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ENCOUNTERING THE VIRTUAL IN AFFECTIVE SPACES. KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO'S *OUT OF HERE* VETERANS PROJECT

Abstract: This paper aims to consider Krzysztof Wodiczko's Veterans Project in the context of the central tenets of ethico-aesthetics and the concept of the virtual proposed by Gilles Deleuze, which emerge from his discussions of representation processes. The installation *OUT OF HERE*, which metaphorically refers to the plight of traumatised American war veterans, triggers a trans-mediated dialogue with spectators, reworking passive attitudes towards the position of the excluded. In fact, Wodiczko has been utilising American institutional spaces to prove that they alienate the marginalised to uphold the dichotomy between the centre and periphery. Hence, the aim of this paper is to show how Wodiczko's project becomes an affective space, an assemblage of different affects and raptures, that organizes a productive encounter, an intensive event, that allows spectators not only to experience records of traumatic events but primarily to increase their capacities to act in the world and to produce new modes of their "becoming".

Keywords: Krzysztof Wodiczko, affective space, the virtual, Gilles Deleuze, ethico-aesthetics

The virtual possesses the reality of a task to be performed or a problem to be solved. It is the problem which orientates, conditions and engenders solutions, but these do not resemble the conditions of the problem.¹

Introduction: The virtual and affective encounters

This paper explores Krzysztof Wodiczko's *OUT OF HERE: Veterans Project* – which had its premiere in the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (ICA), Massachusetts, in 2009 – in the context of the artist's philosophical considerations on the abolition of war and the role of the public domain in this process. The installation, which directly refers to the plight of traumatised American war veterans, victims and civilians in wars zones, is partly based on interviews conducted with soldiers and civilians from Iraq and Afghanistan, and official statements issued by the US

¹ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, transl. P. Patton, Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 212.

government. Interestingly, whether in his public projections, war veterans' vehicles² or installations, Wodiczko has been utilising American war discourse for years, trying to juxtapose certain types of military language with the testimonies of those who directly experienced war atrocities. While examining the effects of the wars on traumatised soldiers and civilians, who tend to be removed from social consciousness once they have returned from combat, the artist opens up channels of expression for a highly marginalised in public discourse. The confrontation of these two types of narratives in the 2009 installation, more broadly speaking, enables the artist to reveal the dislocations between the peripheral – the socially and culturally invisible – and central debates on the ambivalent position of military groups in large conflicts.

Even though the majority of his installations and public projections often trigger a trans-mediated dialogue – which is composed of materials taken from various types of media coverage and documentary – it is the direct engagement of spectators and the methods of collaboration that have always distinguished his output from the other contemporary artists. His works thus become practices that creatively interact with the world – and eventually rework passive attitudes towards the position of the excluded.

As the article highlights, *OUT OF HERE* aptly corresponds to these artistic methods, producing a break with habitual formations and ruling signifying regimes of power and representation processes. The work does not thus conform to traditional methods of rendering military actions, whose role is often reduced to a symbolic and monumental meaning that can produce a cult of sacrifice for one's country. Moreover, it does not strengthen a national identity founded on heroism and martyrdom. Contrariwise, Wodiczko's work demonstrates, in the idiom of Deleuze and Guattari, that "every work of art is a monument, but here the monument is not something commemorating a past, it is a block of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and that provide the event with the compound that celebrates it."³

In other words, Wodiczko not only evokes war events from the memories of those involved in his work but predominantly activates "a form of fabulation" from the present perspective, "following an invisible thread that is more nervous than cerebral."⁴ And thus, in this account, his work creates new potentials that emerge out of the actualisation of the monumental and institutional spaces, transforming, if

² War Veterans projects, which have been of different formats and techniques, have filled public and institutional spaces since 2008. *War Veteran Vehicle Project* was one of the first works in the series and was designed by Krzysztof Wodiczko and Theodore Spyropoulos in 2008. It is a "vehicle with mechanical wings as 'communicative shields' equipped with video screens and speakers for transmission of the memories and images of war" (D. Apel, *War Culture and the Context of Images*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ–London 2012, p. 278). The artist constructed the vehicle, which reminds us of his communicative and interrogative instruments and first vehicles for the homeless, to offer a communication tool that would enable veterans to express their traumatic experiences.

³ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, transl. H. Tomlinson, G. Burchell, Verso, London 1994, p. 167.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

only for a moment, our sense of our “selves” and our experience of our world once we enter the museums and galleries. Hence, the aim of this paper is to show how Wodiczko’s project becomes affective⁵ space, an assemblage of different affects and raptures, that organises a productive encounter – an intensive event – one which allows spectators not only to experience records of traumatic events but primarily to increase their capacities to act in the world.

Since the central focus of this following article is on the artistic strategies that – while disclosing socio-cultural mechanisms responsible for the marginalisation of victims and veterans of wars in the public domain – activate a “past” to summon the audience into being “here” and “now”, the opening quotation aptly captures the line of argumentation of the proposed analysis of Krzysztof Wodiczko’s installation prepared for the ICA. Taking into account Deleuze’s assertion from *Difference and Repetition* that the various actualisations of the virtual are solutions to the world’s maladies, in this sense various forms of art can be seen as a panacea for the problems affecting particular areas at a given time. For the philosopher, the virtual is associated, then, with the creative act, understood here as the realm of affect that needs to be actualized through difference and creation, not by resemblance and limitation. In this way, art is that genuinely creative act that actualizes the virtual, different affects, and a pure past that cannot be fully present⁶; a difference from a pre-existing field of potentialities. Drawing from Simon O’Sullivan’s reading of Deleuze, this process of direct activation of affects/potentialities “gives art an ethical imperative, for it involves a ‘moving beyond’ the already familiar (our ‘actual’ selves), precisely a kind of ‘self-overcoming.’”⁷ Hence, artistic practices unfold socio-cultural blockages to perform particular socio-cultural roles and thus can suggest solutions to certain problems. This activism stems directly from the fact that, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari further note in their seminal *What Is Philosophy?*, artists are presenters, inventors, and creators of affects who reopen unknown territories to dispose of already familiar (our “actual”) selves.⁸ And if we, for instance, contrast this attitude towards artistic process with Theodor Adorno’s assertions that art must be a critique of reality,

⁵ In this article I explore Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of affect seen as “the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide or come into contact” (F. Colman, *Affect*, in: A. Parr (ed.), *The Deleuze Dictionary: Revised Edition*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010, p. 11), or rather, “passages of intensity, a reaction in or on the body at the level of matter” (S. O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari’s Thoughts Beyond Representation*, Palgrave, New York 2006, p. 4). In contrast to psychological and neuroscientific approaches to the study of affect, for Deleuze, affect can be physically and temporally produced. “It is determined by chance and organisation, and it consists of a variety of factors that include geography, biology, meteorology, astronomy, ecology and culture” (F. Colman, *op. cit.*, p. 12). In other words, affect is seen as a moment of transformation that occurs when bodies collide or come into contact, and thus this article considers work of art as a space that influences and is influenced by the bodies present in it.

⁶ G. Deleuze, *op. cit.*, pp. 211–212.

⁷ S. O’Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁸ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

operating as a negative dialectic and positioning itself within the melancholy field, art, for the philosophers, is a practice that “incorporates or embodies virtual; it gives it a body, a life, a universe.”⁹ Art becomes a space in which spectators experience works while being engaged in the sensations and possibilities generated by different affects. As Simon O’Sullivan observes art practice, in effect, becomes “a kind of ethico-aesthetics; the organisation of productive encounters through art.”¹⁰ These productive encounters themselves allow for the generation of “common notions”, understood simply as the concepts we form about the world when we experience the joy of two bodies that agree to come together. Deleuze remarks that “the common notions are an Art, the art of the Ethics¹¹ itself: organising good encounters, composing actual relations, forming powers, experimenting.”¹²

Wodiczko’s ethico-aesthetics: the World Institute for the Abolition of War

In the works of Krzysztof Wodiczko, the notion of ethico-aesthetics¹³ is pivotal. While actualizing the virtual, his works recall war experience – which cannot be wholly present – producing deregulating practices and rituals that form zones of contact with the excluded from socio-cultural discourse. There is no denying the fact that his artistic activism stems directly from his war and emigration experiences, both civilian and military. It is significant to mention that while hiding in non-Jewish Warsaw with his Jewish mother Wodiczko experienced war as an infant and child, and its devastating aftermath, in which his mother lost her entire family.¹⁴ Additionally, as he was brought up in communist Poland, he had to deal with the oppression of the autocratic system of the Stalinist period. Disciplined by centralized authority and its aesthetics, trained as an officer in the obligatory Studium Wojskowe, he had to serve in a regular military unit, familiarizing himself with the tactics of military activities responsible for the formation of the culture of war. Interestingly, the artist emigrated

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 177.

¹⁰ S. O’Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹¹ For Deleuze and Spinoza the science of affect is associated with ethics; “the organisation of one’s world so as to produce joyful encounters, or affect which are of the ‘joy-increasing type’, those which increase our capacity to act in the world” (*ibidem*, pp. 41–42).

¹² G. Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹³ Interestingly, Adam Ostolski, author of a recent publication devoted to Wodiczko, which was published by Wydawnictwo Krytyka Polityczna in 2016, entitled his book *Wodiczko. Socjoestetyka*, referring to socio-aesthetic aspects in the artist’s works. The book comprises several interviews conducted with the artist, unfolding the central tenets of his art engaged in a dialogue with the public domain.

¹⁴ D. Apel, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

from Poland in 1977¹⁵, during the communist regime, exactly when a political opposition was consolidating. Over time, socio-political activism contributed to the establishment of an anti-communist movement. And even though Wodiczko did not actively participate in the mobilisation of Polish society, he faced political oppression that limited his artistic practices and forced him to live in exile. Thus, the stories of exclusion, alienation, struggle and hostility laid the bedrock of his numerous public projections, installations and constructions of performative objects. Undeniably, the artist's experience of war, military service and state repression resonate with the plight of traumatized civilians and soldiers in other military conflicts. Although he has avoided direct political commentaries, he became an artist-activist, defying symbols of authority and repression to reveal the underlying meaning of power in the contemporary world, claiming that "the cult of war has perpetuated itself over the centuries, with the recent ones witnessing virtually preparations for wars."¹⁶

Even though Wodiczko's socio-cultural activism has been visible since his earliest works, his latest "un-war projects" became part and parcel of his theoretical approaches included in his 2012 publication *The Abolition of War*. The book documents, contextualizes and theorises projects conducted in different regions of the world, drawing up a form of ethico-aesthetic manifesto, in which the artist questions and re-imagines institutional sites – historically, politically, and technologically. In tandem with his theoretical insights, he produces a series of works situated within the specific ecology of socio-cultural contexts, strengthening his conviction that his ideas should not be left without any materialization. For instance, the project *The Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War*, which proposes the attachment of a transparent scaffolding to the Parisian historical monument, reworks its practical and symbolic function. The Arc is, therefore, disarmed and loses its patriotic significance as it is no longer a site commemorating those who fought and died for France, the tomb of the unknown soldier. It became "an institutional and architectural idea for an international transdisciplinary centre offering both a symbolic structure for inspiring philosophical, psycho-analytical, and political engagement, and an activist centre to encourage analytical, proactive, and transformative approaches to the war-abolitionist process."¹⁷ According to Rosalin Deutsche, "Wodiczko approaches the Arc of Triomphe not only as a symbol but also as a symptom of our culture of war."¹⁸

¹⁵ Wodiczko has emigrated twice. Firstly, from Poland to Canada, and then soon afterwards he settled in New York City, working in Cambridge, Massachusetts – first at MIT, then at Harvard University. Interestingly, he could not get back to Poland until the fall of communism, carrying out his major artistic projects outside Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, over time, he became one of the best-known and most influential critical artists in the world (P. Piotrowski, *Krzysztof Wodiczko and the Global Politeia*, in: B. Czubak (ed.), *Krzysztof Wodiczko: On Behalf of the Public Domain*, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź 2015, p. 50).

¹⁶ B. Czubak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁷ K. Wodiczko, *The Abolition of War*, Black Dog Publishing, London 2012, p. 58 (translation from culture.pl).

¹⁸ R. Deutsche, *Un-War: An Aesthetic Sketch*, in: B. Czubak (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 49–60.

The role of the World Institute for Abolition of War is to rework the imperative of war and explore the memorial through a wide array of activities that would widely disseminate a peace-making agenda, reconstitute an immense capitalist war machine and implement practical programmes.

As the artist emphasizes, the un-war process should actively engage people in discussions, debates, and arguments entwined with an artistic and cultural agenda that will imply the difficulty and duration of work that needs to be done by different generations.¹⁹ In fact, the primary question that the artist is posing in his artistic practices related to the project is therefore: “How can art contribute to undoing the Culture of War²⁰ and transform it into a new un-war culture?”²¹ And as he indicates in his writings, “un-war is the new state of mind that enables the process of understanding, uncovering and undoing war.”²² In other words, as the artist suggests, “the culture of war cannot be simply forgotten and eliminated from our collective and individual consciousness. It is a deep, long-term process of educational work.”²³ Approached from this perspective, war is not just a military conflict, but a deeply ingrained cultural phenomenon. And thus, as the artist implies,

war exists as something hidden within us and should be brought symbolically and culturally to our singular consciousness before it erupts outward as bloody conflict, the other implication of the term ‘un-war’ is that war is an old state of mind and mental condition installed in us from without, through the Culture of War.²⁴

In this respect, it has to be reworked by events inspired by states of anticipation and actions that go beyond our expectations.

Wodiczko’s projects thus offer indeterminate and alternative spaces in which spectators can undergo dynamic transformation and metamorphoses while entering possible worlds with new affective encounters. Hence, the artistic practice is no longer a cultural object but a communal feeling that harbours within an excess, a rapture – between the actual and the virtual – that redefine representational and mimetic processes, mobilizing endless bundles of affects.²⁵ And more importantly, art, for the

¹⁹ A. Ostolski, K. Wodiczko, *Wodiczko. Socjoestetyka*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2015, p. 169.

²⁰ As Wodiczko emphasises in his writings, a culture of war has been omnipresent in almost all spheres of life: in education, school curricula, high-and-low-brow art, behavioural patterns, constituting the framework of wars, and in fact their major cause (P. Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, s. 54). Therefore, he initiated the World Institute for the Abolition of War to stress multilateral and non-government alliances in the formation of un-war discourse (R. Deutsche, *op. cit.*, p. 17).

²¹ K. Wodiczko, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 13.

²³ B. Czubak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁴ K. Wodiczko, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁵ As understood by Deleuze and Guattari, art is “a block of sensations”. They are particularly interested in what art does while producing affects.

artist, might form new ethical ways of approaching a world dominated by military politics.

OUT OF HERE: (Re)visiting the war zone

At this point, it is crucial to provide insight into the installation *OUT OF HERE: The Veterans Project* that aptly corresponds to the major tenets of the Institute's proposal and its ethico-aesthetic agenda. The work resembles a form of documentary practice based on first-hand accounts of war experience culled from workshops and conversations with soldiers who have returned from combat, as with Middle-Eastern residents currently living in the United States. They all collaborated with the artist, acting as advisers, consultants, and actors in the preparation of his final version of the project. It is crucial to highlight that, while working with those affected by many forms of trauma, Wodiczko regularly constructs a medium or a tool²⁶ of communication for them. Nevertheless, this is usually a public, institutional space whose structure is reshaped by the artist to awaken social consciousness, showing new pathways of thinking and constructing a platform of dialogue free from oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and autocracy. To achieve this effect he often prepares his projects in collaboration with human rights and non-governmental organisations.²⁷

The artist collected a variety of stories while preparing the *OUT OF HERE* installation. Nonetheless, this project is not a linear, story-based narrative, but it oscillates between documentary and film dialogue accompanied by abstract visuals and intensive sonic layers. The spectators' initial expectation while visiting gallery space fades away as soon as they enter a darkened room and become, in fact, entrapped by the loud audio material that bombards them from different directions. The installation does not allow them to focus on and contemplate the overheard voices and gunshots, as the accumulation of different sounds produces an unusual degree of dissonance, or rather an assemblage of sounds rubbing up against another. The sonic material is undeniably the most powerful element of Wodiczko's work, and it establishes a clear dominance over the visuals. The artist engages spectators to participate in the work beyond the sense of sight, thereby encouraging sensory immersion rather than just detached looking. In this way, the dominant audio material makes spectators explore these moments of intensity, opening up different realms of audio experience at the same time. And even though the sounds are as much relational as they are differential,

²⁶ I am referring here to his projects *Alien Staff* (1992), *Porte-Parole Mouthpiece* (1996) or *Aegis: Equipment for a City of Strangers* (1998). These are tools of intercultural communication and self-regulating devices that are often bodily extensions, enabling speakers to present themselves in a variety of fora.

²⁷ J. Stępień, *Nomads and Migrants in Affective Spaces: Krzysztof Wodiczko's Sans Papiers and the New Mechelenians Projections*, in: J. Witkowska, U. Zagratzki (eds.), *Exile and Migration: New Reflections on an Old Practice*, Verlag Dr. Kovac, Hamburg 2016, pp. 87–101.

they become a particular object that has no substance, as a kind of ideal object in the installation that, nonetheless, has real material effects (i.e. literal sounds).²⁸ In effect, the spectators' experience of aurality is transformed into a moment of fabulation.

In this sense such an experience of what, in the idiom of Henri Bergson, "we had perceived without seeing"²⁹, brings spectators to a point at which they need to concentrate on the audio loops with the spoken material. Wodiczko juggles with different documentary materials borrowed from the mass media. We are exposed to the voice of Barack Obama from radio or television coverage and a man singing in Arabic, perhaps an imam chanting. At the same time, we can hear street noise, presumably coming from a nearby open market. Interestingly, Obama is quoting Thomas Jefferson: "Our wisdom will grow with our power. We must use diplomacy to solve our problems whenever possible"³⁰, confirming the political strategy of the USA government and its involvement in military actions. Then, we hear a media report indicating that "a senior Hamas official has told Al Jazeera that this is a Martin Luther King moment"³¹, underscoring the hope that Obama will change conditions for Muslim and Arabs.

Needless to say, the place of these events is not defined for us, and documentary archive material points to the way that language functions as a reminder that rhetorical agencies sustain a discourse of intense negativity and unresolved violence to rationalize the importance of military conflicts around the world. Suddenly, there is a deep, mechanical, portentous sound that is hard to place; then vehicles arrive. "We were here before. Remember that?", a man says in the background. "What's going on?" another voice crackles over a radio. "Get the kids out of here," says a third."³² However, the dialogue blends in perfectly with the rest of the spill-over due to the quick changes of audio materials, which produce again a sort of dissonance. Also, sound snippets are arranged in echoing, overlying loops that at times blur into an indistinguishable mush. The sonic display ends with a sudden explosion of window panes, which are presumably blown inward. A couple of holes are blown through the wall, toward spectators, who are now "psychologically hunkering down in the dark, terrorised by loud shooting from the outside. We are bombarded by the sounds from all sides as if we were trying to take it all in. Finally, the loop ends with their plaintive voices rising in a heartrending lament for the dead or dying child."³³ We have rapidly shifted our attention from the children to the soldiers, to the dog, to the mothers. Mo-

²⁸ D. Cecchetto, *Humanesis: Sound and the Technological Posthumanism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis–London 2013, p. 2.

²⁹ H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, transl. M.L. Andison, Totowa, Littlefield, Adams & Co., New York 1965, p. 36.

³⁰ D. Apel, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 39–40.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

ments of silence pass and the cycle of violence and terror begins once again, almost in a shamanic mode.

To heighten the effect of alienation and surprise, Wodiczko constructed space with the minimal interior design. His project is placed in a dark space that is designed to remind us of a “warehouse or an old military base” – as the wall text at the entrance provided by Wodiczko indicates. Once we cross its threshold, the gallery room soon becomes a sort of military zone that undergoes constant deterritorialization.³⁴ This process of transformation is generated by the production of different and fractured sound temporalities that take spectators to an indefinable spatiotemporal place. And, in fact, we are somewhere “in-between”, which eventually is neither a museum room nor a street in a military zone, but the point where the possibilities of being in – and becoming with – are unfolded to us. Thus, Wodiczko’s work is a form of minor practice³⁵ that generates new forms through a break with, but also utilisation of preconditions for, the media material and testimonies, which here belong to the realm of the Deleuzian virtual. This practice has to be constantly activated by the spectators who form new relations to the material chosen by the artist. The installation becomes a practice yet-to-come. And as Wodiczko indicates in the gallery brochure, “I believe that if there is any truth, it lies in realising the impossibility of gaining full access to the truth of such an experience.”³⁶ This non-definable documentation from war zones contributes to the production of constantly new understandings of the conditions of military conflicts, unfolding affective possibilities and thus the reality of veteran and civilian war terror, and it provides deeper insight into the difficulties of their reintegration back into society.

To accentuate this process of actualisation of war-time experience, the artist projects windows only near the ceiling on three sides of the room, so that spectators look upward and at first see nothing but blue sky and clouds. Surrounded by seven of these blurred windows, each divided into three sections, spectators are physically locked in a building located in the zone of fire. And more importantly, spectators are never able to see anything apart from the windows and the sky. The vision is subordinated to audio perception, and thus the spectators are drawn into a sensory familiarity with horror and chaos experienced on a daily basis by civilians and soldiers during the war. In this respect, this embodies Wodiczko’s conviction that it is impossible to truly depict the events behind the windows as they are beyond representational processes. It is strictly an affective process of realisation for the spectators. His work is hence to be directly experienced; it is what makes up our world and ourselves. *OUT OF HERE*

³⁴ Deterritorialization for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari can be physical, mental, and spiritual and it is tied to the very possibility of change; it is a movement that produces change.

³⁵ Minor practice, as understood by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is a kind of operational tool, a way of thinking through what political or artistic strategy might involve. Its major role is to deterritorialize the mainstream and dominant politics.

³⁶ D. Apel, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

is a subjective and segmented, non-representational experience, which appears to be even more dreadful and haunting as we are in the focal point of war events.

The installation is the collision of affects, the encounter with the invisible voices of trauma enabling us to experience the direct effects of war discourse and social militarization that shape the public domain. Piotr Piotrowski noticed that “devoted to veterans, those projects are like war from the other side of the mirror, the mirror here is the TV screen, where war is shown every day. To reach them one needs to get through to the other side of the mirror.”³⁷ If cinematic and televised images allow us to face the reality of military conflicts, Wodiczko’s work exceeds this visual level, operating almost like an interactive platform, an affective space that generates constantly new sensations. In its heterogeneous format the project resembles more a video game than a film, in which players explore various dimensions of war mechanisms and, more importantly, are able to participate in the events and conditions created by the artist. The visual sphere, or maybe its minimal content in the installation, is just one of the triggers that activate the ongoing combat. This is also our struggle to confront the realities of a war machine (re)staged for us and to empathically (re)connect with the military assemblage happening in the galleries’ space. In effect, we are “to experientially understand the conditions and causes of specific encounters and then utilise knowledge in organising one’s life.”³⁸ Additionally, Wodiczko leaves for us the imperceptible, the virtual, a possibility, an alternative temporality to explore, treating it – as Dora Apel notices – as

a metaphor that separates us from the experience of those who are at war halfway across the world, or locked inside their interior traumas. Breaking through the wall to the ‘outside’ is impossible, yet the attempt to do so is the imperative of Wodiczko’s installation, which attempts to decrease the distance between spectators and those on the other side of the wall.³⁹

Concluding Affective Encounters

To see the unseen is not enough; one must explore the realm beyond the known, beyond the representable, and affectively reconnect with the world’s processes. For Deleuze it is the actualization of the virtual, the past, that generates productive encounters that may eventually solve the world’s problems. Art for the philosopher is thus an affective practice that exerts its impact not only on a beholder’s body but also on the thoughts that result in the ethical and political effectivity of art. Undeniably, analysed from this perspective, Wodiczko’s war is triggered off “here and now”, involving spectators who have a chance to actively participate in the past events removed from the public discourse. The project gives art an ethical imperative by activating

³⁷ P. Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 54–55.

³⁸ S. O’Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁹ D. Apel, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

spectators to move beyond the already familiar representations of military conflicts and their commemorating qualities, leading them almost to a ritualistic reconnection with the sensual and intellectual dimension of the work of art. We were not there, but we are here, exploring the “other worldliness”, the other dimension of war terror and its dramatic results on war veterans and civilians, where violence lingers in unspeakable ways.

In other words, Wodiczko’s projection enables the spectators to experience the invisible, the hidden in the public discourse, and to form an affective bond with the socio-cultural margin that often does not exist in our consciousness. He rouses the public from slumber with a set of liberated singularities, words and movements; the installation art can be seen as an empathic and affirmative reconnection with “the other worlds” (the world of a molecular becoming; a nomadic world with potential). There is no doubt that, in light of this, affective spaces in the artist’s works gain new life, formerly repressed zones and narratives being newly opened to us. Our focus, as we have experienced, is on the present moment, thanks to our encounter with Wodiczko’s messages. As the artist concludes during a telephone interview conducted by Dora Apel, “the kind of work I make is on the side of those who have less access to rights than others, is for me a way to contribute to democracy. Because you don’t find democracy, you make it.”⁴⁰ This assertion is in line with the quotation of Gilles Deleuze which opens my considerations on Wodiczko’s projects. It emphasizes the performative nature of the virtual. The problem has to be activated, deterritorialized and performed to transform socio-cultural consciousness; otherwise, it remains in the realm of a traumatic past removed from public discourse.

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⁴⁰ A telephone conversation with Krzysztof Wodiczko, 30 August 2008. The seven-and-a-half-minute video is available at: <http://kwodiczko.com/WarVeteranVehicle/> (access: 26.06.2018).

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