Projection on the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D. C., 1988

The Hirshhorn Museum is centrally located on the Mall in Washington, D.C. between major national sites, including the Washington Monument, the Capitol Building, the White House, and the National Archives. The projection took place over three nights in the week preceding the 1988 U.S. Presidential Election. The projected images refer to the slogans from the media-oriented Republican Party platform (anti-abortion, anti-gun control, anti-social welfare programs).
This exhibition documents many of the outdoor slide projections engineered by Polish-born artist Krzysztof Wodiczko during the past seven years. In the dark of night, usually sponsored by a municipal or arts organization and with the use of xenon arc slide projectors, Wodiczko has projected enormous slide images onto the facades of public buildings and monuments in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Europe.

These images, often parts of bodies or distinct objects, reinvigorate somnolent structures. Wodiczko intends "to attack the . . . [building] by surprise." He intervenes in order to illuminate the complicit role that historical monuments and public edifices have unwittingly or unwittingly assumed in the acceleration of society's dysfunction. Wodiczko's concerns are far-reaching: the increasingly desperate plight of the homeless in the face of real estate speculation; the rampant escalation of environmental pollution; and the psychic and social costs of increased nationalism, militarism and consumer demands.

While most other artists (even those who also take a critical stance) make objects to be exhibited and collected, Wodiczko has situated his work in a more marginal location on several levels. His projections are ephemeral public spectacles. They usually exist for only a few nights. These projections are, in fact, located outside of museums and usually outside of a museum context. Furthermore, the issues they introduce into the realm of public art are often just barely acceptable to the local civic leadership. It is public art which hopes to provoke public discourse. A Wodiczko projection intends to energize a complacent structure and a complacent citizenry.

Paradoxically, Wodiczko's short-lived projections affirm the power of the reproduced image just at a time when we are nearly anesthetized by the steady bombardment of visual representations in our daily lives. The "after-image" of a Wodiczko projection, often hauntingly memorable, comes to the public either through direct experience or, more likely, through subsequent reproductions (such as those in the MATRIX space).

The strength of Wodiczko's work will be confirmed for Athenaeum visitors if, after seeing these "projections of projections," they find themselves regarding some of the buildings and monuments in our own city with a slightly more interrogatory gaze.

Andrea Miller-Keller
Curator of Contemporary Art

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Projection on the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial on
The Boston Common, Boston, Massachusetts, New Year's Eve, 1987

This projection was part of Boston's New Year's festival called "First Night" and was seen by more than 200,000 people. The images of homeless people, tools of their survival, and the elements of a homeless habitat were projected on the four sides of the memorial's base. The image of a condominium building under construction by the Turner company was projected onto the Memorial's column. The Turner company is a well-known construction company engaged in new real estate development projects in Boston and elsewhere. As everywhere else in Boston, real estate development projects contribute to the production of homelessness.
Projection on Memorial Hall, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1986

Like all War Memorial auditoriums in the United States, the Allegheny County Soldier's Memorial in Pittsburgh operates both as a cultural center (concerts, conventions, ceremonies) and a display of war images and memorabilia. These provincial displays often lack the grandeur of their European counterparts, but sometimes have a strangely persuasive intimacy. The images are projected on either end of the facade, where names of battles from various wars are engraved. There is an iconographic tradition of the skeleton playing an instrument in European and Latin American popular art, the dance of death. The accordion is the most complex but portable instrument for wandering musicians. It is also a working class instrument and appropriate to Pittsburgh's history and memory and social structure.
The Border Project: San Diego/Tijuana, 1988

Projection on the U. S. Side of the Border: San Diego Museum of Man (known as the California Tower)

The landmark "California Tower," designed in the Spanish colonial style, was a former pavilion at the 1915 Panama Exhibition and now houses the San Diego Museum of Man. Statues of Spanish and English explorers form a colonial "altar" at the entrance.

The handcuffed hands of an "undocumented" farm worker holding a basket of fruit and vegetables, and armed with a grape-picking knife were projected onto the tower. The hands of an upper-class consumer armed with a baroque-style gold-plated knife and fork were projected on both sides of the entrance to the Museum of Man.
Projection on the Mexican Side of the Border: El Centro Cultural Tijuana, Mexico

Inside the main (spheric) section of El Centro Cultural Tijuana, a multi-media program in Spanish and English titled "People of the Sun" projects a glorious image of the "history" of Mexican civilization. The image of a captured "illegal alien," hands clasped behind the head in the moment of being arrested at the border, was projected onto the sphere. Spanish question marks were projected on both sides of the image. Tijuana, Mexico is the busiest illegal crossing point in the United States.

These two projections took place on consecutive nights in January, 1988, and were organized by the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art.
Projection on Martin Luther Kirche, Kassel, West Germany (Documenta 8), 1987

The Tower of Martin Luther Church is one of several landmark structures that survived the Second World War bombings of Kassel. It functions today as an unintentional monument to the city's destruction. Six months before the projection, and for the first time since the war bombings, the city of Kassel was forced to stage preparations for a massive evacuation of its inhabitants. This time not bombs but polluted air from the factories of Leipzig and Frankfurt became a deadly threat. Winds gradually blew away the polluted air from the Kassel Valley. However, the evacuation alert stays alive in everyone's memory. The image of a praying figure wearing protective clothing, an oxygen mask and a Geiger counter was projected onto the neo-gothic tower of the bombed church.
Projections on the National Monument and the New Observatory, Calton Hill Memorial, Edinburgh, Scotland (Edinburgh Festival), 1988

For the first ten nights of the Edinburgh Festival, this offered, at one of Scotland’s most popular tourist attractions, an alternative to the celebratory mood of an international arts festival. On the unfinished National Monument to commemorate the Battle of Waterloo, under the projected phrase *Morituri Te Salutant* ("Those who are about to die salute you"), six images were projected which represent some of the less visible social groups who live in Edinburgh (and other cities): a young, homeless person sitting on suitcases; an elderly homeless person; a homeless person eating from a can; a disabled person with crutch and suitcase; a drug addict injecting himself; a battered, evicted pregnant woman. On the cupola of the nearby neo-classic Observatory, the face of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was projected with her eyes gazing at the National Monument and on the architrave the projected phrase "Pax Britannica."

For two hours on Saturday night it looked like South Africa had finally decided to own up. A large swastika appeared at the top of its embassy building in Trafalgar Square. But it turned out to be the work of Polish projection artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, who had been exhibiting images of his past "projections"—beamed onto public buildings—at the Institute of Contemporary Art and Canada House last week. "It was impossible for me to avoid doing something," said Wodiczko. . . . He had been beaming images onto Nelson's Column and decided the embassy was too good an opportunity to miss. "It would have been ethically unacceptable not to take advantage of the equipment I had," he added.

A group of young liberals who had been picketing the embassy came over to show their approval, as did a young man from Soweto. Eventually the police asked him to take it down, saying that they had had complaints. "They didn't notice it for a long time," said Wodiczko. "I think because it looked like it was always there, it looked very natural." (Duncan Campbell from City Limits Magazine, London, 6-12 September 1985, p. 7)
Dominant culture in all its forms and aesthetic practices, in what it says and does not say, remains in gross contradiction to the lived experience, communicative needs and rights of most of society, whose labour is its sole base.

Transmitted not only by the media but also by the Built Environment, and controlled by its commercial and political sponsorship, it creates miscommunication, alienation, misrepresentation and life-in-fantasy while holding a monopoly over public life, education, and the development of a communicative experience as well as over the representation of all the vital public issues, of individual life in society and of its history. The contemporary urban environment of merciless "re-development" contributes to the proliferation of a pseudo-social sphere with its pseudo-public space decorated with pseudo-historical districts, the environment of the real-estate city, and urban pseudo-experience.

In this situation, art must operate as a socio-aesthetic practice that acts critically both from within and from the peripheries of culture, un-doing what culture does by analyzing, resisting, and countering its miscommunicating and misrepresenting practices. While un-doing, art must (in support of and in collaboration with critical popular culture) create new or transform existing culture. In transforming the existing culture and designing new social communication, art must aesthetically articulate and make public the existential complexity of the lived experience and the conditions of life of alienated, speechless individuals and isolated silenced groups in the fragmented and misrepresented society of today.

Krzysztof Wodiczko
December, 1988
New York, New York
Works in MATRIX:

The installation includes two slide projectors showing "projections of projections," including approximately seventy-five color slides of Wodiczko's outdoor projects since 1982. The exhibition also includes seven light boxes of the following projects: Duke of York Column and Steps, London, 1985; Memorial Hall, Pittsburgh, 1986; Martin Luther Kirche, Kassel, Germany, 1987; Soldiers and Sailors Memorial, Boston, 1987; The Border Project: San Diego/Tijuana, 1988 (sponsored by the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., 1988.

Selected Public Projections:

University of Toronto Power Plant '80; Toronto Subway '80; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge '81; School of Architecture, Halifax '81; Nova Scotia Power Corporation Plant, Halifax '81; Scotia Square Towers, Halifax '81; City Hall, and Empress Hotel, Peterborough, Ontario '81; Art Gallery of Ontario, '81; War Memorial, and Festival Center Complex, Adelaide '82; MLC Centre Tower, Sydney '82; American Express Building, Sydney '82; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney '82; Bow Falls, Banff, Alberta '83; Memorial Hall, Dayton, OH '83; Federal Court House, London, Ontario '84; Museum of Natural History, Regina, Saskatchewan '83; Main Train Station and Victory Column, Stuttgart '83; South African War Memorial, Toronto '83; International Conference of Humanities on George Orwell's 1984, Columbus, OH '84; AT&T Building, NYC '84; Tower Gallery, NYC '84; The New Museum/Astor Building, NYC '84; Seattle Art Museum, '84; Memorial Arch, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn '85; Bundeshaus, Bern '85; Royal Bank of Canada, Montreal '85; Performing Arts Center, State University of New York, Purchase '85; Grand Parade War Memorial, Halifax '85; Nelson's Column, London '85; Duke of York Column and Steps, London '85; South Africa House, London '85; Guildhall, Derry, Northern Ireland '85;Arsenal; Piazza San Marco Campanile (two projections), Santo Maria Formosa and Campanile, Condottiere Colleoni Monument, Venice Biennale '86; Replica of Colleoni Monument, Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw, Poland '86; Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst '86; Memorial Hall, Pittsburgh '86; Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles '87; Museum Fridericianum, Martin Luther Kirche, and Statue of Frederick II, Documenta 8, Kassel, West Germany '87; Soldiers and Sailors Memorial, Boston '87; The Border Project: San Diego Museum of Man/El Centro Cultural Tijuana (sponsored by La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art) '88; Neuschottburg, Heldenplatz and Flakturm Arenberg Park, Wiener Festwochen, Vienna '88; R.C. Harris Water Filtration Plant, Toronto '88; National Monument and New Observatory, Calton Hill Memorial, Edinburgh Festival '88; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. '88.
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