

# #PEAE

## Participative Ethology in Artificial Environments

A way to describe my art practice?

an esthetics of attention and trust – a production of relational machines

Artist talk Annie Abrahams  
EloCork 2019

read

Originally I proposed a 20 min long performance called *ThinkTalk* with Rob Wittig – In it, we wanted to mix objects, voices and text live (using webcams) to compose something like a text opera with solos, dialogs, a choir and organic chaos. It should have been a meandering text collage with coincidences and contingency leading to unintentional meaning. - if you have an opportunity to invite us?

Instead I will tell you about my relation to electronic literature and my struggles defining my artworks.

slide 2

Reading Club is an ongoing project by Emmanuel Guez and Annie Abrahams started in 2013.

*Apparatus is {Other-s} ...*

Reading Club session in the frame of *Scripting the Other*, November 1st 2017.  
With as rearriters: Renee Carmichael, Emmanuel Guez, Nick Montfort and Zombectro.  
Original text by Annie Abrahams. <http://readingclub.fr/>



```
import false;
using name [?] [?] [?] space stding;

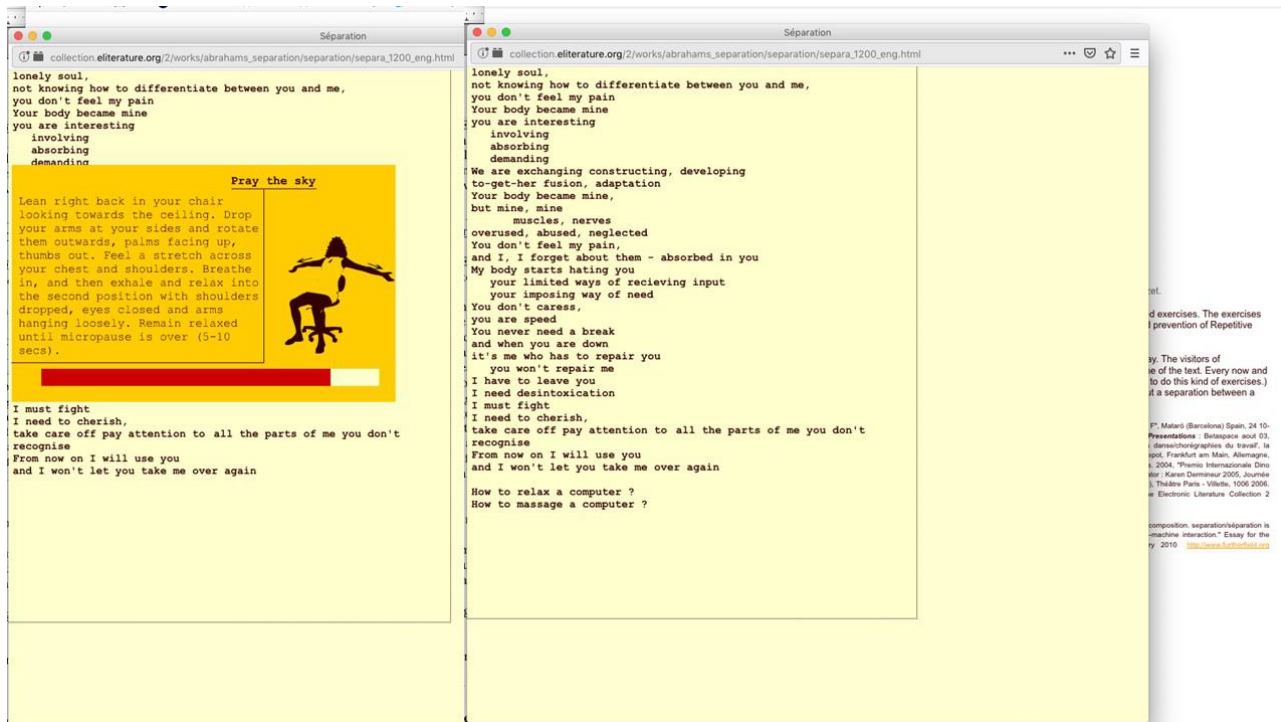
style.display = "none";
enum t {block, deep, variable, time too hot but too cold};
AI = on; // ch. eye / u, si
AI.open(name(other));
[+ +];
prompt_name(int diffra, AI,
gender = void(front); // the human, the humex, the creature, the huwo, the homofemme, the
famal, the mallele, the mascinin, the femulin, the hom'man, the Mensch, the fber schine schine is
shinnings//
var other[intheoutside] ofthewor;
var text = this;
var airtemperature = this.cold;
```



## slide 4



## slide 5



Two other stages of the piece that makes you click not toooo fast to read the text.

## slide 6 show book

from estranger to e-stranger – living in between languages (2014)

buy or download free .pdf

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/annie-abrahams/from-estranger-to-e-stranger/paperback/product-21808647.html>





read

Recent examples of e-stranger posts : the “third texte” is about translation of which Robert-Foley says that its impossibility is an opportunity rather than an impasse.

## slide 8

MAY 3, 2019

## murakami - kristof - writing differently

Writing in a language you are not fluent in ... a great advantage?

Strange (beautiful) non conventional writing can appear when people write in a language they don't completely master.

**Haruki Murakami** and **Agota Kristof** both wrote acclaimed and much-translated books in a tongue that was not their own. **Murakami** did this out of free will and gained style and probably also imagination. **Agota** was an exile and never at ease, always regretting the tongue she left behind. Even while extremely popular she wrote less and less and finally after the publication of her autobiography in 2005 she stopped altogether.

When **Murakami** started his writing, he disliked his Japanese prose and felt something was off. He then decided to write in English, but he was far from fluent. Now he had to use only the words at his disposal to express what he wanted, he found this a very efficient method. This is how his style and rhythm was created. He realized he didn't need to use difficult words or styles to say what he wanted to say. Jonat Deelstra, *Haruki Murakami's Lessons on Writing and Leading a Writer's Life*, 2019.

I was flabbergasted when I first learned this. It also made me very happy. What is happy? A word that is vague and lacks precision? Happy.

**Agota Kristof** was forced to learn French from scratch when she fled from Hungary in 1956. In her autobiography *L'analphabète* (2004), she calls French *une langue ennemie*, which is *en train de tuer [sa] langue maternelle*. She flees sentimental writing and keeps to a factual language.

We would write: "We eat lots of walnuts" and not "We love walnuts" because the word "love" isn't a reliable word, it lacks precision and objectivity. Agota Kristof, *Le grand cahier*, 1986.

*Je parle le français depuis plus de trente ans, je l'écris depuis vingt ans mais je ne le connais toujours pas. Je ne le parle pas sans fautes, et je ne peux l'écrire qu'avec l'aide de dictionnaires fréquemment consultés.* Agota Kristof, *L'analphabète* (2004).



I also speak French (and English) for more than 30 years and I also write in those languages for about 20 years. I am aware I will never be in complete control, will always make errors and will continue to need dictionaries. However, being able to read languages the one through the other is very interesting and often surprising. And, I do know I would never have had this same pleasure in writing in French...

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*He realised he didn't need to use difficult words or styles to say what he wanted to say.*

read

*Writing in a language you are not fluent in ... a great advantage?* Is about Murakami and Agota Kristof, who both gave me more confidence in my own language.

## slide 9

AUGUST 24, 2018

## Minimal English - metalanguage

wrong I capture universal human realities. Polish does have words that correspond in meaning, for example, to *color* and *brother*, but it doesn't have words matching *blue*, *cooperation*, *frustration*, or *right* and *wrong*. Describing languages that don't have words for "color" or "brother" in terms of these English words distorts facts as much as describing the Polish color concept "niebieski" through the English word *blue*, or analyzing Polish moral concepts through the English words *right* and *wrong* does (cf. Wierzbicka 2012a). It prevents understanding and imposes conceptual categories of English (whether uniquely English or shared with other European languages) on humankind at large. For example, an account of "how people see the world" based on the English word *color* amounts to looking at the world through the prism of English. It distorts the picture of how speakers of other languages see the world and it prevents the discovery of what it is that speakers of all languages share.

*English is not an international language and it is wrong that scholars use it as if it is.*

*Describing diversity is impossible if you use English, you need a metalanguage.*

*Depression is an English concept. NSM makes it possible to talk about it.*

Anna Wierzbicka cited from :



In this video she explains, she has nothing against people being naturally imprisoned in their language, but that she opposes scholars' and for instance also politicians' thoughtless use of it. I read Anna Wierzbicka's book *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language*, because I can imagine that this indeed might be a problem.

A conversation with a linguist working on a language that has no word for "brother" (e.g., the Australian language Pitjantjatjara) may go like this:

—Does this language have a word for brother?  
—Sure.  
—What is it?

“English is not an international language and it is wrong that scholars use it as if it is.”

“Describing diversity is impossible if you use English, you need a metalanguage.”

“Depression is an English concept. NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) makes it possible to talk about it.”

Anna Wierzbicka cited from an interview with her by Prof. James Underhill.

read

*Minimal English – metalanguage on Anna Wierzbicka's Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language.*

+ read top phrase from slide.

slide 10

**Ours Lingages** = a script –  
online poetry, language learning  
tools and collective writing +  
code + voice + dance + text +  
singing and a blindfold –  
unrehearsed.

Performance by Annie Abrahams  
in collaboration with Daniel  
Pinheiro, Isabel Costa, Igor  
Stromajer, Outranspo - Lily  
Robert-Foley - Camille  
Bloomfield - Jonathan  
Baillehache, Jan de Weille, Rui  
Torres, Helen Varley Jamieson,  
Anna Tolkacheva and the  
readingclub.fi.

21/07 2017 10.15 PM, Mosteiro  
de São Bento da Vitória, Porto,  
Electronic Literature  
Organisation conference ELO  
2017.



read

If you have seen my performance “*Ours Lingages*” at eloPorto, you know I like to mix languages with other practices like dance and singing. Then you know that control / mastery is not what I am looking for.

Framing my artistic work is and has always been a “problem”.

slide 11

art

net art, digital art, fine art, video art,  
electronic literature, networked performance  
art, code art, media art, time-based media ...

even poetry ...

read

net art, digital art, fine art, video art, electronic literature, networked performance art, code art, media art, time-based media

and more - among which poetry - were all used by someone to classify it.

All these categorisations are based on technology and don't say anything about what is experienced through the work. I am not so much interested in a form as in what this form produces, what kind of behaviour (interaction <-> intra-action) it concerns.

So I came up with behavioural art

**no**, that was not possible – the word “behavioural” became contaminated when I studied biology. It refers to Skinner boxes, socio biology, operant conditioning, eugenics, etc. – **no**

slide 12

*A painting calls forth virtual depth with lines and colours; a sculpture constructs a virtual volume around itself; a novel constitutes virtual memory, tracked through virtual time. Dance follows virtual forces of attraction and repulsion. All the experiences that are part of this “feeling” are spaces of possibility, virtual feelings waiting for actualization; their nature, allurements and dangers must be studied, and art is where this investigation takes place.*

Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (1953), cited by Arjan Mulder in *THE BEAUTY OF AGENCY ART*, Arjan Mulder a.o. (eds), *Virtual Beauty*, V2\_Publishing/Nai Publishers 2012.  
[academia.edu/19554697/The\\_Beauty\\_of\\_Agency\\_Art\\_2012](https://academia.edu/19554697/The_Beauty_of_Agency_Art_2012)

read

Arjen Mulder's article THE BEAUTY OF AGENCY ART 2012, where he uses a “virtual behavioural space”, pointed in a new direction. This concept is an extension of “virtual feeling” used by Susanne K. Langer in *Feeling and Form* (1953). Each individual art medium evokes, manipulates and investigates “virtual feelings” in its own way.

So how about agency art, would that be a better category?

slide 13 + read

Agency Art does not take a medium, or technology as a starting point, but highlights what they make possible. It is an art that is anchored in behavioural choices. Its meaning is the actions made possible.

*Agency Art ne prend pas un medium, ou une technologie comme point de départ, mais met en avant ce que celles-ci rendent possible. C'est un art qui s'ancre dans les choix comportementaux, dans les gestes. Son sens est les actions rendues possibles.*

Agency Art does not take a medium, or technology as a starting point, but highlights what they make possible. It is an art that is anchored in behavioral choices, in gestures. Its meaning is the actions made possible.

*Agency Art is art that makes it clear to the receiver via his or her body what is at stake, where opportunities for action lie, and which virtual behaviours he or she can actualize. It demonstrates how choices work...*

Slide 14 + read

*collectively made, refusing hierarchy, a knitting together of artists and performers in the moment of the event, erasure of the artistic ego, practice, changing rules, choices, connecting, accepting the unexpected, responsive, shared, collaboratively authored, open to all, working with temporal behavioral phenomena, healing, enactment, improvised, including environmental conditions, attentional strategies, instructions, protocols, apparatus, meeting, embracing the ordinary, rehearsing alternatives, re-hijacking therapy, exercising our relations to others, our social (in)capacities, exploring rituals, being together, participatory, concerns individuals and politics*

Keywords for Agency Art collected from text by: Deufert&Plischke, Shia LaBeouf, Lotte van den Berg, Pauline Oliveros, Olivier Auber, Samantha Gorman and Ienke Kastelein.  
From dance, theatre, digital art, sound, poetry to performance.

I looked at works, with which I found my work was connected and found these keywords. They are from dance, theatre, digital art, sound, poetry to performance. It felt good. Agency Art is multidisciplinary and opens up art practices the ones to the others.

But, the words Agency Art are also contaminated in the mind of some people (try google). Moreover I am not sure the concept really covers my work. Sometimes I think more about it as promoting aesthetics **of attention and trust** or as **a production of relational machines**.



slide 15

## *PEAE* Participative Ethology in Artificial Environments

an esthetics of attention and trust  
a production of relational machines

Agency Art

interaction <-> intra-action

read

When I told all this to my friend Cor van der Weele (biologist and philosopher) she said it's simple you do **Participative Ethology in Artificial Environments** – you have an ethnological approach of Agency Art.

Not sure this brought me a lot further, but it is nice to consider.

Food for thought and art works ...

slide 16

*Distant Feeling(s)* - an ever-changing re-enactment of our intra-action with machines.

An online performance series where Daniel Pinheiro in Porto, Annie Abrahams in Montpellier and Lisa Parra in New York experiment “distanced feeling” in an interface that normally is used for videoconferencing. They join in an online séance trying to experience the others presence with their eyes closed and no talking. Next one for VVMalta 26 09 19h30 openings performance. Open to all.

<http://bram.org/distantF>

Constallations by 3G(enerations) = Annie Abrahams, Alix Desaubliaux and Pascale Barret. Using challenges and surprises, we defied each other in 9 sessions of what Annie called *contemporary net art*, Pascale a *non-binary inclusive laboratory* and Alix *performative & collaborative explorations*.

<https://constallations.hotglue.me/?rire>



Methodology of ConstallationS:

<https://constallations.hotglue.me/?methodologie>

read

Two of my recent projects fit perfectly in this : *Distant Feeling(s)* with Daniel Pinheiro and Lisa Parra and *Constallations* by 3*G(enerations)* (Annie Abrahams, Pascale Barret and Alix Desaubliaux).

Show, listen to XD,^\_^,:3,-D rire parce que ...

<https://constallations.hotglue.me/?rire>

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if time slide 17:

*Inter means among or in the midst of, whereas intra means from within. When we add the word action to these prefixes we get a whole different meaning. When two bodies interact, they easily maintain a level of independence. Each entity exists before they encounter one another. However when bodies intra-act they do so in co-constitutive ways. Individuals materialize through intra-actions and the ability to act emerges from within the relationships not outside of it.*

*So, why is this distinction important? Well, intra-action gives us a whole new way of thinking about the relationships with each other; with matter; with materials, with nature and with discourses. When these different things are in relationships with each other our ability to do stuff changes, transforms or emerges.*

From *Three Minute Theory: What is Intra-Action?* Video written & created by: Stacey Kerr, Erin Adams, & Beth Pittard [youtu.be/v0SnstJoEec](https://youtu.be/v0SnstJoEec)

Transcription by Annie Abrahams [aabhahams.wordpress.com/2017/02/06/inter-intra-action-eng](https://aabhahams.wordpress.com/2017/02/06/inter-intra-action-eng)

read

Something more is bothering me: Agency Art seems to consider the art work to trigger behaviour, it stays with interactivity, while more and more I start thinking that intra-activity might be a better way to talk about it.

When I analyse my mostly collaborative work it is hardly ever clear what is causing what, where the agency exactly is – not between clearly distinguishable entities, but coming from within a whole, where interface, individual computers, keyboards, webcams and sound device characteristics, server conditions, as well as the text, voices and images of the co-performers and participants, local light conditions and family situations are all entangled in what Karen Barad, a feminist theorist and physicist, would call the phenomenon of intra-activity.

More food for thought and art works ...