

Palimpsest Multiplex

Artistic Intervention in Public Space

An art project developed by Raymond Saner in cooperation with Luise Kloos, Christoph Schön, Seraina Müller, François Duconseille and Monica Dematté¹.

Palimpsest Multiplex – the idea

Palimpsest Multiplex is a performative installation dedicated to provide a new perception of the public space and to raise awareness of how meaning (particularly in the arts) is constructed through interaction and communication. It shows the spectators that everyday life is a multilayered construct.

The concept of Palimpsest Multiplex is based on Raymond Saner's idea of a "Multiplex Palimpsest".² It was coined during fruitful discussions between the concept developer and artists and art theoreticians who helped further develop the idea. It is a performance concept which provides an experimental space allowing the public to experience art in a novel manner.

While social media has generated a lot of new ideas, e.g. museum 2.0 (use of face book, twitter) or museum 3.0 (global participation via social media of real or virtual exhibitions), the downside of this use of social media is that artist and spectator might be further removed from each other than before thereby further reinforcing "aboutness" of art rather than providing contact and dialogue between artists and spectator.

Palimpsest – conceptual background

Palimpsest Multiplex, as per definition, is a multilayered construct: it touches several layers of experience, which are available to spectators and interlocutors. These layers can range from simple information (about the art object or the artist) to making sense with the visitor's reactions or the intentions of the artist.

For instance, a dialogue between a visitor and an invisible interlocutor might be encouraged, which would help the visitor reach different layers of experience and sense making. It represents the manifold ways we can use technical tools to communicate in everyday life, both as a symbol for and a medium of mobile communication.

Palimpsest Multiplex allows its viewers to expand the notion of mundane communication to an artistic frame. Like a palimpsest, the visitor-interlocutor-artist dialogue might produce different layers of "reading" and experiencing the art events.

Palimpsest Multiplex – the realization

¹ For more information on art project, please contact Raymond Saner at saner@csend.org.

² <http://www.csend.org/programmes-a-services/art-and-society/art-and-society-examples>

Three situations will be provided where artists meet, talk, exchange and share space with visitor-spectators. The goal is to give visitor-spectators an opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and sensations with artists in direct or indirect ways. The artists will alternatively 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),

Three scenarios are suggested namely:

- a) Art Experience with alter ego (museum)
- b) Art Unfolding –visiting artists in residence (in art containers)
- c) Art Dialogue – artists, food and books (studio, home)

Art Experience with alter ego (museum)

Using a retrospective of an artwork by an established contemporary artist put on display in a Museum of Contemporary Art, a group of Alter Egos (interlocutors) are seated in call booths out of sight of the visitor-spectator. Visitors-spectator walk through the exhibition wearing a headphone and attached microphones. While walking through the exhibition, the visitor-spectators can opt to call an Alter-Ego (interlocutors) to share their experiences and get responses from the Alter-Ego which helps them make sense of what they see and experience.

The feedback of the Alter-Egos should be non-judgemental and non expert driven to allow the visitor-spectator to reflect on what is visually at display and on the emotions and thoughts that the art objects elicit in the visitor-spectator. The selection of Alter Egos (interlocutors) is left to the visitors. The Alter Egos should be artists trained in reflective listening or art students trained in reflective listening. The ensuing exchanges between the visitor-spectator and the respective Alter Ego (interlocutor) can be video and audio-recorded and made available to other visitors sitting in separate screening rooms who could follow the exchanges between both actors and switch channels (dialogues) based on their own interests and preferences. Recording and showing of visitor-spectator and alter ego interactions would be based on agreement obtained by both parties before recording.

These interactions could generate a possible **Butterfly Effect** as used in chaos and complexity theory indicating the possibility that during the initial phase of the visitor-spectator and Alter Ego dialogue, the visitor-spectator might become aware of nuances in the environment which then could become a dominant theme as the visit progresses. Such a dominant theme could be related to the artwork exhibited, the artist who is exhibiting or be linked to the visitor's current preoccupations. The butterfly effect might further come into fruition during the simultaneous parallel viewing of the dialogic exchanges by third party visitors who will be able to watch/listen to the emerging dialogues in adjacent rooms.

Art Unfolding –visiting artists in residence (in public spaces, art container)

Various exhibition boxes (containers with windows) are allocated to different public places in a city that are highly frequented or are of particular interest e.g. in regard to neighbouring houses,

public spaces, roads etc. The boxes-containers will be big enough to house two artists who do their art work inside these containers. The containers are large enough to provide space for two visitors to enter, drink a coffee or tea, sit at a table and watch the two artists do their art work and discuss with them what they are doing.

At one of the windows, a telescope is installed which directs the viewer's attention to an object located outside of the container. The visitors can view the object through the telescope and see an initial drawing of the object by both artists.

Both artists start their art work with an initial drawing that captures the object seen through the telescope. Their starting two drawings are hung up on the wall inside the box-container. From this initial drawing, both artists develop further art work and continue to draw-paint and hang up their subsequent art work in sequence on the walls of the box.

The visitors can see the evolution from a common object into different variants of subsequent art work developed by the two artists. One artist hangs up the art work clock wise, the other counter clock wise. Once the walls are covered by successive drawings and paintings, the artists sit and make themselves available for discussions with visitors.

The visits by spectators and ensuing discussions could generate reactions on both sides analogous to a **Two-make-art process**. The exchanges between the four is expected to generate deeper meaning of the art on display and could impact the subsequent drawings-paintings of the two artists who continue to paint and draw after the visitor-spectators will have left their "studio". It can be expected that the visitors and the artists together will discover new elements about the art work, the respective artists and the visitors own awareness and interests in art and the production of art work.

Art Dialogue – Artists, Food and Books (visiting group of artists at home)

A team of artists invite visitor-spectators to one of their homes or studios to eat their food prepared that same day. While eating en famille with the two artists and extended family members, the guests will be served a variety of foods, supplemented by select reading of texts by the artists and their friends (excerpts of short stories or poetry the artists esteem highly). In between food and texts, the artists and extended family will play music to give time to think and integrate. In addition, there will be moments of talk en famille with the guests to exchange views and appreciation of art work that is hanging on display but also to discuss the written texts and general art and aesthetic valued and preferences of the artist.

Art objects can be compared to meals, they either taste good or leave us with indigestion. Sometimes art is all form and no content like a sophisticated looking restaurant which offers much but is short on delivering substance.

On the other hand, sometimes the food is good but the décor is lousy making it hard for eaters to remain and enjoy a meal instead they are ready to rush out of a inhospitable environment. Food and art need care, preparations are a must, presentation essential, good climate mandatory but most of the time the host does not hear from the guest whether the art/food on offer entices the guest/visitor.

Sharing a meal, reading of text and listening to music could provide the visitor-spectators and the hosting artists an opportunity to engage in a "**Droit de réponse**" on multiple occasions

throughout the evening. Droit de réponse refers here to giving artist's the freedom and safe space to respond to all what will be said and asked by the visitor-spectators.

Project partners

Raymond Saner is co-founder of CSEND, a Geneva based NGO which focuses on sustainable development and on art & society cooperation. His education in arts includes acting training, theatre and radio features. Saner has also written various essays on art, e.g. on its influence on political leadership and social change. He has also organized exhibitions of Chinese and Ukrainian artists in Geneva and supported Bolivian new music composer and musicians.

Luise Kloos is a visual artist, founder of next – Verein für zeitgenössische Kunst, a contemporary art association based in Graz carrying out international artists in residence projects. She is member of the cultural advisory board of the city of Graz, president of the artists group Gruppe 77 and chairwoman of the children`s museum in Graz. Furthermore Luise is the curator for the Austrian contribution of the Croatian Biennale for Illustration and a member of the European Cultural Parliament. She works with graphics, paintings, installations and performances and has a broad international network.

Christoph Schön and Seraina Müller have conceived and successfully implemented distinguished art projects in Basel, the most important being the independent international art show 'FOCUS Contemporary Art Africa'. Set up for the first time in 2009. FOCUS takes place in Basel on a yearly basis during ART Basel. FOCUS was designed to present and connect the vibrant African art scene to the world. It showcases galleries and art institutions and features a series of emerging and established artists.

François Duconseille is a visual artist and a scenographer. He initiated with Jean-Christophe Lanquetin the Urban scenographies project (1), which explores through artistic events the complexity of cities in the global world. They propose to artists from different backgrounds to live and work in emerging cities (Douala, Alexandria, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Daka) and organize residencies with artistic collectives living in these areas and countries. He is also teaching scenography and art in public spaces in the Strasburg's Superior School of Art Décorative.

Monica Dematté is a free lance curator who works in Asia (China, India) and Europe (Italy) and curates exhibitions of contemporary Chinese and Indian art in Asia and in Italy. She has worked as a Curator specialised on Chinese Art at the Singapore Art Museum, Republic of Singapore, is a writer and lecturer on contemporary art and lectures on Chinese Contemporary Art at the Venice University. She has a Ph.d. in History of Indian and Far Eastern Art, speaks and writes fluently Chinese and moves back and forth between Italy and the Far East.