

Abstract

Krzysztof Wodiczko's project "The Investigators" is an interactive, public video projection installation which took place originally in Weimar over two days between the 26 and 28 August 2016. Projecting live images and voices of refugees onto the statues of Schiller and Goethe before an assembled public raised on platforms to counteract the plinths that raise the statues from the street, Wodiczko animates the monument for the living. Not only giving new meaning to the monument by dredging up the historical episode in which Goethe sheltered Schiller as a refugee, this work proposes a new model that considers for monuments as unfinished. Talking back to the monument, occupying its space and animating it in real time, is not just a technical feat but a political achievement.

The Investigators

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO

Krzysztof Wodiczko is an artist, theorist, and educator; Professor in Residence of Art, Design, and the Public Domain at the Harvard Graduate School of Design; and a former director of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT. He is renowned for his large-scale slide and video projections on architectural facades and monuments. He has realised more than eighty such public projections in Australia, Austria, Canada, the UK, Germany, Holland, Northern Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. Since the late 1980s, his projections have involved the active participation of marginalised and estranged city residents. Simultaneously, he has been designing and implementing a series of nomadic instruments and

vehicles with homeless, immigrant and war veteran operators for their survival and communication. Since 1985, he has held many retrospective exhibitions at international institutions, more recently at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea (2017). Among many awards, Wodiczko received the Hiroshima Prize in 1998 for his contribution as an artist to world peace. The Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes, France, is a permanent public art project he developed in partnership with architect Julian Bonder which opened to the public in 2011. His major publications include *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews* (MIT Press, 2003) and a comprehensive monograph *Krzysztof Wodiczko* (Black Dog, 2011).

The following is an edited transcript of Wodiczko's own words.

THE **STATUE** represents the past that cannot be changed. We are all very much overwhelmed by the presence of monumental history. So, we need to learn how to enjoy our opportunity to make change, despite the fact that public space is barricaded by monuments. We must keep in mind that memorials are not only statues, but also the names of streets or plazas, subtitles written on buildings (quotations and so forth). Cities are themselves monuments. Why are European cities packed with war memorials and why do the names of various places, streets and plazas commemorate wars and war heroes, victories or even defeats? The city is one big memorial to war. All of our cities are constantly preparing us for another war. All the monuments that are war memorials are actually ideological war machines. Our textbooks, pedagogy, tourism, political speeches and events, mobilise these monuments to keep us ready for another war. Of course, if that's the case, then there is another project for monuments, especially war-related monuments: how to make use of them in a way that will undo their war-making operation without destroying them? Destroying them will do nothing, because we are all war memorials inside of ourselves.

My first projection took place in Krakow on the lonely, very tall tower of the City Hall, a fourteenth-century structure with some additions from the seventeenth and the nineteenth century. People in Krakow were meeting next to the tower of the City Hall, because it is a very prominent, vertical, symbolic landmark. People identified with this tower. I asked a group of people to animate the tower, to become the tower, to inhabit it or wear it. The public already were in this tower, so the project asked them to accept an uninvited roommate, so

to speak, or to cohabit this tower symbolically and *meet* this other person. As such, the tower inside us was also inhabited by another person. This way, the project existed simultaneously on a huge scale and also on the scale of the individual, on the person scale. All my projections address the architecturalisation of our bodies and the embodiment of architecture.

The large scale of those people projected onto monuments and buildings was not simply to make them larger, to make them gigantic and monumental—the monumentalisation of those invisible and marginalised, oppressed people. No, for me, it is more important to make ourselves smaller. I mean, to feel it in our neck when you look up. In our body there is a memory of listening to parents, teachers, also the figures of authority, of course, who are always high up on balconies and podiums or whatever. Already this suggests that we can learn something from those people as an act of going back into a pedagogical position. In my works, on the other hand, there is a meeting through those monumental structures.

I observed in a huge crowd during its first projection in Krakow (when mostly women who were tortured by their husbands were speaking, talking about domestic violence at night—it is a nightmare so to speak), the woman standing next to me without knowing that I was behind this project, said in Polish—it is difficult to translate because it is a play on words – she asked how it was possible that people don't believe people but they believe the tower. In Polish it is much better because 'believe' and 'tower' is the same word. Why? Because most of the miracles take place in towers. That was my answer. But there are too many answers, of course, because people *are* those towers already. In the projections, those people were telling the truth through those towers. Something was maybe easier for them to say through the theatrical process of recording and re-recording in the studio and animating those towers.

People speaking through the tower were attempting to speak many times in the film studio we had set up to record them. They were on a special pedestal in the studio, so the camera could film them from the same angle. They were in the process of becoming a speaking tower. They went through stages of smoking, listening, tears—when they could not say anything anymore—starting to speak and then stopping, getting down, going back, calming down, speaking to others who also were wishing to speak. They went through a theatrical process that takes a long time, such as vocal preparations. They were learning how to speak with emotional charge about things for which there are normally no words. In this way, the mediating aspect of the body of architecture is very important: recording and learning how to speak and listening without too much fear, to stay there despite the rain and cold and listen to this more than once, maybe three times.

The statue is animated and people are there. Some of them are passing by without noticing; others are watching it, standing for a long time, they see others not standing but passing by, but they take another perspective about themselves in relation to others, they communicate, discuss things with others (as Brecht would like) who come from a very different social stratum. So, in a way, this already is a pretty good use of those monuments. Those who are still in charge of parks and monuments, for example in New York city, they have to give permission for these projections. Before I acquired permission they were very reluctant, because those monuments are protected by monument associations. In London, for example, one of the most powerful monuments is actually private property: the Prince Albert Memorial opposite the Royal College of Art. So, the park department, the association of monuments, the police, park rangers, the city, they all seem to be nervous about animating or bringing those monuments to life, because they are afraid that there will be some scandal.

A memorial statue of a hero or civil leader invites the public to occupy a certain kind of space, the space of the civic public, a space set aside for good citizens. Memorials are tools that members of the public use to think of themselves as part of a state or a nation, or a society or a civilisation. My work offers a different kind of invitation. In a sense, I ask the participants who animate the statue to join the hero, to occupy the space of the hero, to become the thing that other people orient themselves around socially. It might be possible to say that the projections restructure our relationship to public memorialisation. I am interested in the significance of participating in memorialisation rather than simply witnessing it. I hope that is true. If this is true, then I would be happier with what I do. At the same time, there is one more step I managed to achieve in this direction in Weimar.

This animation of statues involved a couple of historic figures in one moment. Goethe and Schiller together in front of the theatre building. In Weimar the theatre was placed where the Weimar Republic was formed, so it is a very important witness to the Weimar Republic, fascism, to events in the 1960s. So now Schiller and Goethe have an opportunity to be useful for a communication between refugees from Syria and Afghanistan and some other countries, and the residents of Weimar. The refugees were the ones who became Schillers and Goethes! In the theatre we created a special monument animation studio. Refugees could become Schiller and Goethe in real time, because of a very good team from various departments of the Bauhaus University. Alongside the use of pre-recorded material, they created a mapping team that was so skilful that when refugees took the right position, more or less simulating the poses of Schiller and Goethe, parts of their bodies were immediately taken and organised so that it perfectly fitted Goethe and Schiller within maybe one or two minutes. In this way the rotation of more and more people could speak to the public as if they were Schiller and Goethe. But this was not everything.

A special podium was built for the members of the public to stand up and raise themselves to the height of Schiller and Goethe, and speak back to the refugees or with them via the sculpture, because there were additional cameras, so the refugees could see interlocutors from the public on the screens. They could also see themselves, the way they looked like Goethe and Schiller. They had feedback. They could also start a conversation or ask people to move around so that they could see them better, and so on. There was not that much in-depth conversation, but it was a strangely powerful meeting moment between refugees who became new historic monuments and new philosophers and artists, and these residents who could actually establish contact with this monument. It was almost on a one-to-one basis.

Why Schiller and Goethe? Schiller was a refugee at that time and in order to get to Weimar he had to cross two or three checkpoints. At that time there were various kingdoms and principalities in Germany, and he was a deserter from the army. He was a doctor in the army. He didn't want to be a doctor, so he escaped. He was eventually protected by Goethe. So, some of those Goethes were not refugees, but those who help refugees. Some people who spoke to the monument from the podium went inside the theatre and became, also, Goethes. This was the beginning of this type of use of the monuments of the past to see the future in a more complex way. Of course, those refugees didn't really give a glorious picture of the future. They were seeing the danger. They arrived, fleeing the war; they were welcomed as refugees. At the same time, their arrival has created the potential for fear and danger of a civil war in the host country.

It is hard to help monuments be useful for the living. We have to make the past useful for the future. We have to live with the past without being imprisoned by it. From the psychoanalytical point of view, or maybe the psychotherapeutic point of view, a monument, a statue especially, is similar to

our life in the past. The past cannot be changed. We cannot change those statues unless we do something radical to the culture. Or we cannot change the past we have in ourselves. But we can live with the past in a livelier, worth-living way. Maybe a creative and transformative way? In that sense, a person who is animating the statue in my projections must animate him- or herself first. Also, in an attempt to animate the statue, it helps to have an image for that process. One is integrating it, interiorising it, back. People are listening to me! The whole city is actually listening to me! The statue is part of a larger symbolic environment, which stands for the past.



Images courtesy Krzysztof Wodiczko Studio.





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