

Krzysztof Wodiczko. *The Border Projection: Part I*, San Diego, 1988. All images courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong, New York.

Patricia C. Phillips

## Creating Democracy: A Dialogue with Krzysztof Wodiczko

This dialogue with Krzysztof Wodiczko developed from two conversations with the artist in May and July 2003. The first meeting explored general ideas and concepts in Wodiczko's work. The second conversation was an opportunity to more deeply examine and connect significant issues in the work. The text is a synthesis of these two conversations.

1. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
2. Bruce Robbins, "Introduction: The Public as Phantom," in *The Phantom Public Sphere, Social Text Series on Cultural Politics* 5, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

**Krzysztof Wodiczko:** For me, a central question is, where are we today regarding democracy with relation to art? How can art influence and be influenced by the process of democracy? I believe that the examination of democracy and public space is a project that should continue.

**Patricia C. Phillips:** A critical issue, generally, but with particular relevance for your work.

**Wodiczko:** We are in the challenging moment of having to reformulate new forms of democracy influenced by circumstances and concepts we have never seen before—a multitude of them have been developed by political thinkers and activists all over the world, and artists, too, should find their place in these debates. Democracy is one of the most challenging, if problematic, opportunities. We still seem to have difficulty embracing the great potential of this project in society. Now there is global displacement and uneven development worldwide. There are conflicts of religion, power, and the diminishment of rights. It is a time of major social and economic change. There is the constant threat of serious conflict in many places. The world seems to be populated with enemies and adversaries. How can we proceed with such feelings of fear and hostility?

**Phillips:** Rosalyn Deutsche, who has written critically and eloquently on your work, suggests that democracy involves the recognition, if not perpetuation, of difficulty and disagreement. In fact, it is constitutionally unsettled.<sup>1</sup>

**Wodiczko:** Democracy is always unfinished. It should never be understood as completed. We accept the idea that democracy—and the public sphere—is a phantom, a term that Bruce Robbins introduced in a collection of essays he edited.<sup>2</sup>

Artists are in a special position to contribute to this exploration of new forms of democracy, by creating work that is challenging and disrupting. Artists have the opportunity to continue the avant-garde tradition, which has always engaged public issues. They should try to make sense of this tradition without being imprisoned by it.

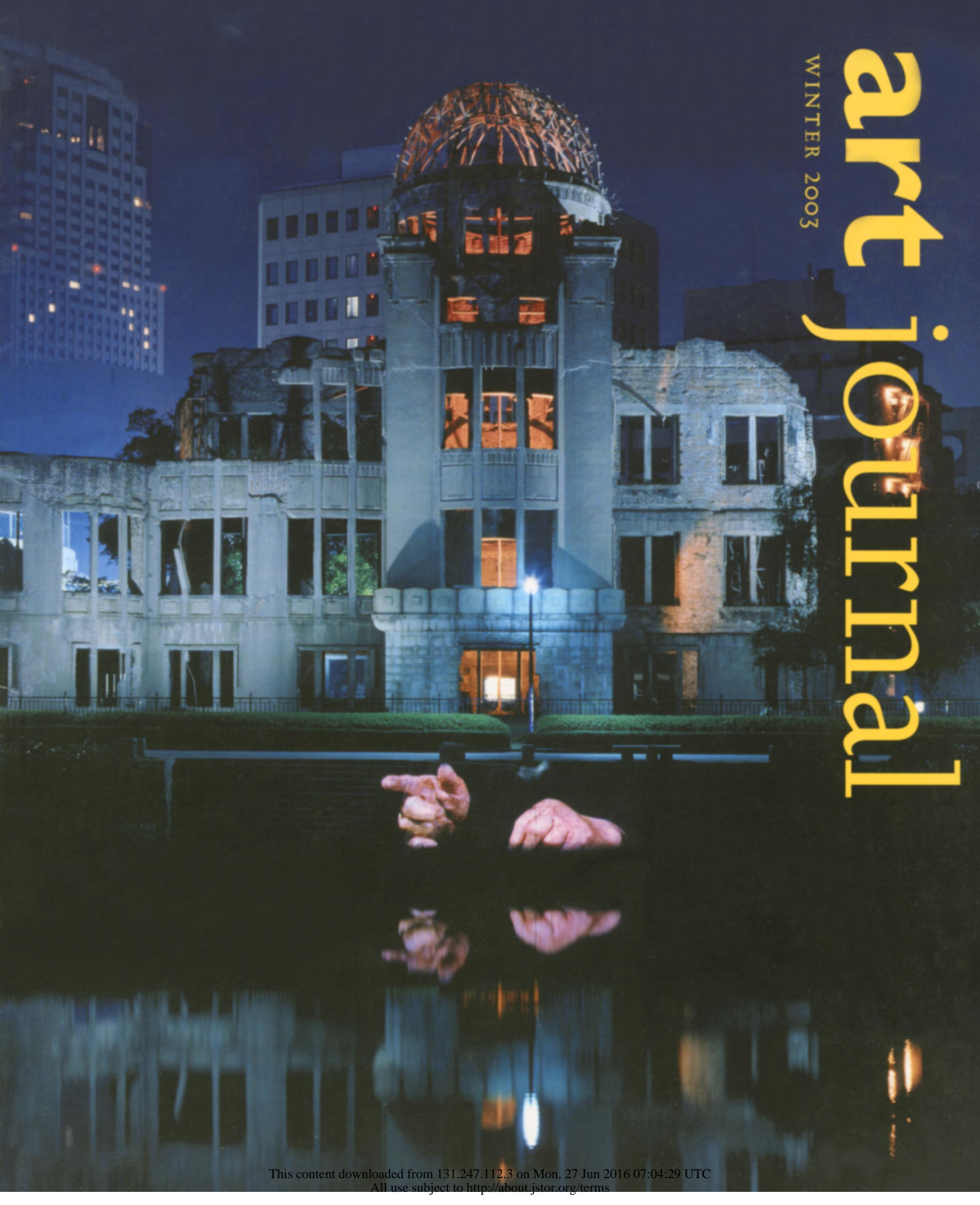
**Phillips:** Phantom is a striking metaphor for the errant nature of democracy.

**Wodiczko:** Public space is where we often explore or enact democracy. In the 1970s, there was a growing interest in public art, public space, site-specific art because of the rapid transformation of cities. Eventually, site specificity was replaced by other concerns, but it was an important stage when artists began to focus on context. Art could be geographically specific, formally and visually specific, or socially specific. Artists began to consider the implications of an intervention in one area when similar events were happening at the same time in other places. In the 1980s, there emerged influences from critical urban geography and the ideas of uneven development, urban struggle, and cultural resistance. Artists began to think critically about art—the position of their practice—in relation to development in a city and the lives of its people. Questions of representation also emerged. How should a particular social group or stratum be represented? More artists became directly involved in the lives of the inhabitants of cities.

Of course, there always exists a theoretical environment that influences artists' activities. I entered this public space with a set of references that are important to

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an understanding of my own work. This began in the early 1980s with Claude Lefort's theory of democracy.<sup>3</sup> Lefort proposed that democracy is founded on public space that should be, essentially empty. This emptiness does not belong to any individual or group, but should be available to anyone who can bring meaning to it, recognize others in it, and instigate and perpetuate dissemination and debate about rights. Lefort's position is a utopian concept. He describes an ideal, nonexistent public space, which in reality is not empty but controlled and barricaded by speakers, commercial and political, who speak at the expense of silent others. In the 1980s, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau introduced the idea of "antagonism" to a theory of democracy.<sup>4</sup> Society is recognized as impossible, as a space of endless contingencies. Establishing precise distinctions between difference and conflict, they articulated a democracy based not on hostilities where parties are enemies to each other, but on "agonism," where parties are constructively adversarial. This theory accepts that democracy cannot be organized in a well-mannered way without room for confrontations and a multiplicity of voices.

More recently, Mouffe has offered a new, agonistic concept of public space, which finally brings real life to Lefort's utopia. Her recognition of antagonisms and the need for agonism in a democratic process radically questions the prominent liberal philosopher Jürgen Habermas for his popular legalistic and rationalistic position on democracy which seeks to resolve disagreements in a blind drive for consensus.<sup>5</sup> I am giving here a very simple description of agonistic democracy, but it is a complex and dynamic model, which, as Mouffe suggests, invites and accommodates passion as well as adversarial positions. For her, democracy is not a solution but a process of engaging more actors (and I hope artists as well) in an ongoing energetic discourse in the form of an "agon," that is, a contest.

In the 1980s we also encountered new conceptions of a public sphere that radically expand and transform Habermasian theory. Barbara Kruger and Nancy Fraser articulated a feminist public sphere, for example.<sup>6</sup> These are critical alternatives to the concept of the unified and dominant (bourgeois) public sphere theorized by Habermas and add to the hope for greater strength of the social "multitude." In this way the aggressive, responsible, and critical agonism of a democratic discourse may be joined by organized social, cultural, and artistic movements and actions as a part of the workings of the "oppositional public spheres." Together they may animate the public space while forcefully holding the state, mainstream media, and even global financial structures ethically and politically accountable.

**Phillips:** The idea of public speech or testimony—and its relation to art and democracy—seems to be a growing preoccupation in your work.

**Wodiczko:** Michel Foucault introduced the idea of fearless speech or, more appropriately, fearless speaking, in a series of lectures he gave at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1983.<sup>7</sup> This idea emerges from Foucault's careful reading of classical Athenian philosophy, which examines the role of the public speaker, without whom democracy cannot exist. A fundamental question is how to prepare this "fearless speaker" to participate in the agora or contemporary public space. And what are our expectations for the fearless speaker? Should she speak from her own experience?

We are speaking here of truth-telling, or the Greek concept of *parrhesia*, frank or free speech. In order to believe that a speaker is telling the truth, there must be

3. Claude Lefort, "The Logic of Totalitarianism," in *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), and "The Question of Democracy," in *Democracy and Political Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

4. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985).

5. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); originally published as *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962).

6. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

7. Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2001).





***The Hirshhorn Projection,***  
1988.

trust. The speaker must sustain her ability to convey truths in public, often to people who may not want to listen. This, of course, relates to agonistic democracy, where there might be more and more fearless speakers who differ and disagree with each other. Of course, this can be seen as a problem by those in positions of power.

I find this an attractive proposition with both political and ethical consequences. Public speech requires a political consciousness that accepts democracy, as Mouffe and others have proposed, as a process. Being adversarial is not about creating enemies or escalating hostilities, but is a way to develop the dynamic conditions from which people learn to respect each other.

**Phillips:** How is public space both an opportunity and obstacle? How can we ensure that new speakers flourish rather than founder?

**Wodiczko:** Public space is a site of enactment. It belongs to no one, yet we all are a part of it and can bring meaning to it. How do we do this? How do we come to recognize each other? There are questions of rights and ideas of utopia. Is utopia harmonious? Or is it the recognition that we are strangers who recognize and accept the strangeness of each one of us?

There are inequities and stratification. Artists need to understand, as most

political and social activists and organizers do, that public space is often barricaded and monopolized by the voices of those who are born to speak and prepared to do so. First, this is done at the expense of those who cannot speak because they have no confidence that anyone will listen to them. Historically, they have good reasons not to be confident. Second, they have no developed language. Third, they frequently are locked in posttraumatic silence. There is repression so that certain words cannot be said because particular memory patterns have been shattered.

Yet, these are the most important speakers in a democracy. They should speak because they have directly experienced its failures and indifference. They can testify, but often at the risk of their status, health, or even life, in order to disrupt normal relations.

**Phillips:** You imply that truth-telling, like testimony, is a deeply felt, embodied experience.

**Wodiczko:** Yes, in my work I try to actualize this concept of truth-telling. If we wish to bring these unheard, invisible, and uninvited speakers to public space, then how are we to do this? We could give a microphone or loudspeaker to these people, but we may hear nothing. So the question is, what kind of conditions must be created for these individuals to be heard? What is required for them to have some impact?

This accepts the political perspective that we truly learn about the world from those less fortunate than ourselves. Truth-telling also requires a psychological understanding of democracy. So we need to connect a political ethic with a psychological program.

**Phillips:** Ideas of speech and representation in democracy raise questions of who determines what becomes part of public memory. Who establishes an official record? Which and whose memories are materialized in form and space?

**Wodiczko:** Often, as Walter Benjamin suggests, it is a narrative of those who have succeeded at the expense of those who are vanquished. It is a history of the victors.<sup>8</sup> This means that from generation to generation, we bear responsibility for what is perpetuated in public space. Those of us who are more fortunate may not recognize that we, in fact, are part of this narrative of the victors. We need to understand our roles in this official history, to question what and how something is remembered.

How can existing monuments and structures be animated? How can the often unheard stories and overlooked experiences of other individuals begin to be represented in public space? How might these other stories animate and reinscribe monuments? Public environments can be resistant to change; most monuments cannot be removed. So how can they be reappropriated, revised, and amended?

**Phillips:** There are interesting distinctions to consider as we think about monuments. There is Alois Riegl's "unintentional monument" of changing and often conflicting values.<sup>9</sup> Currently, there is a growing discourse around the antimonument. James Young has examined the counter-monument, which adapts and often conceals characteristics of the monument and uses them to challenge its visibility, credibility, and authority.<sup>10</sup>

**Wodiczko:** For those of us involved in artistic practices, the responsibility is significant. The arts overlap with so many areas, including social movements, social work,

8. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1955).

9. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origins," *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982).

10. James Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," in *Art and Public Sphere*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

psychoanalytical theory, history, and memory. And there is a special role or obligation when it comes to monuments. Memorials or monuments may serve an unintended purpose for these new speakers in public space. But how are these overlooked people prepared to speak after being silenced through trauma? These people, along with the monuments themselves, must move through various therapeutic stages of posttraumatic stress so that they become operational in public space.

**Phillips:** How do we create a physicality in cities that accepts, accommodates, and advances different kinds of memories?

**Wodiczko:** How do we embody concepts of memory that will lead to change? How do we reach a point where there will be no need for tragic memorials? How do we undo certain cultural patterns, certain readings of the past?

**Phillips:** When did this inquiry into the posttraumatic enter your work? And if always implicitly there, how and why did it become more explicit?

**Wodiczko:** There is a society of wounded people that must be addressed rather than overlooked. And I believe that I must be an agent who can contribute to this process of change. At one time, because of the threat or fear of political consequences, individuals were forced to be silent. Now they can attempt to speak without fear. They can speak on behalf of potential victims, as well as to perpetrators of violence. The silence is ended. They have achieved a way to speak to both victors and victims.

The theories of Mouffe and Foucault must be connected with trauma therapy concepts. A person to add to this growing list of references is Judith Lewis Herman, who wrote *Trauma and Recovery*.<sup>11</sup> She is a psychoanalyst and practicing therapist who works primarily with survivors of rape and sexual violence. She is interested in the relationship of social justice and therapy. Her understanding of the stages of recovery, if not explicitly about a democratic process, suggests the kind of work that must be done for people to become fearless speakers in public space.

It is precisely those who have had traumatic experiences who should speak first. But they are the ones who cannot. So the political and ethical must be connected with psychological and sociological agendas. Posttraumatic stress therapy can never eliminate individual or cultural trauma, but it enables individuals and society to live with it.

Rather than a theoretical inquiry, like in the work of Jacques Lacan, for example, this must be pursued in a practical way. People need help to regain their memory and speech in order to become active members of society. Herman suggests that moving from self-examination and private testimony to engagement and public testimony is a key part of the recovery process. I am not speaking in a clinical way, but this is an issue of personal healing that connects to a vision of society's health.

This interest began when I first worked with immigrants. Strangers. It became clear that the operators, users, and performers of the instruments that I make use them to negotiate their inner lives with the outside world. For example, the *Alien Staff* has a number of functions. These speaking/walking sticks with their personal reliquaries, monitors, and recordings are a user's double. They can be used as therapeutic devices, as well as implements to participate in a democracy. The instruments provoke an exchange of opinions. The entire process of prerecording, speaking,

11. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

recording, and editing required for the *Alien Staff* and other instruments is not unlike the stages of posttraumatic therapy. The process of editing turns speech into a manageable scope and form that is available to anyone.

Crossing borders, in all senses of the word, is traumatic. Consider the aftermath, with all of the legal issues, hostility, euphoria, and disappointment. The stages of transformation of identity for the immigrant, the internal dialogues and disagreements, create a very stressful complexity. In the process of becoming a new person, an immigrant must imagine, examine, and question all identities—the past, present, and future. Those who are ready to negotiate these psycho-political roles need this equipment, an artifice or prosthesis, to begin this demanding process of fearless speech.

I do not propose how all of this should be resolved. I only suggest that artists, who are situated between technology, discourses of democracy, and the lives of people, have unique opportunities to create practical artifacts that assist others in this migratory and transitory world.

**Phillips:** Could you discuss ideas of witnessing in the context of your work?

**Wodiczko:** To testify is to bear witness to a wrong, loss, or injustice in order to propose a change for the better. As an artist, I try to equip unheard individuals with a prosthetic device so that they can more effectively break the silence. The equipment allows them to develop their speech—to help them with this final



**Aegis: Equipment for a City of Strangers, 1998.**

Kelly Dobson during the initial testing of *Aegis*, which consists of two laptop computers, a microphone, speakers, an electric motor, and augmented speech recognition software.

stage of healing so that they can become more effective agents. They can speak in either an indirect (by letting the instrument speak) or direct mode. With the device, they are armed with memory. Memory is annealed through the instrument. There are opportunities for change and interruption, but the act of testimony can occur.

These instruments are symbolic structures that establish unstable situations. The user can speak, but cannot be spoken to. The activity of speech can become a kind of obsession. I think of the survivors of Hiroshima that I worked with for the *Hiroshima Projection*. In this case, it was a challenge to overcome a silence imposed by their own community.

**Phillips:** I see a connection, one that I did not fully understand or appreciate before, between your projections on monuments and civic structures on the one hand and the vehicles and instruments on the other.

**Wodiczko:** There are many contradictions in the reality and ideology of monuments. It is in the shadows of mute monuments that speechless people dwell. Through the instrument, the speaker becomes a critical participant in the environment of the monument. The person begins to animate the monument. Another kind of dialogue begins for the city at large, perhaps for the world. This is what I mean by animation.

**Phillips:** Helping people overcome silence and move through that final stage of trauma is potentially empowering. But what are the risks?

12. D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965) and *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971).



**Wodiczko:** Once they have thought about the act of speech, they need to calculate what is more risky, to speak or not to.

**Phillips:** And what role do you play in these calculations?

**Wodiczko:** Sometimes I meet with people to discuss a project and they never return. It simply is not the right moment. Those who do come back tend to stay until the very end. Obviously, there are risks with either decision. They need to anticipate what this process will mean for them. As a creative director, I serve as an active listener.

Everyone has a choice to stay or to leave. Sometimes loss moves them to speak. Sometimes people are not ready to give testimony. They need more time or other conditions. In some cases, this reenactment of trauma can be very helpful and healthy. But it also can be difficult. This is not a clinical situation. I am not a licensed clinician. I am an amateur in this field who understands the significance of these situations. I try not to make mistakes.

**Phillips:** Do you ever encounter hostility?

**Wodiczko:** In many ways, there is always mistrust at the beginning of a project. It is psychologically charged. The people I meet with first have to accept, reject, or somehow come to terms with this mistrust. Does someone want to make money from them? Do I want to become famous through them? Is someone after a sensational story? These are legitimate questions. The fact that I come from the outside becomes less threatening and probably less interesting. They begin to listen to themselves and each other. The project becomes less threatening. They begin to accept that the project will not retaliate. It can, in fact, be used by them.

**Phillips:** Generally, fearless speech is not spontaneous rhetoric, but something that has to be developed and cultivated. I am interested in the ethical, psychological, and pedagogical character of your work. The prosthetic device is central to these ideas. In our earlier conversation, you cited D. W. Winnicott and the “transitional object.”<sup>12</sup>

**Wodiczko:** The project is no longer just my idea, but becomes a transitional space. This is something that not only designers should learn, but artists as well. We are talking about an object or space that, with recurring use, becomes a container for the inner world of the user. At the same time, we accept that it is part of the outside world. For example, my instruments or equipment have to be chosen by the users; I do not choose who will use it. And this process is very unpredictable and frequently begins with a deep skepticism or rejection of the object. Why would someone whose life is unrepresented in the media trust one of my mediated instruments?

**Phillips:** The instrument may be perceived as enabling, but it is also controlling and entrapping.

**Wodiczko:** Or stigmatizing. There are hundreds of reasons why people would mistrust the situation. But for people who feel marginalized, the opportunity to insert



*Alien Staffs, 1992.*

**Adul Só and Hamed Sow using *Alien Staffs* in Stockholm. By means of an LCD screen and speakers, the face and voice of the user convey a personal account. Other elements of the work are a bag with video player and batteries and, in the staff itself, interchangeable plexiglass containers for immigrant relics.**









their voice may be worth whatever risks or discomforts. In terms of psychological developmental theory—and here Winnicott's work is very relevant—potential users must, in some manner, destroy the project and myself. I have to be destroyed, the project has to be destroyed, if we are to proceed together. Then they need to see if the project and I will survive our psychological destruction. And once they, or someone else, determine that I have survived, they may decide that the project can be used in some way.

Once they determine that they can use me—and I can use them—we may begin. Once we can use each other, we begin to trust each other. And once we trust, we can begin to play. These are a triad of Winnicott's theory: use, trust, and play. In this case, the transitional object can be the instrument, myself, or the project.

**Phillips:** This allows the people you work with to imagine that this is not just your project, but theirs as well. But your and their project may have different objectives and outcomes. This is an empowering way to think about all art: that it will not retaliate, that it can be used in multiple ways.

**Wodiczko:** Some of the questions you sent raised ideas about the ethical dimension of this work. What is trust in this kind of work? It is about mutual interest. They can use me. I can use them. And there is nothing really wrong with being used—ethically speaking—as long as there is some mutual benefit.

**Phillips:** We can accept that there can be a kind of collaboration where participants hold different expectations and understandings of the consequences. Collaboration engages the ideas of democracy that we discussed earlier. It does not require a seamless, harmonious concept of community, but is animated by passages of conflict and difference. Collaboration can accommodate all of this richness and texture. It isn't a homogeneous notion of everyone walking in stride to some common destination.

**Wodiczko:** Yes, this idea of people using the project and me using them is, in fact, a vital form of democracy.

**Phillips:** Often artists are criticized for going into a community and, either unwittingly or willfully, using a group of people to accomplish a project. While I challenge notions of community—and it has become a difficult term—I find the critique a bit condescending. It suggests that there cannot be expectation within a group that differs from the will of the artist.

**Wodiczko:** It is patronizing. There is the possibility of mutual use and trust that may lead to change. Unfortunately, the word community is used to suggest some happy, consensual unit. In fact, many people want to get out of their community. Often there is diminished freedom for individual members. There is less room for the stranger.

I am not against community, but it always must question its own legitimacy, much as larger society should. A community can participate in this kind of critical self-examination, or it can participate in a form of symbolic incest. The instruments and projects offer ways for people to step out of their communities, to engage in independent speech. When they return, it is with a form of agency and insight. They enter the world in order to reenter the community.

**Phillips:** You use the language of trauma and therapy to discuss much of your recent work. I am interested in the relationship of public art, democracy, trauma, and your own experiences and background.

**Wodiczko:** There is an inevitable interplay among all of these. These preoccupations are neither new nor original, but I try to pursue them the best way that I can based on my experience in industrial design, architecture, and the conceptual content of cities. I am deeply interested in images and the iconic structure of symbols.

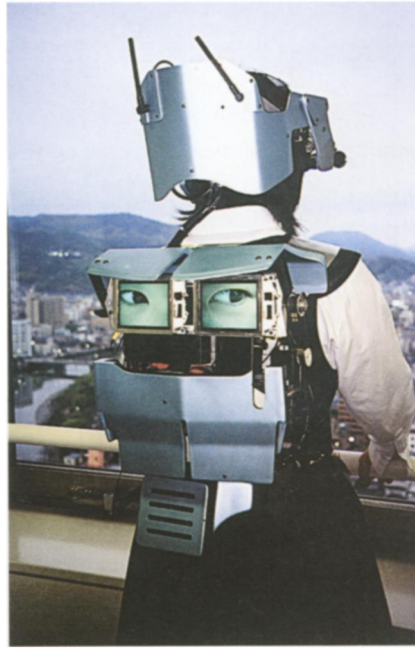
And there is my own background, as well. My own experience of displacement is invariably projected onto the projects.

Clearly, there must also be something here for me. I tend to not analyze my own role, but I recognize that this work helps me. It may be that I also need to heal myself to some degree. I don't know that I fully understand, but perhaps it has to do with my own childhood. Perhaps there is a kind of retraumatization through migration that occurs for a generation that went through hell. And I belong to that generation. I was born in Warsaw in 1943. The events in early childhood must have caused psychological wounds. Of course, I was one of the lucky ones.



*Dis-Armor, 2000, two views.*

This instrument was used by high school students in Hiroshima. A microphone and two video cameras in the headpiece transmit voice and images of the user's eyes to speakers and two LCD screens on his or her back. The piece also includes a rearview mirror, computer, and batteries, as well as wireless video transmission that allows pairs of users to wear each other's eyes and speak with each other's voices.



**Phillips:** You were born in the midst of extraordinary crisis.

**Wodiczko:** It is a standard kind of condition for people whose lives have been disrupted and displaced. It is true that this helps me to understand the people with whom I work. I have to open myself up to do this work, and perhaps people come to see that I really do not pretend to understand. I, however, feel that I absorb the trauma of the people with whom I work. It may be a dangerous situation of diminishing difference between them and me.

**Phillips:** I have been revisiting your earlier, urban projections. Did you come to a point where these projects began to feel insufficient? Or if not insufficient, were they unable to accommodate the questions and issues that seem to preoccupy you now? The current work generally involves speech and testimony in addition to video images. I find this a fascinating development because of what it requires of you as an artist and how it challenges us—your audience. There are risks and responsibilities in making work that deals with lives in crisis. How do we understand different dimensions of cultural trauma—and democracy—through images and testimonies?

**Wodiczko:** You touch on critical issues. Of course, there is a visual similarity between the earlier and later work, but the later work includes video and spoken

testimony. In order to understand these changes, it may be useful to consider the function of monuments or memorials. The early work dealt with slide projections which were like photographs. I was interested in the architecturalization of the body and the anatomical character of buildings. Generally concerned with present-day issues and situations, it became clear to me that injustices of the past kept repeating themselves. I sought a more active process.

**Phillips:** This recent work is more active, but there are variables and uncertainties in the process. In many ways, the aesthetic process is a compelling representation—or enactment—of the vagaries of democracy. I am not suggesting that you have consciously sought a growing harmony between your creative process and your investigation of radical democracy, but there is an internal tension with your own methodology and the dynamics of democracy. In addition to content and subject matter, questions of democracy have become the form or material of your work. Once philosophical, democracy has acquired an appreciable materiality. I think this is a significant transformation.

**Wodiczko:** Perhaps there is something about the earlier projections that illuminated the dangers and limitations of a specific situation. I think this shift to video may stimulate a different kind of discussion. The more recent works create an appetite or expectation for more, which I am not sure I can fulfill. During my projection piece in Charlestown, Massachusetts, having first refused to be part of the project, some mothers of victims came to me to say, “Now we are ready.” I suggested that now that they were ready, they did not need a project—my project—to speak.

**Phillips:** It is important to understand these kinds of projects as inherently inconclusive. I think that as your work gravitates to more open systems, it may become less settled.

**Wodiczko:** The two projects that I did in Tijuana are a useful way to understand these changes and differences. *The Border Projection* (1988) was a two-part still projection that took place on consecutive evenings on San Diego’s Museum of Man and the Centro Cultural in Tijuana. Situated on either side of the United States–Mexico border, the project explored colonialism, borders, and illegal aliens. The Centro Cultural was designed by Manuel Rosen in 1982 to celebrate Mexican cultural heritage. I projected on the building’s domed theater the image of a man with his hands clasped behind his head—the position taken during an arrest and search. For the *Tijuana Projection* (2001) I used both instruments and video projection. Young women who endure terrible conditions in the *maquiladoras*, the region’s factories, participated in a yearlong process to animate—to become—this historical building. At the same time, they forced the building to become them. They appropriated the symbolic authority, as well as the physiognomy of the architecture. Their faces filled the entire elevation of the domed building. They engaged in a highly mediated fearless speech where they were simultaneously responding to their own projections through the instruments they used to project their faces and voices on the dome.

Of course, the media understood that the women who were speaking were not those who are normally heard in public space. This architectural landmark suddenly became human. Regardless of how critical we may choose to be, we have a psychological affair with these civic structures. We invest our hopes and desires. Buildings are conceived to have this effect. The Centro Cultural, in particular,



brought modernity to Tijuana. But most progress is the consequence of a catastrophe. And the women who animated the building during the *Tijuana Projection* have witnessed firsthand the catastrophe of progress and modern industry.

**Phillips:** Did the site change in significant ways in the thirteen years between your two projects? Or did your own understanding or perception of this space change over time?

**Wodiczko:** The site itself did not change. It remains a symbol or icon; it is a busy place. There were other developments. For example, the number of factories along the border increased dramatically. Most of the employees are teenaged girls. They are the economic base. Males of a similar age are unemployed. These young women became temporary actors on the building. This all occurred because it was part of a festival. So here we come to another topic: public art and the festival.

Agonistic democracy has a great deal to do with the festival. Festivals are based on contests and events such as poetry readings, sports, and other activities. Historically, democracy at its most dynamic was allowed to happen during the festival. It was a time of truth, so that even visitors from other cities in conflict could come and be touched. There is a historical connection between fearless speech and the liberties of the festival. So many of my most challenging and problematic projects have happened within the context of the festival, where risks are accepted.

**Phillips:** How have your education and professional experiences as an industrial designer articulated and deepened your work as an artist?

**Wodiczko:** One can take advantage of an education in different ways. I don't bring an essentialist view to my background as a designer. But design gave me an opportunity to observe and learn about the social politics of production, distribution, and use. Use is very important.

**Phillips:** Which suggests that a central question about art is what it does, how it functions in the world and lives of people. This discourse of function is transparent in design, but only occasionally with art. I think this connects with Norbert Wiener's theories of the prosthesis that have influenced your work.<sup>13</sup>

**Wodiczko:** It is significant that design has both symbolic value and use value. Therefore the issue of use has to be taken very seriously. Function is part of a larger culture that influences the work of designers and artists. The education I received allowed me to consider the role of the visionary, agent, or politician. We can see how architecture—a form of design—is a consequence and symbol of a prevailing economic system. Working directly with corporations, designers experience the relationship of politics and ethics directly. Yes, it is an interesting background for an artist.

Design requires that we look closely at the user. Designing an implement that will be used in a work environment eight hours a day requires consideration of the conditions and experience of the user. I once designed technological and medical equipment, biological instruments that measure human beings. People's lives, bodies, and psychological conditions were affected by what I designed. This is a complicated set of problems.

**Phillips:** You talk about the influence and authority of architecture in cities. I was thinking about the architecture of the devices and instruments that you create.

13. Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965).



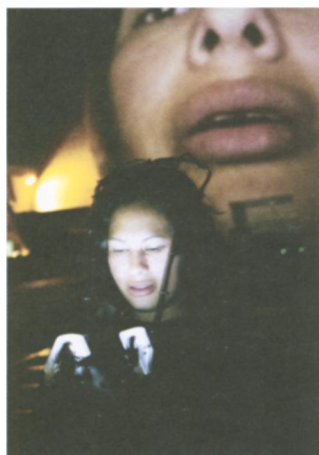
**The Border Projection: Part 2,  
Tijuana, 1988.**

**Wodiczko:** I am preoccupied with the architecture of buildings, monuments, and memorials. This is not surprising; I was trained by architects. Then there is the entire scope of objects. Designers often produce for a mass market of ubiquitous objects. But with the instruments, I am interested in making unique objects that reside between performance, industrial design, and some action.

**Phillips:** Instruments, devices, and vehicles—these all allow people to engage in some kind of activity.

**Wodiczko:** And they all deal with ideas of armament. Armament can be defensive, protective, as well as proactive. Just as a tool can become a weapon under certain conditions. But the cultural weapon or armament, I don't mind. . . . The armament connects with the prosthesis, like a cyborgian project that is chronically switching between its natural and artificial parts. These machines can create conditions where people communicate; they can disarm people with skills and charm.

I am interested in transformative actions in existing environments. I am interested in both making and appropriating objects. Winnicott discussed the transition from object-relation to object-use. I am neither a techno-enthusiast nor am I a techno-catastrophist. But technology has come under such attack, that I am choosing to be on the side of the researchers in this area. There needs to be more trust in what they do.



***The Tijuana Projection, 2001.***

**The headpiece, equipped with a video camera, LED lights, and a microphone, allows the wearer to project her face and voice in real time onto the facade of the Centro Cultural in Tijuana.**

**Phillips:** I very much appreciate that you have talked so honestly and critically about your work.

**Wodiczko:** I will never know enough. I like what I make to be the subject of some critical response. We need artists to accept multiple roles and visions. It doesn't hurt and often helps to be an artist. Not an artistic artist, but a life-artist. Or as Nietzsche described his task in his first great work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, "to see science through the optics of the artist, but art through the optics of life."

Krzysztof Wodiczko was born in Warsaw, Poland, and studied industrial design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. His work involves the investigation of strategies of communication in the public sphere. His projects have been exhibited at the Bienal de São Paulo (1965, 1967, 1985), Documenta (1977, 1987), the Venice Biennale (1986, 2000), and the Whitney Biennial (2000). In 1998, he was awarded the Hiroshima Peace Prize. He is head of the Interrogative Design Group and director of ACT, the center for Art, Culture, and Technology, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Patricia C. Phillips is the editor-in-chief of *Art Journal*. She is a professor of art at the State University of New York, New Paltz.