

Significantly, Haw assisted Wallinger with the construction of *State Britain* in an effort to maintain as much authenticity as possible. As a continuation of his own curtailed protest in 2007, he handed out photocopied maps to passers-by referencing the route between Parliament Square and the Tate.

3. Psychogeographical place

Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971. Stan Douglas, 2009

The expanded lens-based practice of Stan Douglas is built around a combination of film, theatre, and large-scale photographic projects.⁶⁷ As a Canadian citizen, many of his intricate projects are located in Vancouver and reference 20th century points of socio-cultural conflict.



A dominant theme for the artist is modernism's failed utopias and how social contractions feature in this legacy of failure. The artworks that result from these investigations tend to prioritise the viewpoint of the citizen who is depicted as an unwilling actor in dramatised situations of social compliance. Citizens in these performative constructs function as actors in constructed situations shaped by the dictates of corporate power. The still and moving images designed by Douglas focus on the paradox of modernism and visualise how forces of power manifest themselves in particular times.

In visualising the subtleties of conflict theatrically, often with urban backgrounds, he draws attention to the hegemonic patterns of modernism by which power hides in plain sight. The images of confrontation are sourced from hidden histories. Here, the activities of individuals as actors seem to challenge the 'normal' conditions dictated by

⁶⁷ Douglas is adept at processing material through different genres; some which reference the tropes of classic Hollywood film are facilitated by obsolete technologies and are presented in theatrical fashion.

the myth of modernism. Douglas dramatises the tension embedded in these situations by suggesting the modernist façade of urban utopias can be challenged. His hyper-real images address the repression of the imagination of history by asking what determines the possibility of a self-articulating subject and how can this be represented (Watson, 1998).

In reactivating socio-political incidents for art outcomes he queries the construction of modernist boundaries. How did they come to reflect universal conditions of post capitalism and how can the territory of the city serve to interrogate this as an ongoing narrative?

Guy Debord described the spectacle as the accumulation of capital until it becomes and image. Griel Marcus extends this for a description of the modern world as being 'A never-ending accumulation of spectacles, a place where all communication flowed in one direction, from the powerful to the powerless. One could not respond, or talk back or intervene, but one did not want to. In the spectacle, passivity was simultaneously the means and end of a great hidden project, a project of social control. On the terms of its particular hegemony, the spectacle naturally produced not actors but spectators: modern men and women, who were thrilled to watch whatever it was they were given to watch' (Griel, 2001 p.92).

The ideal of modernism insisted on a singular existence of things where the citizen was often contained as a component and where place was a structured consequence of Establishment power. Situations of work, leisure, and protest were intended to function separately. There is an undoubted element of control in this and Douglas is aware that the understated stories of protest will always feature outside the dominant narrative for reasons of power. As an artist he identifies and visualises the critical junctures formed by protest as ruptures in modernism's grand narrative by magnifying these ruptures to interrogate elements of failed modernism that he sees having contemporary relevance. In the context of a conventional historical narrative, the entry points for this interrogation seem obscure but they are carefully chosen. The high-end results, which visualise the subject in a heightened stage of realism emphasise that the craft involved in creating the image is paramount. Large photo images and film work are the consequence of precise detailing in all aspects of the production including setting, location, and costuming and overall production design.

In 2009, Douglas created his first public artwork funded by the developers of a multi-million dollar site in downtown Vancouver. This was a significant coming together by a commercial body and an artist who had an international reputation creating work that questioned dominant public narrative associated with public space. Titled *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971*, the work is a large-scale translucent photographic mural, measuring eight by thirteen metres on glass ten millimetres thick and tempered on both front and reverse. *Abbott and Cordova, 7th August, 1971* is a composite image dramatising the site of a 1971 countercultural protest known locally as the 'Gastown Riot'. It forms a dividing wall between a public plaza and an atrium linking four buildings that confirms the narrative of consumption embodied in commercial development.

In the early 1970s, a group of Vancouver citizens inhabited a space previously

occupied by a community that serviced local factories before a downturn affected the indigenous economy. This new 'hippie' community did not receive the blessing of the authorities in their attempts to change the space to reflect the alternate politics of the time. As official and unofficial agendas converged, the hippies prompted the authorities to act with force to re-establish Establishment boundaries of power. The occasion that provoked the Gastown Riot was a day event organised by the hippies to that promoted the legalisation of marijuana. The occupying inhabitants designed it as a 'smoke out'. The ensuing battle represented a critical juncture for the area as it led to the city authorities reclaiming the place and eventually zoning the area as strictly commercial. The significance in this moment was the decisive shift in the use and policing of public space in the city.

Drawing on a comprehensive collection of archival material, Douglas sought to reposition the site of the protest by designing a grand tableau based on the moment when the riot was contained by the authorities; the moment when resistance and the short-lived hippie boundary was dismantled. This commitment to authenticity required a full cinematic technical specification including 80 actors. Significantly, the contribution of artisans who had worked in the area in 1971 were employed for this recreation. Nine scenes were written for staged scenarios and the final image was digitally assembled in postproduction. The resulting artwork of the recreated riot is an image printed on glass that now towers over the shoppers and inhabitants of the commercial area. The artwork now features as both a testimony to the Gastown Riot as well as an architectural component that forms part of a daily shopping experience.

As a large-scale fixed piece of art displayed in a public arena, *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* is notable in regard to the subject matter depicted and in how it is positioned in a commercial zone. The artist stated that, 'The ultimate effects, the ultimate meaning, are something that happens when the work is in the public sphere and people start responding to it' (Douglas, 1971 p.). It is common for the subject matter of commissioned art pieces located in commercial environments to reference positive aspects of the site's history. Julia Lossau has written on the influence of artworks that affect an audiences 'geographic imaginations' and that artworks 'greatly matter when it comes to reinforcing the identity of a specific area with a new one' (2006 p.47). The commissioning process for large-scale public artworks is a studied and often cautious one, as institutional and civic authorities are mindful on the symbolic consequences that a treatment of subject can bring to bear on the identity of place; the management of this is often delicate. In the eighties the artist Hans Haacke confronted the issue of the function of art where ownership of the space where it was sited was contentious. In his work *Metro Mobile* (1985) he inserted a quote from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 'The Business of Good Art knows the Art of Good Business', as part of his art piece. This quote reminded corporations of the cost-effectiveness of non-contentious art where 'consumer relations may be a fundamental concern' (Leo, 2015 p.103). It remains that in this arena a proposal, which includes contentious subject matter, may be subject to rejection or editing. Douglas benefited from the full support of the developers who welcomed a major piece of art from an internationally recognised artist using subject

matter conceptually seeming at odds with the design of such consumer centres. The final artwork communicates this element to the Vancouver public and the commissioning process recognises that the developers acknowledge all aspects of how the artwork integrates with the day-to-day operation of the site. The rebuilding of Woodward's, a long-standing department store from the original site, was a significant conceptual pivot for the work. A consideration of this introduced the subject of gentrification into its reception. The final development of the store's site involved an issue when a homeless community had to be relocated. Keeping that in mind, the large image of the police in the seventies 'clearing' the streets can be read as a continuum, and not only related to breaking up the area's one and only hippie riot. The singular history of Woodward's store now functions as a conduit between eras and its site functions as a cypher for the area's contested history. This was something that was understood by the artist.

The finished work operates on a series of levels. It is a testimony to a rare form of collaboration between an expansive commercial practice and an art-based critical practice where an uncompromising addition to an area based on a contentious historical incident was the intended visual outcome. In the context of place, the structure and scale of the image bridges commercial and public space and insists that the subject matter of the riot is now embedded in the social fabric of the place as a conversation piece. The work is a historical marker with contemporary resonance operating between commercial and fine art boundaries. In regard to the work negotiating the tropes and recognised commissioning guidelines, Douglas was insistent that 'Public art can be more than just large scale decoration' (2010 p.), rather, it visually promotes a narrative of place that gives a voice to the forgotten 'incidents of social confrontation between local Vancouver police and members of the public at various times throughout the last century' (Liss and Rubenstein, year p.). The vast dramatic image commemorating citizen protest forcefully invites conversation on the non-place that the consumerist arena embodies, a space devoid of individuality and dominated by endless reflective surfaces.

The positioning of the work can be said to feature in an alternative conversation that has its roots in the concept of returning to the street that was promoted by the Situationists in the sixties who 'railed against the systematic and totalising perspective of the governing authorities' (Coverly, 2006 p.81). In a 1958 polemic *The Construction of Situations: An Introduction*, the Situationist International stated that:

Constructing a situation means more than just bringing together and unifying a number of different artistic techniques in the creation of a single environment – however great the power of the environment may be. The situation is also a unified pattern of behaviour in time. What we consider to be a truly meaningful experiment lies in setting up, on the basis of desires, which are already more or less clearly conscious, a temporary field of activity, which is favourable to the further development of these desires. This alone can lead to the further clarification of those desires which are already conscious and to the first chaotic

appearance of new ones – desires whose material roots lie in the new reality. In this way the elements out of which situations are to be built can be examined; as can projects to dynamise these elements (Grey, 1998 p.12).

This manifesto relates to a revolutionary critique of society by which Situationists in Paris and other European centres sought to reveal the true dynamic and shape of the city. This was to happen by encouraging citizens to resist social conditioning and create their own emotional maps of the city. In this, new forms of communication and deconditioning would function as a form of resistance to the dominant order. By 1971 the idea of such mapping as forming part of a wider revolutionary programme in a practical sense for first world cities worldwide had been overshadowed by an international crackdown on youth protests. Many authorities took their lead in this from what could be described as the anti-generational policies of Richard Nixon in America in regard to what the boundaries of protest represented in how city space was managed for progress. This is the critical juncture addressed by *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971*.

The artwork exists as a point of departure for any conversation foregrounding factors of dissent and class conflict that arise in any regeneration process. Douglas has achieved this by designing a legitimate commemoration of the original protest through a process of negotiation that has inserted the legacy of the protest into ongoing issues of urban densification.

Factors of dissent in the form of street protest are a visualisation of community issues of place. Protest shows citizen concern when the process of commercial led regeneration appears to disregard or marginalise core issues of community. The reduction or absence of public representation in new developments reinforces a dominant capitalist narrative. This is an absence that seems to confirm the singular benefits of large-scale commercial development as utopian. In this regard, contemporary protest marches are performative events that test critical boundaries and directly contest a singular reading of place. Traditionally, these conflicts have been framed as transient incidents that deviate from the norm and from which order is needed to be restored. This reception reinforces a commercial narrative where the definition and ownership of the term 'order' is key.

Abbott & Cordova addresses a legacy of dissent visualised in the form of the demonstration. The artwork also asks how is the position of authority in the form of the police ever represented in these circumstances. When there is never any contentious documentation visualised as part of regeneration is to imply that the end result has been agreed by consensus? An absence of 'the big picture' implies that there was a righteousness associated with the process throughout and that the final result is the end of a particular linear narrative. In representing the conversation through the medium of a fine art commission and by inserting a contentious, almost contemporary, countercultural-related event in a manner more associated with that of a high-end commercial spectacle, Douglas has reclaimed both the event and site as a critical juncture. There is an awareness here that that the historical memory of this event has

now become an image that has been absorbed by the spectacle. This provocative element must also factor (Alberro, 2011).

Urbanism is contested here. Debord points out that urbanism reflected the class system by keeping the working class isolated in 'little boxes' as an architecture of power is traditionally reserved to satisfy the ruling classes for city design that promoted manageable structures, that is the factory town and contained shopping areas. This prioritises the use of land for profit. An answer to urbanism would be a reconstruction of territory according to the needs of the people, what Raoul Vaneigem conceptualised as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

The complexity of the construction of *Abbot and Cordova* allows this artwork to sidestep the traditional polemical guidelines associated with large-scale works as it remains slightly apart from its surroundings. It avoids any symbolism that could tone down its contentious history. This disconnect is evident and unnerving having the image of a riot contextualised in the setting of a shopping arena. Superficially, the depiction of the riot in a classical sense could be seen in the context of art history, particularly the polemical large-scale muralist tradition as practiced in the 1930s by Diageo Rivera, the socially active Mexican muralist. The large-scale polemical directions of socialist realism in the communist era would be another comparison. However in those traditions the work stood apart from its surroundings whereas the construction of *Abbott & Cordova* is designed to animate the social space of the commercial site. Douglas's choice to embed the riot in glass plays on the symbolism of the building materials that are associated with the spectacle of consumerism. On one level the transparency of the material fuses the image with the surrounding commercial architecture that surrounds another, the image is held as if fossilised or suspended in quartz.

In the *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord insisted that in the process of describing the spectacle we are obliged to 'use the spectacle's own language, in the sense that we have to operate on the methodological terrain of the society that expresses itself in the spectacle. For the spectacle is both meaning and the agenda of our particular socio-economic formation. It is the historical moment in which we are caught' (2009 p.).

A local commentator addressed *Abbott & Cordova*'s transparent qualities in relation to how its conditions continue to activate the concept, 'And every morning, condo dwellers will pass it on their way to work, their reflections gliding over the image like present-day ghosts' (Kamping-Carder, year p.)⁶⁸ This design subtly short circuits the spectacle of the shopping arena and inserts itself as a component into any critique of the consumerist spectacle.⁶⁹ This is the 'pause' that the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan describes in relation to space, 'If space is that which allows movement, then place is a pause: each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place' (1977 p.6). Douglas addresses the theme of alienation surrounding the space in siting the subject of a riot that occurred decades before in the actual space. In this way *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* functions as a structural displacement.

The public must address the fact that their presence in an art-based situation fixed in a commercial zone is premised on the consequences of an understanding of the site as

68 At *The Gastown Riot* Vancouver artist Stan Douglas reimagines a neighbourhood's troubled past.

69 In his study *Paris et l'Agglomération Parisienne* (1952) Chombart de Lauwe notes that 'an urban neighbourhood is determined not only by geographical and economic factors, but also by the image that its inhabitants and those of other neighborhoods have of it.'

an ongoing situation. The issue of what constitutes a contract between themselves and authority is offered by the artist as dialogue that must be addressed as they participate in the act of consumption. Primarily, the experience of *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* is designed to contest a fixed description of public space legitimised in this fashion. The artist offers conceptual resistance via an uncompromising image of how authority creates these arenas for profit. The dialogue exists as a monumental reminder of how power features in the nature of change, how conditions become owned and managed, how the legacy of resistance features in these settings and how space acquires identity.