

# Dreaming

## A Public Poem

Alain Arias-Misson

The Public Poem is a form I invented in 1967 and have performed in many European cities over the decades. For the last six years in Spain, I had been making “concrete” poems, seeing the sheet of paper as a two-dimensional surface which the typewriter could occupy spatially, then placing Letraset letters on superimposed plexiglass sheets that provide a third dimension of depth. One day, looking about in the street, I thought, “If I can place letters on these surfaces, then I can ‘write’ on the street, as well.” I quickly discovered the cheap, light, industrial material of polystyrene which could be easily cut into letter shapes—the size of the human beings who occupy the streets—and thus enter into a dialogue with them and the urban space. At first, I placed the letters and words at strategic sites of the city, but soon I found that carrying them with a team was more eloquent, like a hand holding a pen moving across the page. I often used a classic concrete poetry device, the permutation and recombination of letters, in choosing a mother-word or matrix that could be broken up into other words and then form phrases—even entire sentences—as we moved along, like text passing across a giant electronic screen where one or two words may appear at a time, and a sentence is eventually formed.

The Public Poem “SOGNARE” (or “Dreaming Poem”) is a project I designed for the contemporary museums of the twin towns of Rovereto and Bolzano in the north of Italy. It took place on July 23, 2021. The idea was to “dream through” the two towns, thus linking them topographically, so to speak. This was the overarching theme. Thus, the letters S, O, G, N, A, R, and E (“dreaming”) ambled through the streets of Rovereto, caught the train to Bolzano, and continued through that town, as well. At various points of interest in both cities, such as the town hall, the orphanage, the monument to the town poet, the drug-dealing quarter, the courthouse, the hospital, a central café, and so on, the word *sognare* dissolved and the letters were recombined into other words, one after the other, which moved across the various sites, forming poetical phrases that related to

each location. A score of phrases were created in the two towns. I have provided just a few examples below. Although a surprising number of combinations exist for “SOGNARE,” about one hundred and fifty, grammar is very difficult to apply given the lack of prepositions, articles, and other linking words. But it is precisely these constraints that bring about verbal acrobatics and wrenching images.



City view of closed shops during Covid time, Rovereto. Alain Arias-Misson standing in street with megaphone.  
Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion.

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At the poet's memorial, Rovereto. "ERGO, I know how to dream." Statue of German-language poet of the Middle Ages, Walther von der Vogelweide, created in 1889 by the sculptor Heinrich Natter. Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion.



Bridge across the entrance to Rovereto. "The Bridge Dream." Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion.



Crossing the street in Rovereto. Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion.



Travel to the twin town, Bolzano. "Trains are for dreaming." Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion.



“The dream marches into Bolzano.” Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion.



“The Bolzano police object to our dream.” Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion



Arias-Misson in front of The Museion of Modern and Contemporary Art, Bolzano. “A place for dreaming.” Photo: Fanni Fazekas. © Museion. Courtesy Fondazione Museion.

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ALAIN ARIAS-MISSON, a Belgo-Anglo-Hispano American educated in classical Greek poetry, is one of the inventors of the visual poetry movement in the sixties, working in Spain, Italy, Belgium, and France. His “transparencies” and other object-poems are in many museums in Europe and North America. He has “written” his Public Poems on a dozen cities on both continents, most recently at Yale University’s Beinecke Library, the Pompidou Center in Paris, the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, and M HKA, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp. Arias-Misson has published a dozen novels in the U.S. and several art books in Europe.