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by

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# Conditions for Research<sup>1</sup>

It is not self-evident that an art academy engages in professional research and deliberately extends its educational enterprise into unknown and untested ground. So why is it that the Amsterdam School of the Arts is deeply involved with Emio Greco I PC's project *New ways of Notating, Documenting and Re-creating Dance*? And that throughout several stage developments we have cooperated across the institutional boundaries of teaching, exploring and art making? The following essay contextualises and responds to these questions; and proposes a framework for the future of the research project.

The last five years have witnessed interesting developments in education policy in the Netherlands. Alongside traditional teaching practice, a series of research groups (or lectoraten as they are known in Dutch) are being funded. The express purpose of these groups is to expand and refresh current educational practice in art schools with current artistic research projects. The resulting initiatives – and particularly the work undertaken by my own group *Art Practice and Development* – do not in any way aim to imitate traditional academic models. Rather, a great variety of artists are invited to further develop their practical proposals and test out their individual methods at the Amsterdam School of the Arts.<sup>2</sup>

It was not that these new opportunities for artistic research projects were initiated or even called for by the artists themselves. The *lectoraat* scheme is purely a state intervention, which was introduced in the Netherlands around five years ago.<sup>3</sup> This was due to a worrying development in art schools and technical colleges, which were increasingly defining themselves according to the current labour market and dedicating too much of their application-oriented teaching to concrete job-training. To take the example of the

performing arts, this means that courses in directing, acting, dance or dramaturgy often become stuck in traditional occupational images, barely contributing to contemporary developments or provoking innovative art forms. Teaching is based on that which has already proven its value and therefore belongs to the canon of knowledge that is generally accepted as being necessary to practising a certain profession or discipline within familiar contexts. In the worst-case scenario, students' abilities are only judged according to vocational rather than artistic practice, a minor distinction, which in my opinion is of fundamental significance in the reinterpretation of higher education in the Arts.<sup>4</sup>

This trend was of particular concern to the Ministry of Education and Science because:

- it led to an alarming move away from academic discourse within Holland's dual education system (i.e. the strict separation of universities on the one hand, and art schools and technical colleges on the other);
- Dutch art schools and technical colleges might not be able to stand up to the qualitative standards within Europe as required by the Bologna Agreement;

- publicly funded teaching became restricted to the predominant professionally operating systems and made a negligible contribution to social innovation.

The fear was of a downright paralysis of educational practice, insufficient ties to the contemporary art scene, widespread isolation from international developments as well as alienation from a social, economic and cultural reality undergoing dramatic change. Accordingly, the aim of the later research offensive was formulated very firmly and was established as an *engine of innovation* in a dynamic mix of teaching, research and practice.<sup>5</sup> This forced the art schools to undergo comprehensive *upgrading* (despite not having the right to award doctorates, a privilege reserved for the universities) and they are now well on the way to developing a very specific alternative which is slowly beginning to present a challenge to academic activity. For in the lively debate regarding applied or artistic research, we have deliberately refrained from following the Anglo-Saxon model and have made a conscious effort to maintain the differences between the educational systems, preferring a productive coexistence of differing approaches.<sup>6</sup>

The *Art Practice and Development* working group is specifically concerned with the questions, methods and themes that artists approach us with if they wish to combine them with research opportunities. We assume that artists have long had their own, equivalent means of knowledge production, that they have appropriated research practices and that they should not necessarily be subjected to the conditions of the academic establishment's knowledge system. From the first *Bureau de Recherche* set up by the Surrealists, to Peter Brook's *Centre International de Recherche Theatrale* (CIRT), from Brecht's *Versuchen* to James Lee Byars' *World Question Center*<sup>7</sup> there has been a long tradition of lively artistic research which continues to this day, a testament to the need of artists to learn more about their own practice and to make their findings available to others. Artistic research has its own history, present and future. Correspondingly, as cultural critic Sarat Maharaj concluded in a detailed essay on *Artistic Research*: "Most of us must feel we have been doing it for years, without quite calling it like that..."<sup>8</sup>

Dance company Emio Greco I PC has been a very interesting partner from the beginning of our collaboration, as over the last few years it has consciously expanded its focus beyond the production or re-staging of artistic

pieces. For a number of years the ensemble has, on the one hand, already contributed significantly worldwide to public debates about contemporary dance in its so-called *Dance & Discourse Salons* (which they have initiated in parallel to their international guest-performances). On the other hand, EG I PC has been around for ten years: veteran protagonist Bertha Bermudez has left the stage (but not the ensemble), and choreographer and dancer Emio Greco also no longer chooses to perform in all of the pieces. The group now has to decide whether and in what way it can pass on or transfer its work to a younger generation and how it can maintain its repertoire. This is a problem the group shares with many contemporary choreographers and dancers.

As *artists in residence* at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, EG I PC in 2005-'06 finally got the long sought-after opportunity to examine the topic of *transfer* in an educational environment. This involved teaching their own methods of training and parts of their choreographies as well as discussing all issues bound up with the subject in three consecutive salons with national and international theorists, dramaturges, critics and students. Direct results of this joint undertaking include the current research project *New ways of Notating, Documenting and Re-creating Dance*, and the *Accademia Mobile* – the company's creative training unit – which has operated since 2006.

For EG I PC, the question of imparting one's ideas and the need to gain an objective view of one's own art is inextricably bound up with the dilemma of dance as an ephemeral art, the material nature of human existence and its continual disappearance. Their attempt to locate and grasp that which is constantly vanishing in their work goes beyond the actual performance to include the artistic process involved in its creation, which is even less perceptible than the final product. "Once the performance is over, all that is at stake in the process of making, all investment in the process as well as the post-production life of the work, tends to fall into oblivion. Neither festivals nor theatre venues make the effort of presenting the work besides the performance as its actualized product. The knowledge acquired, the tools developed in the working process and in collaboration, artists carry along for themselves. Rare are the opportunities where the knowledge of the artists themselves, rational and methodological as well as subjective and experiential, can be shared with a wider public."<sup>9</sup>

*New ways of Notating, Documenting and Re-creating Dance* is an attempt to create a particular system of notation which derives from the choreographic work of EG I PC, to safeguard its memory and understand and learn from its specific vocabulary and way of working. In the first phase, still during the residency, a documentary film was made about the *Double Skin/Double Mind* workshop given in Vienna in the summer of 2005.<sup>10</sup> The resulting systematic elaboration of the workshop contents already contained significant elements of the later idea to create a complex digital resource in the form of an interactive installation, such as filmed dance movements, discursive descriptions of basic methodology (by dancers, choreographers and students, which are gathered in a glossary), as well as the edited and compiled presentation of years of teaching.

The interdisciplinary project team, which was formed for the purpose of taking up this second phase of research, starts from the assumption that the complex nature of dance cannot be adequately represented with a single technology. And in the joint working sessions, the various disciplines and sources of expertise throw light on each other and establish respective lim-

its and needs for development.<sup>11</sup> This phase of *New ways of Notating, Documenting and Re-creating Dance* will be completed with the publication of the prototype of Chris Ziegler's interactive installation, a DVD-ROM containing highly specialised notation work, and this book.<sup>12</sup>

In the third phase, which has already begun with additions to the team and new institutional partners, the project will devote itself to debating the difficult question of how means of recording not only serve to analyse and document works of art, but can also function as a type of "real-time feedback" (Scott deLahunta) and flow directly into the creative process again. This will be a significant step to take and will undoubtedly present a great challenge to the ensemble and the organisational form of our project. Artistic research is obviously not a soliloquy. If we - as art schools and cultural producers - want to take the potential of such ventures seriously, we have to continue to expand interdisciplinary and cross-institutional cooperation between teaching, science and artistic practice. Here at the Amsterdam School of the Arts - at least in the context of the given possibilities, that is the conclusion we have come to.

- 1 The full version of this text will be published under the title *Artistic research as an expanded kind of choreography in the work of Emilio Greco I PC* in: *Knowledge in Motion*, Sabine Gehm, Pirko Husemann, Katharina von Wilcke (eds.), transcript Bielefeld, September 2007.
- 2 The working group *Art Practice and Development* was founded at the end of 2003. It operates on an inter-faculty basis, and with no fixed boundary between the school and its professional environment. Besides individual research projects, it has an artist in residence programme and a great many joint projects with venues, festivals and faculties. [www.lectoraten.ahk.nl](http://www.lectoraten.ahk.nl), [www.artpractice.ahk.nl](http://www.artpractice.ahk.nl)
- 3 This development, incidentally, is not limited to the Netherlands; Flanders is also experiencing an intensive process of academisation. The most prominent institutions in Flanders are the IVOK (Institute for Practice Based Research in the Arts) at the K.U. Leuven and the Platform "Doctorate in the Arts" at the Universitaire Associatie Brussel (University Association of Brussels). <http://associatie.kuleuven.be/eng/ivok/index.htm>, [www.vub.ac.be/english/infoabout/associatie/platform.html](http://www.vub.ac.be/english/infoabout/associatie/platform.html). In Switzerland, too, public policies of funding have now been very closely linked to research.
- 4 Ute Meta Bauer's collection of essays on new artistic approaches to higher artistic education is still topical: Ute Meta Bauer (ed.), *Current Approaches on Higher Artistic Education*, Vienna 2001.
- 5 For a complete overview of related research projects at art schools and technical colleges in the Netherlands see [www.lectoren.nl](http://www.lectoren.nl)
- 6 The debate focuses on the mode of research (and its relationship to art) as well as its knowledge content (and its distinctiveness) in the light of existing and generally accepted research methods. My colleague Henk Borgdorff, who leads the *Art Theory and Research* working group at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, has provided a very comprehensive account of this international debate on artistic research and the meta-theoretical discourse. [www.ahk.nl/lectoraten/onderzoek/debate.pdf](http://www.ahk.nl/lectoraten/onderzoek/debate.pdf)
- 7 As part of a ritual performance James Lee Byars incessantly asks fellow artists what question they ask themselves: "What question contributes to your own evolving sense of knowledge?" [www.edge.org/questioncenter.html](http://www.edge.org/questioncenter.html)
- 8 Sarat Maharaj, *Unfinishable Sketch of 'An Unknown Object in 4D': scenes of artistic research*. In: Annette W. Balkema, Henk Slager (eds.), *Artistic Research*, Amsterdam/New York 2004, page 39.
- 9 Igor Dobricic and Bojana Cvejic, *Before and After the Show: unfolding the working process: part of the cultural programme Almost Real of the Alkantara Festival*, Lisbon, June 2006. [www.almostreal.org](http://www.almostreal.org)
- 10 *Double Skin/Double Mind*, a documentary film by Maite Bermudez, premiered at the Cinedans Festival in Amsterdam, July 2006.
- 11 Media and approaches include: Bertha Bermudez and Emilio Greco have internalised the dance of the company and are the driving forces behind the project; Scott deLahunta, author and dance theorist is comparing four current choreographic experiments with the aim of producing a choreographic resource; Frédéric Bevilacqua is developing the *Gesture Analysis Program* at the Paris IRCAM Institute; Marion Bastien and Eliane Mirzabekiantz are contributing the well-known dance notation systems of Laban and Benesh; and finally Chris Ziegler, who will bring all these different perspectives together.
- 12 Dutch Dance Days 2007, [www.nederlandsedansdagen.nl](http://www.nederlandsedansdagen.nl)

