

LABORATORY SERIES

WHAT IS IT?

The format *Laboratory Series* is an investigation and improvisation set-up with an overarching question¹, task, or subject matter, that is based on the isolation and reduction of elements with controlled variations in a repetitive pattern. Similar to proceedings in a laboratory (Rheinberger 2015), this format is intended to gather effects, characteristics, and dynamics of a research topic, which often cannot be fully grasped or perceived at first sight. In proximity to rehearsal² and creation processes in the arts, a series like this is often conducted in a rehearsal space or studio. The controlled setting allows for a clear selection of elements in the room, including tasks, instruments, specific participants or co-researchers³, as well as protocols of interaction and documentation. As the series continues, the participants can either stay the same or change from session to session. This approach allows for adjustments of the set-up – introducing new elements, tasks, or instruments – and for referring back to results of previous experimental sessions. In difference to a rehearsal process or to a training these adjustments are made to further explore the overarching subject matter, rather than to produce some form of showing.

The repetition creates a familiarity with the matter at hand, in which a spectrum of approaches can unfold, which in turn sharpens the researchers' perception for the subject matter, material or question. Operations need to follow a formal structure or score to document changes and enable comparisons. As in a scientific laboratory, discussions and findings that might lead to modifications of the setting and/or subsequent testing, have to be based on documentation⁴ of former experimental results (Plischke 2020, Matzke 2012, Latour/Woolgar 1986: 47).

CONTEXT

1 Research question: General research questions frame the direction of research and unite the heterogeneous participants with their different agendas. Deriving from a given practice, need, problem or interest, the field and subject matter are defined. After mapping out the current state of research, as well as identifying factors and actors relevant to the given context, an appropriate research format can be chosen to approach the research question.

2 Rehearsal: In the performative arts, rehearsing can be understood as an act of practicing, for example learning specific skills or practicing to play a specific role, and running through different possibilities of solving an artistic task. Beyond that, the rehearsal is also understood as a moment of testing. In its frame of (pre-)presenting and watching, one always forecasts the audience's view and reaction. Rehearsal and performance can fall into one, if, for instance, a test version of a specific form of assembling or a certain form of acting is publicly presented. In both perspectives, the rehearsal can be understood as a procedure to acquire knowledge. Rehearsing is an artistic practice that is characterised by collectivity, performativity and different uses of media (Plischke 2018, Matzke 2012).

3 Researchers/co-researchers/participants: Researchers within PABR are those who are involved in the whole research process from beginning to end and are responsible for the shape and progression of the process.

Co-researchers are invited to collaborate and join the research process for shorter or longer periods of time.

Participants are invited to join the research only at certain points, for instance during its public presentation, and are involved in different ways. In order to organise participation on equal terms, it is crucial to recognise and acknowledge the different questions, interests, responsibilities, capacities and availabilities of the different co-researchers and participants and to define their role within the process.

4 Documentation: How processes of PABR are documented depends on each project and cannot



The same group can handle the complete investigation together or new constellations (see *Improbable Assembly*) of co-researchers can reassemble for each new encounter. In case there are different groups, the research leader ensures that the laboratory setting is maintained and that the results from the different groups are secured within the same protocol of documentation. For her investigation on the practice of marching, Elisabeth Rech organised seven workshops with different co-researchers. Participants came from dance, music, visual arts and activist backgrounds and looked at the act of marching focusing on different aspects such as objects, sound, choreography, etcetera. (>>> Marching Session I-VI____>>>>, 2016)¹

This research format⁵ aims at experts working together and can be designed for groups with heterogeneous knowledges. Each new test is structured and marked by gradual shifts of perspective or new ways of

approaching the task. This shift in perspective might simply occur because a day has passed, or it might result from a new constellation or a reformulation of how the score is implemented, based on the experiences and results of the sessions carried out before (Matthias 2018: 67-74). If the instalments of a

be determined in a general way. Researchers are advised to put documentation measures in place that help to store and translate processes and outcomes for those contexts in which she wants the project to proliferate. Documentation should be intertwined with moments of presentation and of gathering research material. Each project should develop a documentation method appropriate to the project, which may consist of several forms of documentation. Performances can be documented by video recordings, whereas collections, archives and media artefacts may become their own documentation. However, the collective activities are fleeting and perceived differently by each participant. The same event can be evaluated differently from the outside than from the perspectives of the performing participants. For comparison and evaluation purposes, these different experiences need to be represented in some form: collective writing, questionnaires, drawings, transcriptions of discussions or interviews, formal responses, and so on.

CORPUS

I >>>>> Marching Session I - VI____>>>>>
– An Interactive (Lecture) Performance for Followers and Pacemakers (2016): Liz Rech explored the topic of marching as a potentially emancipatory practice through a workshop series and an interactive lecture performance. In seven workshops, she explored relating topics (such as march and objects, march and sound, march and choreography.) The different co-researchers came from diverse backgrounds and contributed their special knowledge and set focal points within the different research fields. The interactive performance itself dealt with the practice of marching movements through a lecture and a workshop. Participatory marching exercises tested some of the results together with the audience. After two parallel workshops with the audience, each of the groups performed in front of the other in the theatre space. Their experiences were documented by a question and answer session.
Liz Rech, >>>>> MARCHING SESSION I – VI____>>>>>– An Interactive (Lecture) Performance for Followers and Pacemakers, 2016, Hamburg

5 Research formats: A single research format is realised in a specific context to configure the collaborative research of different experts in a physical way. It can structure one complete research project or become a smaller element within another format. The process starts with a desire, need, or question that brings together the participants as co-researchers, creating a collective agenda and interest in the research process. This collective interest has to be established before the participating researchers are able to perform, test materials, act, or assemble collaboratively. The co-researchers should be able to arrange, rehearse and plan details and activities for performative events. The activities and events then need to be evaluated or compared in relation to the underlying needs, questions and desires. Only after this evaluation can it be decided whether the same process should be repeated, whether the rules and conditions should be adjusted or modified, whether the format should be changed entirely or whether researchers should proceed to another application/publication.

series do not differ much in regard to the elements present in the room, the series might aim at a familiarity with the material, which can open up new perspectives that would remain invisible if the elements and scores changed every day. The experimental⁶ system is defined by a specific relation between continuity of practice and material on the one hand and different access points on the other (Rheinberger 2015: 313). A rotating system of acting/performing and observing as well as the diversity of participants' experiences and inputs structure the collective investigation⁷. Action-based and discursive parts are combined to generate and share experiences.

WHAT IS RESEARCHED?

The human body and its habituated practices are one major topic of this research format. Questions concerning bodily activities, skills, sensations, emotions, or perceptions are investigated in the set-up. Often, interactions of human and non-human agents are explored. The collective negotiation in the laboratory brings the subjectivity of each participant's experience into a productive relationship with the group – physi-

cally and discursively. Sequences of acting (Post-Production Workshop 2013)⁸ and observing each other enable dynamics of intuitive feedback processes. As the group of researchers is confronted with the same task, different knowledges⁸ are triggered, collec-

6 Experiment: Within PABR, we differentiate between experiment and exploration. Explorations enter an unknown area of interest without a concrete line of inquiry, whereas the experiment needs a controlled space to build a research set-up that enables concrete outcomes or solutions to questions, such as new artistic or performative techniques, practices or formats. To experiment is understood as an act of invention, discovery, and creation. In its continued repetition, however, productive differences are uncovered. (Berg 2009, Rickli 2015, Hinz/Kranixfeld 2018)

7 Collaborative process: PABR projects always lead to collaborative processes between diverse participants. They value heterogeneous constellations, while recognising all disciplines equally and critically self-reflecting each discipline's habitus (Ziemer 2015: 171). While investigating a specific topic, all PABR projects entail an exploration of the limits and potentials of collaborative processes as such.

8 Knowledge production: PABR formats and designs are governed by the pursuit of a question, a desire, a need or by the attempt to find a solution for a problem. This initial framing poses a functional background for the researchers to evaluate the outcomes of the performative events and research activities, and therefore produce specific answers to the functioning of hypotheses or working solutions. For the evaluation, several moments of presenting, analysing, reflecting and discussing results are implemented within the operational steps. Results can include solutions, knowledge, theories, practices, artefacts, feelings, etcetera. Many outcomes can be verbalised or visualised, but some manifest in a way that eludes the discursive grasp. Knowledge production within PABR means that explicit and implicit forms of knowledge are valued equally. The researchers try to choose forms of presentation and analysis that make these forms recognisable. It has to be made clear that this analysis is one of many possible research narratives. Besides, there might be diverse research narratives that can be known and recognised, but also some that remain unknown to the researcher. PABR is distributed knowledge

II Post-Production Workshop (2013): In the installation Post-Production Workshop an artistic residence with guest artists, a workshop with amateurs, an archive of the performances and an exhibition of former artistic research materials were staged and assembled to question participatory modes of movement. The two-day event was a critical reexamination of the physical and theoretical knowledge gained through earlier performances. It used the participants' physical expertise to reformulate the knowledge towards the question of groove. The movement systems were tested in a series of experiments with regard to their applicability for the understanding of groove in clubs. In the public event framed as an open space installation, audiences and visitors joined the discussion or witnessed the serial movement experiments.

Sebastian Matthias, *Post-Production Workshop*, 2013, Hamburg



ted and combined. This produces a spectrum of results that forms the basis for new modulations. The duration and continuation of the experimental series enables the participating bodies to bring forth new practices⁹, as they slowly adjust and develop their processes. It goes along with the development of perception – new ways of seeing and reading bodies. Perspectives are broadened and changed in relation to the material at hand. Variation in repetition therefore is key for this format.

As research processes, *Laboratory Series* should include formalised protocols of feedback, to report and collect individual experiences. Adjustments of settings should be accounted for with reference to documented data. This could, for example, be done in a collective writing practice, in which all participants face the challenge to find words for their experience. However, a notation or mapping system can also be used to organise the feedback process. In the research process to *The Bodies We Are* (2016)^{III}, Antje Velsingier protocolled the discussion with the performers after each set of improvisations. As in a laboratory (Latour/Woolgar 1986: 87), the co-researchers are constantly adding modalities, citing, enhancing, diminishing, borrowing, and proposing new combinations in movements or practices. Conducting a *Laboratory Series* will always also create knowledge about choreographies, bodies, artefacts, and ways of collective working.

III The Bodies We Are (2016): Everybody has an archive connected to their bodies, in which various memories, images, senses, emotions and practices are stored. In the research process of the performance *The Bodies We Are* Velsingier worked with the appropriation of this archive through movement patterns of foreign bodies, in other words, with bodies outside the realm of Velsingier's performers own experience.
Antje Velsingier, *The Bodies We Are*, 2016, Hamburg

ARTISTIC MEANS

The research format *Laboratory Series* has a proximity not only to the laboratory but also to art practices that use limitations to provoke and spark creativity (Stravinsky 1947:65). Under these circumstances, first ideas and superficial approaches are spent quickly, making way for deeper understandings and innovative interaction. Through playful and non-judgmental attitudes, the group can encounter a question over and over again and look at the matter at hand in numerous unforeseen ways. To overcome or even utilise boredom in this durational process, all participants need to stay focused and disciplined, but also open for unexpected and seemingly silly impulses. Over time, new skills are developed that can lead to a virtuosity of practice. Repetition supports the development of skills and techniques that can manifest in the researchers' bodies and change the range of physical coordination. For example, when investigating the interaction of human and non-human agents in the construction and use of barricades, Moritz Frischkorn limited the elements present in the laboratory to wooden euro-pallets, tires, cobblestones and dancers as co-researchers. He hosted a series of daily improvisations, each lasting one hour, for the duration of six weeks (*A Careful Process*

9 Performance practices: Under the term 'performance practices', all methods, acts, and techniques can be subsumed that are used in the performing arts and in live art. Performance practices are characterised by their representational, semantic, as well as constitutional power that influences their aesthetics in different degrees (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 31-57). Performance practices and strategies have also been converted into tools whose uses are no longer confined to the realms of stage and audience, but which can be used to create various forms of participation. In PABR, we have transformed many formats and techniques that were previously used exclusively for artistic production into formats of exploration and public participation.

of Composition, 2016)^{IV}. He limited the options of co-researchers even further by imposing silence.

As a result, interactions between human and non-human actors emerged which, whilst being artistic, nonetheless revealed a dynamic inherent to barricades, related practices, and politics.

POTENTIALS, PROBLEMS AND OUTCOMES

The development of skills and an innovative virtuosity of practice are common results of this research format. With the developed technique, new perspectives can be opened that were not physically possible before. The development of skills runs parallel to a sharpening of the perception. Knowledge derives from repetitive practices, which are embodied, shared and observed, and is inscribed in the movement repertoire and the bodily skills of participants. In *Laboratory Series*, dynamics often manifest physically first and then are grasped intellectually.

Through the reduction and isolation of actions, the affective dimensions of contribu-

ting elements are uncovered. Though artificially enlarged and detached from everyday reality, the new skills researchers experiment with highlight formerly hidden perspectives. This finally enables an informed transfer into a performance or a performance lecture that makes the research accessible to a wider public. This often is in itself a test (see *Testing in Performance*) to find out whether the outcomes of a laboratory series are received as innovative or have become too far removed from established perspectives on the matter and from sensible applications to be relatable.

The format *Laboratory Series* can also be opened to the public in order to either widen the outside observation process or the testing situation. If opened to a public, the same method of feedback and documentation should be applied as in the preceding laboratory situation.

IV A Careful Process of Composition: On Barricades and Dances (2016): *On Barricades and Dances*

was developed as a practice, a series of workshops and, later, a performance, using a small array of objects (wooden pallets, car tires, cobble stones, tents, and umbrellas) from the context of social protests, where they are agents and witnesses of turmoil and civic transformations. Out of a series of experiments with handling these objects, one specific mode of constructing emerged: making unstable barricades. In building something that was not supposed to become stable, the performative practice consisted of actively negotiating in a physical exchange between human and non-human bodies. Besides a workshop that introduced this alternative technique of handling material, Moritz Frischkorn presented a lecture on revolutionary things. Afterwards, he and his team showed a performance that employed this choreographic practice.

Moritz Frischkorn, *A Careful Process of Composition: On Barricades and Dances*, 2016, Hamburg

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