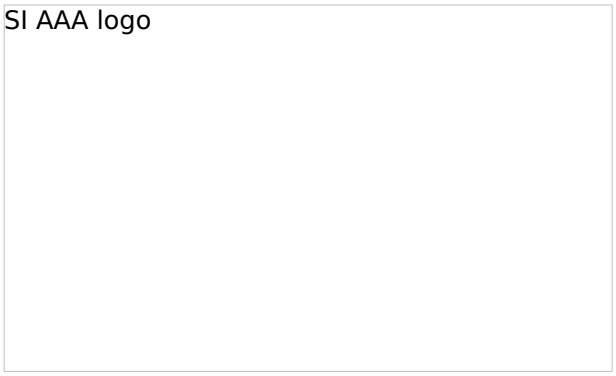

Oral history interview with Krzysztof Wodiczko, 2021 June 28-30

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions
www.aaa.si.edu/

Transcript

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Krzysztof Wodiczko on June 28 – 30, 2021. The interview took place in New York City, New York, and was conducted by Annette Leddy for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Krzysztof Wodiczko and Annette Leddy have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ANNETTE LEDDY: Let's see. This is Annette Leddy interviewing Krzysztof Wodiczko on June 28, 2021, in his East Village studio in New York City. Okay. Let's begin at the beginning, you were born in 1943 in Warsaw, correct?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, that's correct.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, can you describe your family background, your grandparents, your ancestors to the extent that you know it?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, this—hmm, this is a task that I can only fulfill 50 percent, because our entire family of my mother was killed during the first weeks of my life, so I never met those people. So, my mother is the only person from my mother's side of the family that I—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, my God—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —in the Warsaw Ghetto, is that—? Sorry.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: This is not—I don't think that's the case. The parents of my mother were smuggled out of ghetto by my father, who was not Jewish, who managed to get into ghetto wearing the star and—and through some secret passage through one of the churches. He—he took them away to safety in some village, but they vanished. So they were definitely the only people, my mother's side of the family, who are in ghetto for sure. The rest of the family was in various places in Poland, and they vanished. So, in the scale of my mother's family, most of—the vast majority of my family, meaning everybody except—actually, I should say, were not in ghetto, and they were killed not by—not by the way many other Jews were killed, in concentration camps and death camps. So, it's most—you know, I don't know if I should—this should be really recorded, because I don't know. This is just the possibility that none of those people have—of my mother's side of the family were murdered in death camps, but they—they perished somewhere, killed by Nazis, German Nazis, under the various circumstances that we don't know.

But names of those people are in the archives of Yad Vashem, because my mother sent the names of those members of the family who were killed during the Holocaust to their archives, and I've seen those names. I went to the Yad Vashem, and there are those fiches in her handwritings. The names are written by my mother, so you could see it, yeah. So, the reason my mother and myself survived was because we were hidden at the great risk of non-Jewish people.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Meaning your father?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: First, my father, who was hiding us, and then he was taken to labor camp, you know, plus many non-Jews, and some were round up on some arrest—a random arrest or other arrests, I don't know. So he ended up in a German labor camp, so we were helped by his family.

[00:05:19]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Where did they hide you?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: The outside of Warsaw in a small town called Choszczówka. And when the Soviet army—because Choszczówka is on the other side of the river from Warsaw, that's where the Soviet and Polish armies came. And during the Warsaw Uprising, not the Ghetto Uprising but the Warsaw city—Warsaw Uprising, that are—those armies were on that side of the river. But before it happened, there was a front line that was actually the—this Choszczówka was on—a once point of the front line. So one time, that building in which we were staying was taken over by Germans, another time by Russians, so the Soviets. So we were there on that line, and then eventually the parents of my father crossed the front line and smuggled us across the front line to the Soviet side that is further east. And that—after that, we were staying in the city of Wołomin, which is not far from Warsaw, but it was further east. It was on the Soviet side already, and it remained that—in that place, because the front, of course, eventually moved west.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Just to clarify, your father was sent to the labor camp because it was discovered that he had helped you, or—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —for another reason?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: He—this was never discovered, that was irrelevant, but he had to pay one SS or Wehrmacht officer who knew about this, because my father was playing in a restaurant there, in which many Nazi officers were eating. He's playing in this small orchestra; he was a musician, so. Well, one of those officers knew that my father is hiding Jews, so my father had to pay all of his bills in this restaurant. Of course, we were moved several times, because that's the rule of hiding people in order to—not to stay in one place too long, to endanger everybody else, but still very risky for everybody. But some—when my father finally was locked down in this train car, the legendary train car that was used for transporting people for the camps, he told me that he felt relieved because he could no longer do anything, so much tension, and he just was—could not. So he disappeared into those labor camps, and he came back after the war. Maybe a year after the war, finally, he found his way back to Poland from some German territories where he was liberated, and that's—that was the beginning of my memory, and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —do you remember being in hiding? You would've been a baby, correct?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I could not remember that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. But do you remember your father's return?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, I remember the early days; not his return but early days, when we actually were living by the seaside. There was—he was a conductor, a great conductor, very, very famous, in fact, in Poland for his introduction of contemporary music and support of contemporary music in general, and his own artistry of conducting.

[00:10:24]

But at that time after the war, there were only few orchestras in the ruined Poland. So he started in the orchestra in Silesia, when he was assisting to a famous—also very famous Polish conductor, Fitelberg. And then he became a director of Baltic symphony where—that's the time when I remember him, although I did visit Silesia and I was—in fact, I remember Fitelberg, but I think it was a little later, so he was in this Baltic—there was no building at that time, so the orchestra was playing in the forest opera. So I remember at that time—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Playing in the—the orchestra played in a forest?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: An open amphitheater in the forest. I translate a name, Opera Leśna, which was a forest opera. My mother was, at that time, also still playing piano publicly, so he was a conductor, she was a pianist. She was also teaching in a kind of conservatory, the music conservatory in Sopot, so it's the city by the Baltic Sea. But her—also, she was there, but at the same time, her profession wasn't only being a pianist, but also a microbiologist, so she had two degrees, and some also education on probably bachelor level in philosophy. So she was eventually taking those various jobs, like—that's later when we moved to Krakow, she worked in the institute that produced the—you know, the—you know, the immunization kind of—you know, well, the first actually vaccine—vaccines in Poland.

ANNETTE LEDDY: For polio?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, against all of the illnesses that were so typical after the Second World War, so—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —polio, right, you know, the cholera, typhus, and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Typhus—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —tuberculosis.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —mm-hmm [affirmative], yes—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So that's what she was—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —working on. That was actually her first job after the war in the city of Wałcz, but then after my father returned, you know, we went to Baltic Sea, and then after that, we went to Wałcz again, so she worked on many jobs, but that's my mother. So, father maintained always his position as the conductor or director of the philharmonics, for our entire life.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And his parents, your grandparents, did you know them?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, his grandfa—her—his grandmother I knew very well, because I was with his mother and his father in the city of Wołomin, you know, after the Second World War, for several years. And actually by myself, because my mother had to take a job in Wałcz in this microbiological lab, which was the only one probably operating in Poland at that time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So they raised you, they were your—essentially, you lived with them for how long, a year or two years, or—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, a few years. I—

ANNETTE LEDDY: A few years?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —don't remember how many years. It might be two years, maybe a year and a half, maybe two years.

[00:15:03]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you were how old at that age?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, the war ended in 1945 in Poland, so I was four years old probably, when probably my father came back, so I maybe—so I probably stayed there around about two years on my—I mean, with the parents of my father.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you remember this period?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, I remember because my—yeah, father's father was also a conductor of Central, I think, Railway Orchestra at that time, and so it's a very responsible position in the small city, but not very close to Warsaw. Warsaw, by the way, at that time did not exist, so there were no jobs in Warsaw. People actually were not allowed to live there, only the special district where—for those who were rebuilding Warsaw was inhabited. So at that time, Warsaw was not an option, yeah, for anybody except the—you know, the workers who were, you know, working through the ruins and then turning the city into a place to live. So eventually, of course, Warsaw, it—what, became a place where I lived, and we lived, but it's taken time.

I remember Warsaw. I don't know how it happened or how old I was; I probably was five years old or four years old, maybe five years old. I remember myself being in Warsaw with my parents, and I remember vividly the landscape. There was nothing there; it was just a horizon, it was broken kind of line, horizon of ruins.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Like broken teeth, or in a—but badly broken teeth around. So I—that was my first image of Warsaw. It's still—it's incredible. Of course, you look at the photographs today, you know, it is true, it was not my imagination, but it's very different to see it as a child to

this kind of a landscape for the first time.

So, this, I have to jump because the—when I was passing exams, entry exams for Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, those two weeks' long exams, so it's extremely tough, about a hundred people for one place. [Laughs.] Somehow, I managed to pass those exams, and I was very sick at that time, high fever; I don't know how I passed it. But one of the exams was to depict the most memorable moment in one's life, so that's what I did, I just did draw that line of basically no city.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you remember the feelings that went with that? I mean, was—were you—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I didn't know anything. For me, it was—of course, it was some kind of big shock because I—you know, I had not seen anything like this before. I didn't fully understand it, but it was a sense of this complete destruction. I don't remember details, so I don't remember where I was exactly or what ground I was standing or why, in fact, we ended up there, what was the reason, occasion; I mean, I never really even asked my parents about this, but I remember the horizon line, the landscape.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Very—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But later—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —interesting.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —in Warsaw, when we moved to Warsaw, when my father became the director of National Philharmonic, which was, you know, late '50s, the end of Stalinism, there's big, renewed parades, oh, a sense of potential freedom for Poland, which didn't materialize.

[00:20:29]

But anyway, at that time, Warsaw was—still had ruins, big ruins in the middle, it's unbelievable. In 1956, '58, there was in the middle of Warsaw huge ruins, and I was still playing, and—I was in high school, but I was still exploring those ruins, making plans and drawings and just trying to really understand especially the underground areas, the basements that were fully accessible, you know. The underground, you know, that's the real memory of Warsaw from before the war, what's left underground, it's like unconscious of the city. You know, you're exploring that kind of —it was my favorite thing to do.

And in the Baltic Sea, going back to my best—strongest memories after the war, also bunkers and not ruins as much because the city in which we lived was not ruined, it was left pretty much intact, a German resort city, Sopot, but there were fortifications and bunkers around. There were also destroyed barges of—dessant barges, the landing ships along. There were lots of trenches because the war went through it. That's also where I spent lots of time playing. So playing with the ruins or also landfills, that's also an important place where I spent lots of time. The landfills were you could see also elements, fragments, destroyed, broken kind of cross sections, dissections obviously, the isolation in all of the landfills was fantastic education for me as a child. I spent days. People at the time, parents did not really—could not really take care of their children all the time, so we were very free.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: After the war—we were all free to move around. Some of my colleagues were killed or lost their sight because of explosives. We played with explosives. I had under my bed a gun, very good German gun, and in Krakow, we also—it's another city we lived, we play with ammunition all the time. So the children after the war, in any country, I'm sure not just the Poland, they have a special relation to ruins and to weapons and to danger that comes with the war, after the war.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And was there a feeling of sadness in your home about all the people in your mother's family who were lost?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, it's a—it's a very strange feeling not to have a contact with the culture of my mother, because this is not simply not having her parents, not knowing her parents' siblings, it's also not understanding her—her special culture—that is Jewish culture of assimilated Jews from before the war. So it's very hard to understand from where she came from culturally. But of course, not knowing that family, it's meaning like having basically no family around, because my father didn't keep much contact with his family who also was dispersed, you know, some of them in other countries, and some parts of the family she did. So might be the

only person of his side, family was his brother, older—oldest brother with whom he maintained contact, and with whom also my mother maintained contact, so was the only. So, you know, when it comes to holidays or events that usually are so much focus on family reunions and connections, I didn't have that.

[00:25:55]

ANNETTE LEDDY: But what about your grandparents who you had lived with, you didn't maintain contact—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: The—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —with them?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —grandparents, yeah, you know, I did see Grandmother, I mean, the mother of my father several times, because we visiting them, but his father died quite early.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. And you had no brothers or sisters?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I had half, I have a brother from the second marriage of my father.

ANNETTE LEDDY: First marriage, second marriage?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: His second marriage.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So he—your mother was his third marriage?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, my mother is his first marriage.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, I see, and then they broke up?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How old were you?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I was in high school, so it's probably in the '50—'56—'43, '56. I—yeah, I was in high school when they divorced. But see, there was—my father married somebody else and they had a child, and I met—I met him when he was a young student.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, so you didn't grow up with him in any way?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, no.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, going back to your earlier childhood—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I remember when he was born because I was living with my father and his wife, and when this—when the—this boy was born and was—but a very short time, and then I just moved on with my own life, so I left. But then I met him again very briefly once, like in some student club—he was studying art history—but the—but that's all because during the Solidar—around this martial law period, he committed suicide.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Actually, many young people somehow could not take it, so he was one of them, but maybe there was some kind of epidemics of suicides among young people during the martial law. I was not there at that time; I was already abroad.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Can we go back now to just your early—earlier childhood, because I have a question? So you've explained how you, in a sense, were in a very fairly isolated nuclear family; I mean, not that typical of other European families.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: In Poland after the war, there was almost no complete family left.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Every family suffered some losses to various degrees. And in fact, being very much on my own, especially during the holidays such as Christmas, because my mother did not celebrate Christmas, my—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did she celebrate Hanukah?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, she didn't—

ANNETTE LEDDY: No?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —really celebrate any—she was not religious, but Christmas was not something she would imagine celebrating, so I was usually with other families.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], oh.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But those other family, which is, for example, family of Jan Englert, it was very—a small family, it was just him and his mother, because his father was killed during the war.

[00:30:13]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And this—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So I was a kind of substitute for somebody who was missing there, so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —there was a kind of—I don't know how typical it was, but it was nothing unusual.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And this was a friend of yours, or a playmate—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, he's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —that's you're talking about?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —from, you know, in the time of high school.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And when you were a child, when you say you were playing in the ruins and so on, who are you playing with?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, there were always somebody. It's—I suppose it's too—I mean, I did some of the work on my own, I have to admit, but I think it was quite stupid, so I—most of the time, it was somebody, a colleague, friend from high school. But—

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_1of3_sd_track01_m.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —they were not as interested in architectural aspects of those explorations as I was. So I was always inspecting those ruins and making some notes and sketches, but also, I was always inspecting sites of construction when the new buildings were built and so forth, just to—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], just—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —that was my natural interest in design.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes, fascination, really. And of course, you're from a very musical family, and I must ask you, did you have no interest in music, or were you trained in music?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, so I was—I was a student in this—of a special music school, which was actually elementary school. Well, I don't know exactly what was so special; maybe there was a special competition to get there. So I was at the beginning of music education, on the level—on the elementary school level, and I remember myself, there was this end-of-a-year concert where we're supposed to prove ourselves how much we learn—[laughs]—and I didn't feel being part of it. So I remember myself walking away from that, I don't know, concert hall or wherever where we're supposed to play. Everybody was going there, with their little instruments, and I was in the opposite direction, and that was a real moment in my life, early life, to go against the trend.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How old were you?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Elementary school, well, I must—maybe seven—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —seven years old or eight years old, so.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —what instrument did you play?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I was playing—I was, of course, learning to play the piano in the beginning, but my job in this orchestra was percussion. But I think I even lost some button or something, they said, so I had additional motivation not to be there, because I was a little upset that I lost it, but also I was also pretty much, I felt pretty good about going against that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you did not participate, you left?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I left.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what did your parents say?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, my mother was pretty happy, because she's a pianist and she was against torturing children with all of this piano education. You know, she was skeptical about this, but at the same time, I was taking lots of private classes. I was already learning; I was already into drawing and painting. And, you know, at that time, my first exhibition in fact in my life was in the corridor of elementary school. That was illustrations to Old Testament. I didn't know anything about Judaism or Jewish; it was just, we were—we had religious classes at that time in Krakow. And in Krakow—in the Communist time, Krakow practically was never taken over by Communists. The church was so powerful there. Of course, politically, sure, it was Communist—so-called Communist Poland, but they—it was called Communist. Okay. So it was run by Communist party and so forth, but culturally speaking, it was run by the church, so there was classes of religion. So the priest was very friendly with me because he was getting free tickets, you know, to the concerts because of my father, and also, I liked because we started with Old Testaments. So I was extremely impressed by the—what I—all of the images that's so colorful, so dramatic.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Which ones did you choose to illustrate for this show?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I don't remember. It was some pretty much dramatic events, maybe some battles or some earthquakes or something.

[00:05:07]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Or the Red Sea or something?

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Some crossing maybe of the sea. I don't know what it was; I don't remember. But anyway, that was—so I was already into visual arts; not yet into design but definitely into painting and drawing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you were seven, that was—so it was a very early calling.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I started early, I mean yes, because it was elementary school, so maybe I was eight years old with this exhibition, I don't remember which year it was. But, you know, I started elementary school out there on six—when I was six years old, yeah, so one year earlier. So I may—I cannot be sure about all those dates.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. And what was—just because not everybody understands this, can you describe the education, the elementary school education in Poland?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, it was probably like everywhere else except that we had those classes, religion class. But otherwise not—there was nothing—there—nothing that significant that I remember from elementary school education. Like, I remember more because I had a much more critical, analytical position on high school level of education, but it was—of course, the school in Krakow in a so Catholic city, it—it's—I remember when there was a confirmation in the Catholic kind of religion. There was this ritual that is supposed to confirm your membership to, in this church or religion. You know, there's some—

ANNETTE LEDDY: What, First Communion—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —First Communion.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —the first time that you take the Eucharist into your mouth, that's a ceremony in the Catholic Church.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Probably. The—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And then there's one that happens later that's called Confirmation.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, so it's a Confirmation—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —where you have to—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —yes—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —learn the Bible—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and the New Testament—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —it's the Confirmation. Our entire school went to Confirmation except two students, myself and one of my colleagues.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And why did you not go, because you didn't want to be a Catholic?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Because I consider myself as nonreligious.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see, and that was tolerated, even though it was a Catholic school?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It was quite an event, because if the entire school, only two people don't go, you know, that is something. And I don't—of course, my relation with this priest probably vanished anyway. Maybe the—I don't remember what it—I don't remember details. I don't remember the repercussions of this except that we were definitely feeling lots of pressure; I mean a kind of feeling alienated from the school after that. This was not the same place once it became—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —clear, we didn't go. He was not my close friend, you know; he was just one—another person from the school.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. I just thought another thing, if you could just describe your—a little bit your family home, the one that you grew up in for the most period of time, I guess the one on the Baltic?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh well, it was the homes in—on the Baltic Sea, the Sopot because we have to—it's an order for my life was governed by the jobs that my father was stay—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see that, yes.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —or could receive. So one was the Baltic Sea, that one I remember. Well, the first was Wołomin as I mentioned, when my parents were not there, then a time, there was the Baltic Sea, Sopot, then it was Wałcz, right, and then it was Krakow, then it was Warsaw. So in the Baltic Sea, there were buildings where—it was previously a German city, so those buildings were solid buildings.

[00:10:35]

And then about, in my case, I—in Sopot and in Krakow, there were sort of buildings occupied only by musicians from the orchestra, so—[laughs]—you could hear all kinds of instruments, and people actually were, you know, training themselves and preparing themselves for concerts. So sometimes there were several—I mean, there was a quartet involved, and there was a trombone person, and so that's—definitely my life was surrounded by music.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It sounds lovely—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Also—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —but did you like it, or—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It's kind of annoying, so, because one person was playing a trombone in Sopot, you know, and he was trying to—oh, one passage was very difficult. It's from Chopin, a Chopin piano concert symphony. It was something [hums tune]. There's the solo that one musician has to play, and certainly, he's the only one who's playing, so if there was a mistake there, you know, it's a major shame. So he was—[laughs]—always portraying this, I remember, and he always made a mistake there. I mean, this [hums tune], there's always false note there. At least I always remember that when he made that mistake, I mean, it's very—and after the years, and I was already a student in Academy of Fine Arts, I was still spending summers in Sopot, it's vacation. So out of curiosity, I went to this building, I entered the courtyard and what did I hear?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: [Hums tune.] And the same mistake. So what is clear, that—my conclusion is, maybe a haphazardly made conclusion, that people don't learn much by experience. That it's—[laughs]—the education, which is to learn something from other people's mistakes and experiences, and that is the source of our skills and knowledge, not simply training ourselves, because we repeat the same mistake for our entire life.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But he was a performer, so all these years he was playing it incorrectly, also when he was performing?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Probably during the concerts, he maybe mobilized himself enough not to make that mistake, I hope, I hope. But this was—at that time, I remember because I listened to so many concerts, I was so frequently, because of my father being a conductor I was—it's part of my life to—to sit on those—rehearsals, and so. So I understood pretty much the details how this whole process sounds and looks of trying to avoid those mistakes, you know, to make a perfect performance. And some people always have difficulties, you know? Right now, orchestras are on a different level, I'm sure we don't have that, but at that time, maybe it was not very easy to find good musicians, especially wind instruments, so it's very hard.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And did you—after you walked away from that performance, did you stop playing music completely, or did you continue with piano?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, I stopped, I didn't—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Everything?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I never really developed any skills in piano or in any instrument. Basically, that was it; my mother, full approval.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [affirmative], and what about your father, how did he feel?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: My father was disappointed, I'm sure, because it was a history of the entire family. His father was a conductor and his grandfather was a conductor, and also, my mother was a musician, so the whole milieu, social life, everything was around music, especially interpretation, so, instrumental music.

[00:15:28]

And also, my mother was—oh, after she—her time working in this lab in Krakow, she started to work in—as an editor of music, music scores, you know, publishing house, so she was editing, editing music. And of course later, she still continue, connected with music in Warsaw. She worked in Polish Radio in—as a music editor, and then as a music illustration in television, working especially with television theater. But she actually, basically, composed also music to the television theater production. Maybe it was made of a compilation of music that she put together, but she's listed as one of the musicians who contributed to music, to television theater. So she also—so the entire life of my parents is music. The fact that I—and I think that some members of my mother's family were also musicians, so these are those details I don't know, but still that was a major departure from family tradition.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it sounds as though your mother respected your—the direction that you felt was yours?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, although the motivation was very simple. She experienced so much the life and the culture of musicianship and musicians, with kind of community of musicians, that she believed that this is not the best place to be intelligent.

ANNETTE LEDDY: What does that—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: She—believed that it doesn't create conditions for intellectual development because—well, actually most of those musicians—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —practice.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —were instrumentalists. They were playing something that was already written, and of course, some of them were great people, and also very bright people. She was a friend with Rubinstein, for example, when she was a student in the Warsaw Conservatory, thus she has a very good time, but most of those real intellectuals, musicians, were composers.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And that maybe would be the acceptable direction for me to take, acceptable for my mother, but that's a long ways to go. You know, at that time to become a composer,you have to go through all the instrumental trainings, you know, you have to go through in a music academy, and at least that's how it was at that time. So her belief was you will waste enormous amount of time exercising, preparing for—you know, having all the pain of performance in public, all of the stress that is unbearable to some people, and competitions and all of that stuff. And she said, "It's like you will be like an athlete, you know, like—there has—you know, your mind will be wasted because, you know, how much time you have to study, to read, you know, to think, to participate in any forms of culture and life, for that matter?" Yeah, you know, maybe she thought—I can imagine, knowing her, that I imagine that her mind—in her mind, I will just lose childhood and the most precious times of my life, my youth, you know, being constantly devoted to a career like this.

[00:20:00]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay, so she didn't just tolerate your departure, she really—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, no—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —encouraged it?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —she was a very critical person. There was no—not that much sentimental, like traditional way, motivation behind her actions. She was a very analytical person, she knew—you know, after all, she was also a scientist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what about your father, what was his character like, and his attitude?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: He—my father was also a composer, so he was very—a special conductor, he was—he had two degrees, one in composition, one in conducting in Prague and in Warsaw, so he was—his approach to music was social, not only artistic. He was a great artist. His recordings you can still buy and see on the internet, and then some of them are excellent, really excellent. But he was working in the time when it was hard to find very good orchestras, he had to create orchestra, he had to teach musicians how to play. There was such a destruction of the war. So his approach was taken from the tradition of conductors that work in small towns, and with a small orchestra, without resources. So his family tradition was to teach musicians how to play, and also teach the audience how to listen, to basically introduce a repertoire, and the most difficult ones, to train musicians through the most contemporary music, and also to teach the audience to understand and enjoy the quality performance of contemporary art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you were talking about people like Schoenberg and Anton Webern, and—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —so he was essentially—he would train them in the 12-tone system, is this what you're talking about?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It was a time—he was introducing contemporary music already in the Communist time; it was not well received. So he—he managed to sneak into the—lots of contemporary repertoire, and there was no scores, so he—many of those scores had to be

written into various sections of—you know, instrument sections. I mean, the orchestra, there was no good instruments, there was so much work for a conductor or director of the Philharmonic to maintain high quality and contemporary repertoire, so eventually when—in '56 when the situation changed in Poland into a much more open, you know, there was a kind of big shift after Stalinism, he became the director of the National Philharmonic, and he introduced jazz to major concert hall or concerts, so not—it was a chamber kind of concert hall for small jazz and also big concert halls for great musicians from all over the world would come. He, of course, a contemporary repertoire or the names you mentioned definitely, you know, any—anything that he could do to bring contemporary music was—and, you know, some were around. He was working with so many people, he was a friend with jazz musicians like [Krzysztof] Komeda. He was in good terms with—and I remember—and this was—he brought to the Philharmonic such as Modern Jazz Quartet, and Stan Getz, and people like that. He would be in completely one-to-one terms with them, because actually those people were highly educated—But still while there, I remember once my father came from the dinner with the Modern Jazz Quartet, and so I asked him, "What did you talk about?" And he said, "About Stravinsky," so, because they were influenced by Stravinsky and, well, polyrhythmic about all of that, so.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, right, right, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So, so much that. So this is a very special, yeah, musician, conductor, whose job was to make culture and to bring the most contemporary music, and also to make the best orchestras. So he managed to get some support once in a while from high rank officials, so he could probably offer apartments for musicians, bring them from other places, to put the National Orchestra on a first class.

[00:25:17]

But, of course, because it was during the—still the time of Communist—social—state socialism, he had lots of enemies, and people didn't like his forceful commitment to contemporary music, so he was basically kicked—well, he lost the job, he was fired by the Ministry of Culture. So he ended up taking jobs abroad like a cultural refugee. So, he was twice in Iceland, for example; he was the director of philharmonic and opera in Iceland twice. He also got jobs offered in Boston and in Sydney, but he—well, he received those offers, and he dropped those offers once he was asked to be director of National Opera. For example, he refused to take those jobs abroad, because he was a patriot. So he always come back, and so he then became the director of National Opera and that—he continued the same way. He brought opera like, I don't know, Luigi Nono, you know, the most contemporary, you know, composers, and also very difficult—difficult tasks, like bringing Brecht and Kurt Weill, but also he managed to bring the most advanced stage designers and choreographers, you know, from—like from Czechoslovakia, for example, and from England, and other contemporary artists; just, like, Tadeusz Kantor received, you know, a task to do stage design for, I don't know, I think Brecht and Weill opera. So those things, he didn't really keep those jobs for very long because there's so many enemies. So his task was to do the best he could in the three years; that was his credo.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Were you close to him, or were you closer to your mother? How did that—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So, both mother and my father was a great impact on me, because my mother also was on the side of bringing contemporary music and theater through television to masses of people. So they both did not believe in a distinction between high art and low art. They also—they were also in the—very social commitment to contemporary art. And my mother saw that the television was at this time, in a socialist—state, socialist Poland, television theater was still a very high quality, the best actors were playing, and also a very contemporary repertoire was introduced. Poland was not in the same situation like Czechoslovakia or East Germany or Bulgaria or Hungary or, of course, Russia. There was much more openness to contemporary art, as long as no politics was inscribed into this that would interfere with Communist agenda.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, okay, we're—I need to figure out what decade we're in when we're talking about this. You're saying in the 1960s, or are we still in the 1950s when you're talking about their openness?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I'm talking about after 1956; there was a kind of big relaxation and openness to the world. Before, of course, there was a reactionary movement, next this moral repression came, but still it was—never came back to the state in which Poland was under Stalinism.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So that, I mean, in 1956 and 1958, that two years was extremely powerful, but still after that, until my—you know, as long as I remember, you know, that theater or the summer production in—on national television was very good.

[00:30:18]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, I mean, I'm familiar with, for example, the filmmaker Andrzej Wajda, you know, I've seen many of his—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Ah, yes—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —movies.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —Andrzej Wajda—yes—it's his time, of course, of his. Other Polish, for the film, also flourished—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So it's—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —at that time—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —amazing, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —this. It's the same—you know, maybe Polish music, contemporary music as well. You know, to remember that the most famous Polish composers were actually operating at that time. My father also was very much instrumental in "Warsaw Autumn," which is a music festival in Poland, in which most contemporary music—

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_1of3_sd_track02_m.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —was introduced, definitely, since 1956, '58. Oh, I have—I remember concerts where the most avant-garde music you can imagine was brought into this.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So that part of it was taking place also in the philharmonics, at that time that my father was the director.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and so when you're a high school student, let's say, that is about—would be 1960-something, around late '50s, early '60s that—and—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: High school?

ANNETTE LEDDY: —you're—in other words, what would you call it, secondary school?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, '60, so, '50s—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because you graduated from the—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: In '68.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —from the Academy of Fine Arts in '68—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So I was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —but you started—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —in the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —in '64—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —school, and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —correct?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I was six years in Academy.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay, so '62 is when you started art school, and before that, the late '50s and

very early '60s, you were still in secondary school, and—where you already thought of yourself as a visual artist?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes; not as an artist, as a designer.

ANNETTE LEDDY: As a designer. So how did that shift happen? You went from having your first art show when you were seven or eight, with the Old Testament drawings, and then describe how that happened, where you shifted somehow into thinking of yourself as a designer?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, I applied for the Department of Architecture of Interiors in Academy of Fine Arts, so that was clear. I had a choice to write the architecture department in Polytechnic, or to some kind of design department in the Academy of Fine Arts, so I choose Academy of Fine Arts, and eventually, I move into specialization of industrial design. So I went through—I could—but many of those professors, mine were architects, you know. Because that—that department of interior architecture was formed during the Stalinist time by architects who had to find a hiding place, the most—more progressive architects for whom there was no room in the Polytechnic, so they—that was a hiding place for a very good designer.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So like the Vkhutemas, the people who were formed during Vkhutemas, or Bauhaus, those people?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, that was an architect, but one of them, when I became—when I moved into industrial design program, which is a graduate program, the head of it was Jerzy Soltan, who was teaching one semester in Warsaw and another semester in Graduate School of Design, Harvard, where I teach right now. It was a similar position as I had now. He was—earlier, he received that position at Harvard on the recommendation of Le Corbusier, because he was an assistant to Le Corbusier—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —for years in Paris. So, Bauhaus is, well, of course, an important reference, but another reference was the Ulm School of Design, Ulm, U-L-M, which was a kind of descendant of Bauhaus. So it was—and also, Ulm School of Design was closed in 1968 in the same way Bauhaus was closed, as accused for communism, or from a kind of socialist leaning. But that's—we had exchange, there were professors coming from Ulm, you know, that are giving lectures, like Maldonado brothers, and people who are very important, and also members of Ulm, graduates from Ulm, who established a very progressive industrial design firm in Germany. So they were—I was a member of the council, industrial design, I mean, it's the Association of Industrial Designers of Poland. I was on the board until I was working at the—in the industry as industrial designer after I finished my—you know, my academy training.

[00:05:14]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So I had this kind of industrial design, that was an important part of my life in terms of social commitment, ethical aspects of it. It's—we say that I learn for my art so much from an industrial design experience that it's very hard for me—to not to speak about it now. Now, when people don't—would not even think of myself as a designer. I was industrial designer, I am still many—in many ways, I am still continuing that tradition in my thinking. Funny, it's not methodically—of course, I'm not part of that community of professional industrial designers at all, but the ethics of creating something that will be accompanying people's life, that—something that is important for life of people, maybe even everyday life. And so, designing something, creating something so there will be some use value attached to, of course, the symbolic value help them to become—you know, to advance themselves, create conditions for them to make a leap in their lives, you know, or to feel more like a human being, being more—to recognize something about themselves that is worth—you know, that has some value by operating equipment, by—okay, by communicating something through some design instruments, or by seeing that some of their needs are being recognized by some kind of design project, you know. So they can benefit from it, or they can become—they create some level of virtuosity in developing their skills that—speaking better, doing things better, being—and making it a more elegant and more sophisticated way, or performing their own—themselves in public, you know, taking advantage of something designed for that purpose. So in this very large sense, I see a deep link between art and design in everything I do, not just because every art has a design component in it; it's not that, you know. It's more of an ethical commitment to life of people through providing some artifice, or some intermediate situation.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And are you saying that your education when you were at the Fine Arts institute, or possibly even before that, essentially this is the way you were trained? Or are you saying that the ethical approach to design comes from your parents and their very ethical approach to, say, music and it being a kind of almost philanthropic calling the way—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —they interpret it as opposed to, say, a kind of personal concept of artistic, you know—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —pleasure?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —yes, the social ethics in this, combined with aesthetics here definitely comes from my parents, and also comes from my industrial design training because of a very special mission that was attached to the profession.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Industrial design at that time, our job was to teach Communist administration and authorities how they should really—how they should really fulfill their own slogans.

[00:10:02]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So, how they should really do something for people in—through systematic design, through coordinated design from various branches of industry to really recognize the needs of working people. They claim that this whole system was for working people, or by working people, yet they did not understand, you know, how to do it because they had no sense of—they maybe didn't care even as much as one should expect.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But was there a connection, then, in between the thinking of you and your peers at that time and thinking of the early 1920s, you know, designers that associated, like Malevich and—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, this is—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and Rodchenko—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —exactly—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and so on, yeah?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —what I was trying to say. So, it will be three components: My parents, social aspect and cultural—social aspect of the art, the industrial design focus on ethics and social value, and also the artistic avant-garde tradition; well, which I learn from my very close connection with Andrzej Turowski, who is an—at that time the most informed and philosophically most advanced in the—bringing the avant-garde tradition, and thinking about avant-garde tradition, especially constructivism and Productivism. And to really—to recognize the value of artistic avant-garde in Soviet Union or in Poland in the '20s and the '30s, early '30s even. In the value that was very much based on constructing a better world and recognizing needs of the—or advancing the situation of people, so basically making a link between art and life through design.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. No, I mean because so much of what you say in your interviews and so much of your philosophy seems to go back to those ideas, even though, as we will discuss later, they've been altered and shaped in other ways—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Right, right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —for example, through psychoanalysis and so on, that you don't see in those early works. So maybe we have—maybe we're at the end of this interview for today, or do you want to keep going?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: We can keep a little bit more, but I'm sure you're tired by now.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I am not tired, but I look for a stopping point—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I'm not sure if we can put it together because we'd be jumping—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, no, it's been very clear—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —across—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —it's—no, it's very clear how it's all focused on the various influences in your development from an early age. And there's maybe a little bit of a gap in my understanding now of just that period in secondary school before you went to the Fine Arts academy, you know. I mean, I'm not exactly clear on what happened then, except that it seems that your family split at that point, and I don't know what impact that had on your development.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, my parents split, but they never lost contact with each other, so they were—they kept meeting as very good friends, close friends. There's so much bond between them, because of the time they went through after the war, and before the war, and during the war, and also because of that musicianship, you know, that issue, so deeply analyzing in every conversation. I remember myself where I was a few times trying to join them, and I felt I was interrupting them. You know, my presence was interruptive. They were so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —because they were so close?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah. They even went for some trips together when my father divorced again, but they never really lived together again. But, according to my father, one reason was that they would not work because they are two strong personalities, so they prefer to keep it separate. But eventually when my father died, my mother was with him, you know, when he died, and they are in the same grave together, because I basically gave my right to be in the grave with my father to my mother, so—

[00:15:39]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I added the name of—my mother to his grave. His grave was official grave in the alley of people of mevrit. You know, it's the most honorable place in cemetery in Warsaw, so there was a state—actually, paid-by-state grave, it's very big with big letters, Bohdan Wodiczko. So I asked to add Irena Wodiczko, exactly the same large letters, so that they are there, and I am now—I lost my place in that grave. But it was all arranged also before my mother died, and we went through the whole logistical, administrative steps to make this happen, so I think it's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —and they basically are—yeah. Then they are in a history where they should be as—together, because my mother is very much part of the culture, and during her funeral, you know, so many people came. And there was an article in the *Gazeta Wyborcza,* which is the main newspaper, kind of a liberal newspaper, about her, and then people were making some speeches. I couldn't say a word, but—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Why could you not say a word?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It's impossible.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because you were just too emotional?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, listen, the death of a mother of an immigrant who died in her original country is a double death. It's—I know this from many friends whose parents died in their original countries, for the—who live here, it's just impossible loss, yeah, because, you know, it's just—it's hard to explain. It's—the death of a parent is bad enough, it's a shock for everybody no matter what and where, but for foreigners, wow. So when I arrived there, I just couldn't open my mouth, but she prepared very well her funeral. So, the colleagues from the music department and television actually put together some sound installation to play the music she selected for her funeral, so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what—may I ask what piece?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I don't remember the name of the composer. I recognize when I hear this. I hope I won't hear it, because it—I don't want to remember that, but it was a very well-selected music because it was a march, because when the coffin was—oh, that they play it. There was a march, but it was a very light march, and it's like going to heaven. It was something

joyful. There was nothing so-called serious about it. It was—just a sense of humor, imagine, well-selected piece, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Hmm.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, surely, somebody—

ANNETTE LEDDY: What year did she die?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Don't ask me—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Don't—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I don't remember. [Laughs.] I cannot remember. And I have to go through internet to get the date. Yeah, I know it's there, but I don't commemorate those days. One other thing is that, the same with my father, I don't remember. The thing is that, when he died, I was not informed. I was not allowed to visit Poland at that time for eight years, because of—it's not—I didn't—I was basically kicked out of Poland, so there's some political—I didn't feel like it was safe for me to go there before I receive another passport, which was Canadian. So once I got the Canadian passport, I went there.

[00:20:39]

And I went there, and basically it was confirmed that my father died, when I arrived to Warsaw. I suspected that was the case, though. There was some rumors about it because there was something in some papers mentioned then, but I did not register this. I didn't want to really believe it's true, so, especially because my mother was afraid to tell me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Why?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I don't know; she just couldn't tell me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: She was afraid it would be too hard for you to bear?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so—well, that's how it is for an immigrant.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How did you end up finding out?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Sorry?

ANNETTE LEDDY: How did you end up finding out?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, the day after my arrival, actually, my—yes, finally, my—it's hard for my mother to tell me this, so.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, she told you? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I don't know if she told me, but somebody else told me. I don't think she told me, but she let somebody else tell me. You know, it was tough, it was very tough, ah. And so, of course, I always wanted to speak with my father to explain to him what I've been doing, you know? Eight years—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But didn't you talk on the—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —that's a long time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —phone or—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It's problem, is that I tried to call, I was never—I never was announced. Only later I realized that he was in hospitals and that he wasn't—not well, so maybe just didn't—he didn't want to speak with me, and or my mother didn't—something. I have no idea, but it was no—not—and also, yeah, it's tough, because I wanted to explain to him, or maybe he already knew, but I wanted to make sure that I can confirm myself what he probably already knew—that I am carrying on his mission in my own way. And it's not being as grand, great, you know, conductor or person—persona as he is, but as much as I can, you know? So he's—he has the square in Warsaw, the Bohdan Wodiczko Square. So I don't go—I try not to go to the cemetery much, but I go to the square, because the square is actually—at the center of the square is a

music academy, and at one point, he was in fact the president of that academy, so it suits. And then next to it is Chopin, a kind of association building, a special building—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Is there a monument in this square?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, it's actually very nice, modest like a garden, extended garden on the—but it's connected with the academy and with the Chopin Institute, so I think it's a very good place and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: It sounds wonderful.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, it's the right—but you could hear musicians playing all the time, you know—[laughs]—as I remember from my childhood, and they're always are making probably the same mistake as—I hope they will not make them once they graduate.

[00:25:17]

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_1of3_sd_track03_m.]

[Track wodicz21_2of3_sd_track01_m is a test track.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: This is Annette Leddy interviewing Krzysztof Wodiczko on June twenty-ninth, at his studio in New York City. All right, so today we want to pick up where we were, which was discussing your—beginning with your time at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. And you did mention something about the admissions process being quite grueling, and I thought maybe if you could just say a little bit about that, because you were applying to be—both to study fine arts—studio art and industrial design, is that correct?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, I decided to apply to be admitted by interior architecture department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So what we call interior design?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, so interior design department, and that department, that was—on the graduate level, also offered specialization in industrial design, so that was my plan. But to really get to this academy, to be admitted, you needed to go through two weeks of examination, very tough, because there was a very big competition. You know, I don't know exactly, you know, but there was a talk about a hundred applicants for one place, and so many people didn't get, and they tried many times to get through academy, so I was very lucky to be admitted.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And did you have to do—I think where you drew a model, drew from life, and —?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: There was a series—many exercises to go through. For each department, there was a different set of exercises. I don't remember all of them. One of them was to design one's own interior in the house, that interior for the place to live in the attics, in the attics. So was one of the design exercises. So another one was the one I mentioned yesterday, to depict the most memorable moment in your life.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you drew the building like teeth, or destroyed—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, that was—and of course, I didn't really have much capacity to deeply—to put deep thoughts into this, because I was ill. I had a very high temperature, like I was half-conscious of what's going on, but still, I mobilized my brain enough to be able to respond to all of those exercises.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Maybe it helped.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Perhaps it helped, because I didn't have—I was not intimidated by the situation, I was already very much stressed by my own condition—[laughs]—but that was tough. Well, of course, there was not such an equal opportunity for everybody, or maybe it was because it was—well, we call it affirmative action, you know, policies of people from families from the mountains, or from, you know, farmers, or people with lower income. They had priorities, so I was not in a priority list because of, you know, I had a well-known father conductor and a mother who also was known on television, and I belonged to this elite—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you felt—

[Cross talk.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: —there was a higher bar set for you?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I think so, although one never knows, because on the one hand, it was this kind of affirmative system to support people who had less chance. On the other hand, there was a kind of snobbish culture, so the name of my father; but it is unfair to say that the name of my father helped. My father at that time was not, you know, well received by authorities. He was actually working abroad in a kind of—as a cultural refugee—[laughs]—expelled from his position as a director of the Philharmonic.

[00:05:22]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And so I'm curious to understand how the program was structured, you know, because I don't think we have anything quite like that here, right, where you study art—studio art and design simultaneously.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, the Academy of Fine Arts, at that time, its structure contained department of architecture, of interior, the department of graphic design, department of sculpture, department of painting, and some other departments, you know, specializing in murals or in something, so. But within that department, there was a—the last two years, there was an offer, the specialization in industrial design, so that was my objective to get to that program. Right now, there was this independent, separate program of industrial design.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And in your mind, how did that—at that point in the mid-'60s, how did that intersect with your interest in art?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I did not consider myself as an artist. I was interested in design, but of course because of my background, family background, and also my early interest in the avant-garde, special position of design in the avant-garde art history, I did see that there was aesthetics and politics and, you know, the social needs and ethical responsibility of a designer is close to the one that was proposed within the avant-garde tradition, especially of constructivism, which was my interest already. So I was kind of following a little bit of a social direction—socially aesthetic direction that I learned from my parents.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And within constructivism, who—which were the figures who most influenced you?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: At that time?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Uh, on the level of history and theory, it was an art historian and a critic whose name was [Mieczysław] Porębski, Porębski. Porębski actually wrote interesting kind of theoretical treatise on—on the—on the methodology of art history. I have to recall the exact name of it when—in which he brought context, social context, so it's more of a social art history, and also something he called meta-criticism, so. He later became my professor, because he was also a professor at Academy of Fine Arts, and he was my—one of my most important professors. And later, actually, I met him when I was showing my work at Centre Pompidou, as a part of exhibition called *Présences polonaises*. He actually gave a lecture as a part of that exhibition, and he actually completed his lecture quoting my own work, which was a very honor for me. Oh, anyway, we were very, very, very—you know, so, an exchange. So he—that's important.

Another—the other artists who were important to me who were living artists, was Henryk Stażewski, and Tadeusz Kantor. Both of those artists were founding members of Foksal Gallery, of which I also became a member.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And from the generation or my own generation, the most important person was [Jarosław] Kozłowski, Kozłowski, who was a conceptual artist, also a member of Foksal Gallery who was also director of Akumulatory Gallery in Poznan, the city which I visited on a regular basis simply to be with him, or stay in his place and discuss. He—well, his connection with the art world was very special because he was a member of Fluxus, an international kind of network of correspondence art and also art books.

[00:10:41]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. So this is something that I'm also curious about, is how those '60s movements that were really international, like Fluxus, like, you know, the happenings and like land art, did those—were those active influences on you in Poland at that time?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Definitely conceptual art and Fluxus was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But which conceptual art at that point, was it—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh no, I talk—I was talking about minimal art, conceptual art, and body art that were important things that were happening at that time, but also other experiments in art and technology, especially the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: E.A.T.?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I remember giving a lecture on that movement, art and technology movement, in one of the galleries in Warsaw, public lecture. And it's also partially because of my connection with experimental music studio, and, you know, the *Whole Earth Catalog* and all those things, that actually, through the studio I learned, and also electronic music and Experiments in Art and Technology. Of course, it's—strange enough, it was very much part of also what MIT was doing at that time. You know, I ended up eventually being a director of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies, where initially those experiments were taking place, with—yeah, so, you know, people like Nam June Paik projects, or Charlotte Moorman, and people like that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. Okay, so it would be good to explain what the experimental music studio in Warsaw was.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So, there was—it was a very interesting political aspect of it. It's as much as the Foksal Gallery, which was an avant-garde, maybe one of the last avant-garde centers in Europe, maybe late avant-garde centers. And it was organized under the aegis of the director of artist workshops, Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych, which was an organization for artists to earn money through various commissions. But he, the director, was also very much in—connected to his, say, establishment, political establishment; a dubious kind, you know? Those who were, you know, the Ministry of Interior people, which were actually many things. They wanted to overthrow one day, you know, the whole situation in Poland, [Mieczyslaw] Moczar. So, this is one interesting thing, that the avant-garde place was on the aegis of pretty dubious—[laughs]—and I would say political powers. And then also, the experimental music studio, Studio Eksperymentalne Polskiego Radia, it was established by the Polish broadcast system, which was basically nothing else but the mouthpiece of politburo, of, you know, the whole political propaganda system.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So why were they—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —interested in this experimental—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: This is hard for me to answer. My intuition is that it was part of a general building of a picture of Poland as much more liberal—as a kind of liberal authoritarian system, autocratic system, the most liberal in all those Warsaw Pact countries. So the freedoms that we had, and the access connection with international contemporary art, and experimental work, was unprecedented. You could not see it in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, or Bulgaria, or Hungary, or Russia, for sure. Only to some small degrees maybe in Lithuania, or Georgia, when they were a little more open kind of enclaves with which we had actually contact, but otherwise, it was a paradise within the—this kind of Communist Bloc Poland. As long as we didn't directly connect or interfere as they would say or intersect or overlap with political matters because they were all in the hands of Communist Party apparatus.

[00:15:42]

We were pretty free, and in fact, art and technology especially was very welcomed. Any experiments with media, as long as media was understood as an instrument—technological instrument, rather than truly a communication, you know, entity. So artists playing with—or, there was a kind of a slogan—"artists are experimenting with new means of expression," you

know, which is the kind of slogan that allowed us to do anything, but we should not experiment with the communicating, or creating situation for exchange in communication between people in a direction of criticism or, you know, political ideas, and also, you know, in relation to the very policy—[laughs]—of the Communist system. So they were very free, we were free from engagement rather than for the engagement, but that engagement, the city had to say where is the boundary between cultural and a social engagement acceptable by authorities, and the one that is not acceptable. For this, we had to discuss it with censors, so; or, as was always the one who was delegated to negotiate with censors, censorship in Warsaw, on behalf of Foksal Gallery. They thought I am very good in discussing things with them, you know. There were—some of them were sophisticated people, they finished the academy, probably, of censorship, and they understand—they had their own guidelines of which we didn't know directly, but we could have a sense of our time—what are the restrictions, where—? And they were also shifting, so it's tough. I can give many examples, but maybe we don't have time for this right now.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, why don't you, though, explain the project that you did with the experimental music studio while you were still a student? You said something about a—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —a thesis project.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I was part of that culture when I was a student in industrial design, because I was interested in experimenting with sound and instruments—new instruments as a designer, and I was, kind of, adopted by the studio as a kind of consultant member. Or, there was a certain group of people who were always meeting there, so it was like a little bit of an avant-garde group, parallel to what was happening at Foksal Gallery, also a group like this, or Akumulatory Gallery as well. So that was one of those places where I could talk, learn. I met very good composers, you know; [Eugeniusz] Rudnik, for example, who was a member of the studio, he's a very interesting experimental composer. Patkowski himself, Józef Patkowski, who was a founder of this, and also there were visitors; so, there were Fulbright scholars, like, of people coming from the States who were part of this circle, like—so. There was—also, very good composers were there all the time, the friends of the studio like [Witold] Lutosławski, Lutosławski, who was like a *nestor* of Polish contemporary music, also connected with John Cage and people like that. So this was a really—

So eventually, I came up with a special design that will—because the studio was electronic, and—I mean, between concrete music and electronic music. So they did—did not have a laboratory to produce actual sounds, physical sounds, so I designed a kind of percussion laboratory, a laboratory in which sounds could be—concrete sounds, real sounds could be generated, you know, and amplified and recorded through various systems, electronic systems, as a source of sound for further work of the studio processing it, you know?

[00:20:38]

But the process of producing those sounds also, I felt, should be performative. There should be an action there, there should be a surprise, the situation in which the musician actually is playfully developing the relationship with the world of sounds and their own bodily actions. That's recorded and then processed, and maybe even projected back to the same environment, hoping for some sound interference on, for the acoustic, you know, impact, and recording it again. That was never built, because it was just economically impossible. However, that became my thesis, and that thesis, actually, was published, and then it's being republished, and, like even recently somebody published it, you know, last year in—somewhere. So it's a—and even it was a—another reconstructed that represented in the exhibition of ZKM, [Zentrum für Kunst und Medien], you know, the famous art and technology—media technology center in Germany, in Karlsruhe, as a part of experimental music studio work, which also now is being recognized internationally as something influential.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You weren't required to make something for your thesis? In other words, you made this—you created this design, this kind of feedback loop studio, and you had the—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: There was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —you wrote it, and you designed it, and I'm sure there were drawings—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, yeah, there was a drawing, so it was a kind of specification, how it could be built, and particular details for design to actually hold in space, in different ways, of

objects that could become sources of sound, or amplifiers, and the various type, based on the wind, or the—like a simple sine and strings, and all those different categories of potential sources of sound.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay, and then—okay. And then here's something that I'm not completely clear about; so, you graduated in '68, and then you took a job as an industrial designer.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, in a Polish electronic industry first, in the central industrial design office of Polish electronic industry. There were all kinds of things we were designing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like what?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Actually, the things that are the most implicated in propaganda, because—or, like a system of broadcast system for factories, you know, like those speakers that you install in various places that are, kind of, projecting this, kind of, well-orchestrated, you know, programs for workers, and also television sets and radio sets and, you know, popular, also, equipment. So there was a problem, because the overlap with 19—with some way, the beginning of my work was of, you know, anti-Semitic, and some of the kind of the pogrom, the last pogrom in Poland, when so many people were expelled. And so it was like a poison being injected into everybody's soul through those TV sets and the radio, transistor radios, and so forth. So I got very nervous about working there.

[00:25:07]

And so, I remember we had a discussion within that industrial design office, and I said, "We should have some position on this." And that was a very important moment, because the head of this office was actually very intelligent, bright, intellectually very important figure in industrial design, Andrzej Wróblewski. He said, "How can we consider design of a spoon, when—thinking that somebody will use the spoon to poison somebody?" You know, I mean, spoon is a spoon, and that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But that's—you're saying—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —so that was his argument, and I said, "No, no. When it come—first of all, a TV set is not a spoon—"

[Cross talk.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: "—first of all, we don't own the spoon. The spoon is owned by the Ministry of Propaganda, which is called Komitet do Spraw Radia i Telewizji." This is a committee to the matters of—like, the matters of television and radio, so we have no control. "Somebody's feeding us this, so the only thing is, we can refuse to take that spoon. Therefore, I suggest the most important button on television is the switch off, at least we can do that. To—and also, on those radio, those broad—internal broadcast system, intercom to kind of inter—we could—it should be designed so the—but the knob that reduce the sound, or switch off, is the most accessible, so I can take a chair and switch it off."

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's important—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: At least that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —important.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I mean, there is that. And of course, their conversation did not continue much, we—because we didn't know whether that conversation was recorded or not through some microphones installed in the walls, you know, or in those very equipment of which we are speaking.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Exactly.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: At that time, everything was recorded, and even typewriters were—the Ministry of Interior was taking imprints of every typewriter to see the character, you know, like a —you know, like a fingerprint, you know, just to make sure who is writing various things on this typewriter, because there was some alternative, of course, underground, kind of, information distributed. So, in this situation, no conversation could really continue like this for long, but it was an important moment for me; so, no, I had to switch my job.

So, I find a job in professional instruments company, Polish Optical Works, which is the equivalent of Bausch + Lomb, and Optone, or Zeiss, hoping that I would just be working in a highly professional equipment, so there will be no politics there so much. Of course, I was wrong, but I try, I try. So eventually, in this Polish Optical Works, there was another—new commissioner. He arrived from Soviet Union to design a special geological compass, something that would—could—to orient the position of layers of earth, or some minerals, in relation to, you know, magnetic north or something. And that is saying is that we had to design it to kind of—not to follow the patent, you know, that was in the hands of—Swiss patent. But the thing is that this Swiss patent, as far as I remember, I'm not sure anymore, in fact that was the patent by the—I think, by brother of Lenin, who was an engineer, I think, in Switzerland. So it was an idea to do something, and I don't know what it was, but I was asked to be a member of the design team of this—of the *kompas*, *geologiczny*. And I remember myself saying, "It's no problem, I'm very happy to be part of the team as the head of industrial design unit in that industry, on condition that among all the members of the team, there would be no member of Communist Party, because north is the north, no deviations, yeah. No, this is not ideological compass," you know. So there was a silence after this. You know, I thought I will just lose my job, that—and be the end of my employment there, or maybe worse, and I don't—the next day I came, there was nobody—no problem, nobody was speaking about this, and I'm not sure, maybe it's accident, but there was no member of Communist Party in this team eventually.

[00:30:53]

So it was an interesting test that—of course, I was treated as a special person, I was an artiste—

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_2of3_sd_track02_m.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —that, you know, artist man that, you know, special arrangement between the Ministry of Machineries and Ministry of Culture giving me some privileges, so I didn't have to be there, you know, eight hours a day sitting. You know, of course, I was there every day, but I had—I could come a little later—[laughs]—and so, it was special. So then—but also, there is a cultural—there was a myth of an artist here that was on my side, so maybe they just attributed this to my craziness as an artist. Still, I had very good friends, including them who were actually members of Communist Party; they're very, very good, well, hardly working some of the people. And you know, they somehow—you know, it was an interesting place for me to work.

I learned so much about people because, designing microscopes, for example, there were routine microscopes that were being used by mostly women, actually exclusively women workers, who work eight hours a day on the routine, kind of, checking blood tests or something. I just realized the stress of the work of those people, and that's my industrial design background that, to see—to look for what is the relationship between human and machine. So I realized that those—the way many microscopes are designed, they force those women to take a position that was physiologically impossible and hurting their eyes. They could not line up with the optical system because, ocular, you know, the part that connects with the eyes was too high. They could not lean towards that ocular because of their breasts. They could not elevate themselves high enough to be in the right angle to this ocular, because of their—they were overweight, you know, they were hitting the bottom of the table. So there was a problem in their spine, a problem with their eyes, with their neck. This is psychophysiology, and the physiology of work, labor was part of my, you know, knowledge, so I redesigned this microscope. So, turning a different direction, changing the angle of the ocular, so they could actually really line up with it without all of those problems, which was extremely expensive. They had to build a new line, production line, and redesign the whole optics for that. There was a scandal, there was tension, there was screaming. You know, I was this kind of—oh, it's a very romantic, I have to say, but also very—I had nightmares until today that I am again working there, these 150 engineers, many of whom were against me, still—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But now—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —this was produced. So this microscope went into production line and soon, other—in the same time, other companies also changed the angle so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Ergonomics.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —yeah, it was—right from the beginning. So, from 45-degree angle to 35-degree angle, and I insist on that angle on the microscope until today.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's this? [pointing to photograph of microscope in catalog –AL]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah. So this is—and now, this actually microscope was not produced. It was usually purchased by UNESCO, bought by international organizations for poorer countries like Pakistan and India, that's where they were exported. And also they received an award of the Ministry of Machinery, and also it was published in *Design* magazine, so you know, British. So of course eventually, it worked, and it was called Biolar, Biolar.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And now, so what I'm trying to get a sense of here is, you were working there in this very all-consuming job, by day and then by night, were you an artist? I mean, were you designing *Personal Instrument*—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —for example?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —this instrument was designed by—with experimental music studio help by a person whose name was Makowski who was an—who was a kind of creative engineer, experimental kind of engineer but built, physically built in Polish Optical Works, in the prototype department. You know, it was all very good craft people, high—

[00:05:19]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you wrote the specs and gave it to them, and they created it?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, yes. And it was performed then in Warsaw, as a part of some exhibition, and—but first of all, it was performed independently by myself. So this—it's interesting, this is an instrument and it has a function, so it is functional and it's symbolic. It's not the same category of work as microscope, of course, because it actually proposes a completely new function, so it's not the expected function.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And since this is your—this is your first artwork, would you say?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —the first, maybe public, public project, artistic project.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And describe it a little bit, because it's such a unique—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So this, the idea was to take charge of the soundscape of the city, not to produce the sound, but to take charge of transforming it. So, entire sound was received by a microphone that was put on my forehead, and from that microphone, the sound was—of course, all the electronic signals were directed to that matter, into electroacoustic filters, how—two filters: One was filtering a lower half of frequency of the sound from the microphone, another one the higher half of frequency. Now, the—those electroacoustic filters were controlled with the use of photosensors; photoreceivers, or optical sensors, that were in the palms of my hand—hands. So by moving my hands in relation to light, I could affect the operation of each of those filters, two filters; like, the left hand, the left filter; right hand, right filter. If, when I close my hands completely, so there was no light registered by the sensors, there was silence. When I open it straight to the most brighter part of sky, or—then I could hear entire range of frequencies. When I close one hand, I could only half. And then, when I move them around spatially with my gestures, it created all kinds of effects, so it's—could—closer to a traditional glissando effect, you know, in music. But, you know, other—also, I could move around, and I could even speak myself and hear myself, just those sounds were—all kinds of sounds could be transformed. So, of course, nobody could hear this except me, but, well, everybody could see me doing strange things, you know, move—swimming through this soundscape with my gestures—[laughs]—so. But eventually, I let other people to hear, who—but it was an additional kind of speaker if someone wanted to come closer. That was much later, but at the beginning, it was just for myself.

So that, of course, could be interpreted in the context of a Polish situation of average person, who could not speak much but could listen, although at first actually more to listen than to speak and then some serious matters, public matters. So when the reception mode, you know, all of the communication about important matters, we are told about them. We were not speaking much back, maybe a little bit, but no seriously, not protest, not something questioning major—

[00:10:14]

policy. So that this is kind of exaltation of this situation. So if I cannot—if I can only—I can mostly be able to listen, why don't I enjoy it and take charge of listening as my own kind of creation? So what about listening between the lines, reading between the lines was what we were all doing. We were all trying to figure out what is there hidden between what we are being told. So in that sense, tuning also to every sound or every piece of information was our special perceptual talent. And now the instrument was definitely relating to this or maybe playfully relating to this situation.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Was it received as such? Did people understand it as social criticism?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, it was not seen this way. But I think unconsciously, intuitively—I should be more precise—intuitively, I think people really sensed they had special kind of interest in this project. Because this project was published quickly in some—I mean, some magazines and books, and then people were—so, art and technology was kind of officially, you know, supported, you know, reference theme, so it could be placed as, you know, within that, because of the use of—very early use of sensors. Although, those in experimental music studios, they told me they have not seen any artist yet before who would use those sensors creatively, so they were very happy to work with me. So in that sense, it will fit that, but the—this metaphor of what I'm saying about the position of an individual, a singular being in the world of imposed kind of landscape of information and words and sounds, I think it was intuitively clear to people.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And people in your circle, other artists and designers, they, I assume, understood it more deeply?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: They were interested in this, and I was also interested to mobilize industrial designers and other designers to do the work that is independent on existing, you know, market of expectations and needs, and recognized needs, and come up with new needs, such as this kind of a need—having this kind of power of navigating through the soundscape, or any other new needs. So I was in charge of organizing an exhibition of projects of that ambition, but eventually, nobody joined me, so I ended up myself. The art exhibition was in an art center, Galeria Współczesna, a contemporary art center in Warsaw. And I realized that I'm just only one of those great, bright, talented, very, very sensitive, beautiful people, my colleagues, they don't have time to join me in this, so I was quite upset. And eventually, that was the moment when people started to call me an artist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, because since design contacts, design colleagues of my, you know, milieu, did not want to join me in this direction then, but only the art people, or who—artists, other artists accepted me, and art gallery and curators, then naturally, I had to accept calling myself an artist, very reluctantly, very reluctantly. I thought there was a kind of trial of my hopes, design could reach that level, you know, that I've seen in some avant-garde circles in the past, and also some Fluxus projects, experimental music—no. Design was separate, became separate, and I became an artist. So that project was recognized also by Foksal Gallery, and they published little information about it, so eventually this and my first vehicle—

[00:15:17]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Your *Vehicle One*—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —that I designed was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —yes—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —immediately following this. That vehicle was also born of design. It—I was participating with a great industrial designer as a two-people team. We entered a competition for a new bicycle, and he generated lots of ideas, and I generated lots of ideas. His name was Krzysztof Meissner, you know, the industrial designer; excellent industrial designer, extremely imaginative person. So, at one point, I came up with this walking bicycle that will be propelled by walking back and forth, and this—and the problem with this was that I just realized that this project goes beyond competition for a new bicycle. So I said, "Well, Krzysztof, you just go ahead and, you know, just submit all of your ideas, but that particular project doesn't fit the competition. It's born of it, but it's no longer a response to that program of the comp—so I will just separately continue this," so. And that—then I continue, some assistance, some conversation with mechanical engineers. Actually, I further perfected it, you know, the idea was from the beginning like this, but it was perfected through conversations. I was also teaching in

Polytechnic, a course on, it was called "Aesthetic of Construction," or whatever it's called—well, basically, industrial design course. I was teaching for engineers, mecha—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And then you stopped working for the design companies?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, I never stopped working—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, you can't—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —basically, I had to resign, or I will be kicked out from—or resign from that job, when I was basically asked not to return to Poland. So I was on that payroll, and I was working until I ended up living here.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. Now let's talk about Foksal Gallery, you know, because it's just such an important gallery in, kind of, the world of international avant-garde. I'm interested first in the background to the gallery, but I'm also interested in the relationship between the sort of artworks you showed there, like the reflection piece, the self-portrait, or the—the line drawings. On the one hand, and on the other hand these vehicles and personal instruments. I mean, it seems like you're going in two directions?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, I was going in two directions, because being a—becoming a member of the gallery, I also realized that I have another instrument to play with, or to speak through it, and that's the interior of the gallery. So no, I took seriously opportunity of so-called exhibitions by turning to what could be called installation more, that is reinterpreting the interior and adding things to it organically and creating more of a space for thinking and for new perception and thinking. So it was an optical kind of conceptual experiments. They were completely, I think, very different than what I was doing on outside. But at one point, those experiments brought imagery. After analyzing this gallery space as a pure, concrete visual environment, let's say, I exhausted all of my experiments with lines. For example, line as an almost kind of—well, line was a reality, a theory, image, and object. So it was the kind of—I mean, I felt it was maybe the last conceptual work of art—[laughs]—hence closing it completely. [Laughs.]

[00:20:29]

And so, you know, the line in the corner was reality, the line on the—directly on the wall was theory, line on the canvas was an image, and line—the pipe, the thin pipe in the center, was an object; fine. Same, like all of the passages between them, I—and in the chart, so people will philosophize it more like a phenomenological way, you know, that gallery. But then, I realized phenomenology is fine, but there's also politics, and there are lines, also, inside of all of the images that we are seeing in television and in press. And those were the—I called already at that time, I didn't put in *Untitled*, as, *Guidelines*. *Guidelines*, *Wytyczne*. Something that as inside, so the vertical, just as horizontal, just as the landscapes, they are religious kind of vertical structures, you know, a diagonal, like, directed by dramatic, artistic, expressive things, and they all are intersected. They created one *instrumentarium* of our souls. Our souls are being orchestrated by those linear aspects of imagery, you know, that we are being—you know, we are immersed in them.

So then I started to project images from television, from magazines, from newspapers, and also from art books, just to recognize the relationship between art and propaganda, the lines and guidelines too. That was the first projection, because I projected those images underneath of the lines, and eventually over those lines. Now, once I started to see that relationship, that's the last exhibition in Foksal Gallery when those images of art and propaganda were projected over three lines—vertical, horizontal, and diagonal with three projectors, the carousel projectors with lots of slides. And people will actually punch those slides and project themselves, so, to really recognize how much they are being orchestrated. Oh, it's clear that, that in a moment, that three of the slides from those were actually censored. So, the censorship requested that some of those slides are not projected, because they're slides from TV set, you know, from television, so they own the images, you know. They were—that was their property—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —of some politician congratulating another politician, shaking hands, or giving a medal, because I don't own those images, you know? Of course, it's about fear of some—you know, I didn't want this. So they took—I could—had taken away, but on my way to United States in nineteen seventy—I don't know—seven—

ANNETTE LEDDY: 1975, wasn't it?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, '75, that my first trip, and 1977 was my second trip to Canada, and I—I had a key to the gallery, so I stopped the taxi to the airport. I opened the gallery, and I put those slides back that were censored, and then I took off.

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It wasn't—I'm not sure what—whether they—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did they show them?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: They must have shown it, they were there in those carousels, but I'm not sure if they were recognized and taken out again or not, I'm not sure. I mean, many, many years, my work was not shown in Poland, so I was kind of censored. My presence in Foksal Gallery was censored.

[00:24:56]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, because I was treated as someone who escaped to the West.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But what is the real story?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Hmm?

ANNETTE LEDDY: What is the real story? You're saying you didn't escape to the West.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I didn't escape, but that was an expression. Put you on a black—list, because once they called you escape, and on the one hand people were jealous, they also wanted to escape. On the other hand, you were basically cancelled, you were censored, you were no person, you were not part of anything.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you could show in Canada and in the US and other places in the world, but not in your own country?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, or in international exhibitions in which Gallery Foksal participated also. I was not—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —there for a while before, you know, Solidarity and all those changes there, so it was kind of a strange time. This doesn't mean there was some—censorship was imposed. There was also self-censorship on the part of people. That's the real censorship, is that people censored themselves.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So people at the gallery began to be concerned, and they decide to just—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, right, sure, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: That's a tactical self-censorship.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], of course, yeah. All right, so in 1975—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Seventy—so we jump to '77—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But I wanted to—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —go back to—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —there was a time between '75 and '77 when I came back to Poland, you know. I saw lots of very different—that was a very special time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's 1976?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, when I came back and I left again, I mean, I just traveled to Canada, and I didn't know that I would not really be welcomed back for a long time. So it was just one of those trips I was hoping to continue making back and forth.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so what do you think—what tipped it, what made it so that you couldn't come back?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Although, I was, you know, asked by the consul. Well, first of all, over some years, my friends were denied passports to leave Poland to travel, because they have to apply and be permitted to travel. In some ways, on condition that they come back, so they were blackmailed, and in fact, I was also blackmailed this way. It's like, as I come back, those people can travel.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But then, of course, you never really accept the deal with secret police or with the milicja, you say yes once, then there will be more and more, and you will become a collaborator, so I could not do that. So they would, for example, ask them to come to the office to pick up their passports, you know, they will show them their passport and then they will record conversations, telephone conversations I had with them. They memorized them or, you know, or they—were reading letters and so on, so it was basically kind of—so my file, file on myself were connected with their files.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So there—I mean, there was not much I could do, but at one point, I also started to ask for a special passport that will allow me to travel, multiple-entry passport. And for a year or two, I didn't—never received an answer when I was in Canada. So normally, when I visited the consulate in Toronto, I was treated very well. They asked me to visit to the first floor, which is the second floor on American standard. It was a special floor and, you know, coffee and this. And then I got a phone call from the same consul, and say, "You know, please we want to speak with you," so I came. At this time, I had to wait downstairs where everybody else was lining up, you know, to get their visas or something. So the consul came down and offered this kind of sentence. He said, "*kraj uważa*" which in direct translation means "The country, meaning Poland, is of opinion that *obywatel*," meaning me, "leaves here permanently."

[00:30:16]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So they kicked you out?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes. "So, we can offer you a special passport for Polish citizens living abroad, but with this, you have to resign all of your properties in Poland, you—you'll have no job there, you have no insurance, and no nothing. Oh, you have any patents, you have to, you know, maybe transfer it to somebody else." So basically—well, it's very—it was hard for me to even register that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], it was a big shock?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, I just refused to—look, I didn't understand it, it was beyond my—

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_2of3_sd_track03_m.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —comprehension. It's a kind of denial process, and you can call it shock of course; wow. And I do have this passport. I never use it, because in order to come to Poland, visit Poland, I had to have a visa from Polish consulate. In Polish passport, I had to have the visa to visit my own country, only for one week—[laughs]—or two weeks. You know, that's the kind of standard they—I have to pay for the visa. So I do have stamp like this, I got that stamp once, and I didn't go. I came—I went to Poland after eight years, on Canadian passport.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You became a Canadian citizen?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. So you had eight years where you couldn't go to your country, and you then—essentially, did you decide that you would just start your life over in Canada?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Oh, sure, yes. Well, there were no choice. First of all, having a

Canadian passport was a big relief, because I could travel. Oh, I had this Polish passport before, it was kind of not very useful, and—plus, I did teach in Canada. I had gotten—found a job.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You found a job.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I was actually teaching initially, oh, almost—well, I had some connections with colleagues, because I was visiting Canada. I don't remember exactly the dates. Between '75 trip to the United States and '77, I was on some trip to Canada and the United States, but quite a short trip in which I established contacts with people in Canada and in the United States, especially in Canada, including the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, when I had a little exhibition and lecture when I was there, just traveling, visiting, and also exhibition in Montreal in Optica Gallery, and also exhibition in Toronto in Artspace Gallery. So, that means I had also some footing, some connections. So eventually, I was offered a job that started in '77 teaching a drawing course, one drawing course in some agrarian university.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You mean drawing, like, still lifes, and—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Right, in agrarian university. No, but initially, I was an artist in residence at York University when in—during that intermediate trip, but in the '7—in this '77; and I actually had a job, one course teaching. When I was teaching there with this—understand, at that time, I didn't have this strange passport, I had just a regular Polish passport, which was impossible to travel, it's impossible to travel—and that's just too—complicated to explain, like how—complicated it was to use that communist passport. But anyway, being there on that passport, I—you know, they—on '77, I reestablished contact with some colleagues from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. So they said, "Okay, you finish your teaching drawing, maybe you can come here, but you have to leave." I had to leave each time between those jobs and stay in other countries for example in New York and wait for the visa again, so—you know? And then in order to cross the border, I had to have the passport longer, '78, so I had to be extending that Polish Communist passport. There was the additional pages added. I was always—I was checked every time across the border as a kind of suspicious person. They never seen this kind of passport in their lives, they—I was investigated, I missed planes and trains, I had to—it was such a horror to live with this kind of document and also with the regulations that I had to wait outside to get another job. But anyway, I finally got that job teaching in the design department, in Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in the design department, another art department.

[00:05:20]

But when I was teaching, and it was my colleague who was also a designer, a graphic designer of the course, the people from studio art, they got very nervous, "Why is this Wodiczko teaching in the design department? He should be teaching in studio art." So, eventually, I got a job in Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. It was at least more serious when I had this, then I continue teaching there on a temporary basis, before eventually I got the full-time job there as a replacement of somebody who was on leave. And so, I got more and more entrenched in this—at the—on the same time, I was also busy teaching summer courses in—teaching summer courses at Trent University in the history and theory of the avant-garde, artistic avant-garde, so I was teaching those courses, and I was teaching all kinds of things in Canada. Sorry, I'm losing track of it when I start looking at my own biography.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But what about your life in Canada, I mean was it difficult to adjust to living in this new culture?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It's difficult. Actually, Canada is one of those well-experienced immigrant countries, you know, like Australia or Mexico; I guess, the United States. But it's very hard to become Canadian, culturally speaking, because there is something like a dominant culture. Whether it's in French Canada or English Canada or—it's very hard to become what they call integrated. I still don't understand why—I still don't understand why is this like this, because just recently Canada, very much open to refugees, and even at that time, lots of refugees were accepted by Canada, especially from Chile and Hungary. They were there taking very important jobs in media or in some key positions in the academic world, also Polish political—the refugees, especially Jews from '68 pogrom. There was lots of people who have actually established themselves in Canada, but there was something for artists like myself, it was not very easy. That's so hard—there was really dominant—the type of—well, one thing is politically important, that immigrants, so-called landed immigrants, as I was, did not have the right at that time to apply for Canada Council grants. In Canada—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —it's all grants—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —it's all—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —Canada Council grant was a basic source of income in Canada for artists, so it's almost like they were on the payroll of the government—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And I'm familiar with that, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —to the point that actually, they could even consider going on strike, you know, negotiating things with the government as if they were government employees. So I—not having access to those grants, I had to take awful jobs. I was selling *Globe and Mail* in night shift to Florida and—you know. And so, I was working the worst—I could not—for two reasons: First of all, no immediate position. If I was a political refugee, perhaps I would have had more chance, I'm not sure, but I didn't want to be political refugee, because every political refugee had some kind of a person, shadow. We were—they were spied by, you know, a secret service of—in Canada.

[00:10:19]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: They—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —I didn't know—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —didn't trust—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —that—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —political refugees. Chileans, for example, received landed immigrant status, but many of them, as I heard, could not get citizenship because they were still treated like communists, because in fact they were.

ANNETTE LEDDY: They were communists, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, so—

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, what about those—your artist—your circle of artists and, you know, the artist peers, were they very—was that a comfortable group of colleagues, or how did it contrast with your colleagues—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, there was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —in Poland?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I had my good group of friends. They were the small—like I used to say, radical-left artists, because I came from communist country, and I was—so I started to be very interested in Marxism, because we were prevented in Poland from really studying and understanding Marxism, because the two Marxists ended up in prison, you know?

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: They want to study—use Marxism legitimation of their, you know, autocratic rule. They were in charge, but they like—they're like, Kuroń and Modzelewski, for example, they're real Marxists, you know, they—they were put up in prison, so-called revisionists, you know? So we were not really educated in Marx and Marxism; that was just two different things, so I started to learn this Marxism as much as I could on my own, and later, I became really immersed in the Marxist tradition of cultural criticism, cultural study.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what about—?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So there—so, Marxism was a very important instrument for me to understand, well, how to operate critically under the conditions of capitalism.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's exactly what I was wondering. Is it's, sort of, so interesting to me how you're able to transfer a lot of your—the foundations and theoretical assumptions of your work in Poland to this capitalist context, but maybe it was facilitated by the emergence of the New Left in Canada and America at—Canada and the US in the '70s, and especially of course the translation of the Frankfurt School and all the—what we call the neo-Marxists that happened—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Sure.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —during that period.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, that's what I was studying myself, without much help.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you had not read the Frankfurt School in Poland, no? Adorno, um, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin. I notice Benjamin is very much in your citations.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Not much, not much.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I did learn Marxist aesthetics for—with all my deep connection with Andrzej Turowski, who—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The constructivism—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, but—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —primarily?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —we did see constructivism in the light of contemporary critical thinking of culture and contemporary art. That's what was our approach to art history, like coming from contemporary practices, trying to understand more, you know, the roots and tradition.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah, and those also—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —did go through a kind of resurgence—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Right, so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —here.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —we did see, for example, Daniel Buren—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, perfect.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —as a part of Marxist tradition, rather than minimal art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [affirmative], I see that too, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So that's very important. We understood things, that Marxist kind of line was completely hidden and repressed in the largest collection of constructivist, or international constructivist and Polish constructivist art, in Łódź museum, or Museum Sztuki, a rather fantastic collection of avant-garde, including this kind of Marxist, or the left, or anarchal, socialist kind of artistic avant-garde. But that context was kind of censored here for tactical reason by the director of the museum, [Ryszard] Stanisławski, because it was easier for him to protect this collection saying it's connected with minimal art tradition, with art and technology tradition, or Op art tradition, you know, all the formalist way of understanding; even minimal artists, or maybe conceptual art to some degree. So that way, he protected this collection, but at the expense of understanding the tradition, the social engagement and also Marxist, analytical, critical tradition of that avant-garde, or even anarchic—anarcho-socialist tradition or anarchistic tradition, which was also another law to bring to enter discussions.

[00:15:19]

For [Henryk] Stazewski, who was the last living member of the avant-garde constructivist, avant-garde group with whom I had very close contact and—all my—our younger artists, more ambitious artists contact with him. He was an anarchist because his connection with Dutch kind of contemp—art of the '30s and '20s, which was more anarchistic, but he was not allowed to even refer to this. He was trying to write with [Stefan] Morawski a history of art that—and its relation to anarchism, and the censorship completely eliminated this, so. And my—those—what I'm saying is that I had to learn those things, and I learned it because of my close connection, of course, with cultural study circles. Cultural study in Canada was very much, of course, methodologically linked with Marxist tradition. It came from Britain.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And it was more and more developed than in the United States. I think that cultural study came here—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so who are you—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —via Canada.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —like, you're talking about Terry Eagleton, or—who would be the—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, okay—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —Williams?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —so Raymond Williams—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Raymond Williams—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —was the kind of—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —yes.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —key figure.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, fantastic, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But then, of course, we had other common connections, with the *Screen* magazine, you know, with Birmingham's school of research, you know, Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall, you know, all those—you know, there are lots of connections. Of course, the feminist connection, there was the *Screen* magazine connection to Althusser or to, you know, the French theory. So all those things, I gradually started to absorb through my connection, or—with this academic, the academic cultural study world, because I was teaching in—at Trent, which was the first cultural study program in Canada. Before it—the program opened in York University, so I had those. So having this kind of approach put me in a very special relation to the Left, because the—this Left, artistic Left was not New Left, it was an old Left.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] It was like socialist realism, kind of?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, there were some—they were some Leninist line. They could not fully understand even a discourse between Soviet avant-garde and Lenin, and the kind of complex situation in which Lenin—or actually, it was very comp—you know, it's complex—I don't want to go through [inaudible] and all those things, but historically, they were not—they're learning from me in those discussions, and I learned from them how backwards their leftism is, you know? And—but somehow, argument with them, I became a member of the magazine that they published, *Insight* magazine. I also became a co-organizer of Cultural Workers Alliance of Canada, which was a, kind of—not a union, but it's—kind of—some kind of union of people who work in cultural front, you know, to struggle, you know, for their own rights and their own benefits and recognition of the work. And I opened a branch of it in Halifax, even, of that cultural work, but though I [inaudible] and they got involved in this left. But of course, I had those different—they—what do you call, the New Left, or also the new thinking of democracy, you know, after Claude Lefort, after all of this recognition that something was deeply missing in the Left, in the old Left, meaning understanding of democratic revolution, understanding of, oh, you know, so many things, first on the cultural level and the so-called theory of ideology that moved forward so much from the time they were reading Marx on their own. So that is come—argument with Canadian left. It was part of my life, and it was the most significant thing.

[00:20:20]

I had very limited dialogue with liberals, which was—that's the majority of Canadian artists. They're kind of well-rounded, well brought-up liberals, so it was not easy to get into, kind of, fistfight or honest exchange, because they were very sophisticated. Well, it's very—it's a little bit like in the mainstream French kind of intellectual and artistic circles. You know, they know things, they're open-minded as long as you don't question their liberalism, right, and once you start questioning their liberalism, there is not much conversation.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And when you came to New York and began to—how is it different from—in this?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: New York, of course, it's—New York is New York, it's just—

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, but I imagine with regard to this theoretical conflict or inquiry.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Ah, yeah, when I came to New York, it was a battleground between four or three, four, or five different schools of thinking, you know. That was at the Reagan time, so you had very activist group all working that kind of left front. The activist group were working with, you know, homeless people, with, you know, the poor. You know, I was personally connected with them, and then there was a critique of representation, a fraction, which was, you know, a very sophisticated poststructuralist—

ANNETTE LEDDY: You mean like the Pictures Generation—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —post-semiological, post-structuralist—[laughs]—well, very much feminist also, group. And then there was an abstraction group, I didn't know much about that, and then there was the New Expressionist, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, that's right—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —movement, here. So there was again more—probably more, and then there were those Dia discussions in which I participated, and so there was—but they were so—and then there was *October* magazine, it—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah, that—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —was a separate thing. I was not that all part of it at that time, and then only later—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Although that would seem to be more in alignment with—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Only—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —your thinking.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —during the time of Douglas Crimp.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, so I was—I enter that world because he enter it, and it's more radical, you know, activist position. I don't like the term "activist," but that has been used, and maybe I should use it, you know. It's a kind of more of an engaged in—so, first of all, the AIDS crisis, so, well, the homeless vehicle, all that thing suddenly found pages, even words that—the transcripts of what homeless people were saying were published in that issue, number 38—can you believe this—in this very lofty, well, very sophisticated, I have to—a first-class journal, but still. So maybe that was a little—an offensive thing for the journal editors, so the tenure of Douglas Crimp ended, and so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But why did you decide to move to New York, how did that come about?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I always wanted to be in New York.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Even when you were in Poland?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Always?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, after '75 when I came here the first time, I—well, someone, you know, asked me, you know, "How long did it take you to adjust in New York?" I'm thinking, two hours.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you just felt at home here?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Absolutely, and, you know, when I left for Canada and getting back to Poland, I see the same people I met in '75. They never really thought I would—left anywhere because everybody travels from New York anyway. So any time, it was just going to Jaap Reitman bookstore in, SoHo you know, Dan Graham was still sitting there in the same place.

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Or René Block Gallery, you know, I could see musicians there from the avant-garde circles, and I could see lots of people, or Gordon Matta-Clark or, you know, those, you know, Dara Birnbaum, just so many people, various circles. They—it's—we were all friends, so there was no hierarchy so much at that time. It was maybe different than today. There was a resentment towards the art world that many, you know, artists share. At the same time, well, of course, we're in relationship to it, but it was still a continuation of certain camaraderie.

[00:25:51]

ANNETTE LEDDY: But also compared to, say, the art being produced in Canada at that time, how did that compare to the art scene here?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, Canada, it was—there were great things happening in Canada, not the same intensity—intensity, you know—[laughs]—of course. It's a much smaller country, and each of the cities are more isolated from each other, and so. The—you know, Toronto was one scene I knew; Halifax, so, where everybody was there. The visiting artist—I was coordinating visiting artist program, so I met everybody from all around, and so, you know, Mary Kelly, you know, the feminist, all the groups, because the idea was that once we invited one significant artist who had other connections, that artist was inviting other artists. So there was a chain reaction then. So, feminist theory, and also the more of—yeah, the—whether it's about Dara Birnbaum or Dan Graham or Mary Kelly, yeah, there's groups of people coming, theorists and artists, so I had no—in fact, I had a special visa I received to travel between Halifax and New York in order to become this kind of liaison between New York and Halifax. That was my job, which is similar to the job I had when I first visited the United States in '75 and '77 as a kind of—I was on a mission from Foksal Gallery to solicit artists for potential exhibitions in Warsaw, and also solicit artists for some—in some exchange with Akumulatory Gallery. So it was part of my life to be kind of—

[Cross talk.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So that this was not—I didn't feel isolated at all. I was—maybe even more people I met there than if I was here. But in Toronto, when I was living there, I was quite isolated because I didn't have that much connection with most of those artists, although they knew all, because I didn't have time. I had to work, I had—so that's one in isolation, and the kind of certain skepticism towards people who came from other countries, very strong at that time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But you don't—you didn't find that here?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No. But there were great things happening of course, and General Idea was a fantastic—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh yeah, that's a great.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —group—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —did have some connection with them, because they had a fantastic bookstore, and I was preparing my lectures there. And when I—AA Bronson I met a few times. I mean, it was not a very close contact, but it was amazing just to see what they were doing, yeah, there, so. It's—no, it's just, you cannot compare any place to New York, so—any attempt to make—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —true.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —comparison will fail.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: But anyway, you found a kind of—it sounds like this was more your comfort zone when you came here, and that—is that correct? I mean that somehow you're still an immigrant, but it doesn't feel as hard.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, it's a little bit like what Freud will say, when everybody is a stranger, there is no strangers.

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So it's very—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —you feel at home.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes, that's good.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But even if someone is not a stranger, why one ought to think as if one was a stranger. So there was a kind of obligation to be a stranger—[laughs]—in New York to be a member of that, you know, family. But there are so many people who came here from other cities, from parts of the United States—

[00:30:20]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —who—and they're Americans, but they—they really like to be here because they are strangers among strangers.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And when—so, it's sort of interesting, you go to Canada to find the, sort of, theoretical roots of your work, you know, in Marxism, and then you came here and you said you found your roots as a Jew.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, it's because that I did continue that connection on a theoretical level with these many critics and theorists, who definitely were very much informed by Marxism and feminism and—

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_2of3_sd_track04_m.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —such as Rosalyn Deutsche, with whom—a very strong connection. But also with the kind of avant-garde—new type of avant-garde that was here in New York in various places, but the one connected with Exit Art, very important.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Exit Art gallery, uh-huh [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Exit Art was a gallery, but in fact, it was a center, it's a kind of cultural center in which many of those strangers-among-strangers could actually meet and show, even, in the group exhibitions. Some of the names of the group exhibitions were related, like, you know, *Refugees*, or *Villains*, or—[laughs]—whatever, so. Because Papo Colo himself, being Puerto Rican, he actually introduced the whole issue of identity and performance, cultural identity or something, complex. So they published some—like a hybrid—a hybrid state, hybrid culture. You know, they were actually promoting the idea of multiplicity of identities that only artists can somehow grasp through their work. And that's, of course, a little bit of a utopian avant-garde position, but I felt at home there, really. I had several big exhibitions there, installations that were traveling across the country focusing on homeless people, mostly. But that I could work with homeless people, and I could bring those people—come with them to Exit Art, you know? They also felt, at least for a moment, at home there. So there was something there, which is beyond the left, the academic left or New Left and then on—and beyond the liberals or beyond anything. It's just was a special place. And so the relation between Exit Art and, for example, *October* magazine, or like Rosalyn Deutsche, or feminist media art is very—very, very different. They like what was happening in Exit Art, but they didn't have direct connection with them, it

was something special. Of course, I was also connected with 49th Parallel, which was a Canadian center, art center at—now in SoHo. That's it. So that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And John Weber.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —is something else—hmm?

ANNETTE LEDDY: And John Weber Gallery of course.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: John Weber Gallery, very briefly, very briefly, but I did have a connection with artists. Like the oldest kind of contact I had with was Hans Haacke, who actually came to my first exhibition in New York, in Hal Bromm Gallery.

ANNETTE LEDDY: At Hal Bromm, yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: That's where we met and then later, I mean, meeting in his studio and also coming just to see him, you know. The main part of—he was a very important figure—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], I would imagine—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —in my life. Yeah. He is a kind of professor for me. He doesn't know about it I guess.

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But we used to have in my old country, an ancient tradition, we used to call people professors even if they didn't have any position, academic position.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what about people like Nam June Paik who you mentioned, did you ever meet him?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Or what about Robert Watts, also a Fluxus—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, I didn't meet—those people directly. But I did meet people like Gordon Matta-Clark. I also had a correspondence with him, and there's partly some correspondence in—in Montreal, in the [Canadian] Centre for Architecture, because they have archives.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, yes, they have—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —of him.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —fantastic files, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And there are some—because somebody actually asked me for more information about that correspondence, because he's referring to me as being ambassador from Poland, because you see, I was trying to arrange—show his work in Warsaw. So I met those—it was a certain number of people are very close contacts; I know him. It's a long list, probably, if I started to write it down.

[00:05:18]

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, but these are—I was just curious because, of course I would assume Hans Haacke, very much in the same realm, but I also—as I was studying your work, I just—Robert Watts kept coming into my mind as someone—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, it was more people like Dara Birnbaum or Barbara Kruger [Ewa Harabasz, my companion –KW]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Barbara Kruger—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —with whom I—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —also—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —have very close contact. You know, it's hard to list all of those names

immediately—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, but no need, no need.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Weiner also was also was one—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Lawrence Weiner—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —with whom I met—Dan Graham definitely.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, completely, I—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —always, always—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —I see that—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —meeting with him—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —connection, yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —especially in this bookstore.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, that makes sense. Um, I think we might be at the end of this today, do you think?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: The end?

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, we have—I mean, just for today, it's—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: We—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —maybe—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —so it's pretty thick, right, what we were discussing?

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Should we stop? Let me just turn off the projector, oops, wait a minute, okay, sorry.

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_2of3_sd_track05_m.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: This is Annette Leddy interviewing Krzysztof Wodiczko for the Archives of American Art on June 30, 2021, in his studio in New York City. Today, we'd like to talk about your projections and the other works that you've done over the course of your career. Could you explain first how you got the idea of projecting alternate images onto building façades and monuments?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So, I need to go back to my projections inside of the galleries. As I mentioned yesterday, at one point, I started to juxtapose images from media art and propaganda kind of imagery onto the lines, vertical, horizontal, diagonal, and so, just to show how those images are orchestrating our mind as a kind of guidelines for our thinking. Because those images, they're architectural kind of substance. Meaning organization, formal organizations of images are very much guiding our mind, you know; the hands, horizontal hands, vertical hands, they are horizon—horizontal images that have a more social aspect, the vertical, the images of cathedrals. So that's why the—what I call—vertical was supposedly ethical, horizontal is supposed to be social, and diagonal is supposed to be artistic, but, of course, they are being interchangeable, so I'm—I spoke about this yesterday.

Once I moved to Canada, my first exhibition there was on the campus of Guelph University, and I realized I don't need those lines anymore because they are already inside, the directions in each image already has a linear character. So I—instead, I started to reorient those images, so they will be lined up, they would just overemphasize its kind of—like a guideline for our life and thinking, like a score of our thinking.

And so with this kind—armed with this experience, I continued this in Halifax, in Nova Scotia. So I also presented a similar type of work in Eye Level Gallery; that's what it's called. But I also realized that the gallery itself, its architecture is a little more visible. Normally, you have

galleries with blank walls, with—it's just completely abstract, you know, since the '60s. But this was the last kind of a gallery with this type; you could see doors, you could see radiators, you know, and there was a staircase. So I turned my projectors on the objects, on those architectural components, right, just to see there is a relationship between media images and architectural form—that both are kind of communication media, a different kind. So I started to project on telephone—you know, telephones, and to—well, doors, and it became much clearer to me that that kind of orchestration of our life is also done by architecture itself, which has a bodily metaphor. They're symmetrical, there's left and right, there is head and stomach, there's a chest, you know, all that, just gestures that are, kind of, those buildings are making, you know? So we identify with those buildings, so it is kind of architecturalization of our body and bodification of architecture in a projection identification process. When I projected those images, bodily images, it's—I, kind of, invoke that bodily aspect of architecture in our own relation to the architecture, so we, our self, façades, and buildings. I realized that already in that show.

[00:05:07]

So I took projectors outside, so it was the first time publicly I did this. I did some tests in Toronto, but it was not publicly announced, it was not ready. So the first experiments weren't in Toronto, in fact, but in Halifax because it was—The Centre for Art Tapes, and Eye Level Gallery, it was a building where I actually lived at that time; they were kind enough to actually announce this. So I installed my projectors in front of School of Architecture building, which makes certain sense just to turn it into, kind of, well, firm and sure of itself kind of body, architectural body, using two very small projectors, Kodak Carousel projectors. And then I did something else in the center of Halifax, in the Scotia Towers. It's huge, bureaucratic buildings with shopping mall underneath. And so I did also turn it into this very disciplined bureaucrat, you know, corporate bureaucrat body, by simply projecting one hand in the right position, just to organically connect it with the volume of this tower. I was doing this by myself. It was announced, but there was basically not much in media public.

I have accidental people coming out of the mall at night, and I start to hear—I start hearing something, and I realized that there's a couple of people, or three maybe, people who are laughing, looking at this projection and laughing. Once I heard this laugher, I realized that I'm going to continue this kind of work—

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —because why—people don't know why laugh. They're surprised by their own laughter; it comes, you know, naturally. They had to think afterwards, why did I laugh, you know, what was so funny about this? And I think what was funny, probably they realized that they are actually those—[laughs]—building themselves. There's something about a kind of discipline, daily work in those buildings as loyal, you know, bureaucrats that turn them into this building itself. And I—of course, at night, buildings are having nightmares, and, yeah, they dream about their daily activities. So they—there's a strange relation to the building when, you know, not all working anymore, there are just some cleaners, a crew is cleaning them so that they can—they have their own. And they had a distance to those buildings at night, you know, during day, you work in them, so you identify them. But daily, you have a sudden humorous—I mean, there's kind of a Brechtian situation already looking at those buildings at night, you know, and so it's interesting. I've realized that this is the beginning, and I continue since then with the projections.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How do you select a monument for a projection? What is your selection process?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So, my process—well, usually when I work, it's—you know, there are special conditions for this. First of all, I might have some ideas, but I need also to be invited to do projects because I don't own projectors, I have no company on my own, also part of this work, it's lots of research. I need some support of art centers, or maybe some relationship. So, well, it starts, but there's an interest, and so I say, "Well, of course, I am interested, but I have no idea what I will do." I should figure it out, and I need to learn, to study the city, the monuments, history, and also learn about social tensions, problems in the city, hopes, aspirations of various sections of population.

[00:10:04]

So I need to see how the symbolic environment of the city is connected, can be connected with

emerging issues, what there is on people's mind, because people project those things on the monuments mentally. They had a special dialogue with building environment. They've—also, they imagine themselves maybe on those pedestals if they are sculptural monuments, or they of course see façades and institutions, but also their plazas and places that remember events, social events of a great importance in the life of those people, but also historically. So those places are witnesses to the past events, but also to contemporary aspirations, hopes, and tensions. So, I need to see both; so, simultaneously, I try to both learn the social, cultural, historical city and also symbolic artistic, you know, architectural city.

And on one point, I start seeing that some of those symbolic structures, they're waiting for something, you know, to do with them, to make sense of them. They don't know about it seemingly, but I think I—but I am also—have a dialogue with those in the kind of—I dialogue. When I walk around the city, I always speak with those buildings and monuments. I have special life—[laughs]—at this part of my life talking to those, you know, checking the pulse and asking them, well, what do they feel about what's happening around today in the city, but also in the world. So some of those sculptures and buildings, they are responding to my call and they tell me things. I do it at night and during the day, and I do it in company of anthropologists, sociologists, social activists, you know, people who really know things but also that—or going to the bars and talking to, you know, anybody.

Well, for example, in Switzerland, in Bundesplatz in front of national Parliament, you know, and there—so I did it—before I did any projection, I actually spoke to people in a bar, and they told me, "Listen, this is all secret, but everybody knows that underneath of the plaza, the Bundesplatz, there is an entire Swiss gold located. And a lot of this gold is from the Second World War, or some people who are no longer alive, or maybe the gold deposits stolen maybe by Nazis." You know, there's all stories, stories, stories, you know, and then there is—I see suddenly there is a Swiss bank, National Bank, there's the Swiss national Parliament, on the left side is Swiss National Bank. Behind, there is bank of the city of Bern, right, and there is some other bank, original, I don't remember bank here. So it's flanked by banks, the national Parliament, and then there's this gold, I hear; whether it's true or not, maybe it's not that important, it's important that people think it's there.

So then I projected on the—yeah, I decided to project on the pediment of this national Parliament, this eye that was changing its direction from one bank to another bank to another bank, down to the ground where supposedly this gold is, and high to the sky, you know, in the mountains are, you know, so where this kind of eye of supreme—supreme eye, like in the dollar bill, in—the Masonic eye, straight and up to the sky.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And how was that—what was the reaction of people to this projection?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, it is very important, the question when it comes to slide projections, you know, the reaction of the people.

[00:15:04]

I think there was something going on, because it also overlaps always with some events. There was some protest against the National Bank by some who question, you know, their holdings from the Second World War time, or maybe some other, you know, supports holding money from most questionable you know, sources. So they actually sprayed it with blood—with red paint, this bank. It was a little after my projection. So I'm sure there were—some people did see also the comical aspect of this. You know, they realize that this Swiss National Bank has a special relationship to those in the financial system, and also to the kind of Protestant, puritan, you know, sky, mountains, uh—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you go back to a bar and just listen to hear people's reactions to the work?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, not—I didn't really have much chance to hear reactions this time, but on other projections, yes. One that was easier for me to listen, you know, lots of people giving comments. It looks like—also they live in those cities, they know a lot, that each person has own knowledge, own experience, own kind of memory, and they talk about this. So, "This actually, you know, I remember," or, "This or that place means this to me, and that projection helps me or disturbs me," or, "I had no idea what it means, but somehow it's funny," you know, there are all kinds of conversations about. So the exchange of different points of view in front of that projection is an opportunity for people to meet each other in a kind of Brechtian setting, you know, or representatives of various social strata. You know, it could be some drunk person has

some fit, or not a real fit in front of it, and there's somebody else who will just hysterically laugh, or somebody else would say, "Bravo" [claps], or somebody says, "I hate this, you know, why is this *ya ya ya*, it's defacing, you know, the façade, and that it disturbs me, why those artist is doing all of these things?" But also there are some activist groups, you know, that capitalize on this. Like in South Africa House, you know, I projected—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —the swastika.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —the swastika. That was very well received by protest—people who are protesting already in front of that embassy in Trafalgar Square. And they came back with some wine to me, and they congratulated me just before the police came, and I had to stop it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Hmm, too bad, So how have your projections changed over the years?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So we're talking now of those projections that I've done with slides that took for—it was my act of speech, so to speak, it was my animation, it's coming from me. It was—it's silent, there's no sound in them, there was very little motion if at all, so that's what it is. It's a little like a photomontage in some ways. It's very much similar in principle to John Heartfield's photomontages, for example, or any photomontages here, Hannah Höch or, you know, this—this is—that's also something, maybe. There's another that had comical absurd—revealing its contradictions and things that are to be hidden come to light, so there are also aspects of the—uncanny aspects of those projections. But simultaneously, with those projections, I started working with people on my instruments, giving them voice, create—designing equipment for them to communicate in public space such as this, you know, *Alien Staff*, and all of *The Mouthpiece*. And so I've been working on this as an extension of my—the most important equipment that I designed, the *Homeless Vehicle* in 1988. This vehicle is some kind of a possibility for homeless people to present themselves as legitimate members of urban community who work day and night, they collect things, and also that some kind of speaking about this when people ask about, "Why are you doing this, what's the purpose of this vehicle?" They became communicators and performers, so.

[00:20:58]

But that aspect became much more important than I expected initially. That symbolic presence and message with the very—came with a vehicle itself; that's one speech, you know, that vehicle should not be there, there should be housing. So it certainly show certain absurdity and impossibility, unacceptable, you know, and the need for this vehicle. So this was fine, but what I realized the vehicle was lacking, the capacity to record and transmit all those things that the operators, homeless operators had to say. They were born of this homeless crisis, but they remember other time, you know, when maybe they were not homeless, so they can speak about the process in which they ended up living this way. And thus also, they see the world from the point of view of the wound of the bottom—from the bottom up. So it's—that's their projection that should be taking place.

So should I add some media equipment to this vehicle, it would probably be even more effective. So that's why I designed the next mutation of this vehicle called *Poliscar*, which has basically communication—homeless communication network. It was some kind of equipment to a hypothetical network of homeless people who will share their own perception of the city, and also inscribe themselves into political discourse and maybe rep—towards the representation of their needs, maybe towards some change. Now, that vehicle was built as a prototype, and—you know, but it was not implemented, of course, the way I wanted, it's impossible.

But then I moved to France, and I realized that I just face this incredible xenophobic time of Le Pen, and also a Minister of Interior whose name was Pasqua, who actually introduced the harshest possible policy towards immigrants. And there was the whole anti-immigrant situation that I started also to work with when I took the job in École des Beaux-Arts ENSBA with students. We started to work with the encampment of foreigners who were homeless next to the site where now there is a national library built, and next to Quai de la Gare, you know, it's a train, the subway—Metro station. So that we started to work with them, and then at this moment, I realized that some equipment could be designed for those people to open up and share the unsolicited kind of active speech, their points of view, their situation, their story through some special equipment that will allow others to come closer and listen without fear, you know, but puzzled and amused and somehow, you know, get involved in listening to this thing in between rather than directly to the person. And then eventually also communicate with that person, who is, sort of, as a boss, and then more people would come, so it was creating something that

become the center of some kind of new discourse.

[00:25:03]

And that's all pre—based on the prerecorded narrative inscribed into this walking stick, you know, the—this companion of a wandering immigrant, who actually by putting that stick and standing, and I think to speak like a mouthpiece so that person could actually create—establish territory, one's own place in which she—he or she becomes a person of history rather than someone with no history. Someone who has things to say about how—what perception to—contributing some critical and some vision, hopes, and also talk about the reason why a person is here. So this is—saying this, or experiencing work with this, led me on the creative potential to use this experience with my projection. That was a potential that the actual opportunity came with Andrzej Wajda Festival in Krakow. The central market was the largest public space in Europe. You know, he was showing his own films outside, because it was the first time those projectors were available. They were Barco, Belgium-made projectors that could project films even during the day outside, so it's very powerful. I never used those before. I used Barco slide projectors, so I knew what I can project as a static image, but I never projected motion image or video image with sound. But I said, "Well, actually, I have some qualifications to do it," because I work with people on those video recordings, those who use those stuffs. They sometimes took a year or several months for them recording, re-recording, learning what to say, you know, composing that speech, saying all those things that they wanted to say, but there was never enough time, and no one wanted to listen, just to say those things in public space. So I think life. He invited me to be part of his festival, I was very happy, and, you know, I got access to this equipment.

And so I started to study Krakow, as I always do, as if it was a foreign city. Actually, it's part of my childhood, I grew up partially in Krakow, but I assume, you know, I know nothing about the city. It's true, I didn't know nothing. So I learned about that, I realized there was life in Krakow at night of which nobody wants to speak. Just those night situations need to be projected at night, so, to really see the real nightmare of the city. So that was a situation of people who cannot see anything, like the blind people, the people who are addicted to drugs, and the homosexuals, you know, and most importantly, women who are being abused, and children of course being abused. That night is just a nightmare, you know, immersed in alcoholism and drugs and crime, and it's—worse things coming. So, like I will—I learned about all those things for quite a while, and I invited eventually people, including the women's center, to speak through this tower in the center of Krakow, its old city hall tower. It's a gothic, huge tower, lonely tower; the city hall was burned apparently in some 18th-century angst, so the tower—the kind of loneliness of this tower, the alienation of this building, of that body, so that was a very proper site for my projection. So eventually, all those people, so to speak, there was a huge crowd who came. There was enormous amount of people who came. It's such a large-scale public space.

[00:30:20]

So I—definitely, it was the beginning of my projections with the use of video. It's important for me to say it, because on the surface, that is, on the photographs, in newspapers, textbooks, projections with slides look similar to projections with videos, so. But in fact, the difference is fundamental, because of so-called participation of people. I don't like tempered participation because people gave their life to this project in some ways.

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_3of3_sd_track01_m.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I participate in their artistry of finding words and metaphors and expressions, their own performative art. Oh, I take full responsibility for all this, but in a way, the success of the project depends on their success in making themselves clear. If they cannot make themselves clear through this project, it's my failure; if they do it, it's their success. So this is very different than with slide projectors because—with slide projections.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But do you edit their accounts? You do several—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Editing—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —takes?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —is very important, because they speak lengthily, yeah, they speak hours, and there's no room for everybody to say such a long—so it has to be made shorter. Making it shorter is, you know, the communication with those people, so I have to agree, and

they have to agree with what eventually we said. But they're usually very happy with the result, because in the context of the entire project, of *other voices*, they usually are satisfied that I didn't miss anything substantial.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, in relation to that work in particular, you—I was reading about it, and you said that in this case, public architecture becomes the transitional object.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, in the—in—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And I know this is a reference—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, that—what later—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —to when—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —it's just—yes, in case of projection in Tijuana, yeah, so maybe easier—easiest case for me to use to respond. The projection comes—I come, and the idea of the projection comes from outside to their lives. So their job is to reject this, to psychologically destroy Wodiczko, the projection on some building and, you know, maybe whatever, whatever it is. Because they don't want to be manipulated by some artists and some curators in some—some way; sensationalized, romanticized, or, you know, make money of their misery or problems, you know, why they had to reject this. In—and then I have to survive the rejection, the destruction by the way of showing up again as if nothing happened, it was fine. I'm ready to—I'm determined to continue.

So the next time when I speak with people, especially the activists, those people who work on their behalf, like social workers and the people in charge of social support organization or emergency center, those people also have to reject me, because they—to protect those so-called clients. So I need to pass exam with them. They have to test me, they do not respond to my phone calls, they never have time, and I have to continue. So that means once I survive initial destruction, their relationship is changing; they start thinking, well, since he survived this and he's determined, he is genuine. He must have some—maybe it's worth giving him a chance to be trusted, at least a trial. So in this moment, some people will never show up again, others will come. You know, there would be initial recordings that will start discussing what ought to be said, what ought to be made public that nobody wants to hear. What is the issue that is worth using this thing I offer; that opportunity, projection. So they start discussing it. In this moment the project is losing its external position. It's still coming from outside, but also it's absorbing their inner world, their issues, their lives, their existential situation.

[00:05:06]

So the project be—so it's still me—it's absorbing their inner world without losing the outside—outer aspect. In this way, it becomes transitional, so it is no longer only Wodiczko's work, it becomes their work as well. And they start listening to themselves, they start realizing that actually they are—we all—all those authors what they say. So that means that the—so the question at one point whether this is Wodiczko's work or their work, as Winnicott would say, this question should not be formulated because it destroys the developmental aspect of this process.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, so—but you also say that the—in this potential space, you know, between you and the participants or whatever, you exchange roles and they become the artist and you become the narrator in a way. Well, you say that—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —at some point.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —so those—also once their image—even they—also they understand what's going to happen. They agree, they know my previous work, they know the site, they know la Bola—El Centro Cultural's façade, but then once they see themselves projected, they realize that they are not just themselves straight, they're also a façade.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So they are part building, part monument, and part themselves, which means that they also are monuments themselves to their own traumatic, you know, memories, to their own survival, to their speech, possibility of sharing things in public space, the

monumental public space. They actually are also turning their personal experience into historical. Now, they become works of a history.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. But—so, I mean, I notice in many of your descriptions of these—of your work, you refer to Winnicott and to his theory of the transitional object and so on. And I'm curious as to—I mean, it's almost—did you get the idea of creating these works, or was it an idea to make concrete this theory you had read, or did you have the idea and then, kind of, further think it through with the assistance of this theory? Like, what is the relationship between this theory and—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —the actual creative process?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —I didn't learn what to do from—direct Winnicott, that's for sure—

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —but I learned how to do understand what I am doing from him. It helps me to feel—you know, it helps me to also recognize my own role, what he would call a good-enough mother, somebody who is not telling people what to say, how they should play with this, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Object, yes.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —equipment, or an eye design or this projection, become animators. You know, they have to learn step by step how to be monumental animators, I had to. So what I'm—basically, it's a combination here of psychotherapeutic function of those projects that create conditions for them to develop their capacity to express themselves, to find words for their experiences, and then once they listen and see themselves speaking in this public space, they reintegrate it. Now they become much more intelligent, much more conscious, and more in charge of their own past to move ahead, because the monument is standing for the past that cannot change. You cannot change the past.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But making it—bringing life to it, their own life to it also create the possibility for them as monuments to their own past to move ahead, to be alive, and to really see the future—

[00:10:06]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you tell them that—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —with action—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —at any point?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, I don't give them lectures—

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, this is—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —on Winnicott—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —this—[Laughs.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —they know, they know themselves better. You know, people actually have their own philosophy of life; otherwise they will not be part of the project. There are hundreds of opportunities not to show up, and some people didn't show up, and some people show up—after a long time of not showing up, they all say, "I have nothing to say, I don't want this project." And then they suddenly came at the last minute, and that was sometimes the best contribution to the project, and maybe the best—they made use of this project for their life, and for maybe life of others, because they speak on behalf of themselves, but also they speak on behalf of other people who cannot be part of this type of project at the moment. They have similar situation, so they feel they are doing something larger. They are agents for change, you know; they are, really. So in this way they assume another role, which is a positive role towards hope. Let's hope that this project will be—you will create conditions for—better conditions for

others.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you—so how do you—I understand that you—the concept of good-enough mother; in other words, creating a space where this kind of play can take place that is developmentally critical. But what I'm wondering is how you feel when you look back on your performance with these participants, do you feel that you've succeeded in being a good-enough mother?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: This—well, I don't have that many opportunities to speak to people long after, and I had opportunity to speak soon after. So they are more—I never heard any kind of disappointment from them. They were all—so it's quite—it's not a big thing. It's obvious that, once they complete this and they've seen or heard themselves and they realize people will listen to them, that they actually are major actors in urban environment, and they are historical figures. Of course, they are satisfied, but also they are very happy. They sometimes even bring them to tears to really realize they can say things, and a condition set up to speak in a major public space to a large number of people, and it's also extended by media, by films, television, by interviews that comes afterwards. They're being interviewed often, you know, by media like a journalist, and that they really have—they just become—there's nothing more painful, as psychotherapists say, the harsh experience not to be communicated with others. So just the very fact that they found expression, not just facts but emotionally charged form, that is healing, obviously. This is not a—you know, obviously, it's a naturally positive outcome of this type of work. I should not get credit for it—I mean, the only maybe credit is that I learned how to listen.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And did you learn that from going through psychoanalysis yourself?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, you learned that from talking with therapists, like how to talk to patients?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Therapists, many of those—of people who are speaking through my project, not many, but some, significant, they had their own therapist there they go through that; it's like war veterans, not homeless people unfortunately, no, but the war veterans, yes. Some of the people abused, domestic violence, yes, some immigrants, some, not many do, so. And I do—and sometimes those therapists come to the projection, and also the Combat Stress organization in England, actually, those chapters, some of them run by psychotherapists. In Rotterdam there is a—the immigrant center, which is also run by therapists. In Stockholm, there is cross-cultural—center of cross-cultural communication of psychotherapy. So they are—they come in and they're very happy because, see what you do, we cannot do, you know, and also what they do, I cannot do. So those are a supplement, a kind of—complement to those.

[00:15:31]

Because a dramatic therapy, you know, this—there are techniques, but public space for me, it's healing, potentially healing environment. Because it is a place—because of democratic process that is potentially—I mean, it is set up for democratic process, and this democratic process only happens when there is some action. So the public space is basic, created in every moment when you communicate things that are difficult, that are not seen as proper to be communicated. That is—so they—in this way, psychotherapy connects with the emancipation process, you know, with this—with politics of public space, the therapy also is part of it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Would you say your work has become more psychological—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —over time?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So, I didn't go through psychoanalysis myself. I have contact with psychotherapists, also I am—occasionally also speak with a therapist who actually became like an intellectual colleague on most of occasions, but of course, I learned from him how to listen, that's important. But I don't know, you know, what was the biggest influence here in terms of theory. I think the book by Julia Kristeva, which I started to—two books, one is Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* and Julia Kristeva, which I read both in French and English; let's see, the *Etrangers à nous-mêmes, Strangers to Ourselves*. I think that's a very good book. It is—it's—well, Kristeva is a psychoanalyst herself, so she definitely work a lot with foreigners, with strangers and herself actually being a Bulgaria kind of emigré, or refugee from Bulgaria in France, having also a very, very French husband, which I'm sure contributed to her knowledge as well.

[Laughs.] So she managed to put together a pretty good argument for a kind of utopia. Her utopia is that everybody should share one's own strangeness. So this is a kind of utopian society, which everybody will share with everybody on strangeness, so, of course, there will be no strangers at that time; I mean, ideally. But that process is only possible through art, through cultural work; otherwise it will not be possible. She knows perfectly Freud also felt this way. So in that way, I'm kind of part of that utopian project.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I like that, yeah. So just to reprise a little bit, you're saying that when you started out doing the projections that were stills, essentially there—the—there wasn't the kind of psychological dimension that developed once you started using videotapes, and dealing with oral history?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: That is almost exactly what you say. I think there was an element of—psychological element in the slide projections. First of all, because of seeing in those inanimate structures, symbolic structures, humans, so that's part I already mentioned. But another thing is, in Stuttgart in 1983, this is the first time I projected something that was not human body kind image.

[00:20:10]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Not the hands, or the—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, it was actually a Pershing II missile.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, right.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And a Pershing II missile was a very—a center of the Christian Democratic party campaign. They wanted to install themselves in power in an election process by promising that they will arm each city with a number of those missiles, and some actually could have nuclear warheads as well, took—to show that peace can only be achieved through strength. When I—this victory column in Stuttgart actually has very similar inscriptions from a Napoleonic time, that strength can—that peace can only be achieved through strength. That was the same thing written there, or something like that. Another was, you know, a victory, and there was a huge column, and I just realized that this Pershing II missile actually is already in that column inside, it just needs to have an X-ray, you know. So we—so there's a column that's pregnant with a missile, so it was big, and being launched. So the missile—are like columns, of course, and they are iconic weapons, right? So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —the more missiles you have, the stronger you are. You know, it's like —

ANNETTE LEDDY: So it's a psychology of form—of forms, really?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, so exactly, it was psychoanalytical projection, because—

[They laugh.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —there's the—it's uncanny aspect, the truth, something that ought to be hidden came to light. As Freud would say, it's uncanny, but—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes, it is, it feels that way when you get it.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah. So that means that those columns, victory columns that are everywhere, they perpetuate this kind of myth or strong beliefs that, you know, the more weapons, stronger—you know? That this—you know, that it's like a lot of weapons, all vertical, big, you know, weapons. This is something, a continuation, a perpetuation of war because if peace can only be achieved through war, then—there is a continue—perpetual peace is absurd, it's impossible. Yeah, it's a big perpetual war in order to—chasing after peace, you know, by staging another war. And that was—the problem is that those war memorials became the major topic in my mind because of the cultural with the kind of end wars, without challenging or deconstructing and constructing new culture of un-war, rather than perpetuating cultural war. And those forms, symbolic forms, every city and every place, it's armed with those war—perpetuation war machine, symbolic war machines, those—

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's almost—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —war memorials.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —a constant indoctrination that's silent that comes to us through these—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —façades, and these—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and these statues?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —and absurd as it is, the cities are the most tragic victims of war. You know, bombing of the cities, it's, like, expected, right, that's what the war does. At the same time, cities are major vehicles ready for mobilization of masses for war. The names of the plazas, like Grand Army Plaza, for example, in Brooklyn, you know, you have all of those victory columns, you know, that are of course military victory columns, and the real victory column should be the victory over the very idea of war. This should be—triumphal art should be the one that will be—

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Perfect—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —real triumph will be the end of the wars, rather than as it shows around the arch, so that the path to peace is through war.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. Well, you know, I really admire that, and I really—your book, *The Abolition of War,* you know, is a fantastic work, but I did have this question as I was reading it: So, how can you separate war from other kinds of violence, in particular mass shootings, for example?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I mean, I kept thinking if you—how can you say there'll be no more war, when we have this other problem now that gets worse, literally every week?

[00:25:33]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: This is a very important topic you're bringing up. What's more fundamental than war? You know, what it is that we should challenge that is behind it? And so, there's the psychoanalysis of war as one topic that I'm studying, but it doesn't really answer to your question fully. Still, if we could eliminate wars for what they are, that's a massive killing of organized—it's a conflict of—an armed conflict—of organized conflict between societies that turns people into mass killers, which requires quite a complex, you know, machine, ideological campaign—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, and also—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —to dehumanize them enough so—and also to turn enemy into nonhumans. It's so complicated; it has stages. It's actually complicated, but it has a routine now. Everybody knows how to do it and then talking about politicians, because it's done through ancient times, the same process. However, it's not in human nature to kill masses of people. Now, it looks like it is human nature to brainwash other people to do so, and so also it's in human nature to abolish it as we managed to abolish slavery, you know. And practically speaking, war is not legal anymore, according to the United Nations charters, but the culture is, you know, the major engine of igniting those kind of conflicts to become bloody. So I think it's just ending that, doing something that will stop this sort of external maneuver, I agree with you, there is something deeper that needs to be challenged.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But actually, as you're—we're speaking, I was thinking, part of what happens in the war machine is they create a class within each society that is kind of the soldier class. And there's a certain kind of economic deprivation that—and even cultural deprivation that that is premised on, you know what I mean? And it feels like, in a way, you're right, if you get rid of the war, then essentially you get rid of that designation of a certain class as the soldier class, and maybe that changes the mass killing psychology as well.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: You know, it's difficult because it's—well, I'm talking about a situation where, like the First World War, when in one battle, you know, 800,000 people were killed. We—and we should start with this, you know? And during the Second World War, in Warsaw alone, 800,000 people were killed.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], like the numbers keep going up, yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: No, of course, each time the city is attacked or is a terrain or a theater of war, more people will be killed. There seems to be—for every soldier, there may be four to seven civilians killed, you know, for every killed soldier. So we're talking about murderers on account—so I don't know. Artists and cultural work is very important, when you see that the European Union was created only for the purpose to avoid wars in Europe; there was no other purpose; other means were economical, political, and so forth. However, one important mechanism was not challenged that perpetuate wars, they're national—nationalism and chauvinism, and the way history and a national identity is being reproduced from one generation to another. That part has not been done. So now you see those who are like in Hungary and Poland, you know, those places, we see the people start arming themselves for another war, or they revive the memory—what the—our neighbors and ancestors of their neighbors did to our ancestor. And ancestors becomes an issue again, and so the war memorials are becoming again and again used, reactivated like a dormant—dormant bombs. You know, they are reactivated. They can always sell—

[00:30:57]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's so interesting—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —that purpose again and again. So, of course—

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_3of3_sd_track02_m.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —that is a contradiction of European Union right now, like on the—because the—each country member, state—member state of the union has an autonomy when it comes to culture, and that's negotiated, in fact. And it's—now that the union is kind of—to accept that members are doing those things that they're supposed to not do, so, it's becoming a problem. And, you know, those who work in the cultural and education and pedagogy, that work is extremely important. How are we going to formulate a concept of identity within that Union that will be free of those—all this kind of poison, in which humans are tested for their quality as members of society for their behavior during the war, you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Rather than doing it without war. You know, how can you actually be a patriotic person without becoming a nationalist kind of warrior fighting against another nation? It's very hard for people to imagine, because that's most of the history of each of those countries. So any attempt to cherish that, to bring it back, especially with—especially in the form of martyrology, which is a code of heroic—of martyrdom during the war especially, you know? So this—people are born to die again for the nation, and then they reinforce that feeling during the dialogue with war memorials, you know, then we are in big troubles.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, I'm wondering how this relates to anti-Semitism, and the possible resurgence of that?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And I also know that that's a particular area of your research that maybe you want to—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, there is—

something about anti-Semitism, in terms of my mother being Jewish. She never really spoke about this, only, you know, in—a few years before she died she started to open up. So this in itself is an important factor—fact. She not giving me that information; for her, it was a way to protect me, because knowing or building up especially my identity of suffering or injustice, as, you know, of her or our ancestors, it's a big problem. And secondly, knowing this way that I am a Jew by the way that I'm aware of what she went through, and the name on, some joining other people within who identify with that history, and anti—this will be—would put me in danger, you

know what I mean? I still have—it's better if I am not aware of this at all. Just to be like a Polish person, like a standard Polish person, I'll be safe. Whenever I start identifying myself as Jewish heritage, I might be—next time there will be another pogrom, I will be a victim. That's the way people think in Northern Ireland. I work with those people in my project in Derry, Londonderry, you know, they don't tell their children about so-called Troubles, you know, in case it's clear that they—the children will say, "Okay, my parents were on Catholic side," right, and then there will be another outbreak of the civil war, right, and it can be shot as carrying on this kind of association with the enemy by others.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, this is very counter to the approach that says that only by constantly educating yourself about what happened in history can you prevent it from happening again.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yeah, I know, of course. So I did not follow this instruction, I could not, because I came to the United States in 1975, and I realized that I just went through a year—a few years before the last pogrom in Poland without being fully aware of the extent of the whole anti-Semitic campaign. That they expelled masses of the people who were called Jewish, even if they didn't call themselves this way, to other countries, especially to Israel, with a one-way ticket and one-way visa, losing citizenship, so we're talking about a major anti-Semitic campaign. I was in the middle of this without realizing exactly the extent of it; I learned it in New York.

[00:05:31]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And how did you learn—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: I—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —learn it New York?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: —went to Jewish Institute when—there's a library, and I see the section, anti-Semitism in Poland after Second World War, and I see exactly the same newspapers that I've been reading every day but in the context of this particular pogrom, but there were other in '56 of which I didn't—I knew something, but I didn't really know. Of course, there were pogroms immediately after the Second World War of which there were some information, but there was zero information in Poland. Only, you know, the past 10, 15 years that Jedwabne and all those pogroms came out, and it's still being resisted. It's—still people deny it, you know, and that is something I learned. I was shocked by the extent of my ignorance.

And then I met people who were actually expelled from Poland who ended up here in New York, some of them via Israel or directly. And like one of them just told me, "Well, listen, I was just a student in Wałcz in the Academy of Fine Arts, and I was working on my thesis." It's at the same time I was working on my thesis in '68, so I had full identification with. And I had this painting, and I—this is my diploma, a painting. So I came to my studio and see this painting is crossed in some weird—some—destroyed by some lines, I didn't know. I mean, I was shocked, I went to the dean, or—"My painting is destroyed." And so, they came just to—with her to inspect the destruction, and they say, "Well, listen, this is the Star of David across your painting," and I said, "I didn't know, what is Star of David, you know, what is it?" "Well, they think you're Jewish." So that means she was not even—she couldn't identify, it was too large maybe for her to see, but also it was not—she wouldn't anticipate this, so her brain was not programmed for this kind of anti-Semitic action. It maybe was like 19th century, or before the Second World War, but not now.

So basically, that's how people were expelled because some of them who identify being Jewish, even they didn't think of themselves as Jewish, you know, it's just been like this during the Nazi time, the same thing. So I realized this is a major issue here, and then I started. When I asked my mother when I came back, she told me, "Well, what do you expect really? I mean, myself, when I was a student," she told me, "in the, well, university, well, there were special benches for Jews in the lecture halls, so we were standing, we refused to sit, you know. And once we—well, there was a student union, which was the anti-Semitic organization, the main union for students, they were just coming to university and beating up Jews, you know. "So then, you know," she said, "I was awarded a special grant to work on my thesis as a microbiology graduate student to develop some colonies of bacteria, you know, in the best microbiological lab in Poland. It was a great award to have such facility, scientific facilities to work on your thesis. So I went there, and they really loved my project, and then they said, 'Are you Jewish?'" She said, "Yes," said, "No, I'm sorry, you cannot do it here," right?

[00:10:00]

So she ended up working on her thesis in the basement—[laughs]—swallowing some bacteria in the process from the—you know, living down. Oh, she survived this, but this is—so I started to learn step by step. Like she had very good friends, like family who are not Jewish, and they love her. And one day, she was there with them, and some member of that family came back saying, [claps and rubs hands together], "We had a very beautiful pogrom today." So she said—[laughs]—"Well, uh— " So, she couldn't say anything. So, that means that there's this story that for every—you know, the old story that every anti-Semite has a Jewish friend, you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And so, it's this thing. So I learned a lot just before she died, because she opened up. She realized no way, she—there's no way. I already learned something from the United States. And my first shock was in Chicago, well, because I always thought that my mother is a unique person. There's nobody like that, she's crazy, she knows more about everything than anybody else, she's faster than anybody in her thinking, and she's critical all the time, as every day was the end of the world or the Last Judgment, you know, she's completely crazy, I had to accept this. But then, in Chicago, I walk on the street and I see there 10 of my mothers walking, you know, they act the same way, you know, they—[laughs]—they do their things, you know. I said, "Well, she's not unique, she's just part of the culture of other people I never met, you know, a bit special, or." Before the war, Warsaw assimilated Jewish culture, you know, the people who had to be three times better in order to imagine that they are equal.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], exactly.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: You know, that's a minority culture, there's special techniques, you know. I didn't have to develop those techniques, The situation after war was no way as bad as before the war for Jews. Even with all of those pogroms, it was not the same. Although in—ah, '68 was the same, that's for sure, but this was not a continuum, so anyway, I didn't have to learn those things. Now I—as I said, "Listen, I think I am Jewish," when I came back, and I—and she said, "You're crazy, who told you about it? You don't have any other things to do in your life?"

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: You know? "I mean, that's not how I brought you up," she said. "Well, it's too late, you have to accept this." That's—the thing is, well, the—the most comical situation; oh, I had to share with you, she—I got the mission to find in New York the Israeli jewelry, because she really liked Jewelry from Israel; I don't know what it was. She had some joy, she wanted to have something. So I went to the store in—there was—in the Lower East Side, there was, at that time, a very Jewish district, not like today. So I went to this small store, there was somebody there who looked exactly how we're supposed to look—[laughs]—you know, a Hasidic Jew so I say at least I am just coming—I like to. So she—he asked me, "Where are you coming from?" I said, "Poland." His immediate response was, "Is there anti-Semitism in Poland?" I said, "Well, uh, maybe, not really." "That means that there is. So what do you want?" I said, "You have something from Israel?" "I have something for you." So he brought something that has nothing to do with Israel—[laughs]—and some—whatever he wanted to sell me. And I said, "Well, listen, it doesn't look like it's from Israel." He said, "That's the point, no one will know." [Laughs.] So I—I—and so of course, and I went to—back to Poland, to Warsaw, and I am just trying—bringing that story to my mother. "Listen, I went to the store, he asked me where I'm from, well, and he asked if there's anti-Semitism so, well, yeah. He said, oh yes, I understand that story, and then he said—and then he brought me something that's nothing to do with Israel," and my mother, "So nobody will know." [Laughs.] She already knew the ending.

[00:15:10]

ANNETTE LEDDY: The punch line. [Laughs.]

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: So I—that was the moment I just realized she is from the culture that I know nothing about, but I learned something about it in New York and in Chicago, and that's too late for me to—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But did it—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO:—forget it.

ANNETTE LEDDY:—change your—did change your view of yourself or your identity?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes, because I—knowing—having this, I realized that there is no way I can simply dismiss it, so I should do something, maybe add it to my own already tendency to do something socially useful, and do something that make the world better as much as possible, but also about the prejudice and against the potential repetition of catastrophes like that. So, of course, it helped me, but it's not that I became immersed in this martyrology at all, it's against exactly—my mother taught me not to do that, because she never really presented herself as a victim. She never really identify with those circles that build their collective identity on their collective martyrdom and suffering. "I think it's a waste of time, you have to create something new," that's what she was always saying, that's what she was doing in her town working on television, and so she was a proactive person. The same, my father of course, so they—they joined each other in this kind of progre—proactive position, rather than a kind of melancholic position, which Freud will call, you know, the kind of recalling all the time the past catastrophe, you know, and it is an old record, so.

But still it was very important for me to know what is—what's that catastrophe, and how much also I absorbed anti-Semitism myself as a part of Polish culture. So this is another issue here, because anti-Semitism operates in completely unrecognizable forms, you know, it is always to build a certain concept of identity that is against those who are different or this, and it's eventually—so I had to undo, deconstruct myself, and I—this I had done here in New York already, together with another important deconstructive project, which is called feminism, which I learned a lot. And so I became—I came back to Poland as a Jew, you know, and a feminist and a socialist or Marxist. So I—I lost lots of friends. [Laughs.] They couldn't recognize me, and I couldn't really deal with their reactions to what I was saying, so basically, it provided the ground for me to really do everything I can to travel, not to stay in Poland, but to have contact with other countries, especially United States. So eventually it happened, but it took a while.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So that brings me to what we often conclude these interviews with, which is, do you consider yourself an American artist?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes. Okay.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: But I have three passports and—and a fourth—[laughs]—permanent residence in a fourth country. But this is one way to be American, is to be from those countries. That reminds me of my first contact with a rabbi in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1978. He said—asked me, "Well, which country are you coming?" and I said, "Poland." His response was, "This is the best country to be from." [Laughs.] The *from* was a big word—[laughs]—you know, but of course. Because still I am from Poland, and I don't stop being Polish. So the fact that I am American doesn't stop, so I guess one way to be Polish is also—is to be American. That's for sure, and there are lots of people like that. Tadeusz Kościuszko, for example, our famous, you know, person was a—you know, the Washington general during the independence, the—so, excuse me, American Revolution. So he staged another revolution in Poland, and he was American—became an American citizen, he was American and Polish, so. But not everybody in Poland can be this way. I am in—I'm very happy to be American.

[00:20:56]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I actually was—the emphasis in my question was not on American so much as it was on artist, in other words, to be an American artist.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Okay, this is a topic I need to explore a little bit more. What does it mean to be American artist from my perspective.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's what I'm asking.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: It is—coming from Europe, it's to do something that Europeans cannot do—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], oh, good—

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO:—as an artist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —point, mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Which means to create art that is based on First Amendment. In Poland, the equivalent of the First Amendment is on the 40th position or something, in French constitution, it's more fifth position. And the United States, the only country that has expressive communication, or communicative rights, at the top, as if every other bill of rights would not be practically operational without that one being at the top.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Free speech, mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: This creates a new situation for art, because in European way of thinking, art has a kind of privilege to—a special position to be enigmatic, you know, to have a very complicated, complex and then subject to various interpretations, which is fine; I agree, art is doing this. But the demand that art should also be an act of speech, public speech, an outcry, and to—and something that has a strong voice, because the First Amendment doesn't make any sense if people don't exercise it. So in fact, there is also almost a demand to speak, to speak up, speak out, speak up, to express, to convey, to convince, to make a position, to exchange, to challenge, to defend your right, to have that freedom, right? Otherwise democracy will be in trouble, and that's what's happening all the time, this never-ending project.

So art immersed in this situation assumes a different kind of strength, and a different emphasis. So, Europe is spitting in the United States too much. When I am in Europe, I always defend the States; of course, when I am here, I'm criticizing United States. But the thing is that they—you know, they have been dominated by American art, you know, they complain about it, whether it's popular art, whether it's films, media or even the kind of so-called high art. They are—they have had fed up with this. So they—in fact, they decorate themselves with American art in their collections and everything. Why they love it, they and they—why they cannot live without it? Because there is something in it they cannot do, or they do rarely, and it's great—made difficulties, they see those. So that's something I joined. So when I show my work, I present my work, I produce my work in Poland, I see my work as American art in Poland, not Polish art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's so interesting. And then, so then you—maybe you've already answered this question, then what has been your contribution to American art?

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: Well, that's very hard. I have so many colleagues, you know, I joined the crowd of people who are doing similar kind of work that I do, you know, the ones that are trying to pro—make a meaningful contribution to democratic process through some artistic means.

[00:25:18]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO: And engaging people in this, and bringing people to it, and creating conditions for the kind of self-realization, or maybe advancement, in terms of their own capacities to communicate. I think there are people who are doing this; I am not alone, but I'm glad that I'm part of that—of that crowd. And so, in this way, I—I don't want to be alone; I want to be part of something that I support. So, that's my contribution, is maybe to that group of artists, to join them, you know, whether here, you know, Hans Haacke became Hans Haacke in the United States, you know, or—or Alfredo Jaar became Alfredo Jaar, or—and Antoni Muntadas. Of course, there are people who are born here who did—who also are doing this kind of work, like, you know, Barbara Kruger. It's hard for me to compare myself to colleagues who have achieved more than me, but I am glad that I know them, that we actually were developing our thinking, and work together here in East Village, we—we exchange some thoughts, we supported each other.

So that—my contribution is maybe not such significant as others, but I contribute to this culture, this particular culture in which art and life and politics and ethics connect, and maybe adding the psychotherapeutic aspect. That might be my specific—more specific entry, you know; create conditions for people to transform themselves and become more useful to others and change, more encouraged to move on with their lives. I think that part is something specific, because people—as you asked me the question, what's the reaction of the audience when it comes to slide projections, when it comes to video, but so-called participatory work, that question is not as important. The other question is more important—in what way people who brought life to the project, and makes sense of it for their life to—what way they gain something through that process? That's the question.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Thank you.

[END OF TRACK wodicz21_3of3_sd_track03_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]