

## Conclusion

### Managing the Reactivated Fragment

In *A Power that Governments Cannot Suppress* (2007), the historian and activist Howard Zinn comments on history as being 'creative'. A creative history might disclose, 'Hidden histories of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, and occasionally to win. The promise of the Future remains in the Past's fugitive moments' (quoted in Schneider, 2011 p.177).

Artists such as Deller, Wallinger, and Douglas who construct situations for socio-political art for outcomes that are manifested in a physical merging of the past and present cannot but reference the work of those who interrogated the urban environment as a modernist critique from the mid-sixties onwards. The critic Rosalyn Deutsche states that in the 1980s, 'City spaces were treated solely as aesthetic, physical or functionalists environments, economic forces shaping them were obscured in an enforced distinction between spatial forms and social processes' (2015 p.142). By the late eighties the concept of public art as existing independent of the specific forces that combined to shape the location of the work were questioned by artists such as Hans Haacke who, in his visualisation of systems-based interrogation artwork, sought to span the artificial gap created by the corporate of commercial ownership of urban space. The aura of public art suggesting social responsibility but confined by academic notions of site-specificity brought into question a comprehension of the real character and historical meaning of urban sites. By 2003, the Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's political-based projections on public buildings were intended to 'foster a healthy antagonism and confrontation which in turn leads to healthy debates.' Wodiczko described his practice as 'symbol attacking' by which he creates a 'public psychoanalytical séance, unmasking and revealing the unconscious of the building' (2009 p.119).

The act of visualising the past to reactivate contention and refocus dialogue for the present, as evidenced in the works of Deller, Wallinger, and Douglas references Walter Benjamin's writing on territory and representation notably in his collection, *The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. The writer and critic McKenzie Wark points to Benjamin's theory of the reactivated fragment as being an entry point for any research on modernism's failed utopias and the resulting social contractions that surface as part of this particular legacy of failure:

Benjamin thought that there were moments when a fragment of the past could speak directly to the present, but only when there was a certain alignment of the political and historical situation of the present that might resonate with that fragment. (Wark, 2015).

In a political representation of place, two key dialogical points can be considered. Firstly, outcomes directed by an art-based investigative process can recontextualise a site that the artist sees as embodying an under-represented critical juncture. Validation is established when the artist undertakes a socio-affective intervention by locating historical points of contention as subject matter that have micro and macro outcomes. Together they transgress conventional modes of commemoration.

Secondly, in regard to the ongoing social politics of site: the success of any dialogical outcome is determined by how much of the contentious aspect of the subject matter is managed in an uncompromising manner in regard to the site. There is a responsibility by the artist to present subject matter in a contemporary light for both fine art and civil outcomes. Project design and management should communicate the fact that the conceptual framework encourages trans-historical outcomes when an audience politically examines the sites sense of place, that is, in artworks that foreground the emotional, experiential and affective traces of particular environments.

How the social boundaries of the city are marked to register past and ongoing protest conversations are considered here. How to position testimonies and how they can be reactivated feature as do the intersections that happen between them.

The commonalities in these three artists are evident in the following:

- Curating under-represented social histories that highlight the politics of social memory.
- Value in the vernacular material that forms an integral part of the finished work.
- How protest histories are reclaimed and presented for a contemporary public to receive them as activated spectators.
- How counterfactual and speculative directions feature in assembling material to contest institutional boundaries.
- The curtailed mission of the alternative society.
- Foregrounding the revolutionary context of the Situationists as a continuing process of interrogation as the task of deconditioning the city remains.
- How the contemporary spectacle represents the failure of utopia sold by modernism and the dynamics of how the spectacle is maintained.