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## THE EXPANDED PROJECTIONS: KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO INTERFERENCES IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

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### **Abstract**

The city itself can be considered a living organism. It breathes (subway ventilation system, flying plastic bags), moves (new buildings, demolitions, stores opening, residents moving) and has its own personality (history, geography). The citizens are the ones that trigger the existence of this vivid body by relating to the physical spaces the city provides. In order to make these relations visible, it is necessary an outsider, the "other", someone who explores and understands the city as a living body and makes its meaning emerge. This paper investigates the works of the Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko as a way to fundament the concept of an expanded projection and to demonstrate how they question the common relationship between citizens and public spaces.

**Keywords:** projection, public space, citizenship, urban environment.

## **The projection**

In 1984, Krzysztof Wodiczko presented one of his public projections using the facade of the New Museum in New York during the opening of the exhibition *Difference: on representation and sexuality* (figure 1). At that time, the floors of the building were empty, and the institution had no plans to use them due to a stalled development project. In the meantime, the neighborhood was facing an increase in the number of homeless people, which the artist experienced directly, as he was living near the main shelter of the region. With this situation in mind, he projected chains and padlocks on the facade at the opening to represent how the art institution and the surrounding galleries weren't helping the situation. In fact, the cultural and art organizations in the neighborhood were doing quite the opposite by accelerating the gentrification process, a fact almost implicit in staging an exhibition in the building next door to the real estate project. The area was passing through a strong urbanization process excluding members of the poorest economic classes in the area. And, even with empty spaces available to the homeless during the winter, the New Museum didn't open its doors to them. The institution was closed

Wodiczko's public projections are intimately related with the physical space he inserts them in. For the artist, the contemporary city operates in two distinct zones that must be understood to comprehend his works: the state architecture, which is rooted in the history of the place; and the real-estate architecture, which "develops freely, appropriating, destroying, redeveloping, etc." (Wodiczko, 1987, p.42) The films and slides he projects play with the historical and political contexts of the site to emphasize them to the public and create an environment favorable for critical consciousness. The artist does not consider the public space only as a support or screen, but as an important material to complement his message. In this way, the images and their space have an intimate relation. The virtuality of the projected images interfere directly in the meaning of the materiality of the architecture of the buildings and monuments that he works with.

It is important to identify the meaning of what can be considered virtual. Donald Kunze, to explain how different readings can interfere with the

architecture, defines virtuality as “the presence of what is not literally present, and it thus enables the immanence of building to be annealed to the past and future, analogous form, and hypothetical possibility.” (Kunze, 1998, p.28) This concept cannot be confused with the virtuality that represents a virtual reality or environment. When a new and digital space is created and relates with a physical object, the virtuality implies action in a different reality. It is not about the building anymore, but about what is happening in this other dimension. This distinction can be better understood considering Richard Norton definition of this new environment. “Virtuality,” as Norton comprehends, “then, implies an immediate, if tacit, admission that something is not the case in fact. But something else *is* the case and this something else is quite practicable.” (Norton, 1972, p.499) In other words, the main action occurs in a virtual reality and *happens* and stays there. However, Wodiczko's projections interact with the physical reality, even though using virtual elements to communicate with it; it is not in a different reality. It is a new layer of information added and related to the physical material. This connection makes the projection to be considered something beyond only ephemeral images on a facade. The final work has its own meanings and structures, which need to be analyzed together as a new construction: it is a third object, an *expanded projection*.

The definition of the word “projection” can encompass areas such as geometry, psychology, physics and optics (Païni, 2004, p.23). It can be applied when analyzing a cinema setting, a black box, or in the case of Wodiczko works, when the apparatus leaves the closed space of a gallery and goes to a public environment. The dictionary defines this system as “the action of projecting images on a **screen** and the representation of a volume on a flat surface.” (Païni, 2004, p.23)<sup>1</sup> It demonstrates how strong the screen- and its dimensionality- is inherent to the notion of a projection. It restricts the act of projection only to regular and controlled spaces, leaving works like those by Wodiczko outside the classification. They are beyond projection itself.

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1 It is necessary to point out that the text is originally written in French and translated to English. The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, nevertheless, between several other ones, defines the word as it follows: “the display of motion pictures by projecting an image from them upon a screen; the act of projecting especially to an audience.”

The projected surface cannot be interpreted as a neutral support. The images used in this event at the New Museum for example– despite being the symbolic use chains and padlocks –are not literal as one imagines. The virtual experience provokes a question of the role of an institution in that neighborhood, and it further pressures what could be expected of art and cultural organizations that ignore the location of their headquarters. Wodiczko's events expand the traditional projection experience and challenges the intersection between virtual images, public space and audience.

### **The audience**

The open environment gives a freedom to the audience unseen in a traditional cinema structure. Instead of remaining seated and waiting for the images in a flat screen coming from a projector behind, the audience can interfere in the installation in an open space by changing the position from where s/he is viewing it. The set allows one to choose individually how the art work will be experienced. It is no longer the artist or the institution that creates the perfect settlement for the piece; the public has an active role in this system. Using public space as a support for the virtuality of the projection sets the audience free of the standardized and controlled reception, creating multiples perspectives around a single work. If one appreciate the *expanded projection* from the window of his/her house, it will provide a completely different meaning than if one were viewing it from the middle of a public park in severe snow and the thermometers registering -15° F.

The artist and art institutions lose control of how it will be assimilated and who comprises their real public. If the projections were inside a museum, the entrance would be controlled by different social aspects, such as the price of the ticket, social relations, or an elitist conception of the art world. By choosing to show the projections in an open environment, the artist opens his work to a broader public that can have a personal and self-codified experience of it. Within this set, the audience can be a homeless, an immigrant, or an upper-middle-class citizen.

## **Expanded projection**

*The Border Projection*, realized in 1988, was Wodiczko's way to question and to represent the immigration situation between Mexico and USA. On two consecutive nights, Wodiczko used the Museum of Man, in San Diego (USA), and the Centro Cultural Tijuana, in Tijuana (Mexico), to project images that stressed the situation of the 38 million immigrants that cross that border annually (Wodiczko, 1992, p.145). Museum of Man was created to represent the opening of the Panama Canal, thus, relating to Spanish Colonial policy. The Centro Cultural Tijuana is a monument to the Mexican heritage, where the film *The People Of The Sun*<sup>2</sup> is screened daily. On the United States side, images of two hands holding a fork and a knife were beamed onto the facade, with the museum's doors symbolizing a missing mouth. The tower received the image of handcuffed arms holding a fruit basket, portraying the fruit of the labor of the immigrants. On the Mexican side, a man with his hands clasped behind his head and two question marks covered the dome of the institution. The historical context of the two sites provides the connection to interpret what those images represent in a broader sense. If one tries to analyze the images without considering the context where it was beamed, the work would lose all its meaning related to the status of the immigrants and likely would not be decoded at all. This historical background is necessary to give the full meaning of the work.

In considering Rosalyn Deutsche's interpretation of public space, this work can serve as the trigger to visualize the conflicts which characterize urban space. For Deutsche, public space must be understood as a place where social conflicts happen, and where democracy can exist. As she explains: "The public space, in [Claude] Lefort's account, is the social space where, in the absence of a foundation, the meaning and unity of the social is negotiated— at once constituted and put at risk. What is recognized in public space is the legitimacy of debate about what is legitimate and what is illegitimate" (Deutsche, 1996,

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2 Originally titled as "The Pueblo Del Sol," the movie was released in 1983 and grasps the daily life of Mexican people, representing a promise future and showing images of natural beauties, such as Isla Contoy and Copper Canyon.

p.273). In this interpretation, it is impossible to conceive public space without considering the people who do not have rights and those that are forbidden to have free access to local. Hence, Deutsche refers to the image of the homeless— someone in constant movement, without a place to live, and with no political representation. These people are unwanted by communities and groups which administrate parks and public squares.

Deutsche narrates a case in 1991 reported by *The New York Times* where a neighborhood group was fighting for the right to lock the place at night after the reconstruction of a small square in Greenwich Village. With the argument that this prohibition was for security reasons, the City Parks Department even congratulated the group for protecting a public space. What is in question here, however, is the “dangerous” role that the homeless represents in these kind of environments. They are the outsiders, those that cannot enjoy the city. Instead of being a by-product of the urbanization process and elite public policies, the homeless are to be avoided, evicted and ignored according to this logic. In the Greenwich Village situation, the public space is not public anymore, but transformed in a private one (after all, someone or group has the keys to it). The presence of homeless people creates the conflict with upper-middle-class citizens necessary to construct the notion of public space in a democratic society: “The person without a home is constructed as an ideological figure, a negative image created to restore positivity and order to social life.” (Deutsche, 1996, p.276-7)

In this way, Wodiczko's works can trigger conflict and create awareness around public space. The figure of the immigrant questioned in the *Border Projection* does not have the same meaning as the figure of the homeless, but both represent the same fear of the “other”, of someone that cannot be related to within the traditional and national social class. The homeless and the immigrant are characters needed by society to maintain its democratic aspect. They are strangers that enter the national group but are never rooted to it. They are outsiders at the same time as insiders. Deutsche refers to Julia Kristeva's argument to explain and understand the role of the immigrant and the homeless. For Kristeva, the unconscious disrupts the image of the self as

an organic unit, creating the foreigner within us. The process is that the self projects the strange out of itself, which is experienced as something dangerous or unpleasant. "The repression never fully succeeds," according to Kristeva, "however, and meetings with foreigners, those who are not citizens of the nation in which they reside, can provoke confrontations with our own foreignness, the unconscious." cited in Deutsche (2002, p.33-4)

Class struggle and different relationships to a public space can exemplify not only a subdivision between the citizens, but they can also indicate a power relation. Society is formed based in this difference, in which there are some people able to change and create realities, and others that who do not have the same mobility and opportunities and receive only what is created. Although they exist in the same place, they do not possess the same power to relate to social partners. This situation is called "power geometry" by Doreen Massey. To explain the contraction of space and time theorized by Marx, she argues that the locality and cultural background can interfere in the relation that a social group has to a space or to the social structure. In other words, there are some groups that have the opportunity to communicate, flow, and move, and others are "effectively imprisoned by it." (Massey, 1991, p.26)

It can be easily demonstrated if one compares the countries of the Northern and Southern hemispheres. It is clear that one part of the world, as movable cultures, creates and imposes their creations to the other part, forcing whole nations to believe, think and consume the same things. The North is the "developed," the "first world," where possibilities happen and where locally created culture can move to other places; and the South is considered "underdeveloped," is seen as the imprisoned part, where no one can really consciously effect the rest of the world. But this does not mean that the South is not part of the geometry. It is quite the opposite: the imprisoned cultures can- and surely do- contribute to the hegemonic power. Imprisoned cultures provide materials that can be reinterpreted by hegemonic power and used as a new trend. It is common now to see styles of music created in very poor areas playing in high and expensive clubs in world metropolises. Although the residents of slums in Rio, for instance, provide the material to the movable

culture, they cannot interfere with how it is appropriated or ways in which it could improve their situation. "At one level they have been tremendous contributors to what we call time-space-compression; and at another level they are imprisoned in it," writes Massey(1991, p.26).

Power-geometry is not only perceptible on a larger scale. It can also be sensed in social relations, such as between the immigrant and upper-middle-class citizen described above. The latter is the representative of the movable culture, while the first is the imprisoned one. This conflict is what Wodiczko's work tries to stress. When he makes the link between Tijuana and San Diego, as the first representing the producer and the second representing the consumer in the food industry, power-geometry is evidenced by the virtual images projected on the sites, especially considering the difference of audience in each location. The Mexicans –or immigrants– see themselves as someone arrested, handcuffed, and are forced to question the reasons behind it; while people in the U.S. confront the consequences of their capitalist system, in which their consumerism is responsible to enslave other cultures and explore the fruits of other's labor.

Using virtual material, Wodiczko triggers the conflict theorized by Deutsche and exemplified by Massey. Even with nothing physical to relate with afterwards, the local public is forced to question themselves by these events. For that reason, Wodiczko's works cannot be thought of as just a regular projection, but should be thought of as an *expanded* one. The audiences that have access to the images are not a random one; they are related to the local and historical context of the site. They are the ones that connect with the content of the images and activates them. In a conversation with Louisa Buck, the artist explains how the connection happens: "My work doesn't necessarily have a specific political message. It reveals the contradiction of the environment and the events actually taking place there. It is to do with the politics of space and the ideology of architecture. City centers are political art galleries." (Wodiczko, 1992, p.163)

These galleries, however, are almost imperceptible as they appear in our daily live as a common landscape. The rhythm of the urban space creates a



disruption in our environment, erasing the representation aspect of these constructions from our sight. They are there, but unseen to a regular vision. Some interference is needed to reactivate them in our space, and Wodiczko's expanded projections are one way to bring them back to our consciousness. After one event, it is hard to forget the intervention and what it represented for that locality. The interference becomes part of the historical monument and it is reactivated every time one narrates the event or remembers the disruption. For this reason, it is complicated to classify Wodiczko works as ephemeral. Although the images are projected for a few hours during one night, the consequences can be sensed indeterminately. They stay intrinsically with the state architecture; they become part of the history of the local. It is this conflict with the monument or building that reactivates the project in our consciousness.

### **-side projections**

It is important to note that Wodiczko explored the role of the surface in the projection significantly before going outside to an open environment. While he was still working with indoor projections, the artist projected images in three different canvases inscribed with vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. The installation, *References* (1977), explored the relationship that slide images could have with those interventions. They were drawn to underscore the basic composition of the photos, as a way to disrupt or to interfere with their representation. In this case, the images were from the Polish press, a metaphor to the "artistic character of propaganda images and the 'propagandistic' character of art images." (Boswell, 1992, p.12) Another indoors exploration of the screen was made in 1981 at the Eye Level Gallery, when Wodiczko used the whole wall of the gallery to project only gestures of different people, erasing the identity of them. The wall was not prepared or transformed to be a flat screen; in its center, the format of a door and the door post could be seen. The effect is that the wall framed the images and the disruption of the projected image was not on the screen itself, but in the tension before the possibility that someone could open the door and be

literally part of the artwork. And even if the door was locked and anyone could not actually open it, the sensation of the imminent sense of disruption related to the projected gestures. The tension shaped the way the images were seen.

The discussions around how the screen can interfere in the images finally culminated in exploring the boundaries of buildings, facades and monuments outside. At the same exhibition at Eye Level Gallery, Wodiczko projected a gesture in the side of the Scotia Tower, in Halifax (Canada). "All of those manipulations with images projected in the gallery were not effective enough because the architecture of the gallery did not relate to anything, either the building or the street. As an act of desperation, I moved out." (Boswell, 1992, p.15) In doing so, Wodiczko even started to question the materiality of the building itself. The gesture of an arm in one of the sides can bring to the imaginary the relaxed position made by soldiers, but instead of an army uniform, the arm was wearing a business man suit. The building itself start to have an anthropomorphic meaning, going beyond the static notion of its materiality. It relates to what W. J. T. Mitchell calls "biomedia", which understands the image of human body a media for information. "Biocybernetics," as Mitchell describes it,

the newest technology of image-production in the sphere of what has come to be called 'biomedia,' is exemplified by the production of those 'living images' we call *clones*. Cloning has reawakened all the ancient phobias and taboos regarding the creation of images because it seems quite literally to introduce the prospect of 'playing god' by taking over the role of making creatures. (Mitchell, 2010, p.37)

Wodiczko's interferences transform the buildings into clones: images of human body that carries and activates the political content of the locality. It relates to the local residents to create awareness about the symbolic meaning of that construction. Wodiczko gives life to inanimate objects and makes them communicate with the local context. At the end, the historical background receives another layer of interpretation. The building itself is seem as a body part of the locality, in the same manner as the upper-middle-class citizen, the homeless, or the immigrant are considered as well.

Another interesting aspect of the *expanded projections* is their versatility. In the case of Wodiczko, the equipment used is intensively heavy and extremely

Careful work is necessary to map the projected area. Still, the images can have a quick response and, in minutes, create a new and unexpected work. That was the case when, in 1985, Wodiczko was working to question the role of memorials in public spaces when projecting a missile aimed to the ground in the Nelson's Column, in Trafalgar Square (London). According to the artist, the objective there was not to bring the memorials back to our imaginary and, then, back to the social life. For him, the memorial has a "deadly life" (Wodiczko, 1992, p.115) which needed to be analyzed and discussed. Parallel to that event, a delegation from South Africa just arrived in the city to articulate a loan from the British government. As the South Africa House is located at the same square as the column, Wodiczko beamed a swastika in its facade to protest against the Apartheid policies that were still in effect in the African country. The interference happened for only two hours, until the police suspended the event as a "public nuisance," but the image and the connotation of the ephemeral performance is in the history of the building forever.

In that case, the swastika has the same materiality as a graffiti. When the paint is applied to a wall, building, or any public structure, the meaning of being part of that environment matters although someone paint again to erase the image. This is one of the reasons for graffiti to be considered a political tool to be used as a response in the urban environment (another kind of conflict that could demonstrate the characteristic of the public space in a democracy). In Wodiczko's case, he has the particularity that his interventions cannot happen during the day as the projection wouldn't be visible because of the light and the very restricted temporality. But, even so, the meaning of his virtual and ephemeral images stays with the history of the site. As Wodiczko explains: "Postcards and images of this projection were distributed after the event. Many people told me that even though they hadn't seen the actual projection (i.e., they had only seen media images of it), somehow when they look at the pediment the swastika is seen as missing, as a kind of afterimage." (Wodiczko, 1992, p.115)

At the same time of the Nelson's Column event, another monument received his interferences. The Duke of York's Column, in Waterloo Place, was the stage

of an *expanded projection* in three phases. The stairs to reach the monument was a surface that received images of crowds of British mineworkers. The base of the column, suddenly, became tank treads. Above all that, two male hands crossed in a gesture of modesty. It was Wodiczko's response to the bitter mineworkers' strike in Wales that had happened days before. Simultaneously to these events, a spectacle celebrating British imperial history was taking place on Horse Guard's Parade. The three events were connected by representation and disruptions provoked by the artist. In this way, the British military history, the current workers condition of the time, and British relations with countries that do not respect human rights principles were all connected questioning the political situation of the country. As Wodiczko articulated his plans to interfere in the constructions:

The strategy of the memorial projection is to attack the memorial by surprise, using slide warfare, or to take part in and infiltrate the official cultural programs taking place on its site. In the latter instance, the memorial projection will become a double intervention: against the imaginary life of the memorial itself, and against the idea of social-life-with-memorial as uncritical relaxation. (Wodiczko, 1992, p.115)

At the same year of the intervention in England, Wodiczko received the permission, circumventing the bureaucratic system of Switzerland, to make an event at Bundeshaus, in Bern. For this project, he mixed the anthropomorphic characteristic of his interventions in buildings with the place in the facade (pediment) where the swastika was located. For the swiss performance, instead of the Nazi symbol, he projected an eye, which looked to some specific points of the square: first was to the National Bank, followed by the Canton Bank, then to the City Bank, finally to the ground of the Bundesplatz (where the event was happening), and at last to the mountains and sky. The eye's movement created a political connection to Switzerland treasure. The recent human characteristics of the building made possible for it to demonstrate, in a very didactic way, how economic relations are linked, something taken for granted by the citizens of the country. The artist was able to confirm this information because he spent some time in bars there. The status within the city of being an outsider, almost a tourist, made it possible for him to understand the information of the site as a stranger, someone protected against its mythology and tradition. As he himself argued, to be from outside

made him analyze the situation in a critical manner, which was impossible to the local residents. His experiences as someone considered a stranger and not an immigrant could be used to better understand the social relations within the locality.

## **Conclusion**

Wodiczko events raise a lot of questions triggered by the interference it provokes. The architecture, for instance, has its authority questioned when a facade does not have its own materiality anymore; suddenly, the building or monument exists with a disruption in its conception and its history. The static characteristic of its materiality is debated when walls receive arms, which initiate an anthropomorphism in the relation and interpretation of what that construction represents to the city. By adding some ephemeral images on a surface, the artist breaks the traditional expectation of the constructions and new unplanned significations are inserted in monuments which already carry symbolic histories. Even the virtuality of the material used by Wodiczko is contested when its afterimage is remembered more than what was– or is there.

These cases demonstrate that the projections made by Wodiczko cannot be understood as regular projections. They are a third object– not just the screen or just the image, but the relation with the environment as well– which represents all these interferences, contradictions and disruptions. Even having the same virtual characteristic, the events consider the environment and the relationship with the image as a starting point to understand its meaning. These spaces are not only a black box set up or a cinema structure. Wodiczko's events go beyond the formal structure of traditional projection atmospheres. They relate and connect to something more, thus the necessity to consider them as *expanded projection*. It is no longer only about the slides or films, but the meaning created with the relation with the public space. And it is not only the architecture of a building or the representation of a monument, but what this intertwined object, this third object, can bring when decoded. The screen, in this case, is not a neutral space. It represents its context and historical background. The public, in that moment, is not just an audience, but an active

participant of the context and the proposed discussion.

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