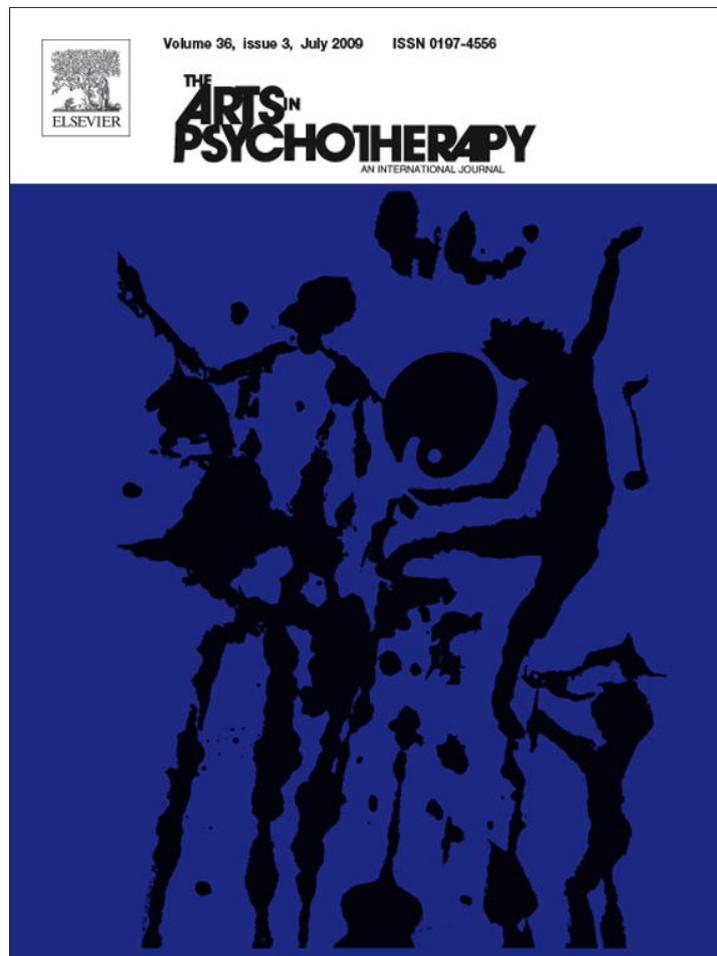


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## The Arts in Psychotherapy



## Therapeutic thinking in contemporary art Or psychotherapy in the arts

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show the possibilities of art as a political and social tool, and the possible intersection of contemporary art, community, politics, and therapy, with reference to the activities and politics of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona, Spain (MACBA) and three artists of different nationalities. Some of these artists' works can be considered social interventions, demonstrating the close relationship between community work, therapy, and contemporary art. Moreover, these social interventions frequently provide a public voice for those who usually remain unheard: minority groups, people from different linguistic or cultural backgrounds, victims of trauma, etc.

While originating in a largely artistic sphere, these practices can also serve to inspire and inform those of art therapy. Often, both in training and professional practice, there is little interaction between art therapy and contemporary art. Certain artworks by Sophie Calle, the interventions, projections, and design projects by Krzysztof Wodiczko, and the therapy produced by Lygia Clark, however, exemplify how one discipline can illuminate the other. A number of works by these three artists will be analyzed in relation to their therapeutic approaches and political effects.

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### Art in the 21st century and the museum (MACBA)

Art in our century can be redefined in political terms and as a social tool. Art addressing the demands of the present moment is far removed from the bourgeois, romantic, or expressionist concept, in which the art object becomes the fetishized subject of private possession and the artist is perceived as misunderstood genius indulging in subjective expression. The purpose of this paper is to explore this new way of considering art within the frame of the politics and activities of the Contemporary Art Museum of Barcelona (MACBA) and the works of three artists: Sophie Calle, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Lygia Clark. From the author's position as a trained art therapist, psychoanalytical psychotherapist, anthropologist, and collaborator with the MACBA, the intersection of art, community, politics, and therapy will be explored ethnographically with the help of her professional experience and the museum politics as well as with the social exploration of the work of these three artists.

In Barcelona, the MACBA has been pursuing precisely this intersection. Since 1999, the policy of the MACBA has been to consider art as a social and political tool. On the one hand, this is reflected in the

exhibition programming. Many exhibitions have political content, such as the individual show by William Kentridge, a prominent anti-apartheid activist in South Africa; the exhibitions by the Austrian artists Günther Brus and Peter Friedl with their anti-establishment performance art; and the exhibitions *Disagreements: On Art, Politics and the Public Sphere in the Spanish State*, which proposed the construction of "a counter narrative and counter structure of contemporary art in Spain," and *Antagonisms*, "which presented a series of case studies of moments or situations in which there have been a confluence of artistic practices and political activity in the second half of the twentieth century" (Ribalta, 2004, p. 6).

However, the purpose of the museum is not only to produce exhibitions but also to provide different types of services aimed at a variety of groups and subjects. Ribalta (2004, p. 9), director of the MACBA's Public Programs, writes: "Beyond the idea of visibility whose paradigm is the exhibition, we believe it is possible to restore forms of subjective appropriation of artistic methods in processes outside the mainstream and outside the museum." This necessarily involves removing art from its traditional elitist pedestal and taking it to groups within the community that would not ordinarily visit a museum of contemporary art.

Although for Walter Benjamin (1991a) the social and revolutionary transformation of art was based above all on its technical industrialization, in keeping with Soviet revolutionary art he also aspired to "the end of art in its traditional bourgeois form" (Buck-

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Morss, 2005, p. 238) and to achieving a new audience for art among the working classes.

In keeping with this spirit, the MACBA program includes short- and long-term training, together with socialization activities such as conferences, workshops, seminars, and “relational spaces” for a variety of different professionals and groups. Instead of the term “education” the concept of “mediation” is given preference (Ribalta, 2002, p. 74). An educational model emerges designed to favor experimentation with:

...forms of self-organization and self-education. The purpose of this method is to produce new structures both in terms of artistic and social processes (networked, horizontal, decentralized, delocalized structures). It is a matter of giving the public agency, of providing conditions for their capacity for action, of overcoming the limitations of the traditional divisions of actor and spectator, of producer and consumer.

(Ribalta, 2006, p. 29)

In short, the public should be considered as an active transformer and not as a passive contemplator. Brecht's (1963) and Benjamin's (1991a and 1991b<sup>1</sup>) ideas of redefining art and theatre are relevant here.

Several of the MACBA's activities address subjects such as art and therapy, art and psychoanalysis, and anti-psychiatry, including the series of conferences entitled *You still remember—anti-psychiatry* (2006). The activities are often supported by exhibitions, as in the cases of the Prinzhorn Collection, Zush, Jo Spence, and Robert Frank among others.

Furthermore, over the last 5 years, a series of activities were held in an attempt to redefine the relationship between the museum, art, and the city with a view to establishing a critique of official institutions, such as those belonging to the public mental health system, justice department, public education, etc. In this spirit, the workshop *Direct Action as One of the Fine Arts* (2002) was held in which various artists' collectives joined with social movements to work on the following five themes: under-employment and new forms of precarious labor; frontiers and migrations; urban speculation and gentrification; construction of alternative media networks; and direct action politics. As a relational space, the program *Good Vibes. Politics of Resistance and Music Subcultures*, 2002, analyzed musical subcultures and how they are related to alternative public spheres.

Curated by Roger Buergel in 2004, a further project was entitled *How do we want to be governed?* and consisted of three concurrent exhibitions in the Poblenou-Besós suburb of Barcelona, involving neighborhood and local groups “in a sort of *board of trustees from below*” situation (Ribalta, 2004, p. 8). In short, the museum aims to contribute to a radical redefinition of the artistic relationship and how art can be an essential part of the political sphere. With this in mind, self-criticism forms part of the artistic practices of the museum, considering and analyzing the power and economic relation within art museums in general and its expositions. Moreover, conferences and workshops were held about the possible reorganization of the museum in a postindustrial, postcolonial, and postmodern era, as well as about the decentralization of art activities, as in the seminar and in the workshop *Musée d'art ancien, département d'art moderne. How to rethink the cultural organizations considering the new relations between art and economy* (2008), organized among others by George Yúdice and the participants of the network *Transform and Translate*. The museum is also regarded as

a forum for popular education in which it is vital to expose the divide existing between the contemporary arts and society. In this vein an attempt is made to discuss and investigate how art can be articulated and how art is manifested within different social environments.

Furthermore, the MACBA has developed a long-term training program entitled PEI (*Programa de Estudios Independientes* or Program of Independent Studies), which covers subjects such as writing and critical theory, feminist and gender-technologies, therapy critique, urban history, political imagination, subversive movements, and political economy. Within these educational frameworks it is hoped to achieve a new form of political education for the public and to propose a counter-model of education to that of the local universities.

Gender-technologies have been one of the main subjects of the museum, and the seminars, workshops, and conferences have involved internationally recognized academics and representatives from feminist movements who are not frequently invited to Catalan or Spanish universities (with the exception of Dolores Juliano), such as Angela Davis, Beatriz Preciado, Gayatri Spivak, Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, and Hélène Cixous.

The museum is taking a different approach to interpreting art and its function, or in other words its role in political, social, and therapeutic fields. Unlike the traditional role of the museum, the MACBA does not see itself as part of the entertainment/education industry. Rather, the aim is to achieve activities and exhibitions that reach “beyond the perfect image” (the title of feminist photographer Jo Spence's exhibition in 2005). As the title of the in press book by MACBA collaborator Xavier Antich suggests, it is about a contemporary re-reading of aesthetic ideas, establishing a position against what Delgado (2005, p. 14) calls the “*good girl city*, under control, domesticated, and tame...”

As a freelance professional working in the field of art/psychotherapy, health, and immigration, for the last 6 years I have been participating in the museum's social program. With the support and the sponsoring of the museum I established a program that includes art workshops with teenagers who are labeled conflictive and belong to the social risk category. These art workshops take place at the Miquel Tarradell Secondary School next to the museum, and also in the UEC (Shared Schooling Unit) of the *Casal dels Infants* in the nearby Raval neighborhood: a specialized unit for 13–16-year olds that have been expelled from state secondary schools, often for aggressive behavior.

When working with adolescents, the plastic arts offer several advantages. Problems relating to social behavior, coexistence, and communication can be approached indirectly through the creative process, as it is necessary to share space and materials, and to respect the work of others. As the youngsters have inadequate social skills and behavioral problems—often the result of manic defense mechanisms—they tend to immediately reject psychological introspection and consequently psychological treatments in general. When I was working as an art therapist in different institutions for mentally ill adolescents in Barcelona I could observe that a further reason for this outright rejection is endemic to the operation of these mental health centers and their staff, as they frequently fail to achieve a suitable identification with young people. A failure to acknowledge the specifics of learning, interests, and social experience of this age group all too often leads to them being regarded as either socially and educationally deficient or as victims, leading to patronizing approaches with a predictable reciprocal response. The youngsters on the other hand, challenge the knowledge of these professional workers, which they perceive as completely distanced from their own knowledge.

The art workshops, which for the reasons indicated above we do not call “art therapy” and which are not imparted as therapy in the

<sup>1</sup> Concerning Benjamin's work, I am quoting the German complete edition edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (1991). Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

traditional sense, have been shown to be quite efficient in indirectly provoking discussion about social relations.

Furthermore, art is a suitable vehicle for addressing frustration tolerance, which tends to be low in these young people. Creative activities require many decisions to be made at a cognitive level, and can lead to frustration when results fail to meet expectations. The concept of process must be interiorized before any magical solutions can be attained.

All these issues can be addressed and discussed on a symbolic level, once the adolescents have gained confidence in the adult professional, and a safe empathic atmosphere is achieved in the group in the sense of the potential space described by Winnicott (1971). Then, the artistic expression can obtain a personal meaning and can become a form of constructive communication. Doing art in this context helps the participant to control his or her aggressive feelings, since they can be brought into a form that itself can be developed, transformed, changed, or stored and kept in a safe environment. Impulses can be slowed down in the creative process and conflicts are given a form, so that the participant experiences how s/he can control through symbolization his or her aggression (Dannecker, 1999).<sup>2</sup> If this happens, this activity also helps to encourage the participants' creativity and sense of self-esteem. In every group, inevitably there are many youngsters with considerable creative potential that has remained underexploited, to the extent that some undoubtedly have sufficient skills to study in a college of art and design. After 6 academic years at the Miquel Tarradell Secondary School, the staff has noted that many youngsters consider their participation as a privilege, while many non-participants from other courses ask to take part in the groups. In short, these workshops provide a resource that is highly valued both by the directors and coordinators of the secondary school and the Special Unit School and the participants. They also help to compensate for a deficiency in the special care services available to certain adolescents who do not or cannot attend mental health care centers and for whom there are currently no official resources provided by the Department of Education. In other words, MACBA uses part of its budget to offer resources that are not yet available through the areas of Health and Education.

Many contemporary artworks follow the same ideas as discussed above: using art as a social tool and taking it out of the official art institutions, like galleries and museums, to different collectives, some of which are marginalized or socially disadvantaged. Nicolas Bourriaud has called this phenomenon "Relational aesthetics" (2001). According to him, in interactive art, relation and reality are connected, establishing relationships with those who traditionally were mere spectators. These relations become an artwork due to a process called the aestheticization of communication, which means that the artist inserts him- or herself in already existing social relationships or creates them in order to extract a form out of them afterwards, which becomes the art work. This kind of art appears as "a rich field of social experimentations" and represents "the production of a space in a specific social context" (Bourriaud, 2001, pp. 10, 16). It can achieve political dimensions if these social spheres are problematized (Bourriaud, 2001). All this succeeds through images and results in a more spectacular form of display than that achieved by transcriptions of sociological or anthropological research alone. These research papers in the end only circulate in academic fields, whereas the artwork reaches a much broader audience.

Hal Foster, however, has criticized and warned against a possible "pseudoethnographic" character and also against the danger of an "ethnographic self-fashioning" that these artworks sometimes

contain, very often due to a lack of serious research work among the collectives with which the artists are working. The result is that "the artist is not decentered so much as the other is fashioned in artistic guise." (Foster, 1995, p. 306).

Three artists who create relational art in social contexts—and in an ethically acceptable and aesthetically interesting way—are Sophie Calle, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Lygia Clark. Their artworks are often described as social interventions, since they achieve social, therapeutic, and political dimensions.

Among these three artists, Krzysztof Wodiczko and Lygia Clark have been important references for the MACBA.

### Sophie Calle

There is no single genre in Sophie Calle's artwork, the French artist wandering between photography, installations, collage, and relational art. If her work has to be classified, it could be described as an art that deals with intimacy, both her own and that of other people<sup>3</sup>. Some of her artworks have an exhibitionist character, such as *Strip-tease*, 1979, where she asked a friend to photograph her while she was performing in a striptease bar. In *La Filature*, an intimate journal, 1981, she had her mother hire a private detective to observe her. Later she made a collage with all the photos and documents resulting from the detective's work. In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, an installation of objects from 1998, she worked on her personal memory. In the Sigmund Freud museum in London, Calle introduced certain objects with a special importance to her life and to her autobiographic essays. Among these was a razor blade referring to a time when she worked as a nude artists model. Every day one man drew her for 3 h. After each sitting he took a razor blade and carefully cut his drawing without taking his eyes off her. Then he left the studio and the pieces behind. This was repeated twelve times. The following day she did not go to work. The locating of this object/artwork in this particular museum—Freud's home during the final two years of his life—plays with the relation of memory, fetishism, and psychoanalysis.<sup>4</sup> The work draws meaning from its context, but in return the context is enriched by the work.

Some of Calle's works can be classified as relational art and some as social interventions. *Souvenirs de Berlin-Est*, 1996, deals with the individual and collective memory of the citizens of the former East Berlin. Many symbols of the German Democratic Republic have been removed, but still leave their traces. Calle took photos of that absence and asked passers-by about the symbols. Her project was to substitute the missing monuments with the memories they had left, and she gathered together the photos and people's responses in the book, *Souvenirs de Berlin-Est*. Let us consider one example. The symbol of the German Democratic Republic—the hammer, sickle, and compasses set in a laurel ring—has been removed from the *Palais de la République*, which formerly served as the parliament. Now, in its place, is a hole. Asking people about their memories and association with this, some of the answers were as follows:

"By taking it away, they might have taken away the possibility of remembering."

"I always found that awful."

"That was nice! You could read things that you cannot read in the new system. And as you can see, there is nothing other than emptiness now."

<sup>3</sup> For a study of Calle's entire artwork see for example Calle, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> I do not intend to explore Calle's psyche or to analyze her as a person through her art. This has already been done elsewhere (Rech, 2005). In this context, I prefer to concentrate on the social impact of Calle's work.

<sup>2</sup> Dannecker explains these processes regarding the feelings of fear and anxiety.

“It was just symbolism imagined by the bureaucrats.”

“They just took away what they did not want to see anymore.”

“In general, that empty frame summarizes the present situation. You could leave the symbolism the way it was, like traces, rather than leaving a space for Coca Cola.”

“There is a resistance in that hole. In my mind it is still there, like a phantom. I see it.”

“The Utopian instruments no longer exist. There is only an empty utopia left. We only see the emptiness.”

(Extracts translated by myself from Calle, 1999, pp. 42–45.)

Calle brings together the former image, the hole or the emptiness, and the individual and collective memory. Obviously, people had lost an ideological point of reference that they had grown up with and through which they had been educated. In this sense, it did not really matter if they had agreed with the German Democratic Republic system or not. As a consequence, they had to cope with the gap left by the destroyed system and its ideology.

Another of Calle's artworks that can be classified as a social intervention and which has a lot in common with art therapy is *Les Aveugles – The Blind*, 1986. For a long time Calle had been contemplating creating an artwork with/about people who had been blind from birth. She was concerned about the ethical issues—it might be considered too intrusive to ask sighted people about their visual lives—but then she met one such person who was perfectly happy to discuss his images. Encouraged, Calle started to investigate in schools for sighted people. She met ten people who had very concrete images of people and things that surround them. It transpired that they had a very visual life and clear ideas about what things and people look like. Furthermore, none of them rejected Calle's project, they were not even critical or skeptical towards it (Spiegel, 3/1999). The cycle *The Blind* includes a photo of each person, a quotation about his or her image of beauty, and a photo of the object of beauty. For one, the most beautiful thing in the world is the sea where it meets the horizon. For another it is the sculpture of a woman in the Rodin museum. A third cites fish as fascinating him. Another man mentions women's hair. For one girl it is the beautiful, luxurious things she imagines while reading Claude Jaimière's novel *Romance à Grenade*. A further girl mentions the color green, because, whenever she likes something, they always tell her that it is green, and she likes to dress in green. Finally, there is one man who says: “As for the beautiful, I have already mourned it. I don't need beauty, I don't need images in my brain. As I cannot appreciate beauty, I have always avoided it.” In the place where all the other juxtapositions are displayed, hangs the photo of the person's object of beauty, in his case there is nothing, only the white wall.

This artwork allows different readings, as sophisticated art invariably does. There are philosophical aspects about the question of what beauty is, what the images of beauty are, and what images themselves are. Do we really have to see them in an optical sense? Or can we also see with the images we have in our minds? Maybe seeing is imagining. How do we perceive the world around us? By seeing or by imagining? If the sighted have such a vivid visual life, what about the imagination of those who can see in an optical sense?

Furthermore, the creation of this artwork had therapeutic effects for the participants. They enjoyed talking about their images. This occurred despite social taboos. Also, Calle mentions the ethical issue that initially prevented her from starting her artistic project. The important factor, in order to be able to “break the ice,” was to talk to the first person she met with a visual disability. Very often the collective imaginary and social taboos do not coincide with the

desires of those affected. Here, it is useful to approach the other in an empathic attitude in order to speak about the issue.

On a social level, *The Blind* helps to challenge prejudices about the visually impaired. Contrary to common belief, they obviously have clear ideas what beauty mean to them. The last example of the man who needs neither beauty nor images might be a clarification that not all people who are blind have these clear images. Thus, his statement does not permit the creation of a new stereotype concerning the visual life of people with blindness.

I would suggest that Calle's process of making *The Blind* could be considered as a possible process in an art therapy group with the visually impaired. Besides a creative process on a three-dimensional level, which is considered the most appropriate plastic art form for participants with visual disability, the verbal and symbolic discussion about beauty and about images in general could prove fruitful and inspiring. Though Calle does not refer explicitly to therapeutic theories, *The Blind* and also *Souvenirs de Berlin-Est* do contain therapeutic elements and approaches, and *The Blind* in particular could have therapeutic use. Moreover, on a social level it helps to clarify prejudices and, with regard to the Berlin artwork, to illustrate the individual and collective memory and its implications for the present situation.

### Krzysztof Wodiczko

The Polish-born artist Krzysztof Wodiczko has developed many interventions that could be classified as social or political. This artist, who was born in 1943 and who now lives in New York and Boston, considers art to be in permanent dialogue with social movements, social work, psychoanalytical theories, history, memory, and urban anthropology (López Riojo, 1992; Phillips, 2003). He has always worked in and with reference to public spaces, realizing and conceptualizing public art.

In a previous phase, Wodiczko carried out silent projections on emblematic supports such as monuments, public buildings, or banks. Usually these were related to social, political, or cultural events of the present, for example *The Venice Projections* during the 12th Venice Biennale in 1986, in which he criticized the “art-Disneyland and shopping-for-the past plaza” (Wodiczko, 1999, p. 53), or *The Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York*, 1986, or *The Projection on the Monument to Friedrich II* during the 8th *documenta*, a curated survey exhibition of contemporary art celebrated in Kassel, Germany, every 5 years. In this projection he criticized the *documenta* organization for

...accepting donations from Mercedes and the Deutsche Bank, though knowing of their South African dealings during the apartheid. (...) To expose the relation between Daimler Benz and *Documenta 8* as a clear example of the way the shameless “history of the victors” perpetuates itself today, I had decided to recall the Landgrave's monument in order to critically actualize it.

(Wodiczko, 1999, p. 57)<sup>5</sup>

The projections were performed during the night, giving them a phantom-like character. The objective was to make the public buildings talk, by reappropriating, reinscribing, and revising them through public actions. Monuments and public buildings very often represent the official collective memory and the official course of history, which usually coincides with Walter Benjamin's concept of the “history of the victors.” The monument stands erect towards

<sup>5</sup> For an exhaustive study of Wodiczko's projections (see Wodiczko, 1999, pp. 42–73).

the sky, like a phallus, claiming absolute power and at the same time expressing a power that is completely indifferent towards current conflicts, contradictions, paradox (Delgado, 2005). As they are as intransigent as this official version of history, the only way to move them is to write or project on them. Thus the monuments and the memory are rewritten by a public action and can subsequently represent a different experience within public spaces in the present (Phillips, 2003). These ideas coincide with Benjamin's "dialectical images" through which the past and the present emerge at the same time. These images transmit the culture of the past in a way that the revolutionary possibility of the present is illuminated. Benjamin had already claimed the importance of the artist in the field of dialectical images (Benjamin, 1991a), a function that Wodiczko certainly fulfils.

Among Wodiczko's most famous artworks are the *Homeless Vehicles*, 1988–1989. He designed several versions of vehicles that served homeless people for shelter and for improving their living conditions as well as for storing their belongings in a way that allowed them to travel from one part of the city to another. Wodiczko, as the artist-designer, has developed several reflections on the homeless and their non-acceptance by other citizens:

They are reduced to mere observers of the remaking of their neighborhoods for others. Their homelessness appears as a natural condition, the cause is dissociated from its consequence, and the status of the homeless as legitimate members of the urban community is unrecognized.

(Wodiczko, 1999, p. 81)

Thus, they became exiles, aliens and strangers in their own city. Furthermore, these vehicles look like weapons because this cart-movement has to be considered as an act of resistance, "opposing the continuing ruination of an urban community that excludes thousands of people from even the most meager means of life" (Wodiczko, p. 83). The homeless very often live from collecting and selling other people's garbage and the cities should "recognize the value and legitimacy of their daily work" (Wodiczko, p. 83). Concerning public space there is a contradiction, for the homeless are obliged to live there but at the same time they are excluded from it in terms of communication. "They have been expelled from society into public space but they are confined to living within it as silent, voiceless actors. They are in the world but at the same time they are outside of it, literally and metaphorically" (Wodiczko, p. 95). With the vehicle-intervention they can draw public attention to themselves and this gives them a voice in public.

Wodiczko's design instruments are made for breaking the silence. As a trained industrial designer he equips people who are not heard in public with machines that help them to develop a form of speech and to speak in an indirect way, which means that they do not have to talk to others face to face. As Melanie Klein stated, indirect or symbolic representation is less frightening than direct communication. Indirect or symbolic expression reduces anxiety and can offer more security, for it respects the person's defenses (Klein, 1927).

According to Wodiczko, these design objects can be considered as transitional objects that serve as a bridge between the interior and exterior world. They contain the interior world and operate as a "psychological container." At the same time they communicate with the exterior world "as a social opening" and "displayed-presenter," "the stranger's speaking double" (Wodiczko, 1999, pp. 216–217 and 13). In this sense, the designer can represent Winnicott's "good enough mother" who is able to read the child's necessities.

One of these instruments is the *Alien Staff*, 1992–1993, a walking stick with a TV monitor at face height designed for use by

immigrants. "On the small screen an image of the person's own face appears and the loudspeaker narrates the story of his journey, which attracts the attention of the passers-by" (Wodiczko, 2005, p.1) and makes them approach, so that the usual distance between foreigner and local citizen is reduced. Immigrants can thus express themselves, telling their story to the citizens whose attention is drawn by the symbolic shape of the instrument and its associations with Moses or with totems. This double presence in "media" and in "life" might help to attain a new perception of a stranger as "imagined" opposed to the "experienced," "real" one. Thus, both the imagination and the experience of the passer-by increase with the decreasing distance (Wodiczko, 2005, p. 2). This change of perception then hopefully provides the ground for greater respect and dialogue. In the host society the immigrant is often considered like a child who does not yet talk and who has "to acquire self-understanding in a totally new world and, simultaneously, a self-understanding" as s/he transforms him-/herself (Wodiczko, 1999, p. 217). Winnicott's concept of the transitional object is useful in this situation, since it can stand between the outside and the inside world and bridge these two worlds in a creative way (Winnicott, 1971).

Also Winnicott's "potential space," described mainly in his work *Playing and Reality*, 1971, can be transferred to the immigrant's situation. The British psychoanalyst had already outlined the importance of this space for cultural experience. The Argentine psychoanalysts Leon and Rebecca Grinberg stated the importance of Winnicott's potential space for the relation between the immigrant's original group and his or her receptive group, between his/her past and his/her future. Exploitation of this area leads to a pathological condition, to a loss of symbolization, and makes the immigrant use primitive defense mechanisms (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1996). This is especially the case if the host society does not offer to the immigrants a receptive environment but rather a hostile one (Marxen, 2005).

The immigrants are usually treated as if they were unqualified adults or even incapable children, though they are supposed to master their destiny in an often hostile new world. The immigrants, on the other hand, require the locals to understand, tolerate, and appreciate substantial differences of customs, ways of thinking, relating, and living (Wodiczko, 1999). It is important to bring one side in contact with the other in a playful atmosphere, in a potential space, and with a transitional object in order to experience in a creative, symbolic way this third zone, between the individual and the environment, between the newcomer and the local (Wodiczko, 1999, p. 11).<sup>6</sup>

For Wodiczko the *Alien Staff*—immigrant object is both transitional object (Winnicott) and also a communicative artifice according to Kristeva (Wodiczko, 1999; Kristeva, 1991). Concerning the communicative aspect, Bruce Robbins (1999, p. 194) draws a parallel with Guy Debord's "society of spectacle" (Debord, 1992), referring to the:

... fact that people will not stop for human beings telling their story but will stop for a televised image of the same human being telling the same story. When the image replaces the person, when there's an obstacle between you and the person, there's a better chance of making contact."

Both, the projection works and the instruments are combined in a latter phase, when Wodiczko creates video projections, again ani-

<sup>6</sup> In Barcelona, I coordinated an art therapy project, "Colors", funded by the European Community, in which locals and foreigners met in art therapy workshops, [www.art-therapy.it](http://www.art-therapy.it). One of the objectives was precisely to facilitate contact through the arts, in a creative and playful atmosphere.

mating the public space. Referring to Foucault's *Fearless Speaking*, which itself is based on the Greek concept of *parrhesia* or truth-telling (Foucault, 2001), Wodiczko reflects on the public space that is often monopolized by the voices of those who are born to speak and are prepared and trained to do so, namely politicians, lawyers, prosecutors, etc. This occurs "at the expense of those who cannot speak because they have no confidence anyone will listen to them" and unfortunately, their experience has taught them that they are right to suppose this. Moreover, they lack a sophisticated language to allow them to speak in public. Quite often they "are locked in a posttraumatic silence" and cannot verbalize that experience. "Yet, these are the most important speakers in a democracy. They should speak because they have directly experienced its failures and indifference" (Phillips, 2003, p. 36).

In my own practice as an art therapist and psychoanalytical psychotherapist working with adolescents at social risk, I have often been able to confirm Wodiczko's reflections. These adolescents described above are completely segregated from official society and its institutions, in a geographical, literal, administrative, and metaphorical way. They go to special schools where professionals have to work in often severely inadequate conditions with very little economic and moral backing from the government's educational board. Although the adolescents are fully written off by their teachers, educators, the administration, etc., who do not value their knowledge and experience, in reality, they know a lot about society. It is not knowledge they have acquired from private schools, private music lessons, or museums, but from street life itself or from their often unstructured families. Some of these boys (there are hardly any girls in these groups) have a very strong creative potential and a lot to say. They would be important speakers as Wodiczko describes them for his video projections in which these individuals can speak in public and be heard. He wants to represent untold stories and overlooked experience within the public space, again by animating and reinscribing the monuments that are part of official history.

While his works from the eighties had to do with contemporary political, cultural, or social events, Wodiczko now works on the past, memory, and traumatic loss. Here, he refers explicitly to Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). Herman distinguishes between three phases concerning recovery after a traumatic event. In a first phase the person must re-establish and regain his/her primary security and safety. Afterwards, there is a need to reconstruct his/her story and mourn the traumatic loss. Finally, s/he must reconnect to society on a social level. Whereas the first two phases are especially delicate on a therapeutic level, during or after the third phase a successful reconnection is mainly achieved by people who are able to engage in public with their experience, for example those who founded groups or associations or performed social actions in public that inform people about their traumas (Herman, 2004<sup>7</sup>). These survivors have found a political dimension to their trauma. They have discovered that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy into the base of a social action. Although there is no way of compensating for an atrocity, there is however a form of transcending it, which consists of making a gift to others (Herman, 2004).

Herman's reflections coincide with those of Michael Taussig, who also shows the importance of confronting terror in public. He explains this with the Mothers of the Disappeared in various Latin-American countries during the different military dictatorships. The mothers and partners of those who disappeared also performed various social actions remembering and reminding others about

the atrocities committed by the military. It is extremely important to move these crimes from a private sphere to a public one, for if it remains on a private level the memory becomes fragmented, disassociated, and broken, thus feeding the fear. The actions of the mothers and partners "create a new public ritual whose aim is to allow the tremendous moral and magical power of the unquiet dead to flow into the public sphere, empower individuals. . ." Taussig calls these actions a "counterritualization of public monuments," which can "unleash feelings of self-confidence which in turn inspire visions and joy. . ." (Taussig, 1992, pp. 48–51).

Wodiczko tries to create the conditions of this public engagement, the "truth-telling" as a deeply felt, embodied experience in public. Of course, only persons who have already recovered their basic security and find themselves in or after Herman's third phase can apply themselves to those actions. They have already had to move through various therapeutic stages in order to be able to act in the public space and to move from private testimony and memory to public engagement, testimony, and memory (Phillips, 2003). Obviously there are ethical issues. Previous research and group work has to be done with the people who will participate in these social actions, which, furthermore, are supposed to become artworks. The whole process and also the use and the production of the final artworks have to be fully explained. There should be a democratic negotiation of the mutual use and the mutual benefits. The participants have to be able to profit themselves, in their situation, from the public "truth-telling." The artist obviously profits from their participation, since s/he creates his or her artwork with them. In relational art there is a lot of abuse of people in inferior social situations as raw material for mediocre artworks. This ethical failure can easily be avoided through previous empathic group work with the participants, providing them with exact information and also allowing them the possibility to withdraw from the project at any time. On many occasions there should also be an elaboration after the performance.

In the *Tijuana Projection*, 2001, which was performed on the *Centro Cultural* in Tijuana, Wodiczko worked with young women who endured terrible conditions in the *maquiladoras*-factories. They:

...participated in a yearlong process to animate—to become—this historical building. At the same time they forced the building to become them. (...) Their faces filled the entire elevation of the domed building. They engaged in a highly mediated fearless speech where they were simultaneously responding to their own projections through the instruments they used to project their faces and voices on the dome."

(Phillips, 2003, p. 44)

Thus the architecture became human. Ironically, this building represents modernity and progress, and these women exposed the consequences of this progress, since they had to witness first hand the catastrophes of modern industry.

Whereas Sophie Calle in *The Blind* touches therapeutic methods without naming them, Krzysztof Wodiczko works explicitly, among other theories, with psychotherapeutic concepts, strictly speaking with those of Winnicott (transitional object, potential space) and of Judith Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*). This illustrates how contemporary art and therapy can be connected and stimulate one another.

### Lygia Clark

In her latest phase, from 1976 until her death in 1988, the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark developed her own therapeutic method, which she called *The Structuring of the Self*. This clinical/artwork

<sup>7</sup> I quote the Spanish translation: Judith Herman (2004). Madrid: Espasa.

consisted mainly of a treatment focused on the client's body. The artist–therapist touched the clients with the help of the “relational objects.” Some of these objects were malleable, others solid. Among them were light and heavy pillows, objects made with panty hose, seed objects, objects made of stone and air, wrapped in a net, little stones, plastic bags filled with water, air, or sand, shells, tubes (Clark, 1998; Wanderley, 2002). They were of a “surprising formal simplicity” (Wanderley, 2002, p. 35). The “relational object” does not present analogies with the human body but it creates relations with the body through its texture, its weight, size, temperature, sound, and movement. It does not have any specific nature itself. As its very name indicates, it is the relationship established with the fantasy of the subject that is important. “The same object may express different meanings for different subjects at different moments” (Clark, 1998, p. 319). Clark's idea was to exorcize through the body the phantasmatic, which she located there. Thus, it also had to be relieved, treated, and transformed in the space of the body, with the help of these objects or by means of the direct touch of the artist–therapist's hands. The relational objects stimulated and mobilized the affective memory because of their texture and the way Clark manipulated and handled them. The physical sensations of these objects were the starting point for a further elaboration of the phantasmatic (Rolnik, 2006). This work could not be done on a verbal level, since “in manipulating the ‘relational objects,’ the subject lives out a pre-verbal image (. . .) and during this phase of the work, silence is totally respected.” The verbal elaboration can come afterwards, if the person wishes or needs it (Clark, 1998, pp. 320, 322). According to Clark, “the process becomes therapeutic through regularity of the sessions, which allows the progressive elaboration of the phantasmatic provoked by the potentialities of the relational objects” (Clark, 1998, p. 320). People regained their health when they connected with their *cuero vibrátil*<sup>8</sup>, their creative power and energy. For Clark it was easier to achieve this goal with borderline patients or those who had had some psychotic episode than with neurotic patients who usually hold on to their defense mechanism, such that they could not open themselves up to these bodily experiences (Rolnik, 2006). In a similar way, Deleuze considered creators to be “great livings with a fragile health” as opposed to the neurotics who, according to the philosopher, had a “big dominant health” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p. 12; Rolnik, 2006, p. 7).

The setting of Clark's therapy is reminiscent of psychoanalysis. Instead of a couch, she made her clients lay on a mattress (Rolnik, 2006). Her own psychoanalytical experience as a patient and her reading had influenced her own clinical practice. She referred also to Winnicott's “good enough mother” and to the importance of the therapeutic holding (Rolnik, 2006, p. 9, 13). As Bion explained his concept of *rêverie*, the mother/father has to be able to respond to the child's necessities, to capture them, and to return them to him/her with a new sense, which makes suffering for the child more understandable. Therapists have to fulfill the same function with their patients. If this process cannot take place, the child—and also the patient in therapy—suffers the “terror without name” (Tous, 2006, p. 287). For Clark, this therapeutic responding has to take place by means of the contact with the body and not by classical analytical interpretation. She calls this process a “massive maternalization” (Clark, 1998, p. 322).

Lygia Clark also kept her clinical reports about every patient and she got regularly paid by all of her clients (Rolnik, 2006; summaries

of some reports: Clark, 1998, pp. 323–26; Wanderley, 2002, pp. 23, 24, 117, 118).

In her case, the artwork consists of a clinical practice she developed and which was based on her psychoanalytical knowledge and experience. Like Krzysztof Wodiczko, she also refers to Winnicott and his “potential space” and “transitional objects.” Moreover, the political meaning of her work was extremely important, since she herself had witnessed during her own life and also by means of her patients' sufferings the terrible effects of dictatorship and censorship. Their terror had exercised on the population's creative potential limiting their expression and capacity for symbolization, which harmed its mental health. In Winnicott's terms, in a dictatorship there is no potential space for cultural and creative experience on a macro level (1971). Clark acted as an artist–therapist in the threshold between dictatorship and neo-liberalism in Brazil. The military dictatorships in different Latin-American countries had damaged the population's potential and creative space. Afterwards the neo-liberal dynamics tried to reanimate artistic activities and expression, but using them as ideological and commercial instrument (Rolnik, 2006).

Lygia Clark's artworks can be considered simultaneously as artistic, political, and clinical. She never wanted to abandon art, nor to swap it for clinical practice, “but rather to inhabit the tension of their edges. By placing itself on this borderline, her work virtually has the strength of ‘treating’ both art and clinical practice” (Rolnik, 1998, pp. 347, 348). In the same way that she had never hidden her preference for borderline patients, she also “created this hybrid on the borderline between the two fields,” art and clinical work, in order to undo forms, “in favor of the new compositions of fluxus, which the vibratile-body experiences throughout time.” Clark's art-clinical hybrid proves the transversality between the two fields (Rolnik, 1998, pp. 345, 346, 347).

For this way of art-clinical making her notion of form is of course crucial. She rejected a perception of art that would be limited to the form of an object. She wanted to realize artworks *in* the receiver's body, so that person would develop from a passive spectator to an active participant. Thus the art object as such does not make sense unless the participant acts with or on it that means s/he creates it together with the artist. The participant is *in* the art and not outside (Rolnik, 2006, 1998). Clark was searching for an intense relationship between art and person. In order to achieve this goal, she abandoned the artwork as a determinate object and addressed herself directly to the spectator's body. The art should finally lead us to ourselves (Wanderley, 2002). The Brazilian psychiatrist and artist Lula Wanderley follows Clark's ideas when he is suggesting that art in the contemporary world is loosing its prescribed limits and should be considered a creative act itself and a way of touching directly the social, psychological, and corporal forces (Brett, 2002).

The artist–therapist's consulting room forms part of the artwork too. If this kind of artwork is ascended to the museum and the official art institution—which has been the case with Lygia Clark's artwork, at least since it had been shown at *documenta X* in Kassel, Germany, 1997, and in the Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona, 1998<sup>9</sup>—then the museums can become consulting rooms (Rolnik, 2006). In this sense, Lygia Clark already foresaw the latter development in contemporary art as it has been performed in the MACBA: to introduce art into therapeutic, educational, social, and political fields.

<sup>8</sup> The Brazilian art critic and psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik, who can be considered an expert of Lygia Clark's art, has created and developed the term *cuero vibrátil*, “vibratile-body,” in different writings, such as her thesis *Cartografia Sentimental. Transformações contemporâneas do desejo*, 2006a, and “The Hybrid of Lygia Clark”, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> This individual show was organized by Manuel Borja who at that time was the director of the Tàpies Foundation and one year later became director of the MACBA. In December 2007 he has been appointed director of the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid.

## Conclusion

We have seen how contemporary artwork is created implicitly with therapeutic ideas (Sophie Calle), explicitly with psychotherapeutic concepts (Krzysztof Wodiczko), or directly as another form of clinical work (Lygia Clark).

The aesthetic issue in this kind of relational art consists of giving artistic form to social interventions, communication, and relations, and to reproduce the participation, the interaction, and the relational sphere. The social interventions in contemporary art differ from social work or sociological and anthropological research in their form. The interactive, relational, or participatory art, in which the social interventions can be included, become artworks through a process that Bourriaud has called “relational aesthetics” and the “aesthetization of communication” (2001). Bourriaud’s idea of extracting forms from social relationships has already been mentioned above. Thus these relations become an artwork, which has ceased to be just an object with definable forms. However, it is still an aesthetic and ethical challenge to find a way of giving new forms to the mentioned social relationships. This is even more complex when the artwork consists mainly of the spectator’s/participant’s *experience* during the art-making process and who are sometimes even transformed by the experience. The “here and now” seems to be unreproducible. This can hardly be reproduced for others who only see, for example, the video or any other medium of representation of this event, without having had the immediate experience themselves. The event is represented by a register like photography, video, or graphic documents. At the same time it might be theorized and contextualized by art theory and art critique. A part of the action might become an artwork in the museum, which in the action was just a segment of the artistic intervention. A social intervention with a political character can be neutralized when it is represented in an official art institution (Longoni, 2007). Thus, relational art is confronted with the ongoing challenge of how to reproduce it after the event. In the case of Krzysztof Wodiczko’s *Alien Staff*, there are video records (see the video in the virtual MACBA journal, vol. 1, [www.macba.es](http://www.macba.es)). Furthermore, there are drawings of the different design stages and the transcriptions of what the people who used the instruments said (Wodiczko, 1999, pp. 100–136). Finally, there is also the *Alien Staff* itself, as an object. Wodiczko states that it goes beyond the state of an object. It also represents the interaction and the relations in which it was used: “. . . I have nothing against their second life as museum objects (. . .). They were tools, but now they contain within themselves the memory of the condition of which they were born. . .” (Wodiczko, 1999, p. 218).

For Krzysztof Wodiczko, art also has the advantage of being able to affirm democratic rights in an aesthetic way. Aesthetic means of expression are needed and not mere information or transcriptions (Serra & Wodiczko, 2005). Art in this sense is an important and powerful voice because of its symbolic character.

However, one should keep in mind Hal Foster’s critique on mediocre “pseudoethnographic” artwork, which is not properly investigated and prepared (see above).

Furthermore, as Walter Benjamin had already stated, art is always vulnerable as it is used not only to transmit democratic rights but also abused for the opposite: to glorify power and dictatorship. Political art can aestheticize and justify politics (Buck-Morss, 2005).

There are some similarities and differences between art therapy and social interventions in contemporary art. In the latter, the final result and its aesthetic aspects are much more important than in art therapy. Moreover, in contemporary art, participants create an artwork with and for the artist, whereas in art therapy the client creates foremost for him- or herself. The event in relational art is

usually limited in its time and process, which finishes with the final artwork (except for Lygia Clark’s *Structuring of the Self*, which is based on an ongoing process). In art therapy the process is much more important and interesting than the final artworks.

Concerning the similarities, mutual trust and confidentiality are the basis for both the contemporary art process and the therapy process. In both cases clear information about the destiny of the final work(s) is essential.

The embodiment and engagement in the process is crucial for both a successful intervention in contemporary art and for progress in art therapy. The women’s embodiment in the truth telling within the *Tijuana Projections* could be compared with the intensive process during the creation of an embodied image as opposed to a diagrammatic one (Schaverien, 2000).

Referring to Krzysztof Wodiczko, who considers the designer-artist to be Winnicott’s “good enough mother,” one who is able to read needs and to equip the needy with designed machines, and to Lygia Clark, who also intended to fulfill this function in *Structuring a Self*, another parallel can be drawn with the art therapist who is the “good enough mother” during the therapy.

Also the complexity and the difficulties of reproducing the relation itself on a formal level are similar in art therapy and contemporary art. To write about these relations and experience or to film them, no matter if they have taken place in art therapy or in contemporary art, can never be considered the same as to live them at the moment. This means that both art therapists and contemporary relational artists have to constantly develop new and better forms of reproducing the experience.

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