

# Krzysztof Wodiczko

## *The Tijuana Projection, 2001*

*The Tijuana Projection*, a live projection using high-powered video projectors and sound equipment, took place February 23 and 24, 2001, and lasted about three hours each evening. This was the closing event of InSite 2000, a several-month-long public art festival on both sides of the Mexican-American border.

Tijuana is the centre of a belt of maquiladoras, border factories, some 500 of which have been built there by transnational corporations. Foreign materials and parts are shipped to them for assembly by cheaper Mexican labour, with the finished products being returned to consumer markets throughout the world. Young women from all over the country provide 90% of this labour.

Whether or not these new workers actually cross a border, they must constantly pass through a multitude of difficult social and psychological checkpoints. There is, for example, the crossing from the feudal status of a village-based social economy to the post-modern, global, industrial assembly line of the maquiladoras. What effects does this drastic shift of context have as it rockets these women right over the process of modernization? At the same time they cross from a traditional division of labour to new identities where the woman is the preferred wage earner, even head of household, rather than the now often unemployed husband.

Six women from various generations participated in this live projection. They were able to animate El Centro Cultural's huge globe-like form, an urban icon of the city, transforming its faceless, silent mass into a manifestation of their presence. This presence, whose force is so central to the social economies of Tijuana and the world, usually remains hidden from view, as does their testimony. The participating women sought to voice the difficulties of their personal situations—domestic and sexual abuse, exploitation in the work-place, police violence. Trying to find the words to describe traumatic life events rarely addressed either in their culture or in the media, each of them projected her face on to the central sphere and amplified her voice via a specially designed head-mounted camera-microphone and wearable transmission equipment and loud-speaker system.

For these women this was a great step forward psychologically and ethically. This performative speech-act became a transformative action making the passage from private confession to public testimony possible—an important bridge to developing a capacity to intervene in real life. This may bring Tijuana a little closer to fully acknowledging who really inhabits her and how.



