

Power to Empowerment: Critical Literacy in Visual Culture
Presentation Proposal: City as Screen / Body as Movie

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Video images are increasingly finding their way outside, into public spaces as large-scale projections, interactive artworks and digital graffiti. While many of these large-scale outdoor videos advertise products, and many others produce entertaining spectacles for dazzled viewers, some are politically motivated works intended to interrogate and re-energize the public sphere and invite spectators to consider their physical, somatic relationship not just to the projected images but to the built environment around us.

Perhaps best known among artists working with video in public space is Krzysztof Wodiczko, who has been projecting controversial images onto public buildings and official monuments for more than 25 years. Speaking of his work with large-scale still image projects, Wodiczko says, “Public space is an enactment,” and his projections are attempts to make the building exteriors embody the living, breathing inhabitants of urban spaces. Similarly, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer uses public space in his projection-based artwork. In *Under Scan* (2005), for example, Lozano-Hemmer projected a series of video portraits on the ground of the public squares in several towns in England. However, the portraits are invisible until people walk into the light of the projection, at which point their shadows reveal the portraits. An exchange takes place between the viewer and the video portrait, and one result is a sense of composited and performed social identity that is at once connected to and more than the single, individual body.

This paper considers several moving-image based artworks that appear in public space, asking what kinds of literacies are being shaped by pervasive video in public space. Further, in a space rife with advertising, what rhetorical strategies are deployed by artists and others to “speak” to viewers about important issues? And how are everyday viewers responding with their own images in public? Finally, as cities become screens, and bodies become movies, where do we situate empowerment and literacy?