

Report on a European Project: The laboratory for the twenty-first century (LABO21)

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Brief Report on a European project: the Laboratory For The 21st Century (LABO21)

Jonas Rutgeerts, Bertha Bermúdez Pascual, Tomislav Medak and Sarah Whatley

From 2010 till 2014 different European partners join forces to conceive LABO21 (labo21.eu), a platform for transdisciplinary research on artistic methodologies. LABO21 would bring together organisations with a common interest in how performing artists make work and the wish to make knowledge about these making practices, or poiesis, available to a wider audience. The main artistic organisations involved in the project were BADco. (HR), Troubleyn/Jan Fabre (BE), Wayne McGregor|Random Dance (UK), ICKamsterdam (NL) and The Centre for Dance Research at Coventry University (UK).^[1] This article briefly presents some of the specific approaches and outcomes of the project.

The platform's focus on methodologies should not simply be understood as an interest in production processes (a set of tools used to create a performance) or techniques (the development of a specific skill), but as an engagement with the durational and holistic practice that structures the artistic working process and surpasses the scope of the (next) performance. Methodologies constitute the backbone of an artistic research, which is not based on distant reflection, but where 'practical action (the making) and theoretical reflection (the thinking) go hand in hand', as Janneke Wesseling reminds us (Wesseling 2011: 2). The research that was conducted within the framework of LABO21 could thus be understood as research on (artistic) research.

Notwithstanding the variety of the propositions and partners, the different research projects of LABO21 all shared the same basic premises. LABO21 research projects were all artist driven, developing research starting from a specific performance practice and questions that are generated by that specific practice. Each project also adopted a transdisciplinary approach, aimed at enhancing and generating new understandings in performing arts through direct encounters with other fields of knowledge such as cognitive science, biology and technology research, social science, and philosophy. This transdisciplinary approach was not an end in itself, but a way to stay close to the specificity of the artistic research, which in itself often combines different media and techniques and to enable the development of technological tools that help articulate, analyse, encapsulate and transmit the methods, or poetics of the individual approaches to artistic making. By combining

artistic knowledge relating to performance and dance, with the knowledge from other areas the projects tried to generate valuable expertise on the nature of these artistic practices and to provide the artist with tools and spaces that enable a reflection on the way they work and the methodologies they use.

[{ figure1}]

BADco.

Throughout the first phase of LABO21, BADco., a collaborative performance collective based in Zagreb, Croatia, focused their research on Object-Oriented Theatre, developing the entanglements between the image technologies, methodologies of choreography and the organization of spectating. Exploring how to relate technological tools and choreographic methodologies, spectating and image, cinematic images and bodies, the company developed two sets of digital tools Whatever Dance Toolbox (WDT){ note } 2, now distributed freely as a set of cross-platform tools and Algorithmic Live Video Editing System (ALVES). These tools encapsulate specific poetic concerns of BADco. both with respect to the compositional aspects of choreography and spectatorial aspects of theatre.

In the period 2012-2014 BADco.'s research focus shifted to Post-hoc Dramaturgy, an exploration of how the afterlife of a performance, its encounter with the spectators and institutions and the remnants of compositional artefacts and tools that were suppressed with its finalization, provide a form of reflection back on the work and of its remaking. Using the live video recording and editing capabilities of ALVES BADco. submitted its 2004 choreography Fleshdance to such a reflective process in order to create a performative installation Broken Performances (fig. 1).

[{ figure2}]

Troubleyn/ Jan Fabre

Within the folds of LABO21 Troubleyn/Jan Fabre devoted transdisciplinary research into the 'guidelines' of Belgian performance maker and visual artist Jan Fabre{ note } 3. These guidelines, a set of exercises Fabre developed throughout

his career, encourage explorations of all possible transitions between 'act' and 'acting', or between 'physicality' and 'representation'. Through practicing the exercises the performers search for ways to intertwine the physical, or bodily characteristics (i.a. muscle traction, fatigue, pain, cramps, dizziness) with the theatrical, or imaginary characteristics of performing and explore how this interrelation can create a more complex understanding of both the physical and the theatrical.

The goal of the research was to engage with scientific disciplines from the University of Antwerp (including theatre science, sports medicine and medical imagery) to analyse both the physical features (muscle activity, heart rate variability, posture, etc.) and theatrical mechanisms (the use of metaphors, the reference to stereotypical images, the historical references of the exercises etc.) that are at play in each exercise (fig. 2). This information resulted in a toolkit (to be published in 2016) that brings together descriptions, graphs and visualisations of each exercise.

[{ figure3}]

Wayne McGregor | Random Dance and Centre for Dance Research, Coventry University

The main goal of the partnership between this London based choreographer, dance company and university research centre was to build on a decade long interdisciplinary collaborative research with cognitive and computer scientists, digital artists and social anthropologists into the creative process of choreography. This research had been consolidated in 2009 by the creation of the R-Research Department, which oversaw continued research into choreographic thinking and the development of related theories and applications in the form of new creative tools used by the company.

The LABO21 project supported the development of a large-scale public exhibition commissioned by [Wellcome Collection](#), UK. Titled [Thinking with the body: Mind and movement in the work of Wayne McGregor | Random Dance](#)[{ note}]4 the exhibition opened on 19 September 2013 and remained open for six weeks offering the general public access to the artistic methodologies used by the company and some of the disciplinary frameworks that had helped to probe and make aspects of

these making methods more explicit. In parallel with the exhibition was the publication of Mind and Movement [5] a choreographic resource 'designed to develop students' personal imagination skills in order to enhance the creation of new and original dance movement' (Wayne McGregor/Random Dance, 2014)(fig. 3).

[figure4]

ICKamsterdam & Emio Greco | PC

The research project Pre-choreographic Alphabet was initiated by the dance company Emio Greco | PC at the ICKamsterdam Choreographic Arts Centre. The aim was to create a multimodal glossary that collected the different 'oral transmissions' that took place within the artistic practice of Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten. It used methodologies that were developed and applied within two previous research projects (Capturing Intention (2005-2008) and Inside Movement Knowledge IMK (2008-2011)). [6] Both projects evolved around the notation, documentation and dissemination of artistic work of Greco and Scholten.

A variety of disciplines and areas have been involved in these projects including motion tracking, interactive environments, cognitive linguistics, dance analysis and dance education. The use of digital media, especially the relation with motion-capture, revealed both the possibilities and limitations involved in creating numerical data out of the oral and somatic praxis. The wide range of outcomes include the website of the project, the glossary with the terms, the installation Pre-choreographic Movement Kit (fig. 4) and the protocol for the transmission and documentation of dance principles. Each outcome proposes different modes of dance representation, including ones where the digital and the analogue can co-exist. Each result also addresses different audiences: artists, general audience, other artists, students and young makers.

Concluding remarks

Next to these individual projects, LABO21 also established a platform where all individual partners came together at four salons/public events organised by each partner to jointly explore the topic of research on artistic methodology. As the

individual research projects started to come to a close, there was a need to devote more attention to the overarching context in which the research was taking place. Together with this growing attention the conceptualization of these salons also changed. Being at first a platform that would enhance the exchange of information and best practices between the different partners, therefore stimulating their research, the focus shifted from 'doing research on artistic research' to 'creating perspectives on artistic research'. This shift was driven by a double motivation: the need to reflect on the position of this research in relation to both art and the academy and the questions on how to both implement and critically reflect on the research outcomes. Via this transition LABO21 sought to position itself as a catalyst for new reflexive frameworks on artistic research and a bridge between artists, researchers and spectators.

Notes

1. In a first phase, from 2010 till 2012, this platform assembled researchers from BADco. (HR), Buda Arts Centre (BE), DOCH (SE) and Troubleyn/Jan Fabre (BE).
2. For more information about the Whatever Dance Toolbox go to:
<http://badco.hr/works/whatever-toolbox/>
3. For more information go to: <http://janfabre.be/troubleyn/en/research/>
4. For more information go to: <http://wellcomecollection.org/thinkingwiththebody/>
5. For more information on the book go to:
http://www.randomdance.org/creative_learning/mind_and_movement_choreographic_thinking_tools
6. For more information go to: <http://insidemovementknowledge.net>

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