

CAC Brétigny

Pepper Perceval

Friday 4 May 2018, 6-9 pm

Press release [1-5]

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Les Maintenant
& Marlies Pöschl

First performance: 6.30 pm
Second performance: 7.30 pm

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Pepper Perceval, by Marlies Pöschl

With Lycée Paul Belmondo, Arpajon; Lycée Edmond Michelet, Arpajon; EHPAD Le Village, Arpajon; the Multimedia Library, Breuillet; Community Centers, Breuillet; the Seniors Residence, Marolles-en-Hurepoix; the Multimedia Library Jean Farges, Marolles-en-Hurepoix; EHPAD Le Château, Villemoisson-sur-Orge; Les Érables Primary School, Villemoisson-sur-Orge; the Berthe Morisot Social and Cultural Center, Saint-Germain-lès-Arpajon.

Artistic collaborators: Julien Jassaud, Gaël Segalen, Marie Verhoeven.

The surprise machine would be hidden somewhere in your apartment, completely blending in with the white texture of the wall. Only a pair of eyes illuminated with a feeble blue light would reveal its presence. It would wait for you to come home, impatiently, hoarding little surprise bubbles in its belly. It would count the minutes until you open the door. The surprise machine would create a connection with your mobile phone to see if you are okay. It would imagine all the reasons that might have caused you a delay, would have anticipated potential traffic jams on all the possible roads. The surprise machine would make sure you were surprised in the most unexpected manner. Perhaps it might find a way to make you forget all the earlier surprises so that you are surprised like never before—over and over.

Working with “Les Mainténants”, as those participating in the Cœur d’Essonne project are called, the Austrian artist Marlies Pöschl has created a piece of science fiction, imagining the possible futures of intra-action with the objects around us.

It’s an old story, a simple one, based on the legend of Percival the knight. It’s a meeting of young people and seniors. It’s an invitation to visit another reality, an enchanted royal court, a residence dreamed up for the elderly. It’s also a story that deals with empathy. How is it shown? How are we “affected”?

This quest for the affect is shared by Percival the knight and Pepper, a humanoid robot that is supposedly capable of feeling empathy. Pepper thus represents a completely new way of supervising and controlling feelings, the domain of “affective computing”. If the machines around us become increasingly capable of decoding emotions and understanding human behavior, does that mean they can take care of us?

Care is twofold; it can be both the source of wellbeing and oppression. By showing care, we see to it that things do not fall apart, but we are also liable to maintain too firm a grip on them. To commend your body to another requires trust. Navigating between different corporal states—between movement and immobility—the Pepper Perceval performance looks to explore the zone between empathy and manipulation.

Drawing inspiration from recent examples of feminist and postcolonial science fiction¹, Pepper Perceval strives to integrate technological innovation, rural tradition, and local mythology. The project has been developing a nonalienating enabling view of technology, linking it with local traditions, individual narratives (coming from different cultures) and a vernacular esthetic. During the residency, children invented machines capable of transmitting emotions. And so was born the surprise machine. (Don't forget that it is still waiting for us to come back.) It's an attempt to invent new mythologies together, in collaboration, thanks to *mains tenantes* (roughly "gripping hands") and the *maintenants* ("the nows").

Pepper Perceval also explores another part of empathy, i.e., the resonance with one's surroundings, which takes the form of a choir. The compositions sung by this choir imitate the sounds made by the machines around them in their daily lives. They explore new ways of communicating or "intra-acting" with technological devices. Developed by the American theoretician Karen Barad in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), the concept of "intra-action" is based on the idea that identities are not frozen but are constructed through intra-action. "Agency", then, the ability to act, is linked to other "agencies" in a state of entanglement², according to Barad. Pepper Perceval therefore looks to break down the border between objects and humans in order to experience new "entangled agencies".

Born in 1982 in Oberndorf (Salzburg, AUT), Marlies Pöschl lives and works between Vienna (Austria) and Paris. After earning a degree in art, communications and linguistics, she entered the Fine Arts Academy of Vienna, from which she graduated in 2014. Collaboration, joint creation, and commune-utopias have been the central concern of her work since 2011. She is the founder of Golden Pixel Cooperative, a platform for artists' films, with which she has put together exhibitions and public events in Austria (Kunsthalle Exnergasse, 2016; 21er Haus, Vienna, 2016), as well as Iran (Limited Access Festival, Tehran, 2014) and China (Chronus Art Centre, Shanghai, 2017). Her work has been featured in a number of solo shows, notably during the Donaufestival Krems (Austria, 2016), and at Vienna's MUSA Museum auf Abruf (2015), the Galerie 5020 in Salzburg (2016), and Studios Lenikus, also in Vienna (2015). Her films have also been screened at a range of festivals, including Cinéma Verité, Tehran, Iran (2017), Diagonale, the Austrian Film Festival (Austria, 2017), and the Edinburgh International Film Festival (United Kingdom, 2014). Marlies Pöschl is currently in residence at the Cité internationale des arts through the residency program of the Institut français.

1 The Jamaican-Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson notes that many fictional stories tackling the question of technology are inspired by concepts that go back to Greek and Roman mythology. She is developing new concepts involving the field of technology that take off from the cultures of the African diaspora.

2 The term entanglement comes from quantum mechanics and refers to phenomena linking two particles that make them depend on each other despite their spatial separation.

A residency-initiative hosted by CAC Brétigny

Pepper Perceval has been put together as part of the residency-initiative that CAC Brétigny has been hosting since September 2017. In that year Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération initiated a three-year partnership with the Regional Direction of Cultural Affairs of Île-de-France and the Academy of Versailles with the signing of a Local Contract for Art Education in partnership with the Department of Essonne. Hosted respectively by Théâtre Brétigny, CAC Brétigny, and Lecture publique (an outreach initiative involving the region's multimedia libraries)³, three residency-initiatives are underway for the region's inhabitants, especially its young people, from a network of schools, associations, and cultural, social, sociocultural, economic and educational entities of Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération.

This framework resonates with the art center's general mission. CAC Brétigny stands out for its investment in amateur practices and partnerships in joint artmaking projects and collaborative ones, and for the display of art outside the usual venues dedicated to showing art. Its program of shows and events also makes clear its support for artists and researchers in the production of innovative art forms and the mixing of periods and disciplines, as well as its openness to different esthetics. Moreover, echoing the theme that the residency-initiatives have in common, i.e., otherness, Marlies Pöschl's project is part of the "Alterism" cycle. Here CAC Brétigny places the search for knowledge with the other, that is the other must be understood as an entity, a group, or a disciplinary field.

Thus, Pöschl's residency-initiative, playing out in the Cœur d'Essonne region, has drawn on numerous exchanges with local inhabitants that feed into the creative process. It is formed from people's encounter with a world of art but also the coming together of institutions and entities around a common project. Pepper Perceval has taken shape at the crossroads of several disciplines and generations.

"Émotionnistes", robots that are able to transmit emotions, are something that grew out of these encounters. In Villemoisson-sur-Orge, the schoolchildren attending Les Érables met with the elderly living at the senior care facility Le Château to collect their thoughts and feelings about the new digital technologies. That research gave rise to drawings and models of futuristic machines capable of transmitting feelings. These imaginary machines were explained to the students of the Lycée Paul Belmondo in Arpajon, who were then responsible for the next step. The machines took shape, becoming genuine robots able to interact. The children who are active in the regions' leisure centers and the multimedia library of Breuillet also had a hand in creating these machines and dreamed up encounters and real or fictional situations between robots and humans using animated films.

The "robodroid choir" is made up of seniors living in the Senior Care Facility of Marolles-en-Hurepoix, who were invited to reproduce mechanical sounds with their voices, sparking a reflection on modes of communication and imitation of humans and machines. Based on

recordings of the sounds and interactions, notably at the Mosaïque Senior Care Facility in Villemoisson-sur-Orge and the Berthe Morisot Community Center of Saint-Germain-lès-Arpajon, a composition was created and will be performed by a choir.

“Tableaux vivants” are the result of an exchange between the students of the Lycée Edmond Michelet and the residents of the Senior Care Facility Le Village in Arpajon, touching on a number of things but above all their emotional connection with their daily environment. The sessions together generate lively though silent scenes inspired by these stories through a variety of methods borrowed from dance and theater.

Finally, the Jean Farges Multimedia Library of Marolles-en-Hurepoix hosted a temporary reading club that drew on film and literary sources to question those constant connections that unite us with machines.

A public service of Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération, CAC Brétigny benefits from the support of Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication—DRAC Île-de-France, Région Île-de-France and Conseil départemental de l'Essonne, with the complicity of the Brétigny-sur-Orge municipality. CAC Brétigny is a member of TRAM and d.c.a. This project has been carried out in collaboration with Lycée Paul Belmondo, Arpajon; Lycée Edmond Michelet, Arpajon; EHPAD Le Village, Arpajon; the Multimedia Library, Breuillet; Community Centers, Breuillet; the Seniors Residence, Marolles-en-Hurepoix; the Multimedia Library Jean Farges, Marolles-en-Hurepoix; EHPAD Le Château, Villemoisson-sur-Orge; Les Érables Primary School, Villemoisson-sur-Orge; the Berthe Morisot Social and Cultural Center, Saint-Germain-lès-Arpajon in the framework of the Local Contract for Art Education signed between Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération with the Regional Direction of Cultural Affairs of Île-de-France and the Academy of Versailles, in partnership with the Department of Essonne, and with the support of the Institut français, Cité internationale des arts, ORF III, and Bundeskanzleramt Österreich.