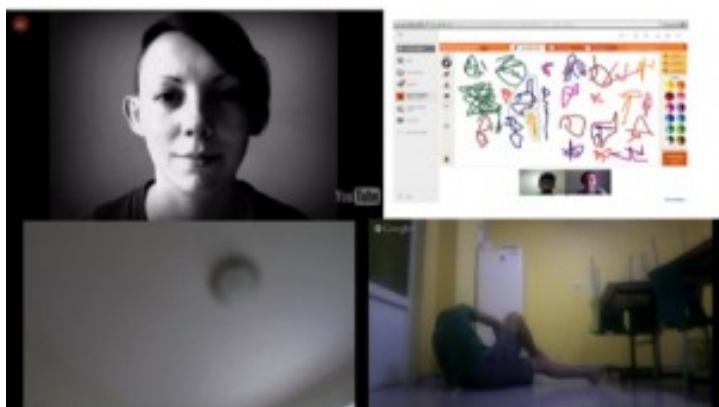




« [Work in Progress 2013 Blog](#)

The First Pilot for Meta-Academy Brings the Jam Online

You have more than likely heard about the increasing importance of online courses in higher education. If you're like me, you respond to the Massively Open Online Course ([MOOC](#)) with a mix of hope and horror. On the one hand, the unprecedented access to knowledge and community is potentially revolutionary. On the other hand, as a dancer, I have many doubts and fears about losing the powerful experience of physical interaction in education. What about being in the room together? What about collaborative learning? What about touch, rhythm, WHAT ABOUT THE BODY?



Meta-Academy screen shots

I had an opportunity to meet these questions head on when [Marlon Barrios Solano](#) approached [me](#) with his idea for [Meta-Academy](#), an experiment in online collaborative learning focused around embodied practices and co-creativity on the internet. Barrios Solano and I were joined by online dance education expert, [Josephine Dorado](#), to launch the first pilot of Meta-Academy at the [Bates Dance Festival](#) in July-August 2013. The pilot, entitled "[Meta-academy@Bates 2013: Minded Motion Lab](#)" focused on collaborating with master improvisation teacher [Nancy Stark Smith](#) to translate elements of her [Underscore](#) to the online space. We asked the question, "what does a collaborative, embodied practice like the Underscore look and feel like if transposed to the internet with all its connective, social, visual, remixing and re-sampling capabilities?"



Meta-Academy participants: Nancy Stark Smith, Marlon

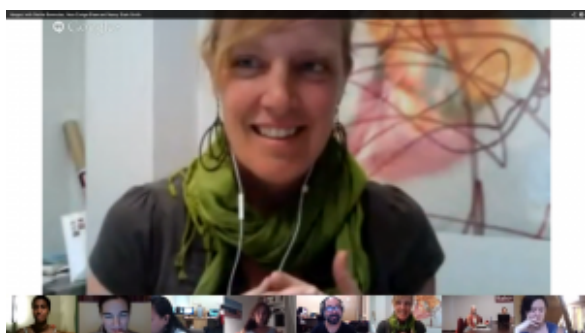
Barrios Solano, Josephine Dorado, Rachel Boggia

Barrios Solano, a dancer and digital media researcher and creator of [dance-tech.net](#) and [dance-tech.tv](#), conceived of Meta-academy as an opportunity to invite artists and authors to experiment with the unique opportunities for collaborative knowledge production available on the internet. Rather than broadcasting existing realms of thought into the online space as courses, Meta-academy proposes to work with experts/artists to translate their ideas into co-creative online activities, creating an online multimedia lab. It is a free, non-hierarchical space in which all participants are treated as artist-scholars and collaborators. It uses massively available platforms such as google+hangouts on air, youtube, and flickr, as well as sophisticated tools for knowledge mapping and visualization. The material co-created stays available online after the lab is over for self-guided learning.

[Meta-academy@Bates 2013: Minded Motion Lab](#) featured creative activities and critical investigations that branched out from a [central video interview](#) in which Nancy Stark Smith describes and discusses the Underscore in detail.

Nancy Stark Smith helped us create a great [resource commons](#) of articles and videos. When we arrived at BDF, Barrios, Dorado and I worked with Stark Smith to design creative and critical activities around the Underscore including:

- videotaped translations of dance exercises with Stark Smith (we called these [embodied activities](#))
- online creative [investigations](#) like [collaborative tagging](#), [mind mapping](#), [online video editing](#), [thick video editing](#), and [collaborative drawing](#)
- [threaded discussions](#)
- [online synchronous video encounters](#) (video chats) in which participants talked and [danced together online](#)
- [Guest lectures](#) in google+ hangouts became active conversations between Nancy Stark Smith, lab participants and researchers on subjects ranging from neuroscience, philosophy, dance and technology, dance notation and the history of contact. Guest lecturers included:
 - [W. P. Seeley \(Philosophy and Cognitive Science/ Bates College, USA\)](#)
 - [Corinne Jola, \(Dance and Neuroscience, NSERM/CEA in Gif-sur-Yvette/Paris\)](#)
 - [Bertha Bermudez \(Dance Researcher/ICK Amsterdam, The Netherlands\)](#)
 - [Norah Zuniga-Shaw \(Dance and technology, composition, critical theories of the body | Associate Professor @ The Ohio State University\)](#)
 - [Hannah Kosstrin \(Resident Scholar @ Bates Dance Festival 2013 and Visiting Assistant Professor @ Reed College, USA\)](#)



Nora Zuniga-Shaw discusses dance documentation with Bertha Bermudez, Nancy Stark Smith and lab participants in a google+ hangout

[66 participants](#) from four continents collaborated in the lab with zeal and creativity. Many were dancers, some BDF alumni, some students of Nancy's, but some were researchers in other fields. They reported increased understanding of the Underscore, digital literacy, creative connections with others across the world, and finding new nuances on the experience of embodiment in relation to the computer interface, their creative work and theoretical approximations. More than 20 hours of video content were created, as well as writing, images, and other forms of creative and critical output. Fascinating questions about embodiment, cognitive processes, creativity, presence, mediation and collaboration on the internet arose.

Barrios Solano, Dorado, and I organized an open lab/gallery showing of works at the conclusion of the Bates Dance Festival, which was met with interest, enthusiasm...and surprise. Participants continue collaborating. All activities and outcomes can be seen (and tried) at <http://www.dantech.net/group/meta-academy-bates-2013>.



Meta-Academy images

We are continuing to develop Meta-Academy and are looking for funding to create a better website interface, as well as to conduct more pilot programs. We are especially looking forward to presenting our work at [Motion Bank “Live and Online 2013”](#) in Frankfurt in November and our upcoming contribution to [Contact Quarterly](#).

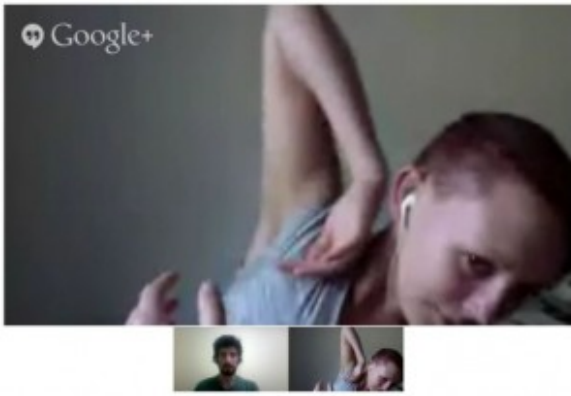
None of this could have been done without the curiosity and creativity of Nancy Stark Smith and her assistant, as well as the support of Laura Faure, the Bates Dance Festival, and Bates College. Also key was the support of the hard working BDF video team, headed up this year by Peter Richards and Lindsay LaPointe. I want to thank them all for their generosity.

Of course the creative energy and sense of community at BDF is something that is hard to describe and so vital to my positive experience this summer. Without the chance encounters in the dining hall, the inspiring, sweaty efforts of my students, peers and heroes in class, the rhythms of the musicians echoing through the quad as I rushed to the computer lab, this project wouldn't be the same. And that brings me back to the excitement, questions, and fears around online learning. There is no way to recreate the magic of BDF or an Underscore online. That's not what we are trying to do. But there is a whole world of related creativity and community available through the internet that is not yet being accessed by the lecture oriented teaching that dominates online education.



a word cloud generated by Meta- Academy participants

The future is now when it comes to the importance of online education, but the models are still being formed. It makes sense for those of us that carry the tradition of embodied, co-creative learning to start to enter this online learning conversation, to put some skin in the game. Master teacher [Stephan Koplowitz](#) is teaching the first MOOC on [site dance](#) on [Coursera.org](#) starting October 21. BDF Alumnus [Emily Lawrence](#) is producing videos for the interactive crafting website [Craftsy.com](#). [Scott DeLahunta](#) and the [Forsythe Company](#)'s [Motion Bank](#) are working with artists like [Bebe Miller](#) to articulate the choreographic process and create examples that dancers have unique but transferable skills to offer the culture at large. But there is much more to be done. The idea is not to replace our traditional experience with an online one, but to enrich the online experience with the knowledge we carry from the studio.



lab participants use google chat for an embodied activity

A full set of images from Meta academy@Bates 2013 can be seen at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/unstablelandscape/sets/72157635329996875/> Thanks to Marlon Barrios Solano for his contribution of text to this post.

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