



THE HATCHERY PROJECT INTERIM REPORT YEAR ONE

by Claudia La Rocco

YEAR ONE:

Hi Sheila, Sara, Craig, Jennifer and Brian:

Today, I am staring at the beginning of trying to make a new work—deeply confused and “discomfited.” Unsystematic—working by trial and error in a non-empirical system.

So your notes on your process with the Hatchery resonated.

I cite these quotes from your statements below: I’m not a believer in “models” ... I’m standing on the outside of it, looking in ... We simply don’t know the answer ... Attempting to push beyond assumptions ... Destabilize conventional notions ... I DO care about making my own work better...

--Annie-B Parson, June 20, 2013

What is it to attempt to make something? A thing that will help other things come into being, things you cannot imagine, things that might not succeed or might drive you crazy if they do? What is it to come together with others in this attempt—friends and respected colleagues who may not do business the way you do business? Artists do this. So do producing and residency organizations (funders, too)—this thing which is deeply, maddeningly human, and marvelously, terribly optimistic. As Ralph Lemon said in a recent tribute to Sam Miller, it involves “such a brilliant, beautiful denial—that someday the boulder is not going to fall down.”

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It can be tempting to think of the organizations that support artists as static and monolithic—they support creativity and flux, they aren’t themselves beholden to these forces. But of course this isn’t so. The Hatchery Project has now been in existence for a year; it’s a baby itself. Yet in this time, it’s been rocked by one intense change—Craig Peterson’s transition from FringeArts (details attached)—and almost daily weathered a shifting set of negotiations between the five partners and four artists. This flux is not the problem, but, as Jennifer Calienes put it, the point: “As a group we have a constant push/pull between the way we know and the way we don’t...The partners are clear as to what this is not, which is business as usual.”

And yet on one level, business as usual goes on, in the form of these nine individuals doing their work, even as they hold it up for examination. Push/Pull:

At the Vermont Performance Lab, Reggie Wilson and collaborators worked for six days in the Guilford Sound studios to develop and record vocals for “Moses(es),” which will have its premiere in Philadelphia this fall. They shared some of their work in a “Community Shout” at the local Grange hall, and recorded the Vermont audience singing one of the hymns (these voices were added to the sound score). Reggie returned four months later to continue working with sound engineer David Snyder, who has evolved from technical supporter to artistic collaborator. “It was immensely

gratifying,” Sara Coffey said, “to see our community’s participation and imprint become part of this project and the extent to which Reggie Wilson was able to make use of Guilford Sound’s production and design expertise.”

In Philadelphia, luciana achugar decided she wanted to use Hatchery resources in part to collaborate with the composer Michael Kiley, whom Peterson introduced her to last year; achugar realized that her needs would be better suited by an ongoing back and forth between Kiley’s city and hers—as Brian Rogers put it, a sort of traveling, “low-impact residency over many months” between various Philadelphia sites and The Chocolate Factory Theater. In doing so, she will draw strength from her already deep relationship with The Chocolate Factory while working to develop a network of relationships with Philadelphia artists.

Wilson (who also had a 10-day production residency in Philadelphia) used his time at MANCC, said Calienes, “to not only intertwine the academic component of his research with kinesthetic exploration in the studio, but to also further it by interactions with local FSU scholars.” He and a collaborator, Dr. Susan Manning, examined manifestations of Moses across cultures, the Islamic, mystic tradition of Zar, Zora Neale Hurston and fractal symmetry. And Wilson continued his Cohort Tracking Project, which engages students at various developmental sites in the making of “Moses(es).”

These are a few of the early outcomes from the Hatchery’s first year in operation, with numerous site visits and proposals planned for the coming years. Following an April workshop/audition at VPL, and a series of delicate negotiations between Annie-B Parson and Sara Coffey, Big Dance Theater will spend a week in August working with 12 local pre-teens to develop movement and sound for “Alan Smithee Directed this Play,” which will premiere at Les Subsistence in the spring (the company will have additional residencies at MANCC and in Philadelphia prior to the premiere). Following premieres of “Moses(es)” and “Alan Smithee Directed this Play,” Parson and Wilson plan to make use of The Chocolate Factory; Wilson as an open space in which to investigate ideas free from the pressures of developing and contextualizing a product, and Parson as a starting point for a new work. achugar has plans for residencies at VPL in October, following a site visit in April, and MANCC in the following year.

And Beth Gill is in various stages of discussion with all of the partners, with a first residency planned at MANCC for December. A key idea behind the Hatchery is for artists to have time. So that it isn’t about: “ok you have two weeks and \$2000, go! Make magic and do it now and then get out of here and please be sure to credit us appropriately in your program notes.” It isn’t surprising that, as the least experienced of the four artists, and one who has risen quickly to prominence, Gill has needed the most time to best understand how to marshal her resources. Nor that, as a mother of a four-year-old and an artist working outside of a company structure, achugar has been interested in forging more fluid connections with these organizations, while Wilson and Parson have moved quickly to organize around their pending company premieres. The promise and challenge of a pilot program like the Hatchery is to be simultaneously stable and flexible enough to allow individual artists to chart their own courses. “The huge, very important thing, is that they are saying we don’t want to just give you a residency for a piece but we want you to think bigger, we want to support your process,” achugar said in April. “This encourages me to be more ambitious, to think beyond my next production and, even though I haven’t done that much work, to think about my legacy.”

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So there it is on paper, pretty straightforward, smooth sailing, etc. In practice? Not quite. During Wilson's residency in Philadelphia, Nick Stuccio of FringeArts quipped that he saw "how much time Craig spent on those Hatchery phone calls." None of the five partners anticipated how much logistical and administrative work it would be to build an adequately durable yet mutable container for the four artists they are seeking to support, particularly in this planning-heavy first year: in addition to 251 combined residency days at MANCC, VPL and FringeArts, three in-person planning sessions (one with all the artists), 13 monthly partner meeting calls, a first round of interviews between Documenter-Evaluator Claudia La Rocco and all the partners and artists, two site visits (Calienes to VPL, La Rocco to Philadelphia), in-take meetings with each artist-advocate pairing and three pre-residency planning visits at VPL, there have been close to 24 meetings with artists and partners (in person and via phone) and countless hours on the phone outside of the monthly partner meetings. These numbers begin to suggest the amount of work it has taken to earn (and keep) each other's confidence and the trust of the four artists, who have understandably been both excited and cautious in navigating this pilot program. This is an ongoing challenge and responsibility, one that the five partners take very seriously. The amount of information sharing among them, both through at least monthly conference calls and a continual flow of emails, is immense, so that they can keep each other in the loop regarding what an artist is thinking, what to watch out for in terms of dealing with a company representative or how to handle a collaborative venture like securing video documentation for an artist (as they did with Wilson, in a coordinated effort between VPL, MANCC and FringeArts that was a direct result of the partners sharing information and problem solving around the particular needs of one artist). And also the support they give each other, sometimes in the form of talking each other off ledges, and sometimes in the form of wrangling, as competing bedside manners and perspectives on best practices jostle in the same space.

"When we started this, I wanted to collaborate with these people and not hate them," Sheila Lewandowski said in March. "I'm serious. Collaboration is very hard. I wanted to be able to have drinks about it, and talk about how hard and how wonderful it was, and in the middle of it try to address the problems in this production-driven system."

Twelve months in, they are still working hard on this front (and so far, still able to have drinks with each other). A key challenge for all of the partners has been maintaining the integrity of their individual ways of doing business while being open to change in a collaborative environment. There are as yet no definitive answers as to what is most important about this Hatchery experiment, only more (better?) questions and doubts and excitements and frustrations and possibilities—and that seems exactly as it should be.

"This first year has been an enormous challenge," Peterson said in June. "It has raised many questions for the partners individually and collectively and it has challenged many of our assumptions. At a recent meeting, we all questioned how successful we have been so far. We agreed that we simply don't know the answer to that question yet but that each of us is willing to keep trying to define and refine what this project is and can be."

Stay tuned.