Quaderni di *Venezia Arti* 6

e-ISSN 2784-8868

Space Oddity: Exercises in Art and Philosophy

edited by
Giulia Gelmi, Anastasia Kozachenko-Stravinsky,
Andrea Nalesso

Edizioni
Ca'Foscari

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Quaderni di *Venezia Arti*

Serie diretta da
Silvia Burini, Giovanni Maria Fara

6

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Palazzo Malcanton Marcorà, Dorsoduro 3484/D
30123 Venezia

URL https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/collane/quaderni-di-venezia-arti/

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Venezia
Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Venice University Press
2022

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Edizioni Ca' Foscari
Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari | Dorsoduro 3246 | 30123 Venezia
https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it | ecf@unive.it

1a edizione dicembre 2022 | 1st edition December 2022
ISBN 978-88-6969-675-6 [ebook]

Space Oddity: Exercises in Art and Philosophy / edited by Giulia Gelmi, Anastasia Kozachenko-Stravinsky, Andrea Nalesso — 1. ed. — Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2022. — xii +296 pp.; 23 cm. — (Quaderni di *Venezia Arti*; 6)

URL https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-675-6/
DOI http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-675-6

Abstract

The volume includes papers presented at the 4th Postgraduate International Conference of the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage of Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Venice, 5-7 October 2022). Our understanding of reality is filtered through myriad media, and we have the ability – and power – to gather, ignore, tweak, and explore the information needed to define what we mean by 'reality'. The concept of 'space' – in its broadest sense – plays an essential role in an individual's explanation of reality, and we must deal with a plurality of models and concepts of it. As elaborated in the text *Space and Time in Art*, the Russian theologian, philosopher, and art theorist Pavel Florensky states: "all culture can be interpreted as the activity of organising space". Starting from this culturological reading, Florensky identifies three spatial "dimensions" and three corresponding genres of activity: (1) The space of our strong relations and the activity of 'Technique'; (2) The mental space and its organisation and the activities of 'Science' or 'Philosophy'; (3) The space between the previous two, and the activity of 'Art'. Ultimately, all have the same aim: to change reality to reconstruct space. According to leading scholars and critics, the late 1980s saw a "spatial turn" take place in literary, social, and cultural studies. In 1991 Fredric Jameson theorised a shift from the paradigm of time to the paradigm of space, from modernism to postmodernism. The pandemic era has refocused investigation on the present paradigm, where Florensky's spaces have been concentrated through cyberspace almost overnight. Through the notion of the 'semiosphere' – as elaborated by Juri Lotman 100 years ago – we collectively pondered the question: "should we reconsider the concept of space as a cultural category altogether?".

Keywords Art history. Philosophy. Space. Displaying. Architecture. Historiography. Visual studies.

Space Oddity: Exercises in Art and Philosophy

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Display Tools: From Theory to Practice

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Darkness Visible: The Art of Occupying Public Space as a Space of Appearance

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Abstract During the twentieth century, art has increasingly dialogued with public space to escape the normative role of institutional exhibiting contexts. However, the first artistic efforts in public spaces mostly failed to reconsider what 'public' and 'space' could represent, thus implicitly upholding the status quo ruling those spaces. By discussing two case studies – namely, Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967-72), and Krzysztof Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection* (1986) – this paper argues for the presence of artistic operations that instead focused on a critical rethinking of 'public space' from a site of transit or an extension of the art system to a space of political appearance.

Keywords Visibility. Public space. Photography. Martha Rosler. Krzysztof Wodiczko.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Ground Control: Spatial Ideologies in Art and Public Space. – 3 Just a Shot Away: Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*. – 4 Citizen Erased: Krzysztof Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection*. – 5 Conclusions: Just What Is It that Makes Photography in Public Space So Public, So Agitating?

1 Introduction

During the twentieth century, and more extensively since the 1960s, art has increasingly incorporated the spatial dimension within the definition of the artwork and its experience. By merging the art object with its exhibiting site – be it a gallery, a museum, or, eventually, public space – artists have attempted both to de-define what could

Edizioni
Ca'Foscari

Quaderni di *Venezia Arti* 6
e-ISSN 2784-8868
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-675-6

Open access
Submitted 2022-10-28 | Published 2022-12-21
© 2022 Borselli | 🅭🅯 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-675-6/001

be properly accepted as artwork and to renegotiate the traditional relationships underlying the art system. Despite such utopian élan, the first artistic efforts in public spaces merely tried to bring contemporary art to the widest possible audience, thus failing to reconsider, in and through public art, what 'public' and 'space' could represent. To counterpoint this condition, the objective of this paper is to stress, through the use of two case studies, the presence of artistic operations – namely, Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967-72), and Krzysztof Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection* (1986) – that instead focused on a critical rethinking of 'public space' from a site of transit or an extension of museums and galleries to a space of political appearance.

2 Ground Control: Spatial Ideologies in Art and Public Space

The history of western art since the early twentieth century could be effectively framed as a story of *space*. As pointed out by the art historians Francesco Poli and Francesco Bernardelli (2016), although virtually every artwork relates in some way to a concept of space – represented, assumed, purely imagined, or even refused –, it is only with the vanguardist movements that a more deliberate shift from the space *of* the work to the space *around* the work occurs. Artists operating at the beginning of the century and, more extensively, during the 1960s and 1970s were animated by a burning desire to exceed the "frame-and-pedestal syndrome" (Lippard 2001, viii), i.e., the representational and self-referential constrictions that supposedly hindered a more direct relation among the artwork and the 'real world'. In other words, if according to Dan Graham all artists "dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art" (Graham, in Bishop 2012, 1), practices such as collages, assemblages, ready-mades, installations, environments, and so on all witness a widespread tension towards "a continuous confrontation with the real space and its progressive involvement in the making of the works" (Poli, Bernardelli 2016, 11). This, in turn, "elicits a sense of reciprocity based on a real mutuality in which *art creates an environmental space* to the same extent that *the environment creates art*" (Celant 1976, 5; emphasis in the original). After these experiences, therefore, the critical paradigms for the comprehension of an artwork could no longer exclude the external conditions of its production, display, and reception. However, *which* aspects of space were to be considered for the understanding of the work has long been related to strictly formal parameters, such as volumes, shapes, size, scale, 'full-ups' and 'voids', light and darkness, meant to enhance the viewer's experience of the artistic object. This, of course, is not neutral and traces back to Duchamp's seminal insight into the power of the exhibition venue to automatically guarantee the artistic status of an artefact, that is, to legitimise through dialectics of inclusions and exclusions highly constructed hierarchies of cultural and economic value (Lebensztejn 1981, 19-47). Following this fundamental acknowledgement of the role of the exhibiting context as content (O'Doherty 1999), artists have increasingly recognised the normative function of the modernist spatial ideology, as well as the situated character of the autonomous, unique masterpiece crafted by a solitary genius. As clarified by Miwon Kwon (2002, 13) in her genealogy of the notion of 'site specificity', the attack on "the 'innocence' of space and the accompanying presumption of a universal viewing subject" started with a redefinition of the *site* – now seen as both a physical and cultural framework – and of the *spectator* – a social subject endowed with class, race, gender, and sexuality. In this perspective, the materialist investigations conducted by authors engaged in various forms of Institutional Critique (Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers, and Robert Smithson, among others) exposed the space of presentation as a relay of interrelated places and economies to be challenged in its hermeticism and gate-keeping role. Therefore, in Kwon's words, "To be 'specific' to such a site […] is to decode and/or recode the institutional conventions so as to expose their hidden operations" (Kwon 2002, 14). A substantial mistrust towards the very possibility of conceiving artistic projects inside the institutional framework that could resist the art system's operations of absorption and neutralisation, together with "a developed sensibility about audience, social strategy, and effectiveness" (Lacy 1995, 20), fuelled the emergence, in the 1990s, of practices in the context of 'new genre public art' and 'socially engaged art'. These explicitly rejected the use of traditional venues, the exclusive role of the sole 'author', and, often, the production of specific objects in favour of collaborative processes of social transformation *for* and *with* specific communities – typically disenfranchised social groups – in their own public spaces. On the one hand, therefore, the site was not so much a geographical connotation, but rather a network of social relations; on the other hand, it was profoundly grounded in the everyday places of participating communities. In their overt political commitment, in their frequent belonging to the same communities their work was supposed to affect, and in their refusal of the gallery-museum nexus, socially engaged artists directly opposed the aesthetic models imposed by what had hitherto been labelled as 'public art'. This mainly coincided with either gigantic minimalist sculptures indifferently disseminated through the city – installed since the early 1960s and ultimately referred to as 'plop art'[1] – or integrated projects of architecture and art that, since the mid-1970s, sacrificed their aesthetic qualities to a mere functional ethos as urban furniture. In both cases, the proposed notion of 'public space' was not as *public* as presented. On the contrary, it proved to rely on a neutral and formal ideal of space, as well as a unified and generic audience. However, according to philosopher Henri Lefebvre, space is never neutral:

> Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies. (Lefebvre 1976, 31)

In this perspective, artworks in public spaces that show – more or less openly – indifference to the uneven social conditions hidden beneath their sites are not just naïve forms of urban embellishment or amelioration. Instead, they subtly but purposefully uphold the *status quo* ruling those spaces.[2] In other words, they must at least be reconnected to an understanding of space, as Michel Foucault has extensively elucidated, as an active instrument for controlling, disciplining, and policing bodies (see Crampton, Elden 2007), so as to reproduce the hierarchies and power inequalities behind the established apparatus (Mathews 2010; Mould 2017; Pritchard 2020). Once the normally invisible connections of political and economic interests behind public space are laid bare, a further recalibration of the concept of space may be disclosed. More specifically, the intertwined poles of 'space' and 'time' – in their relation to discrete approaches to the exercise and/or claiming of power – are essential to the distinction operated by Michel de Certeau between 'strategies' and 'tactics:'

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[1] The term is commonly attributed to architect and professor James Wines, who coined it in the late 1960s in reference to what he considered as non-specific artworks casually 'dropped' into urban space.

[2] Regarding the social inequalities concealed by these practices, art critic Grant H. Kester has correctly stated that: "While the artist was privileged in all of his or her exemplary individuality, the public was treated as an undifferentiated and essentially passive mass on whom a work of art would be benevolently conferred" (Kester 2011, 192).

> I call a 'strategy' the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment'. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles', 'targets', or 'objects' of research). […] I call a 'tactic', on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a border-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality. […] The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'. (de Certeau 1984, xix)

Space, therefore, is both the objective of the apparatus's strategic control *and* the place where power is (re)produced. However, it can also become, under specific circumstances, the battlefield where everyday practices of resistance can take place. Although tactics can only insinuate themselves into the other's place and hope to gain temporary victories, they can provisionally 'occupy' public space to provoke a questioning of the established order and interfere with consensus-building mechanisms. Even with its structural and systemic violence, space can thus provide the place and medium for a counter-appropriation by individuals. This collective reclaim of the ground as the commons occurs, according to leading visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff (2017, 208), "by means of the refusal to move on and the insistence that there is something to see here". In other terms, if a public sphere can only emerge "with the breakdown of the consensus that is otherwise always silently presumed" (Marchart 2019, 145), such public sphere can retain democratic contours "only insofar as its exclusions are taken into account and open to contestation" (Deutsche 1996, 289). The inextricable entanglement between public space, struggle for power, and visibility is thus apparent, and its consequences are eminently political. Close to the Foucauldian notion of the archive as "the law of what can be said" (Foucault 1972, 129), visibility directly relates to what Jacques Rancière has termed the 'distribution of the sensible', and has a strictly normative character. In fact,

> Rather than simply a sensory register […] visibility concerns an enlarged domain that gathers together and interweaves the sensory and the representational (or, symbolic) registers. It is a complex terrain where a continuum between what can be seen and what can be said is laid out. (Brighenti 2017, 1)

The capacity of visibility of not only scoping reality but already acting upon it verifies director Wim Wender's statement whereby "The most political decision you make is where you direct people's eyes" (Wenders, in Levi Strauss 2003, 1). However, when that decision is exclusively retained in the hands of the apparatus, all the subjects that do not reinforce its economic interests and governmental objectives are systematically excluded from visual and political representation. Against this dramatic imbalance, and in the effort to return public attention to 'what has to be seen here', alternative paradigms of political togetherness must then arise to guarantee everyone the right to appear and have a place in public space. In this way, space undergoes a further evolution into what Hannah Arendt (1958) has defined as a 'space of appearance', a social space in which matters of public concern may be articulated from different perspectives. In this complex task of fostering the development of conflictual, democratic, politically engaged, and plural tactics of counter-visibility, a major role can be played by the visual domain *par excellence* – art. In the following paragraphs, therefore, two examples of artistic operations based upon a critical rethinking of 'public space' from a site of transit and an extension of the gallery-museum nexus to a space of visible appearance, political representation, and activist occupation are discussed.

3 Just a Shot Away: Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*

Even though Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* **[figs 1-2]** is today recognised as a seminal photographic series and has been vastly discussed regarding its visual approach and formal aspects, as well as its iconographic references, the relevance of public space in the meaning of the whole project has long been downplayed, if not intentionally ignored.[3] When she started working on the project, Rosler had already received an artistic formation at Brooklyn College and was familiar with the latest trends in Pop Art and Fluxus, as well as the poetry avant-gard, documentary photography, and film (Buchloh 1999, 23-4; Butler 2007, 290). Nevertheless, her pictures were not displayed in galleries or museums as fine art prints, but disseminated through underground publications and, most importantly, distributed as flyers during protests (Rosler 2019, 352). As Rosler later recalled,

> it seemed imperative not to show these works […] in an art context. To show anti-war agitation in such a setting verged on the obscene, for its site seemed more properly 'the street' or the under-

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[3] In this respect, see Dawsey 2016, 71; De Zegher 2005, 21-5.

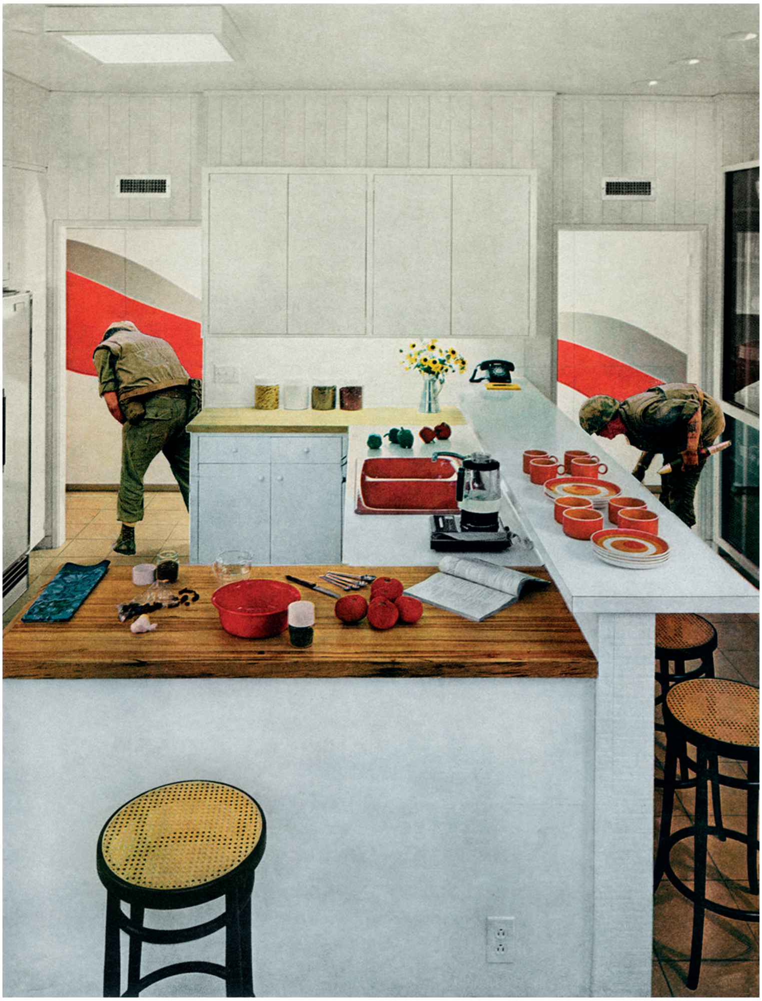

Figure 1 Martha Rosler, *Red Stripe Kitchen*, from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*. 1967-72 ca. Courtesy of Martha Rosler and Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan

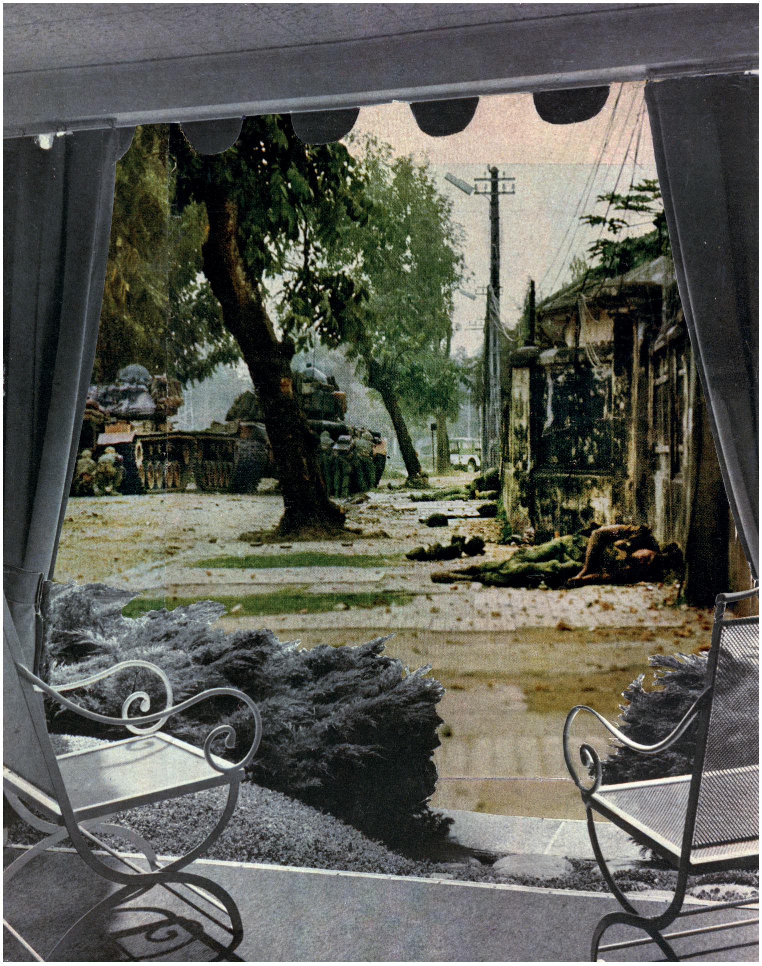

Figure 2 Martha Rosler, *Patio View*, from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*. 1967-72 ca. Courtesy of Martha Rosler and Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan

> ground press, where such material could help marshal the troops. (Rosler 2004, 355)

The importance of the space *around* the series – that is, its site of distribution and reception – directly relates to the space framed *within* the pictures. Rosler's politicised practice began, in the artist's own words, when she recognised that "things were left out of explanations of the world that were crucial to its understanding, that there are always things to be told that are obscured by the prevailing stories" (Rosler 2004, 353). More specifically, the *House Beautiful* project was born out of dissatisfaction with the 'official rhetoric' legitimising American occupation of Vietnam. However, if artistic critiques of the conflict during the late 1960s and early 1970s typically dwelt on vivid depictions of the devastation wrought by the war or on representations of rallies to affiliate viewers with protest movements, the series aimed in a different direction. Borrowing from the practice of political photomontage initiated by Berlin Dadaists such as Georg Grosz, John Heartfield, and Hannah Höch, Rosler combined images of casualties and combatants from the war front with glossy photographs of luxury domestic interiors presented in mass market magazines – *House Beautiful*, as the title suggests, being the main source for such appropriation. The objective of this cut-and-paste process was to hinder the very possibility of a clear separation between the perceived security of American homes and the 'remote' locations where the conflict unfolded and was supposed to be confined. "I was trying to show", Rosler recounts, "that the 'here' and the 'there' of our world picture, defined by our naturalized accounts as separate or even opposite, were one" (2004, 355). Photomontages thus allowed the artist to reach for "an imaginary space where different tales collided" (353). Such 'symbolic collision' was not just about making the Vietnam War visible – a task made redundant by the massive media coverage of the conflict endorsed by the government itself, which had turned it into the first 'living-room war'. On the contrary, it aimed to challenge received narratives, but also to expose the audience's complicity with the same ideologies that justified American military campaign. By 'bringing the war home', and hence collapsing as much the domestic sphere as the battlefront within a cohesive symbolic space, the project highlighted the normally invisible connections between postwar housing development, consumerism, gender role differences, and domestic containment, ultimately revealing how these "Expertly designed images of domestic bliss were launched to the entire world as part of a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign" (Colomina 2007, 12). The same notions of home, technological advancement, and nuclear family that were supposed to provide "a secure private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world" (May 2017, 1) were thus disclosed as part of the larger American Cold War ideology, whose main premises were the framing of consumption as freedom, the emphasis on gender differentiation, and, lastly, the spread of American liberal democracy to foreign countries. Moreover, through her disturbing and destabilising photomontages connecting the idealised middle-class lifestyle and the Vietnam War, Rosler exposed not only the situated and highly ideological character of the American Cold War political model but also the flaws and weaknesses of its promises. In its aim "to expose the ideological norms internalized by the individual and exerted by a controlling bureaucracy, by industrial production, or by the media" (Eiblmayr 1998, 160),[4] the *House Beautiful* series therefore operated a twofold spatial movement. In the first instance, the work visually and conceptually reconnected the war front to the American domestic realm, seamlessly combining troops and housewives, tanks and patios, battlefields and modernist sculptures. Subsequently, in an opposite move, this newly constructed 'imaginary space' was returned outdoors, in the streets, where it could serve an agitational purpose.

4 Citizen Erased: Krzysztof Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection*

Public space was also central to Krzysztof Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection* **[fig. 3]**, although only as its conceptual framework and not as its site of presentation. As its original subtitle indicated, the project solely existed as *A Proposal for the City of New York*,[5] never getting to be materially executed on its expected location. On the opposite, it was exhibited at the 49th Parallel, Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, in late 1986, as a series of four slide images projected onto the gallery's walls; a brochure containing an artist's statement complemented the projection. Coming almost two decades after the beginning of Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, *The Homeless Projection* emerged from a radically different context, which reflected in both its motivations and its political scope. Instead of joining and fuelling widespread protests such as the anti-war agitations at the core of Rosler's work, Wodiczko, as a resident of the area near Union Square in New York City, directly intervened in the urban and social context he belonged to. Through the 1980s, the city of New York was undergoing a massively distributed

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[4] Although Eiblmayr's analysis is not referred solely to *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* but to Rosler's whole production, her observation is particularly applicable to the series presented here.

[5] The second part of the work's title has later been changed to *A Proposal for Union Square*, as it is now mainly known.

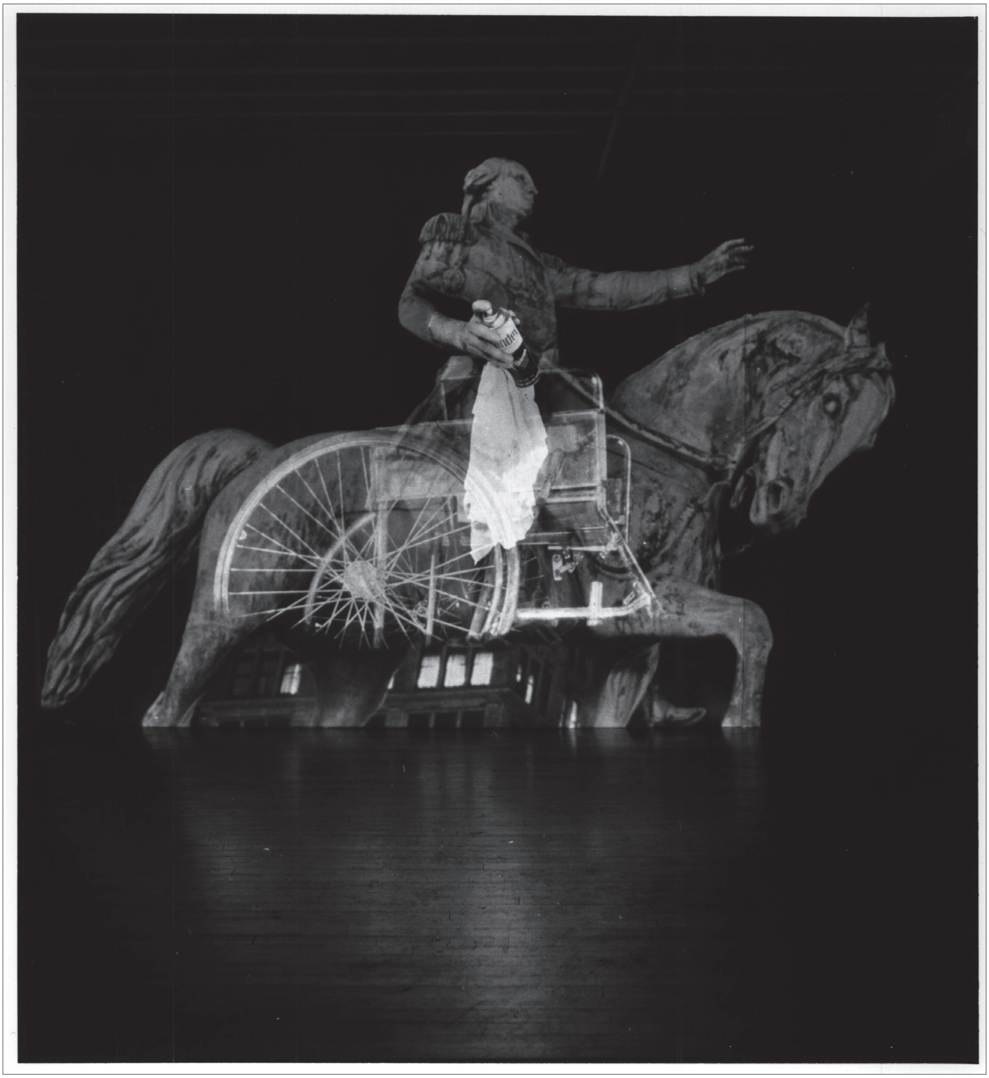

Figure 3 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York*. 1986. George Washington Monument. © Krzysztof Wodiczko. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co., New York

and highly problematic urban revitalisation scheme promoted by the real estate industry with the endorsement of the city government. In the specific case of the area of Union Square, the rise of high-rent luxury buildings and the parallel dissolution of affordable housing stocks mostly relied upon the exploitation of the place's 'past' and monuments to justify their premises. The mass eviction of lower-income tenants, as well as the forced expulsion of the many homeless 'inhabiting' the square – explicitly designated by the planning documents as "socially undesirable population"[6] – was in fact legitimised "in recognition of the area's unique character or quality".[7] In particular, the promoters of the redevelopment of Union Square 'appropriated' the square's historical statues of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Marquis de Lafayette, and the Allegory of Charity to develop a self-legitimising discourse and a distorted image of the site's history. This, on the one hand, aimed at proposing an extremely questionable continuity between the values of liberty and patriotism represented by the Square's mythical past and the real estate's gentrification project, and, on the other hand, omitted the gatherings, protests, and assemblies that had also participated in the place's life. Aesthetics, as Rosalyn Deutsche (1996, 19) puts it, played therefore a prominent role in framing the beautification program "under the aegis of historical preservation, restoration of architectural tradition, and reinforcement of the existing urban context", while diverting attention away from the displacement of minorities, homeless, and low-income current residents that would have resulted. However, as philosopher Fred Evans has aptly observed, these communities of citizens could be obscured, but not be completely 'erased:' "As disguised, the voice of the expelled is still tacitly contained within the revitalization discourse, in tension with it, even if only as a logical implication, an antonym, of the promised elegant neighborhood" (Evans 2019, 37). In advancing his counter-plan for Union Square – expressed through photographs and texts so as to mimic the bureaucratic descriptive forms of the renovation planning – Wodiczko focused exactly on this entanglement of presentation and obliteration, visibility and obscurity, removal and reappearance. In his images, in fact, photographs of the homeless forced to abandon the area were cast upon the monuments, thus attempting to both bring attention to the displaced subjectivities and disrupt the often-internalised unawareness of the ideological role of the sculptures. This way, as Justyna Wierzchowska (2015, 2) has pointed out, "when the cold, petrified, and obdurate structure is flooded with an elusive image or an emotionally-charged narrative, the taken-for-granted narrative is suddenly deconstructed”. While relying on the same aesthetic elements commodified by the real estate’s ‘official narration’ – i.e., the statues of American traditional heroes –, the artist adopted a fundamentally opposite approach to the site. In her pivotal study of Wodiczko’s work, architecture theorist Deutsche thus described the author’s operational paradigm in relation to the politics of urban space:

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[6] Department of City Planning, *Union Square Special Zoning District Proposal*, November 1983, 3.

[7] "Glossary: Selected planning terms applicable to New York City real estate development". *New York Affairs*, 8(4), 1985, 15.

> Its form: site-specific, temporary, collaborative with its audience; its subject matter: the capitulation of architecture to the conditions of the real-estate industry; the content of its images: the fearful social outcome of that alliance. These qualities render *The Homeless Projection* useless to those forces taking possession of Union Square in order to exploit it for profit. (Deutsche 1996, 6)

For Wodiczko, therefore, architecture was not a formally defined space, nor exclusively the place for the strategic exercise of power, but the starting point for tactics of symbolic re-appropriation. In the artist’s own words,

> The building is not only an institutional ‘site of the discourse of power’, but, more importantly, it is a meta-institutional, spatial medium for the continuous and simultaneous symbolic reproduction of both the general myth of power and the individual desire for power. (Wodiczko 1999, 46)

As expressed in the five theses declared by the artist in the accompanying brochure, architecture could then serve as a means for redistributing the visibility unequally controlled by the city officials, according to specific objectives:

> To magnify the scale of the homeless to the scale of the building!
> To astonish the street public with the familiarity of the image and to make the homeless laugh!
> To employ the slide psychodrama method to teach the BUILDING to play the role of THE HOMELESS!
> To liberate the problem of the homeless from the unconscious of the ‘architecture’!
> To juxtapose the fake architectural real estate theatre with the real survival theatre of the homeless! (Wodiczko 1986, 16)

Besides the common appropriation of the square’s monuments, *The Homeless Projection* and the revitalisation program mainly differ in that

> mainstream planning claims that its proposals will restore a fundamental social harmony that has been disrupted while Wodiczko's project illuminates the prevailing social relations of domination and conflict that such planning both facilitates and disavows. (Deutsche 1996, 12)

Nevertheless, as Evans (2019, 43) has underlined reconnecting the work to Foucault's concept of 'genealogy', "the aim of Wodiczko's counter-architecture is 'not the erecting of foundations' but to disturb 'what was previously considered immobile'". In political terms, the notion of 'public space' underlying the gentrification scheme was a rational, deliberative, 'habermasian' public sphere ultimately aimed at the creation of consensus – pursued, however, for the benefit of private interests. On the contrary, *The Homeless Projection* relied on an 'agonistic' understanding of public space as a conflictual sphere in which the "hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices – practices that will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony […], without any possibility of final reconciliation" (Mouffe 2008, 9-10). Accordingly, Wodiczko reclaimed a role for aesthetic expression as "art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate" (Mouffe 2008, 12), rather than the utilitarian tool for the promotion of a self-legitimising discourse.

5 Conclusions: Just What Is It that Makes Photography in Public Space So Public, So Agitating?

Both Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* and Krzysztof Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection* crucially put photography at the very centre of their project of "bringing together conflicting narratives" (Wierzchowska 2015, 5). Whether through photomontages or projected photographs, the two authors appropriated existing images (or monuments) as 'screens' onto which to display the "hidden histories" (Rosler 2004, 372) obscured by hegemonic discourses. "Photography", Mirzoeff (2017, 211) explains, "creates a ground against which figures or subjects can be seen", and it is exactly to this capacity of the medium that authors such as Rosler and Wodiczko directed their interest. However, it is important to stress that the photographic tradition these artists turned to was not fine art photography – nor, in a broader sense, the art world itself. As already mentioned, the administrative aesthetics chosen by Wodiczko for the presentation mode of *The Homeless Projection* was designed to emulate and parody the official language of the revitalisation plans, in order to destabilise and expose the opaque mechanisms of institutional urban planning. In Rosler's case, the departure from traditional exhibiting contexts marked an even stronger interference in the public sphere, and yet numerous efforts have been conducted to reframe her work as related to the high art scene. In this perspective, while it is certainly true that urban settings are not directly presented inside the space *of* the project, this does not necessarily imply – as conversely argued by art historian Stephanie Schwartz (2020) – that the series should be seen through the lens of the art world, rather than the social sphere. The decision not to work exclusively with images of the war front or the street, but rather on the intertwined representations of the perceived security of the home and the horror of the conflict, must not be understood, as discussed above, as a disappearance or weakening of the social. On the contrary, it directly aimed at countering the mass media imagery and the subtle complicity, deceptively normalised by magazines such as *House Beautiful*, between Cold War American ideology and the domestic sphere. Consistently, Rosler's return to Dada in Berlin resumed a conception of works "no longer understood in the traditional sense, as a unique piece to be exhibited in a gallery", and used instead "as posters, newspapers, tools for demonstrative actions" (Patti, Sacconi, Ziliani 1979, 24). Hence, just as the Berlin group's signature innovation of the photomontage "attacked the traditional notion of art as unique beauty created by an inspired genius" (Altshuler 2008, 189), Martha Rosler could later describe her project in these terms: "I saw *House Beautiful* not as art. I want it to be agitational".[8] Significantly, it was not until the late 1980s that an art collector proposed Rosler produce a portfolio of the images composing the *House Beautiful* series (see Wallis 1992, 105; Rosler 2004, 355). Moreover, the scarce possibility, fully acknowledged by that time, of creating artworks *outside* the art system that could then be recognised *within* it, especially due to the financial cuts to public support for artists started by Reagan's administration, is among the motivations that eventually led the artist, once she reprised the project in 2004 as a response to American military action in Iraq, to display the new pictures in institutional exhibiting contexts. In their respective projects, Rosler and Wodiczko thus saw photography as both the instrument of repressive forms of political domination and "a place of refuge, from which the discourse on the res publica may be revived" (Azoulay 2008, 32). By fighting the powers that be on their own constitutive grounds – that is, public space and the symbolic realm – *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* and *The Homeless Projection* proved to rely on a specific and politically-charged redefinition of the meaning of 'public' and 'space'. Publicness, in and through the two works, was defined as the conflictual tension they fostered between official narratives and obscured statements, or, in Fred Evans' terminology, as the struggle between 'oracles' – characterised by the fact of presenting themselves "as absolute truths and thus not in need of significant revision" (Evans 2019, 38) – and "voices that have been muted by dominating forces" (Evans 2019, 44). In spatial terms, this tension over the 'right to speak' holds at a distance any possible understanding of the city as an outdoor extension of galleries or museums, which would automatically uphold the capitalist and autocratic network of power relations underlying both hegemonic discourses and the art system. By oppositely interpreting public space as "a sphere of assembly, debate, and political struggle" (Marchart 2019, 41), the works of Martha Rosler and Krzysztof Wodiczko can therefore be reconnected – and, in fact, even pave the way – tosocially engaged art's operational approach, in that they "are not simply symbolic actions in the spectator system, but rather actions in the social world with a symbolic and aesthetic dimension" (van den Berg 2019, 25).

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[8] `http://www.moma.org/collection/works/152791`.

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