

# Reading Club

## Reading Club, a web site

For performative reading together

For "battles" by readers who are writers and writers who are readers

To observe a collective process of thinking

*Lire ensemble et partager sa propre lecture, actualiser les promesses du texte et le performer, le décortiquer individuellement et le (dé)construire en commun, douter, chercher la faille, trouver une forme, des formes, prendre parole, et, finalement, penser et produire ensemble ... rendre effectif la lecture, observer la pensée en action, adresser la potentialité du texte, faire naître une communauté de lecteurs.*

## Project leaders

Annie Abrahams and Emmanuel Guez.

## Project advisors

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## Partners

Furtherfield (London), Poptronics (Paris), OUDEIS (Le Vigan), Zinc (Marseille), Le Jeu de Paume (Paris).

## Short Summary :

The project ReadingClub artistically explores the relation between reading and writing on the web as well as the status of the author. Readingclub.fr brings together writers - readers to share performative readings. Limited in time these "battles" by the readers - writers, this reading through writing also reveals the naked process of thinking together.

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## Project intention :

The Reading Club project contributes to an artistic exploration of the relationship of reading and writing on the web, experiments with the status of the author and stimulates the development of multiplicity in thinking in the networks.

What means reading in our networked times? We can not say that our digital environment affects the way we write - and what is written – without saying it also affects the way we read. Perhaps it is because our way of reading operates a mutation, that the way we write also mutates.

The Reading Club project proposes to test the mutations in reading and writing in a sensitive way through an interactive device combining web performance and writing in common.

A text published for the occasion on the website of the Reading Club ([readingclub.fr](http://readingclub.fr)) is proposed to four guests, four readers. These guests are instructed not only to read (in the conventional sense of the word) the text but to change it, in other words **to write their reading**. All four they can annotate, comment, develop, add or delete text, the "original" text or matrix as well as the changes made by other readers. This is done in a limited time span, which gives this act of reading together a performative dimension (duration: 10 min - 2 hours depending on the text).

Reading Club is a web performance, inspired by Brad Troemel's *Reading Group*\* and the *Department of Reading* by Sönke Hallman.\*\* It is a continuation of previous experiments in participatory writing by Annie Abrahams\*\*\* and experiences of collaborative writing and web happenings by Emmanuel Guez\*\*\*\*.

**an interpretive arena**

In *Les Limites de l'interprétation* - about *Finnegans Wake*, Umberto Eco writes:  
"After a text has been produced, it is possible to make it say a lot of things (...), but it is impossible (. ..) to make it say what it does not say. Often the texts say more than

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what the authors intended to say, but less than what many incontinent readers would want it to say."

Through the Reading Club, this incontinent reader of the web can not only transform the text in his own way - and thus make him say what he wants him to say - but can also change the reading of other readers. The Reading Club is like an **interpretative** arena in which a reader battles the other readers by on the fly writing.

Unlike the, sometimes endless, flow of comments that follow published articles on the network, the Reading Club offers to materialise **in a single text** the power relations between the readers (and thus the writers). This relationship is tensioned, a tensioning which is materialised not as a succession of arguments of pro and cons, but by the very act of writing, involving deletion and addition. Materialising this kind of confrontation, the Reading Club traces the conditions of a reading together on the web.

## **challenging the status of the author**

This work starting with a matrix text which is a raw material, food for thought, for interpretation (and what ever else forms the act of reading, an interaction), disrupts the scientific conditions of commenting a text as well as the integrity of the concept and the status of the author, of its authority. The Reading Club dispossesses the reader of its reading. Paradoxically, by the presence of multiple readers who modify the text on the fly, it transforms the reader in a dynamic element who serves a shared reading experience. Does she become a data transmitter? A "Telephone switch", to use the image Bergson gave of the human brain. In the ReadingClub the reader is not the owner of his reading, but a means by which the information transits.

## **what status for the reader / author ?**

The work on the text, the reading / writing will be done anonymously and so will allow a radical struggle freed from any statutory determination. In other sessions we will be able to recognise the authors who read / write, rewrite the text. For legal and philosophical reasons (should the common work be a work without names) and to examine the effects of anonymity on the authors and their auctorial reality: authority / increase (auctor / augere), it will be very interesting to compare the two options and view their impact on the reading / writing itself.

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Pour des questions juridiques et philosophiques (l'œuvre commune est-elle une œuvre sans noms) et pour interroger les effets de l'anonymat sur la réalité des auteurs en leur réalité auctoriale :



## questioning the attitude of the spectator

While the four readers write their reading of the text, and fabricate a common text, the viewers, via a chat window will have the opportunity to comment on "what happens." However, unlike the readers, these viewers are not forced to write. How will they behave? What kind of text will be written in the chat window? Two texts will interweave, the one of the readers and the one of the spectators, who by their exchanges, their comments, will become a public, that is to say, a community of spectators gathered in one place and in a given time. This spectator might also choose to stay a witness only. In short the question is will a session of the ReadingClub become more a happening or will it be closer to a spectacle?

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\*Brad Troemel ,Reading Group, <http://readinggroupnumberone.tumblr.com/>

\*\*Sönke Hallman, Department of Reading,

<http://automatist.net/deptofreading/wiki/pmwiki.php/DepartmentOfReading>

\*\*\*Annie Abrahams, Expérimentations en écriture participative,

<http://bram.org/textdynamics/cnes/index.htm>

\*\*\*\* Emmanuel Guez, H/Ephémère#1 – happening sur Yahoo! Answers (2008) ;

H/Ephémère#2 – happening sur MMOG (2008) ; [illusion.com](http://illusion.com) (2009)

\*\*\*\*\* Free Art Licence 1.3 <http://artlibre.org/licence/lal/en>