



MULTIPLEX PALIMPSEST

AN ART PROJECT

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Overview

Multiplex Palimpsest is a performance concept which provides an experimental space for art spectators to experience art in a new manner. Instead of going through the routine mechanisms of visiting, watching, judging and leaving a museum, art spectators are given support to experience an exhibition in a novel and exciting manner and to go beyond where they normally get when visiting museums.

Starting with the habitual watching-perceiving-consuming of art on display, spectators are provided with a dialogue partner who acts as an extension of his/her perception. Visitors to the museum walk through the exhibition space outfitted with a radio set through which they can, at their initiative and control, talk to an interlocutor who sits in a call centre adjacent to the exhibition room.

The interlocutor is there on call to respond to the spectator's comments and queries as he/she is walking through the exhibition space reacting to the art on display. Discussing his/her impressions of the art on display with the invisible but audibly present interlocutor allows the spectator to move from initial impressions to deeper reflections and appreciation of the art objects.

Alike a radio play, spectator and interlocutor go on a journey together discussing, contemplating and assessing the art on display. At the same time, the spectator is given the possibility to become aware of his/her own ongoing judgment and classification of art- in the sense of good, bad, new, old, interesting etc. Being accompanied by the interlocutor takes the spectator to his/her own discovery of art quite in contrast of what is normally the case when visitors to museums are either told what the art on display is supposed to mean.

Objective

Going beyond traditional art installations and expos, the aim of this novel art arrangement is to create art awareness through interactions between interlocutors (alter ego art coaches and dialogue partners) and visitors of art exhibitions interested in such interactions. Concretely, visitors walking through an art exhibition would be given the option to discuss their experiences with interlocutors through mobile phones.

The interlocutors are not present physically but reachable through mobile phone. The goal is to give visitors an opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and sensations with an interlocutor while walking through the show. The interlocutors function is to be a **resource person** (giving art related background information), a **sounding board** (reflecting the visitor's statements and questions), a **dialogue partner** (making sense conjointly with the visitor), a **coach** (explaining how an art critique might view the exhibited art work) and a **muse** (supporting the visitor's aim to discover his/her own potential for artistic expression or art appreciation),

Format

Using a retrospective of artwork by an established artist put on display in a Museum of Contemporary Art; the interlocutors are seated in calling booths out of sight of the visitors. The visitors participating in the interactions could opt to establish contact with any one of the interlocutors to share their experiences and make sense of the art exhibition. The selection of interlocutors is left to the visitors. Choices can be made based on the interlocutors' background, e.g. Art installations, film, dance, movement, art curator, art philosopher, art event

designer, or theatre actor/director/author. The ensuing exchanges between the visitor and the respective interlocutor would be video and audio-recorded and made available to other visitors sitting in separate screening rooms. They could follow dialogues and be able to switch channels (dialogues) based on their own interests and preferences.

Background

The idea emerged after months of discussions between some the concept developer and his artist's friends having visited and experienced different art exhibitions over the last five years (Venice Biennale, Documenta, Lyon, ART) and after discussions with Harald Szeeman before his untimely death. A prevailing view was that while valuing the experiences made possible through the various directors/curators of exhibitions, a feeling of incompleteness prevailed as if missing out on a deeper experience of art appreciation, namely that of making sense of what has been made available to see.

It was found that a lot of art work required substantive interpretative power, which visitors either accumulated over years (informed modern art elite), or they tried to get by chance or divine intuition while walking through an exhibition. However, even if well "educated" or "lucky", visitors were often found to be left incomplete wondering what they did see/experience versus what they could/might have been able to experience. Despite all the often-extensive information made available through catalogues, expert books, artists own pamphlets, guided tours etc., there often remained a gap between the actual experience and the sense of making satisfactory contact with the exhibited art work and indirectly with the artist.

The group of artists and art critiques analysed their own experience and came to the conclusions that the key missing ingredient is an on-the spot (here and now) exchange with another person who could help the visitor broaden her/his perspective, enrich appreciation of the art work exhibited and better grasp the artists intended message but, and foremost, allow for an existential dialogue which could facilitate a broadening of awareness of the visitor's own embedded creative leaps and inspirations.

Today's main exhibitions, even if highly sophisticated and well documented, do not allow for such a deepening of understanding nor do they facilitate a broadening of the mind and feelings of the visitors/spectators. They remain locked in a one-way communication conducive for passive consumption but not supportive of reactive participation and sense making. Traditional exhibitions tend to reinforce consumerism, passivity, voyeurism and hence increase dependency of the spectators to be "told" what "this means" versus being given the opportunity to "find out for themselves through exchange and dialogue" with another person, a kind of alter ego.

Related Concepts

a) **Multiplex Palimpsest** is based on several layers of experiences, which are available to visitor and interlocutors. These layers can range from simple information (about art object, artists, curator, etc) to making sense with one's own reactions to the exhibited artwork, the intention of the artist, and the intention of the curator. A dialogue might between a visitor and an invisible interlocutor might help the participating visitor move up and down between different layers of experience and sense making. Like a palimpsest, the visitor-interlocutor dialogue might produce different layers of "reading" and

experiencing of the art event, which overlap with each other or replace each other depending on the unfolding process.

- b) **Butterfly Effect** as used in chaos and complexity theory indicates the possibility that during the initial phase of the visitor-interlocutor dialogue, the visitor might pick up on a small item of awareness, which then could become a dominant theme as the visit progresses. Such a dominant theme could be related to the artwork exhibited, the artists exhibiting or be linked to the visitor's current preoccupations. The butterfly effect might further come into fruition during the subsequent and/or parallel viewing of the dialogic exchanges by third party visitors who will be able to watch/listen to the emerging dialogues in adjacent rooms.
- c) **Two-make-art** pertains to the interactive process between the visitor and the interlocutor. (Term initially suggested by Jordan Bojilov). The exchange between the two is expected to generate deeper meaning of the art exhibitions and art objects going beyond what either one could fathom separately. In a Buberian- existentialist sense, it can be expected that the visitor and the interlocutor together will discover new elements about the art work and the respective artist and which either one of them would not be able to do by his/her own.
- d) **Droit de réponse** refers to an exhibiting artist's freedom to respond to all what emerges through the dialogues. The exhibiting artists would be given opportunities to create new or follow-up art in reaction to what is being said by the visitor-interlocutor pairs. New art will be created on the spot and added to the exhibitions thereby enlarging the exhibitions. It could also be envisaged

that artist be given opportunity for soliloquies describing their art and their reactions to the unfolding dialogic exchanges.

Interlocutors

The role of the interlocutors is crucial for this experiment. Defining it negatively, they should not be art lecturers, tour guides, psychotherapists, museums sales personnel. Instead, their goal should be to establish contact with the volunteering visitor, meet him/her where they are (what they say not what the interlocutors might think they presumably want to say), bring in art related information as long as useful but not to fill space and time with their own knowledge and thoughts. Their goal would be to facilitate the visitor's discovery of the art objects, artists, and exhibition and of his/her own feelings, thoughts about art, life and creativity.

The interlocutor's role is somewhat comparable to the moderator of a web based Forum who "directs" traffic without imposing "specific destinations". Their varied background will give visitors (volunteers) options to select matching interlocutors thereby increasing chances of feeling in charge and responsible instead of being "taken charge" by an interlocutor.

The choice of making an interlocutor only available through mobile phone is based on the assumption that the personal presence of the interlocutor might limit the concentration on introspection by the visitor. Instead, he/she might be distracted by the physical appearance of the interlocutor (positive or negative) thereby ending up limiting the potential impact of the exhibited artwork and exhibition space.

Ideal Setting

The exhibition hall should not be too large nor should there be competing exhibitions running at the same time. An intimate space within a larger art exhibition hall would offer opportunities to focus, concentrate on process, and provide enough space to reflect, take in experience, move, experiment without having to be worried about other visitors interfering or causing too much interruptions.