

# Act of Resistance

*A collaborative event led by Andrew Howe at the Fourth World Congress of Psychogeography, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2019, Dewsbury town centre*



*Actively challenging the control of space and place is an important part of psychogeography. In this event, participants made small interventions in the urban landscape to foster community kindness, before gathering for a short performance walk as a demonstration of unity.*

Artist, Andrew Howe led the event in partnership with Vicky Holliday, Senior Producer at Creative Scene, host for the day's 4WCOP programme in Dewsbury. The event tied into the theme of peace in Creative Scene's Blink! project, part of a training and heritage programme called Paper Peace.

The event took place in the context of the incoming Prime Minister Johnson's attempts to prorogue parliament and accelerate the process towards exiting the EU by the end of the following month. There was, therefore, an element of tension and impending emergency with the real threat of a "no deal Brexit" in the atmosphere of the country in general.



Limited edition prints of a collage made by artist Jean McEwan were handed out to passers-by as gifts during the event

Dewsbury town centre itself shows many of the characteristics of “left behind” towns of the North with the grand old cloth mill buildings surrounded by boarded up shops and dereliction. The town has a relatively high ethnic minority population. Within the last 30 years there have been a number of riots and sinister instances of intolerance towards Muslim and other minority groups.



Well before that, however, Dewsbury had a history of resistance and protest struggle for social justice through the Luddite and Chartist movements. The town's rapid expansion and commitment to industrialisation resulted in social instability. In the early 19th century, Dewsbury was a centre for Luddite opposition to mechanisation in which workers retaliated against the mill owners who installed textile machinery and smashed the machines which threatened their way of life.



**Act of Resistance** commenced with a brief introduction to the history of people's protests in West Yorkshire, with reference to specific local places and movements. The group then walked to some sites with historic connections to the Chartists.



*The Wellington Tavern where Rev. William Hill addressed local Chartists in 1838 and secret meetings were held before riots in 1840*



*Formerly the Royal Hotel, where in August 1838, a 5,000-7,000 strong mob besieged the Poor Law Guardians after a speech by Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor.*

The group were then invited to reflect on how Psychogeography emerged from Avant Garde origins in Surrealism, Dada and Lettrist International to become one of the tools of the Situationists International, led by Guy Debord. The combination of *dérive* and *détournement* were used as a means of subversion and radical resistance to the Spectacle.

Howe contended that psychogeography should not be viewed as a passive means of observing and experiencing the environment whilst walking, but should be an active mode of critique, challenge

and playful subversion. It can be a tool for changing the perspective of participants and the people they interact with.

Opening a case to reveal a number of small boxes containing “peace, kindness, community spirit and tolerance” Howe invited the group to take these boxes, to disperse into the town centre and to place them discretely in locations so that they were not hidden, but not immediately obvious, so that they may be available to be used “in case of emergency”.

The small interventions encouraged participants to look closely at, and engage with, the streetscape with a specific purpose in mind. The task required careful exploration of the nooks and crannies often overlooked during urban walking. The results were then intended to engage non-participating members of the public by encouraging curiosity, raising awareness of an urgent need for more community spirit. The emptiness of the boxes highlighting the need to find these qualities within ourselves.



In a closing activity, the group gathered back together in the main pedestrianised centre of the town and walked slowly in a show of unity towards and through the busy Dewsbury market, brandishing mini-placards promoting the Blink! Paper Peace project and handing out free collage prints. This simple performance, drawing on Fluxus events and performance projects such as Open City, offered an opportunity to take part in a creative action, transforming albeit briefly and subtly, a public space, whilst drawing attention to the important role that walking has in demonstrating collective solidarity, identity and belonging

