larger body of work and as a significant example of animation and urban memory. While the work is clearly an unusual foray into animation and interactive technology for Douglas, it does intersect with his broader artistic interests in many compelling and sometimes unexpected ways. I ultimately argue that the digital renderings of *Circa 1948* allow Douglas to re-animate Vancouver's urban past, while simultaneously questioning the processes of development and economic change affecting the contemporary city, fueled in part by the growth of computer imaging and gaming industries themselves. The chapter begins with a brief description of the work itself before moving into a consideration of how it connects to some of Douglas' recurring preoccupations, including his archival interest in the urban history of Vancouver, his examination of multiple and often conflicting experiences of modernity, particularly in relation to black identity, and his examination of the characteristics, affordances, and biases of the "apparatuses" of imaging technologies.

CIRCA 1948

Circa 1948, an interactive app for iPhone and iPad, allows users to navigate through two historical Vancouver locations, employing a first-person point of view common to video games. Douglas produced the project, his first foray into digital animation, in collaboration with the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), working with the NFB's Vancouver Digital Studio and its executive producer, Loc Dao. The work has also taken the form of a more immersive installation, appearing at the Tribeca and Vancouver Film Festivals, and was given a more extended run at the Simon Fraser University Campus. The computer-generated imagery of the 1940s Vancouver that forms the basis of *Circa 1948* surfaces in a constellation of

other related works by Douglas, as a backdrop for the 2014 stage play *Helen Lawrence* and as stand-alone printed works, such as *The Second Hotel Vancouver* (2014) and *Bumtown* (2015).

The app itself opens to a roaring jazz soundtrack and a recognizably noir text prologue that reads: "A rain-soaked city caught between the ruins of an old order and the shape of things to come. Where what is right is not necessarily what is good and what is wrong can exist above and below the law." We next zoom in on an animated black and white map of Vancouver in 1948, complete with the smoking chimneys of boat building yards and lumber mills no longer present in the post-industrial contemporary city. Two locations are highlighted on the map as possible places of exploration: the Hotel Vancouver (this is the second of three iterations of hotels bearing the same name, built in 1916) and Hogan's Alley, the unofficial name of Park Lane, a ramshackle alley running through the neighborhood of Strathcona. The virtual Hotel Vancouver recreated by Douglas is a once grand, but now crumbling, railway hotel, and through the app we learn that it has, at this moment in time, been taken over by homeless World War II veterans. Its real-life counterpart would be razed the following year in 1949, as is discussed below. Hogan's Alley, a post-war red-light district known for its illegal drinking establishments, brothels, and gambling dens, but also home to a diverse community of residents, was already under threat of destruction in the 1940s and was eventually demolished in the late 1960s to make way for the Georgia Viaduct overpass. The alley is described within the *Circa 1948* app as a place where "immigrant workers, drifters, and dreamers rub elbows with politicians and cops on the take." (Figs. 1 and 2)

Circa 1948, thus, presents two locations that have long since disappeared from the Vancouver cityscape and from the memory of most of its inhabitants, making the app experience an exercise in urban remembrance. The relationship between memory and the built environment has produced ambivalent reactions amongst cultural and architecture theorists. Mark Crinson (2005, xii) notes that "the problem of memory," in the context of the urban, "is that it has become not so much a term of analysis as a mark of approval." Urban memory is often, he explains, uncritically associated with the authentic, the personal, and the human in opposition to the amnesia and depersonalization of the mass media, commercialism, and globalization. The current "hypertrophy of memory" (Huyssen 2003, 3) and "memorial mania" (Doss 2010, 2) seen in cities from Berlin to New York is indicative of the scale of a con-

Fig. 1   *Circa 1948*, 2014. (© Stan Douglas and Loc Dao. Courtesy of the Artists)

Fig. 2   *Circa 1948*, 2014. (© Stan Douglas and Loc Dao. Courtesy of the Artists)

temporary global memory industry, which can be a stultifying and con-
servative force. Yet Douglas' interest in Vancouver reveals that some
cities—in this case one on the Western periphery of the British Empire—
remain relatively immune to this urban memory boom. Far from being
over-inscribed with traumatic memory, cities like Vancouver can be

remarkably forgetful of the urban conflicts and struggles that have shaped even their recent histories. The lack of physical traces within the built environment can make the fusion of "architecture, media and memory" that *Circa 1948* represents all the more necessary as a critical and progressive intervention (McKim 2018).

Circa 1948 certainly presents the user with an impressively detailed digital version of its two locations—virtual environments generated through the use of Maya 3D animation and modeling software, and a custom open-source Canadian 3D render engine called Kraken (Glassman 2016). Exploring the hallways of the Hotel Vancouver or the homes and yards of Hogan's Alley, the user encounters a number of ghostly apparitions that narrate different elements of a developing but fragmented, non-linear story of the role the two sites played within this period of the city's history. Themes of municipal corruption, shady development deals, and marginalized communities emerge from these overheard scenes. Near the decaying ballroom of the hotel, for example, we hear a spectral character with an English accent reading out the headline, "New Mayor Vows to Clean Up East Side . . . Never mind it will never happen. Too much money to be made down there. Too much money finding its way into the pockets of city hall." On one of the porches of Hogan's Alley we overhear a cop shaking down a man (seemingly an informant) named Henry for allegedly "selling reefer." "Why are you always harassing me?," asks Henry. There is an intentionally disjointed feeling to the app experience, produced by the play of a number of paradoxes: the juxtaposition between the historical material and the digital aesthetic of the animated environments; the studied, archival nature of the content mixed with the cliché noir tropes of its delivery; the thorough, almost pedagogical level of detail provided, combined with the elliptical form of the narrative. As Sven Lütticken (2011, 78) notes, "one of the fundamental experiences that one can have when confronted with Stan Douglas's works is that they are both excessively rich and reticent; that they come with a surplus that may also, depending on the viewer and the situation, be experienced as a lack." The slightly unsettling or alienating way we encounter and engage with *Circa 1948* is therefore characteristic of the experience of Douglas' works, despite the novelty of the chosen medium. But there are still, I would suggest, other connections to his overall body of work that are worthy of exploration.

Envisioning Vancouver

There is certainly nothing parochial about Douglas' geographic scope. His work is often relentlessly global in its outlook, from *The Secret Agent* (2015)—a six-channel video installation that transposes Joseph Conrad's London-set story of espionage and terrorism to Lisbon and the events of Portugal's Carnation Revolution—to his video piece titled simply *Vidéo* (2007)—which takes inspiration from works by Beckett and Kafka, transporting them to the banlieues of Paris—to his film work *Inconsolable Memories* (2005)—effectively a Havana-set sequel to the Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1968 "third-cinema" classic *Memories of Underdevelopment.* For much of Douglas' career, if his native Vancouver was to appear at all, it would appear as it does in his series of short *Television Spots* and *Monodramas* (1987–1991), as a kind of non-descript North American "anyplace"—a latent potential fully exploited by a motion picture industry that uses Vancouver (sometimes dubbed "Hollywood North") as an affordable shooting location capable of doubling for any number of American cities.

Yet, Douglas has been interested in documenting the contemporary and historical specificities of his home city for some time now. His photographic work *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* (2008) is a staged re-enactment of an event known as the "Gastown Riot," a violent confrontation between police and young people gathered for a "smoke-in" protesting punitive city drug laws at Maple Tree Square in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The event was the culmination of growing tensions between municipal authorities and the hippie and Yippie (Youth International Party) communities that had begun squatting the unused industrial buildings of the once blue-collar neighborhood (see Boudreau 2012).[1] The riot led to the re-zoning of the area as strictly commercial, which had the unintended consequence of further accelerating the decline of an area that is now reputed to be one of the poorest urban districts in Canada and stubbornly resistant to "revitalization" initiatives (see Dacey 2010; Ley and Dobson 2008). The photo is part of Douglas' "Crowds and Riots" series depicting various historical scenes of civil protest and unrest.

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[1] Douglas' photo serves as the cover image for the book *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* in which the Boudreau essay appears.

Unlike the other photographs in the series, *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* also appears in public space in the form of a thirteen-by-eight-meter mural installation on display in the atrium of the recently redeveloped Woodward's Building located at the very intersection named in the work. The fate of the Woodward's department store building, originally built in 1903 and significantly expanded since, had been emblematic of the general decline of the neighborhood. With its local clientele gradually dispersing to the suburbs, the department store declared bankruptcy in 1993, and the building remained vacant until it was occupied for three months by the 2002 "Woodsquat" activist group, calling attention to the city's housing shortage and demanding the building be turned into social housing (Vancouver Media Co-op 2011; Ward 2010). The occupation helped lead to the city's decision to re-develop the site, demolishing all but the original 1903 structure. The new complex, completed in 2010, included some 200 public housing units (approximately 25 percent of the total), various shops, and civic offices, as well as the Simon Fraser University School for the Contemporary Arts. Douglas proposed the installation of his image within the atrium of the complex as a manner of preserving the memory of the area's frequently contentious past, a legacy of urban conflict and dispute that has not simply been eradicated by the introduction of the development. He states, "the photograph has produced an image of something that will hopefully produce more hearsay and conversation about history . . . I wasn't interested in the image conveying a single message. I was more interested in facilitating a conversation between people about a historical event, a series of historical events" (Alberro 2011, 20). The area is of particular interest to the artist, as his studio is located just one street south, on a block described by the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper as "The worst block in Vancouver" (Somners and Bloomley 2002, 19). Douglas documented the street in his panoramic photographic work *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2001), capturing it at a moment of transition between dereliction and gentrification.

Like the animated images of *Circa 1948*, these photographic works use media as a method of reconstituting or reinscribing the historical complexities of an urban location that may not otherwise be visible within the built environment. Douglas' photographic explorations of Vancouver's history have continued in his "Mid-Century Studio" series, a project that brings him even closer to the post-war era and the mix of fictional and historical material featured in *Circa 1948*. The forty black and white photographs that make up the "Mid-Century Studio" series are purportedly

taken by a fabricated Vancouver newspaper beat photographer working between 1945 and 1951. They document the seamier side of the city during this period—its gambling dens, police crime scenes, and nightclub entertainment. Christopher Phillips describes the series as, "a group of unsettling noir-ish images that collectively hint at dark forces operating behind the veneer of civic respectability" (2011, 21). Douglas styled his fictional photographer on actual local historical figures like the Royal Air Force veteran-turned-photo-journalist Raymond Munro. He explains that his interest in the period of the late 1940s stems from it being an often overlooked and uncertain moment of history, an interim period between the more recognized war-era and "the sudden call to order and morality" of the 1950s (Farago 2014).

These scenes of crime, corruption, and post-war disillusionment that appear in both the photographic series and *Circa 1948* are far removed from the city's currently promoted image, a modern metropolis of gleaming condo towers and pristine nature. As Douglas suggests, "we get a sense of the various real estate scams that are going on in this post-war period, and a lot about the reorganization of urban space…" (Glassman 2016). The complicated history of the Hotel Vancouver presents one significant example of the questionable decisions and back room arrangements that have often dictated the development of the city. The hotel was built by the Canadian Pacific Railway, one of a series of iconic hotels constructed across the country that includes the still standing Château Frontenac in Quebec City and the Banff Springs Hotel in Banff, Alberta. The hotel was in fact the second to bear the name Hotel Vancouver, as it replaced a more modest hotel built by the railway company in 1888. The second Hotel Vancouver was a much grander building and its Spanish Grill nightclub, Crystal Ballroom, and roof-top garden were celebrated destinations for both visitors and locals (Wade 1986). Near the time of its completion in 1916, the competing Canadian Northern Railway struck a deal with the city to allow the east side of its False Creek Flats to be filled in to allow for its own rail yard and train terminal to be constructed. In exchange, Canadian Northern agreed to build a rival grand hotel, just two blocks away from the Hotel Vancouver. But when Canadian Northern struggled financially during the First World War and became insolvent in the 1920s it was taken over by the federal government and renamed Canadian National Railway. Canadian National rekindled the hotel plans and commenced work in 1928, and although its steel frame would be erected by 1931, the hotel would sit uncompleted for another eight years

due to the downturn in the economy during the Great Depression (Woods 2012). Its eventual completion would be carried out through a government sponsored work scheme. Yet, recognizing that the city could not support two massive downtown hotels, a further deal was arranged to allow Canadian Pacific Railway to enter into a joint partnership with respect to the new hotel, with the stipulation that the 1916 Hotel Vancouver would be closed and its name transferred to what would then become the third Hotel Vancouver. Many of the somewhat shadowy details of these various economically and politically motivated deals are cynically described by the characters encountered in the virtual hotel of *Circa 1948*.

It is this chain of events that resulted in the second Hotel Vancouver laying vacant and available to be occupied on 26 January 1946 by thirty returning war veterans protesting the housing shortages of post-war Vancouver. Despite being in apparently sound structural condition, the second Hotel Vancouver was demolished in 1949 to be replaced by a parking lot (Wade 1986, 288). The history of dubious city planning and real estate developments, and Vancouver's persistent housing problems are a clear point of connection between *Circa 1948* and Douglas' Gastown-based photographic projects, but they also link these works to the city's contemporary situation. Provoking memories of these past moments of urban re-organization and resistance is particularly relevant at a time when Vancouver has once again reached a point of acute housing crisis due to real estate speculation, processes of gentrification, and soaring prices. Gregor Robertson, who served as mayor of the city from 2008 to 2018, recently stated, "I wouldn't have dreamed the crisis would get this intense . . . We're dealing with global capital, national governments underinvesting in housing and provincial governments not doing enough. That leaves the cities dealing with chaos on our streets and people struggling to find a place to live" (Kassam 2016). *Circa 1948* is, in other words, not simply an exercise in historical documentation; it attempts to bring the past into an active and critical dialogue with the city's current situation.

Divergent Modernities

Douglas' interest in the late 1940s is indicative of his wider concern with the historical trajectory of twentieth-century modernism and, more specifically, the moments when that development appeared uncertain or insecure. The 1970s with its economic volatility and political upheavals is

another era of fascination for Douglas and one he explores in numerous works, the aforementioned *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* and *The Secret Agent* included. Douglas' self-declared preoccupation with the "failed utopias" of modernity is a frequent reference within interpretations of his work,[2] but Douglas' interest is actually often directed toward the uneven or divergent distribution of modernity and the communities or groups that seem to suffer the effects of modernization in both good times and bad. His works dealing with his home region of British Columbia point, often subtly or obliquely, to the various populations that have endured the injustices of the province's modern and colonial history, from Japanese immigrants interned during the war to the territory's displaced native communities.

Black experiences of modernity are explored in Douglas' work more consistently than is sometimes acknowledged, and the typical hierarchy that exists between differing cultural and racial modernities is the subject of one of his earliest works, *Deux Devises* (1983). The slide and sound installation begins with the presentation of a nineteenth-century love song by French composer Charles Gounod (translated lyrics appearing on an otherwise empty screen), before moving to a second segment showing Douglas himself, seemingly mouthing the words to Mississippi Delta blues singer Robert Johnson's 1936 song "Preachin' Blues" as it plays. As a black Canadian raised in a predominantly white Vancouver neighborhood (his father moved to the city from the Caribbean to attend university), Douglas has described the "odd condition of alienation" (Coleman 2016, 74) produced by being directly connected to neither this European tradition of high modern culture, nor the African American cultural traditions and experience of modernity.

Even more closely related to the themes of *Circa 1948*, Douglas references the ways in which black North American urban communities have been affected by the industrial and demographic changes of the late twentieth century. In his Detroit-based works, such as his "Detroit Photos" series (1997/98) and film installation *Le Détroit* (1999/2000), Douglas alludes to the "Motor City's" transition in the late 1960s and

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[2] He asserted early on in his career that "To a large degree, my concern is not to redeem these past events but to reconsider them: to understand why these utopian moments did not fulfil themselves, what larger forces kept a local moment a minor moment: and what was valuable there – what might be useful today."

1970s from a predominantly white, "blue collar utopia" to a majority black urban area in a state of decay. Okwui Enwezor connects these works to the history of the city in the aftermath of the 1967 race riots, stating: "Space then and psychic trauma of its destruction, the loss of cohesion, and the slow corrosion wrought by urban neglect, poverty, and economic degradation of city life form part of what *Le Détroit* tries to analyze" (2001, 22).

In the animated landscapes of *Circa 1948*, a different time and a different form of urban demographic change is documented. Strathcona's Hogan's Alley and its surrounding streets, the second location rendered within the app, constituted one of the most ethnically diverse areas of Vancouver and home to one of the only black communities in the city at the time, which had established itself in the area by 1918 with the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel (co-founded by Nora Hendrix, grandmother of Jimi Hendrix). According to the writer Wayde Compton (2014), who has been a leading figure in the memorialization of the neighborhood, "black settlement there was due to the neighbourhood's proximity to the Great Northern Railway station nearby, where many of the men in the community worked as porters." A vibrant "cultural centre of gospel, drinking, dancing, gambling, southern blues and ethnic cuisine" (Scott 2013), the area was viewed as an urban blemish by members of the Anglo-European Vancouver elite from its earliest inception, and by the post-war period it had become the target of urban renewal/slum clearance plans under the auspices of the Canadian National Housing Act.

This section of Strathcona has a long history of resisting the threat of demolition that came with each urban renewal project, but much of Hogan's Alley was eventually razed in the late 1960s and 1970s in preparation for the construction of the Georgia Viaduct overpass (planned as part of an extensive, yet only partially completed freeway system). While destruction of the adjacent Chinatown area was halted due to "a crucial alliance between the Chinese community and local academics at the University of British Columbia," the black community of Hogan's Alley found no such support (Scott 2013). Douglas' *Circa 1948* captures Hogan's Alley, in digitally animated form, at the historical point when urban renewal and freeway development plans are just beginning to be mobilized, ultimately leading to the dispersion of the black community from the area.

THE APPARATUS OF ANIMATION

We have seen thus far that upon closer investigation *Circa 1948* is more directly linked to the thematic concerns of Douglas' other projects than it might first appear, but the medium of digital animation and the format of an interactive app may still seem like an unusual departure for an artist known for his film and photography work. Indeed, Douglas has often been depicted, particularly in his early career, as an artist who examines and employs the obsolete technologies particular to the specific historical moment he is addressing (see: Thater 1998, 12, for example). In his early film installation *Overture* (1986), for instance, Douglas splices together Edison Company films of "train's-eye" panoramic views of King Horse Canyon and White Pass, British Columbia, shot in 1899 and 1901. The soundtrack accompanying the footage consists of the Vancouver writer Gerald Creede reading Douglas' reworking of sentences taken from the opening section of Marcel Proust's 1913 novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The installation, thus, brings together two technologies of modernity, the novel and film—one usurping the place of the other at the turn of the last century, but now both arguably obsolete—and two different forms of memory, human and mechanical. It also draws connections between the technologies of image capture and geographic domination that characterized this colonial period of expansion. As Enwezor (2001, 21) notes, the installation "makes of landscape an important subject of representation; one which passes from the ideal of nineteenth century romanticism to the moment when the machinery and pervasive reach of global capitalism began to impose an historical consciousness proper to the legacy of industrial forces of production."

Douglas (quoted in Smith 2018, 93) has described his interest in the particular properties of historically specific representational technologies as a practice of "adopting different idioms," explaining, "I've self-consciously used photographic styles from the eras I've depicted—assuming these visual styles are like languages . . . Historical genre or idioms make visible certain tensions, and maybe they can make visible absences as well." The aesthetic idioms of crime photography or hard-boiled films and novels are therefore as historically significant to Douglas as the archival records he uncovers. The image technologies that he explores, analyzes, and reproduces are recognized by the artist as being constituted not just by technical properties, affordances, or specifications, but also by stylistic conventions and conditions of production. Douglas

(quoted in Smith 2018, 91) acknowledges the influence of Vilém Flusser's writing on his practice, saying that the philosopher of technology's thought "inspired me to look at photography not as discrete pictures but as part of an apparatus." Flusser (2000, 29) makes clear that apparatuses, like photography, "are not machines," but are rather bound up within a series of further programs: "that of the photographic industry that programmed the camera; that of the industrial complex that programmed the photographic industry; that of the socio-economic system that programmed the industrial complex, and so on." In exploring the technologies and idioms proper to an age, Douglas is far more concerned with exposing the broader apparatuses of representation and image production operating at a given historical moment than he is with nostalgically replicating the aesthetic qualities of an obsolete media form.

It is also important to recognize that *Circa 1948*'s foray into digital image production is not as radical a departure from Douglas' typical creative process as we might imagine. Douglas' work has for some time now been investigating and incorporating advanced forms of technology that are far from obsolete. His "recombinant" moving image works employ computational algorithms in order to re-mix film footage into an almost infinite number of variations—the six-minute confrontation between two characters presented in the two-channel video installation *Win, Place or Show* (1998) can play out in some 204,023 different combinations. Recent photographic works are, in actuality, digital composites of multiple images, each one involving extensive post-production work—over fifty in the case of the previously discussed work *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971*. The 3D digital models that Douglas created in order to map out his rendition of the Gastown Riot reveal that this photographic work and the animated landscapes of *Circa 1948* share a similar technological substrate. Two of Douglas' most recent photographic works, *Mare Street* (2017) and *Pembury Estate* (2017), digitally recreate the events of the 2011 London Riots sparked by the police shooting of Mark Duggan. For these works, Douglas digitally manipulated contemporary aerial photographs of the two locations named in the titles, inserting scenes of confrontation and restoring the architecture to its 2011 appearance. According to Douglas, the technical construction of these photographs reflects the reality of our current photographic apparatus—a moment when virtually no photo is left unaltered by digital processes, but one that also brings with it a new ethics of image production. He comments: "Because of technology, nobody believes any more that a photograph is real. But that just means

that we have to take more responsibility as creators of images . . . You have to take ownership. It's always a construction, no matter what" (Farago 2014).

Seen in this light, the animation of *Circa 1948* should be viewed as a further extension of this work of digital construction, rather than a deviation from it. Douglas' animated urban memory of Vancouver is precisely this form of responsible rendering of the past. Douglas regenerates this moment in the city's history through careful research of visual and written archival materials, but he is also cognizant of how these historical facts and events are passed through time via the styles and conventions of particular media forms and genres. Rather than privileging the archival over the fictional, or the physical over the mediated, Douglas recognizes the ways in which these differing mechanisms of memory inevitably interweave and intermingle through the process of transmission. In this respect, Douglas is at least partly in sync with Alison Landsberg's (2004, 24) notion of "prosthetic memory," an argument that the media representations of mass culture actually "have a unique ability to generate empathy." Yet unlike the historical tropes of Hollywood film, Douglas excavates more marginal moments or events of the past that are unlikely to receive the cinematic treatment. In this context animation, itself (until recently) a somewhat marginal media form, becomes an interesting tool for historical representation. As Esther Leslie suggests, animation always foregrounds its powers of construction, manipulation, and projection. She writes, "animation evokes history, plays with it, undermines it, subverts it, but it does not have it, just as it does not have nature. It has second nature. Or different nature. It has different history. It models the possibility of possibility" (2014, 35). And as Annabelle Honess Roe (2017, 284) notes, there is considerable critical potential in "the way animation can condense space and time, and make smooth and swift visual connections between temporally and geographically distant, yet politically related, events."

The apparatus of digital animation is by no means an arbitrary one in relation to Vancouver, a city that has prioritized the development of image technology industries, from feature films, to post-production, to video games. The city is second in importance only to Montreal within Canada's burgeoning gaming industry and is home to over a hundred design studios, including Electronic Arts Inc., Microsoft affiliate The Coalition, and Sega subsidiary Relic Entertainment. For a brief period from 2010 to 2013, it was also home to Pixar Canada, the animation company's first studio outside of the United States. The 30,000-square-foot studio space

left vacant by Pixar's departure has since been taken over by Lucasfilm's Industrial Light and Magic (ILM). The Vancouver ILM studio is situated in Gastown, about a block away from the corner of Abbott and Cordova, an indication of how the apparatus of the digital image industry is transforming this historically and politically charged area of the city. Indeed, the NFB Interactive Studio with which Douglas collaborated on *Circa 1948* is located directly on that corner in the redeveloped Woodward's building. The regenerated industrial area in and around Yaletown, located between Hogan's Alley and the Hotel Vancouver, is home to many of the city's gaming studios, from larger operations, like The Coalition and Relic, to smaller independent and mobile gaming studios, like Next Level Games and This Game Studio.

CONCLUSION

While the physical remnants of *Circa 1948*'s Vancouver locations have been all but erased from the urban environment, Douglas has used the image technologies of an emerging digital animation and gaming industry to help ensure that a memory of this moment in the city's history is preserved, or more likely generated for the first time. But more than merely a vehicle for passive memory, the interactive animations of *Circa 1948* bring the history of the city's municipal dealings and contestation into conversation with its current political moment. With its mix of archival material, noir sensibility, and digital aesthetics, *Circa 1948* blends the visual idioms of two eras, linking them. As Huyssen (2003, 6) claims, "memory discourses are absolutely essential to imagine the future." At a time when Vancouver's housing shortages, rising living costs, and processes of gentrification continue to be a source of conflict and debate, knowledge of the city's history of urban struggle becomes a necessary resource for both resisting these developments and envisioning a different urban future. While the city's digital image production industry is having transformative effects on the city (both positive and problematic), animation in the context of Douglas' practice becomes a tool for challenging the unquestioned acceptance of a version of urban progress fueled by unfettered real estate markets and non-transparent municipal development projects. *Circa 1948* can, thus, be placed within a much longer lineage of Douglas works that investigates the uneven experience of urban modernity and its apparatuses of representation.

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