

Inge Hoonte, December 5, 2011

"Everything is already in the room."  
-- Laurie Carlos

### **I'd like to tell you something I've been thinking about.**

Hey there, how are you? Thank you for coming. Have a seat. You want some coffee? A cookie? No cookie. Are you comfortable enough, do you need an extra pillow? I'm glad you're here, I've been looking forward to talking to you. I've been having a hard time articulating myself lately. With all these immaterial explorations online and in my head, I've been craving physical intimacy, but even when I'm with people, it either doesn't seem to be enough or I can somehow not let them get very close. Sometimes I'm afraid that I've become so digital that I'm losing the connection with my physical body. In my longing to connect, I roam the streets of Brooklyn, Chicago, San Francisco, Berlin, Paris, the Portuguese countryside, the blurry roads in the small towns of my childhood, the oceans in between. I meet new people, I encounter bits of old friends in new friends, it all connects but I feel disconnected.

In hopes to reconnect the dots within myself, I head to Brussels for the Junctions event at Constant. I'm attracted by the promise for connections, protocols, online networks and the Internet as public space. The first night I'm there, there's a blond woman sitting across from me during a presentation. She immediately stands out to me. She's vibrant, heavily gesturing, and talking to Seda Guerses, a computer scientist I've met a few times and have had great conversations with. When someone mentions her name, An Mertens, I realize we've emailed back and forth a few times about the possibility of meeting up. She's a writer and has been working on a performance with a programmer and several dancers. Our interests seem to relate. I introduce myself, and we talk a bit over the next few days, small conversations wherever the program pauses and we find ourselves in proximity. On day three, she asks me what I'm working on. I hesitantly move my hand back and forth in the 30 to 40 centimeters between our faces, and mumble something about the space between us. This. Right here. This air I can't touch. The space that stops where she begins. That's how I've always thought about it, but now that I think about it, I know there's more to it, I know that that space continues. It's a space that connects a bit of me to a bit of someone else. The bit of you I want to draw to me.

Let me try to explain this to you, and figure it out, as best as I can. A little over a year ago, I wrote the following description of my practice when applying for this program: "Combining real and imagined narratives, I document and script human interaction through observational writing, performance, video, and sound. I investigate the space between people, and the attempt to connect with one another across this undetermined terrain: a constantly changing landscape amid emotional, sociopolitical, and bodily or physical boundaries. Examining the play between reaching out and keeping one's distance in both intimate and everyday relationships, I require myself, as well as participants and audience, to be playful and vulnerable, while embracing the unknown outcome when our paths collide. Aiming to capture and elongate these rapid, fleeting intimate encounters, I carefully collage seemingly disparate information into a dense and rich construction, leaving space for the audience to insert themselves and form their own associative experience."

What continues to spark me on the one hand, are the conflicts that can arise in relating to people, and on the other hand, moments of connection between one or more people, provided that one also relates to oneself, introspectively. A moment in which time seems to stand still. Although I strive to document, re-enact, or make these moments happen, they cannot stand out and be recognized as such without their immediate

surroundings: absence. In terms of content, the tension between connecting and not connecting, through the process of addressing, listening, being there, spending time with people, responding and relating, and all this back and forth movement it seems to come with, is something I have to continue to investigate. In the balance of hiding, revealing, exposing, running away, and returning, I get closer to describing this space, and creating moments for others to spend time in it as well.

But let's get back to describing the work in front of me. My efforts to move a bit of digital realm into the physical and vice versa. The past year, I constructed maps to enhance an exhibition experience with added scripted personal encounters; gave new life to a captain's 200-year old log via automated entries on Twitter; started a web-based essay that navigated around a seemingly never ending page; played records that were endlessly stuck in the final, repetitive groove to provide a heartbeat to a space; wrote small scripts that created a new design or poem every time the script was run; and I wrote letters to a computer scientist who didn't want to be found. I will touch on a few of these projects more in-depth in the next section, but what emerges is my desire and ability to animate the inanimate, to share with you what I have a hard time expressing.

The coming months, I want to set out to forge stronger connections between the emotional fragments, experiences, and glimpses I've shown in previous pieces, while utilizing my role as facilitator to create a larger, more complete and encompassing setting. By connecting smaller projects, I want to create an experiential environment or setting in which live performance and storytelling form bridges and gaps with online interactions. A sound sample is followed by a movement elsewhere in the space, with characters moving in between screens, perhaps set in motion by the audience moving between them. A space where that little bit of me connects to that little bit of you. A small, intimate, yet expansive space. After having worked on an online performance a few weeks ago, I realized that what was most interesting to me, was what was happening live in the room, which couldn't be experienced by the online audience.

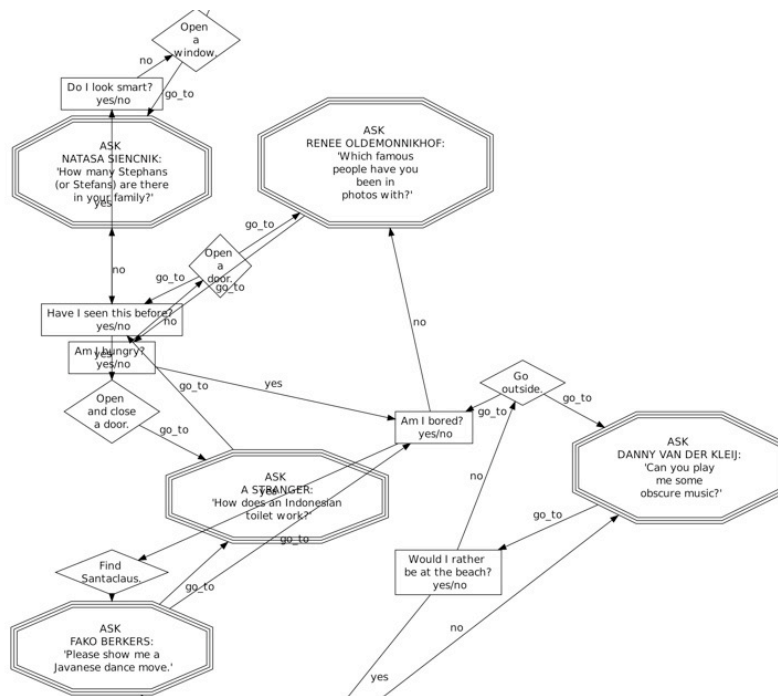
As a testing ground to further define what I mean, I will be organizing events under the header Under/Up the Stairs (Onderop de trap). This is a small project space in two locations: my hallway and stairwell at home in Rotterdam, as well as the space above and underneath the stairs at Noe Kidder's apartment in Brooklyn. She's someone I've been working with for a few years, and have previously produced writing and small books with. Together we will curate events and shows for these strange in-between spaces, and coordinate opportunities to connect them, such as openings, readings, and presentations. An informal monthly Sunday Salon at my apartment will provide room to work with live, improvisational performance. I see Under/Up the Stairs more as a project space for dialog, to showcase, and present works-in-progress. In the first show, opening for a small audience in Brooklyn on February 4, I will adapt the space at Noe's apartment and connect it to my own. After this, other people are invited to partake and transform the space for up to eight weeks each. I'm currently working the program structure, to foster overlap and moments of reflection without programming.

"It is as if you have entered an underground workshop (...) existing in an alternative universe. Sounds (...) enhance this atmosphere. The objects / experiments that occupy the cabin are more than a reflection of the traveler's obsessions; they are an escape route for the viewer into a forgotten world."

-- Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller on the small ship they converted into an immersive environment, 2010

## Selection of previous work

### Random Personalized Exhibition Experience v.10.5.11 (2010/2011)



This project establishes connections between people to create unexpected narratives in an exhibition experience.

Based on various algorithms, a computer script connects three separate sets of data to one another, namely Actions, Questions, and People. The connections that the program forms between these nodes are random, and differ each time the program is executed. The results, or links between nodes and how they relate to one another, are processed by a graphic visualization software (GraphViz), and saved as a PDF. The links between nodes are visualized by an arrow, and each group of nodes has its own predetermined box or shape. The file is then printed onto paper. This map forms the base for the navigation of an exhibition space, in which People present on paper are also present in the space. The user of the map, the player of this textual game, is the exhibition audience. The player picks a point to start, and follows the questions and actions from there to create an individual experience.

Let's say you start at the action 'open and close a door.' After you perform the action, an arrow on the map leads you to the question 'Are you wearing two pairs of socks?' Answering 'no' then takes you to 'Ask Natasa Siencnik "How many Stephans (or Stefans) are there in your family?"', and so on. Although each map is different, the players are subjected to a predefined script. They are mere agents performing a communicative routine through short interactions with strangers. The map offers an alternative route through the exhibition, encountering unexpected behavior such as people singing, refusing to tell you their full name, or admitting they'd save their computer should their building be on fire, not their cat.

### Captain Tweet (2011)

Captain Tweet is a live twitter feed ([twitter.com/tweet\\_captain](https://twitter.com/tweet_captain)) that I created for the HMS Weymouth, a settler ship traveling from Portsmouth, United Kingdom, to Algoa Bay in South Africa. The feed consists of entries in a travel log written in 1819-1820 by Captain Turner, the ship's captain, which I copied from the site [theshipslist.com](http://theshipslist.com).



**tweet\_captain** Captain Tweet  
Saw the Island of Annabona SSW 11 or 12 leagues  
57 minutes ago



**tweet\_captain** Captain Tweet  
Performed the customary ceremony in crossing the Equator  
10 Sep



**tweet\_captain** Captain Tweet  
Committed the body of the above infant to the deep  
1 Sep



**tweet\_captain** Captain Tweet  
Departed this life ELIZABETH STORTON settlers child  
1 Sep



**tweet\_captain** Captain Tweet  
heavy squalls with thunder and lightning

On this ship, over 450 settlers including children left England to start a new life. From July-November 2011, the historical log for this ocean journey was blogged "live" via Twitter, the captain's 200-year old tweets being sent to the website in real time by an automated script. The feed includes information on the food reserves, the weather conditions, and the high number of dead bodies being thrown overboard, especially towards the end of the trip. All of this is presented within the generic Twitter interface. Each minute of the day, the script ran through the remaining list of entries, and there was a date and time that matched for that exact minute, the message was posted to the captain's account. As such, early 19th century events are seemingly being written in the present, a supposedly live log of what is happening out on the sea.

During the exhibition "No Such Thing As Repetition," curated by Inke Arns, Captain Tweet was displayed on a computer screen. The screen was rotated 90 degrees to accommodate the long list of entries on the Twitter page.

### Dear Philip E. Agre (2011)

Dear Philip E. Agre is a correspondence project in the form of three letters to Phil Agre, a scholar and professor in information sciences. He was reported missing by his former employer UCLA in October 2009, and found and deemed safe in January 2010 by LA's Sheriff's department. He requested to be left alone, and disappeared again. A few colleagues who feared for his mental and physical health teamed up to search for him. They updated those interested through Twitter, Facebook, and a blog. Countless people expressed their concern by posting messages on the very networks he chose to abandon. After searching for him for over a year, a member of the group was able to talk to him in person in February 2011. Mr. Agre again expressed the desire to be left alone, to remain "offline."

The project departs from and reflects on Phil Agre's essay Writing and Representation, in which he uses examples of everyday behavioral routines to illustrate the way in which computation and communication technologies affect human interaction and privacy. Seeking to understand the subject matter better, and relate it to my own practice, I wrote him a letter. And another one. And another one. Herein, I meticulously describe brief, fleeting encounters with people in my daily life, and relate them to his ideas on the obsession to constantly upkeep our always present, digital relationships the way our always-on world requires. By approaching communicational, interactive activities, both improvised and routine, from a computational standpoint, I ask him if he thinks we could devise a mathematical analyzation using all variables involved in my previous encounters as a hypothetical solution to figuring out how to connect and relate

to people.

The more I found out about Phil Agre's disappearance and possible whereabouts, the more I became aware of the multiple layers of the project. An effort to communicate with someone who doesn't want to be reached easily turned into a process of talking to myself -- through him -- to gain a deeper understanding of my own developing practice. Not necessarily expecting a reply, the letters provided space to philosophize about mathematical, computational, and interactive problems, through practical examples.

## Inspiration & References

"At the heart (...) here is the desire for constructive and inventive thought, for a form of attention that struggles to articulate an intractable object, in the full knowledge that the everyday is always going to exceed the ability to register it." -- Ben Highmore, 2002, *The Everyday Life Reader*, p3

- \* Ed. Jones, O. O. J. L., Moore, L. L., Bridgforth, S., 2010. *Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: art, activism, academia and the Austin Project*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- \* Bateson, G., 2000. *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- \* Highmore, B., ed., 2002. *The Everyday Life Reader*. Routledge.
- \* Egmond, F., 2005, *Het Visboek, de wereld volgens Adriaen Coenen 1514-1587*. Zutphen: Uitgeversmaatschappij Walburg Pers.
- \* Multidisciplinary performance work by Aki Sasamoto (Japan/New York)
- \* Installations and sound work by Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller
- \* Theatrical and filmic play-within-a-play aspects of films like *Dogville*, *Synechdoche New York*
- \* Gabriel Lester, *Suspension of Disbelief*, Boijmans van Beuningen, seen 2011 (ten new and previously created dealing with fate and magical thinking)
- \* Omer Fast, Exhibition and publication, NIMk Amsterdam, seen 2011 (three complex video installations, centered around truth and fiction, individual and collective histories)
- \* Elmgreen & Dragset, *The One & The Many*, 2011, Onderzeebootloods Rotterdam
- \* Candice Breitz, *Legend*, 2005. (thirty channel video installation, recordings of Jamaican people simultaneously singing along to the record *Legend* by Bob Marley)
- \* Loops in work by people like Marijke van Warmerdam, Phil Niblock, David Lang