

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology  
of Egypt / Egyptology

**THE EFFECT OF NEW MEDIA ON CONTEMPORANEITY OF THE  
WORKS BY KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO**

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**Sepideh Takshi, Mohammad Kazem Hassanvand. The Effect of New Media on Contemporaneity of the Works by Krzysztof Wodiczko-- Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology 18(4), 7651-7663. ISSN 1567-214x.**

**Keywords: Contemporary, Medium, Rendering, Situation.**

### **Abstract**

Attentions were paid to media since the second half of the twentieth century and it was with the technological progresses that the number of the media was increased and a vast ground was in addition set for the artists to grant a power of manifestation to their ideas. The present study aims at finding an answer to the question as to how have the new media influenced the contemporaneity of the works by artists, especially Krzysztof Wodiczko? In order to find an answer to this question, the definition and specifications of contemporaneousness should be studied and investigated hence it is proposed that how much have media influenced contemporaneity of the works by various artists. Considering the study, technological progresses and the application of the new media, especially of the digital type, have enabled more interaction between the audience and the artworks to the extent that the former is no longer just an observer; thus, contemporaneity of the artworks is not specific to the time in a historical sense and numerous factors have caused the artworks to become contemporaneous; media are amongst these factors. The present descriptive-analytical research tries studying and defining the aforesaid indicators; the works by Krzysztof Wodiczko will be also analyzed in the end.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term "medium" has been revealed in the artworks in diverse forms since long ago. In the past, medium had a more limited meaning and it was mostly defined and applied as a ground for an artwork; however, it was following the progress in technology and change in the trends of the artworks with its onset being the postmodern period that the media began playing a more considerable role not only as the grounds but also as the ground-setters of the artworks'

meaning. Of course, this does not mean that every artist can identify his or her works as contemporary by means of technology because the term “contemporary” itself and the trait “contemporaneity” have been analyzed herein. The contemporary era is often called the postmodern period. This is while the present artists mistakenly use the same specifications of the 60s-70s postmodern art in the works they call contemporary. The contemporary art is not an art separated from its historical background rather it is the continuer thereof or even mixed with it but with a different approach. Due to the same reason, medium plays a considerable role in the contemporary art; in fact, medium gives the artwork a chance of reiterated experiencing and repeatedly being experienced and the medium, as well, causes the creation of commonalities between the various cultures and it originally engages in producing a unit language and, based on the study hypothesis, an artwork can be characterized by contemporaneity by the assistance of medium. Emphasizing on the works by the contemporary artists “Krzysztof Wodiczko”, the present study tries finding an answer to the abovementioned question. Considering the fact that the effect of the medium on the contemporaneity of the artworks by Krzysztof Wodiczko is the present study’s subject, we will review concepts like contemporaneity, rendering, situation and medium before dealing with anything else from the perspective of the art thinkers and theoreticians and, concentrating on the obtained information, we will analyze the works by Krzysztof Wodiczko according to the study’s objective. The present descriptive-analytical research has been carried out by gathering information through library searches.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The important words of this research have been expressed from the perspective of various theoreticians and thinkers and they have been utilized through data-based reasoning in line with the study goal’s accomplishment. What are contemporary and contemporaneity from the perspective of Giorgio Agamben<sup>1</sup> in the book “contemporary”? The theory of the contemporary art has been posited by Ann Calken. The term “rendering<sup>2</sup>” has been presented not necessarily in its hermeneutic sense but in a sense beyond interpretation from the perspective of Walter Benjamin<sup>3</sup> and situation that means an interstitial space that can be also subjective and visual and the cause of an effect named experience has been investigated from the perspective of Walter Benjamin. And, medium has been explored from the perspective of the theoretician Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913), the book “modernism art” by Sandra Becola, McLuhan<sup>4</sup>’s theory and Walter Benjamin’s theory.

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<sup>1</sup>Giorgio Agamben (born 1942), a contemporary Italian philosopher and writer.

<sup>2</sup>The methodical theory and regulations of a text’s interpretation is called the science of rendering (hermeneutics in English) or the study of rendering. The goal of such a science is the discovery of the messages, signs and meanings of a text or phenomenon.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Benjamin (Walter Bendix Schönflies Benjamin 1892-1940) was a German-Jew Marxist philosopher, translator, writer, radio programmer, aestheticist; he was also a member of Frankfurt school. He was one of the cultural critics, a literary scientist and a social journalist in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century in Germany. He was one of the imperialism’s critics in the west and he got involved in the fight with capitalism. Benjamin used to criticize the capitalism’s instruments and embodiments and knew it as the cause of certain and, often, negative evolutions in the process of the social changes.

<sup>4</sup>Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980).

## CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY AND CONTEMPORANEITY

No specific definition can be offered for the concept “contemporary” in art rather the perceptions are somewhat more individual. Fredrick Nietzsche was amongst the individuals who offered a clue for contemporary; he published the “untimely meditations”. These were meditations by the assistance of which he wanted to settle down with his own time and take a position in respect to the present time (Agamben, 2010, p.2). Nietzsche lays his claim about “contemporaneity” and “timeliness” on the foundation of a sort of disproportion and phase difference in the face of the present time (Ibid, p.4). Nietzsche’s intention in expressing the timeliness has been being not completely in the control of and in the present time and this per se causes the delimitation between the present time and the individual and this same border causes the individual to have more subtle perception about his or her time. Here, a question can be asked that should a contemporary person not synchronized with his or her time spend time in the past or in the future? From the perspective of Giorgio Agamben, contemporaneousness is not a historical matter rather the contemporary individual realizes all the times (past, present and future) as being related; such a person does not historically approaches the times rather s/he thinks of an event in them and brings about change and deals with the events as sorts of warnings and, from the perspective of Agamben, “it is this historical untimeliness and adventitiousness that allows us make changes in our time in many early forms which are, in the meanwhile, very late, as well” (Ibid, p.20). In the meantime, the contemporary artists are enumerated amongst the individuals influencing the time, as well; thus, the contemporary thinker and artist is the person who authenticates his or her lifeworld; recognizes his or her time’s distinctions from the past times’ and, at the same time, s/he does not undergo transformations through being enchanted by and attached to the present time and keeps his or her distance from the present time. So, the contemporary individual establishes a dual bond with his or her current time and lifeworld (Abd Al-Karimi, 2018, p.6).

In fact, it can be perceived that the role of tradition and future can be effective in the contemporary time’s events. The actualization of the contemporary thought is indeed interlaced with the bond between the tradition and the present and future times. Contemporaneity is experienced where the tradition starts speaking in the present and future’s semantic horizon so as to be able to respond to the pains, sufferings, crises and black and dark aspects of the present time (Ibid, p.7). Thus, the contemporary thinker should take advantage of his or her time’s facilities and technologies for being able to effectively respond to the time’s happenings.

### *Medium*

In the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century and based on the linguistic theories by Saussure, the significant role of the medium considerably influenced the formation of the concepts and it is recounted as an important concept in art. Medium that means matter included each of the formats of art expression or artistic communication (Pakbaz, 1999, p.252). Besides setting the artistic ground, medium establishes a relationship between the artist, artwork and audience. The first growths in the medium’s diversity came about with the

emergence of the shaped canvas (early 1960s) and, since then, the shape of the display screen became a determinant factor in the configuration process hence it can be concluded that the artwork did not just rely like the past on the playing of a role as a ground and bed and it became united this time with the artwork. Then, during the Pope Art's time, the issue "technique" was posited and the industrial techniques were utilized and not just one medium was put into use and various areas like publishing entered the art arena and were employed for producing artwork and this propagation of the artwork changed the position and role thereof and made it public and available to all as viewed by Walter Benjamin in his article "art in the era of the mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin, 2001).

After a while, McLuhan's mass media theories drew attentions in 1960s. He realizes the mass communication instruments as new languages featuring an exceptional and extraordinary expressional power. In his mind, radio, film and television freed the written language from the chains of abundance and granted a power of improvisation thereto (Tehranchian, 1988, p.12). Here, reference should be made to the personal and collective aspects of the media. In the former, reference is made to the medium's reachability as the relationship between the minds of the individuals such as in painting and so forth; however, in the latter, medium is in communication with the others as a unit such as television and so on. Thus, the personal media might be more suitable for the production of the artworks but the collective aspect of such a medium as photography, as well, became an important capital for the conceptual artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but it was with the emergence of photography and, later on, with the use of the artwork-publishing technologies that another sort of artwork production quality and method was formed. The question that can be asked is that whether the media like television share collective aspect's specifications with the new art and even, in a more detailed approach, the new artistic media or not? Lev Manovich realizes the term "media art" for the explanation of this stream. From his perspective, the software arts are important parts of the media art's stream. According to Andrew Darley, a pioneer in paying attention to the digital media and art created by them, "digital visual culture deals with the evolutions in the extant media and digital technologies and assesses the effect of these novel pictorial forms on the experiencing of the visual culture because the new visual digital species have caused new forms of audience and watching levels to enter the mass culture" (Morseli Tawhidi, Ma'anavirad and Moridi, 2018, p.3). However, in the new media, a scale like being digital and the use of the latest technology does not suffice and other factors like the media's interactivity play a notable role. Surely, television was considered as a new medium in its time but it does not establish interaction between the audience and the sender. In the new media, interaction should be created between the audience and the author and the roles of both of them are very important in the art-related matters because the creation of a unilateral relationship causes passivity and noncompletion of the artwork (Masdari, 2015). From the perspective of Benjamin, the presence of the new media causes interaction between the medium, the audience and the artist and there has been no such a situation for an artwork before them. Thus, "in the interaction-oriented art, the audience shares the construction of a new work and constructs numerous coding

systems in the position of a creator” (Rahbarnia and Khairi, 2013, p.104). By coding systems, the authors mean the renderings of an artwork with or without the presence of the author according to Benjamin.

### ***Rendering***

As it was mentioned above, an artwork can be rendered whether with or without the author’s presence. Artworks have been rendered in the entire length of the art’s history but this specification is more highlighted in the contemporary art, particularly the set formed by the new media due to such an indicator as being more interactive. The new media place more emphasis on the influential role of the rendering through their providing of the possibility of having different experiences and by enabling wider representation. Walter Benjamin states that the method of perceiving a work or as he calls it “Nachgeschichte” which can be translated into “post-history” is actually the work’s adventures after its creation when, independent from the author and free of the intentions and goals that have led to its creation, it is made available to the audience and rendered in various horizons (Ahmadi, 1997, p.31). Here, distinctions should be made between interpretation and rendering; when engaging in the interpretation of an event, we actually intend to describe the happening as it has exactly occurred; but, when engaging in rendering, we try describing the happenings that have not objectively occurred in addition to the interpretation of the event; thus, it happens to share things with imagination but it is still different from imagination. The latter is a subjective concept but the former is the result of matching the meaning with the examples. So, it can be understood that an artwork can be numerously rendered with the author him or herself being unaware of many of them; so, the correctness and incorrectness of any of them can be decided and this is why the contemporary art is definitely an art that can be rendered.

### ***Situation***

The issue “contemporary” is due to a situation or status’s being stable or transient and such situations are actually experienced in various temporal and spatial grounds and in the course of certain events hence different experiences of situation could be made. Thus, contemporaneity can be considered as a sort of situation. Now, the situation can be objective or subjective or both. The medium is definitely effective in the objective aspect thereof; in the subjective aspect of the situation, medium is one of the influential factors because as it was mentioned, the artist’s idea and rendering cause the creation of a subjective situation that reconstructs a different experience for the audience. As stated by Walter Benjamin, “spiritual experience” has had an extensive influence in every given period of time on the perception and change of the art. The thing that is faced in this regard is the issue that the art is no more the possessor of a transcending and inaccessible domain (Kamali and Akbari, 2008, pp.3-4).

“In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the necessity of correcting the artists and onlookers’ situations was gradually felt so a situation was brought about in which the audience was constantly seen playing an uncertain objective and subjective role. In the modern world and with the emergence of different kinds of technology, the prior forms of the artistic communication were no longer

responding to the audience and artists' needs rather there was felt a need for a mutual interaction in the new world in which both the artist and the audience actively participate in the process of the artwork's construction and enjoyment" (Masdari, 2015, p.7). In the contemporary art, the artwork and the audience are faced with an interstitial situation and this situation points to the concomitant existence and nonexistence. In fact, the situation is experienced by the audience and, here, the audience's presence matters not as the observer but as part of the artwork. On the other hand, situation can react to the present era's ambiguous statuses by means of an artwork with a designed searching idea. The thing that can be comprehended from Benjamin's statement is that an interrogative design enables a higher perception of ethical consciousness that causes the creation of an emergency situation in some of the artworks. This emergency situation is a criticism about the present and past and a strategy for a better future (Wodiczko, 2019, p.64).

### **KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO<sup>5</sup>**

Krzysztof Wodiczko was born in 1943 in Warsaw, Poland. He studied industrial designing and he took part in the Polish electronic industries consortium (UNITRA) and exhibited his own art in 1968. In 1977, he migrated to Canada. Krzysztof Wodiczko is a photographer, an industrial designer, a media artist, a critic, a historian, a philosopher and a politician; his designed works are sorts of interrogative designs. It is worth mentioning that a designed work can be questioning when it interrogatively expresses the ambiguous situations of the today's world (Wodiczko, 2019, p.64). Based on this definition, Wodiczko is a critical interrogative designer. By means of the instruments, digital ones included, he tries helping the individuals claiming for their common rights in the general and digital spaces open a space for discourse. According to Wodiczko, "designing should express and inspire the transferring of the real and often difficult lived experience instead of being a substitute for that experience" (Ibid). During 1980s, he had several designs in open spaces around the globe in cities like New York, the US, and Stuttgart and Kassel, Germany, in the form of installations giving critical messages. He displayed his videos in the US, Mexico, Germany and Japan before the public in the public spaces and they had themes like oppression in the society towards the refugees, foreigners, homeless people and victims of domestic violence and this provided an opportunity for speaking in the public spaces. Specifically, the issue of the homeless people has always been amongst the contemporary era's concerns. The works by Krzysztof Wodiczko have been described and analyzed in terms of such aforesaid indicators as contemporaneity, rendering and situation as well as the effect of media on them.

As it was mentioned, the themes of his works are related to the social crises the outcomes of which would be surely continued; these are the issues and the consequences of which most of the society members are unaware. Amongst the indicators of the contemporary art, closeness to the daily life can be pointed out (Taghavi, Kafshchian Moghaddam and Pahlavan Nodeh, 2018,

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p.5). This rule holds true for the themes of the works by Wodiczko; he showcases all the experiences such as feelings, thoughts and occurred events and their outcomes as well as the fears in his works. He gets close to the subjects of his works and gives them freedom of expressing words and feelings to the extent that the audience can readily sympathize with them and, of course, the rendering created from the works' themes could have also stemmed from the audience's sympathy. In addition to the themes, his medium has a large deal of effect on the contemporaneity of his works. His selected medium is most predominantly video projector. A projector is the best method for creating a perfect experience of the home cinema. This instrument is in the meanwhile considered as the cheapest method for achieving the largest possible image. Projectors can create images that humiliate even the largest televisions. The luminosity of a projector is measured in lumen and the larger this value, the brighter the projector. Krzysztof Wodiczko's videos are mostly displayed in public spaces and during the nights or inside the dark interior spaces for the reason that most of the projectors have lamps with relatively little brightness-about 1500 lumen or lower-and they have been designed for watching films in a dark space. Wodiczko's works are not displayed in every place. He chooses the places in relation to his video; thus, place is of a great importance in his works and his works can be resultantly called a sort of installation<sup>6</sup> or, better said, video installation. This same issue causes the situation to play a more accentuated role in his works for both the audience and the video. He displays his videos on the statues of the famous persons; he also uses the city bridges and walls that are not the places of certain persons' coming and going thereby to either change the nature of the place or grant it, apart from being a memorial monument, a theme and concern and he also creates a situation in both objective and subjective terms.

Wodiczko makes film of the homeless individuals, war-stricken people, migrants and others and displays their experiences and feelings on the selected and related spaces before the public's eyes. Considering the above interpretations, no place or space can be senseless for Wodiczko. It can be asked as to whether he firstly chooses the space and secondly makes his video or vice versa but the feature vividly visible in his videos is the discourse. This discourse can mean conversation or body movement in both of which the observers are in a stationary status because they do not witness an unexpected happening that makes them amazed or horrified rather they sit to watch the memories and the hidden angles of a happened event and, on the other hand, become aware of the situations that have previously occurred but not from the perspective of the news or the politicians but from the perspective of an individual like them and in their position. As believed by Plato, the audience occasionally sympathizes with the story's suffering person (Ahmadi, 1995, p.26). Thus, it can be stated that the accompanying addressees become part of the work and, on the other hand, experience a vague and unclear feeling of fear about what has happened. It is here that the addressees that have now become part of the work are instigated to respond even if mentally. In order to better perceive the goal of the artist and his opinions, the forthcoming sections deal with a number of his works.

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<sup>6</sup>Installation or arrangement is the placement or launching of the works; in Rou'ein Pakbaz's art encyclopedia, it means functionary.

In one of his fairs in 2017, his new project that is named “my wish” and comprised of four parts, was displayed in gallery number seven; his prior works were being simultaneously displayed in gallery no.5. The first part incorporates his initial and old works that had been displayed in Poland. In these works, he showcases the interpersonal freedom and society’s controlling power and norms (image 1).



**Image 1** National museum of the modern arts, South Korea, Seoul, 2017  
(Source: URL1)

The second part embraces the instrument or the very medium he has used for showing his works. He displays the discriminations and social injustice experienced by the deprived persons like the homeless individuals and migrants and others. This way, he allows them to gain access to freedom of expression and present themselves to the society (image 2).



**Image 2** National museum of the modern arts, South Korea, Seoul, 2017  
(Source: URL1)

The third part encompasses the general videos and the projects developed in the various cities of the world within the format of ten films, including Tijuana project (2001) that includes the women who survive the domestic violence.



Hiroshima Projection (1999) is the presentation of the voices of the victims of nuclear bombs, including the Korean-Japanese women (image 3).

The fourth part of his works include UN wars and he displays video works that, meanwhile explaining about the damages suffered by the individuals injured in wars and the other victims, present a panorama of the world wherein war is always present. Impressed by the ideal Kichuk society, Wodiczko was a political activist supporting the freedom. For the accomplishment of this goal, he met various individuals, including the victims, artists and so forth and, from his perspective, this pain can be soothed when it is somehow shared between the members of a society. Doing so, he demonstrates the social role of art and his works create an opportunity for the audience so as to better conceive the relationship between art, society and democratic opinions (image 4).



**Image 3** National museum of the modern arts, South Korea, Seoul, 2017  
(Source: URL1)



**Image 4** National museum of the modern arts, South Korea, Seoul, 2017  
(Source: URL1)

He used to use the memorial and historical buildings situated in the main squares of the cities for questioning the critical situation sought by historical persons and, doing so, he revived the monument or statue but, this time, in another way. In fact, as a person who has experienced migration and aware of its difficulties and problems, he can better speak about and perceive the society members who are losing their freedom. He announces his concerns

from the others' tongue to the ears of the general public. In fact, he realizes speaking as an essential right for every individual in the society. By offering the migrants and refugees' secrets and mysteries and their untold words in his recent works on the historical buildings, he helps the audience hear things beyond the ordinary talks. He uses the Syrian refugees in Germany, Mexican refugees in the US and war-injured persons and others and showcases an interaction between them and the general public; this is an interaction and relationship that might not anymore happen to any of the addressees (Art 21, 2011 (images 5, 6 and 7).



**Image 5** Mesonevo theater (source: URL2)



**Image 6** Abraham Lincoln: war-injured soldier, Unity Square, New York City, 2012 (source: URL3)



**Image 7** The cultural center in Mexico's Tijuana, 2001 (source: URL4)

The notable point in his works is that the addressees of his works and their experiences and feelings differ depending on the choice of the place. In the first place, he selects the places that are related to these strangers (migrants, war-stricken individuals and others) and, in the second place, the chosen places are usually cultural and public spaces wherein these strangers are not given any chance to express their stories (Wodiczko, 1999, p.7). Similarly, the addressees of his works are most often individuals who either live in or come to and go out of those spaces. In fact, his audience is somehow related to those places. The addressees of Wodiczko's works should have correct perception and information of the space so as to be able to establish communication and interaction with the concerns and experiences of Wodiczko's works. Actually, it is here due to the situation that rendering comes about. Of course, the very important point is that Wodiczko has been thinking about the audience's experience from the beginning of preparing the video and even far before that. Apparently, it is just the displaying of a simple video in an unusual place but it is in depth Wodiczko's want or wants of the artwork itself; this want can be a sort of objection to the current status or a warning about the existing situation or a made state. Thus, the issue that was previously controversial is that Wodiczko seminally makes a video in respect to his goal and, subsequently, finds the related place.

## CONCLUSION

In the contemporary art, the artist seeks producing language and gives it the ability of being manifested through the new media. Due to invoking the highest percentage of participation in the audience, the new media enable the audience establish an effective interaction with the artwork. Thus, the role of the audience in the completion of this language's production cannot be ignored. Resultantly, the audience comes to help the media hence it can be considered as an integral part of the artwork. Moreover, rendering and situation have been existent in the entirety of the artwork but such a capability of being rendered and having a situation play a vaster role in comparison to the past in the new art to the extent that the contemporary art is currently called an art that can be rendered and contemporaneity is termed a situation.

Amongst the other factors influencing the contemporaneity of an artwork, the new media can be surely pointed out. Based on the study question that how do media influence the contemporaneity of an artwork, it can be perceived that the new media, especially the digital ones, can, due to their interactivity, create the indicators of contemporaneity, including the ability of being rendered, situation and participation of the audience not as a watcher but as the third diagonal of the artwork. It can be concluded based on the information obtained in this research that the contemporary artist and art seek responding to the time and place wherein they are present but with a glance at what has happened so far. In fact, this same issue transforms the contemporary art into an original art. As for the properties of the works by Krzysztof Wodiczko, including critical designing, the use of the digital media, the addressees' presence as part of the work, use of the urban places and elements that per se causes an artwork to have a space a lot larger than a local space and the interaction between his artworks and the audience causes the corroboration of the contemporaneity's properties in his works.

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URL2: <https://macm.org/en/exhibitions/krzysztof-wodiczko-homeless-projection-place-des-arts>

URL3: <https://macm.org/en/exhibitions/krzysztof-wodiczko-homeless-projection-place-des-arts>

URL4: <http://web.mit.edu/idg/cecut.html>