



## THE HATCHERY PROJECT INTERIM REPORT YEAR TWO

by Claudia La Rocco

*They are practicing trying to move as a group of four, in a circular motion, with no one really leading, or, well, they all have to agree to go in the same direction and motion, to travel and evolve but not fall apart...*

I wrote those words last October, while watching luciana achugar work on material that would eventually become *Otro Teatro*. I was in a dimly lit theater at Marlboro College, which Sara Coffey had secured for achugar as part of her VPL residency. I realized that achugar's choreography was a perfect metaphor for The Hatchery Project. Outside, it was distinctly New England, fall weather—that unmistakable chill beneath an intensely crisp sun. Inside, it could have been anywhere:

*Working in the studio is working in the studio, the materials don't change that much. The slow, halting, groping figuring it out, the sticky parts, the boredom, the flashes of something else, the pulling together for a show...the real thing here is: how is The Hatchery itself working? And just...how much labor is involved. What a crazy amount—what is this endeavor? But then you go back to—what else is there?—in the larger macro human question? And is it about not getting burnt out, or figuring out how to proceed once you are? For the individual, and for the system...*

achugar interrupted my thoughts, announcing to the room: "I know it's a mess. But I think it has potential."

This past year, year two, I watched The Hatchery partners, both as individuals and a system, get burnt out and figure out how to proceed. I watched them do this while they weathered Craig Peterson's transition to an independent entity in Philadelphia (soon to be New York) and prepared for Jennifer Calienes' departure from MANCC (her successor, Carla Peterson, is just now being brought into The Hatchery fold, slowly and thoughtfully). I watched as the inevitable excitement and anxiousness of year one of a big new endeavor gave way to the more certain and more wearying push through of year two. From "Where to begin?" to "How to go on?"

How to go on: this perhaps sounds problematic—but I think it's inevitable and healthy. Systems have to grow up. To refine themselves. Especially systems that are asking big and unwieldy questions. The following, a final quote from that achugar residency, strikes me at The Hatchery's core question. It isn't going to be answered in a year—or, rather, last year's answer won't work today:

"The work of being an artist—an artist who needs other people, other systems, and so is inherently collaborative—what is the best system in which this work should take place?"

If you are asking this question in America, which The Hatchery Project is, then you are asking a thorny tangle of interconnected questions, using trial and error to try to give adequate support to artists in a country where resources are never adequate.

One example of this trial and error occurred with Beth Gill, a fiercely talented artist whose structural organization isn't quite as focused as her choreography. Year two saw an ongoing and

concerted effort from the partners to respond to Gill's pressing needs, but also to help her move into a less reactionary mode of planning. This has been labor-intensive but deeply rewarding.

By the time Gill realized that she badly needed a production residency for her NYLA premiere, it was far too late to apply through the regular channels. The Hatchery partners brainstormed about this, and reached out to various colleagues to find a way to make this work. In the end, Coffey landed a production residency at Mass MoCA which included housing and technical staff. VPL allocated \$5,000 of its money earmarked for Gill's activities in Vermont in order to support the off-site residency. VPL promoted the work-in-progress showing at MoCA to its Vermont audience and included it as a destination for VPL's Performance Club.

It's important to see Coffey's individual effort within the collaborative support of The Hatchery, stemming from group conversations and emails. Likewise, Jennifer Calienes conferred with her colleagues to use an additional \$5000 in Hatchery Funds to get Gill's sound designer down for Gill's 11-day MANCC residency (which I also attended—it appeared to be a productive and fulfilling time for both the artists and MANCC staff). Gill focused both on creation and documentation:

“Beth utilized all aspects of the residency documentation to the fullest,” Calienes said. “Photos from the residency were featured (and credited accurately) in *Time Out* and in *The New York Times*. Raw footage from Chris Cameron (MANCC's media specialist) was used by Beth for her successful Kickstarter campaign and a separate video about the work and residency was developed by MANCC and circulated after the premiere.”

Craig Peterson secured a mini-Maine getaway for Gill, so that she could clear her head and have some time away after her NYLA show. And Brian Rogers gave 162 hours of free rehearsal time to Gill and achugar, through the Chocolate Factory's partnership with spaceworks. These weren't official residencies (all of the Chocolate Factory's official Hatchery residencies will happen in the final year. Says Rogers: “I'm actually pretty excited that things shook down this way. All of the artists will have just completed big projects before they come to CF so they will be able to think about our space and resources a bit differently.”)—but they were, like the Mass MoCA activity, brokered as a result of the Hatchery partners understanding the varied and changeable needs of these artists—needs which aren't always legible to organizations working with artists for shorter, product-driven lengths of time.

Of course, there have been ongoing residency activities at the partner sites. Year two saw a total of 475 combined residency days, monthly partner meeting calls, two in-person partner convenings and one private dinner with all of the artists, partners and La Rocco.

One of these residencies was Big Dance Theater's nine-day production residency in January at the University of the Arts' Arts Bank Theater in Philadelphia. Nine cast members and four company technicians worked with a nine-person local crew and three paid interns from Headlong Dance Institute, all hired by Peterson. This labor-intensive stretch also included community interactions, including choreography students observing Anne-B Parson's work and hearing about her creative practice.

BDT also had VPL and MANCC residencies this year. Parson is by far the most organized and structured of the four Hatchery artists, and, along with Wilson, the most established in terms of touring and commissions. Peterson puts it succinctly: “BDT is a machine.” It perhaps at first sounds paradoxical but is not a coincidence that the partners have experienced the most roadblocks (from scheduling to access) with Parson and Wilson, the two more experienced artists in the group. They,

like the five Hatchery partners, have developed ways of working in the field—often as self-protective mechanisms—that can be difficult to undo. It is one thing to say one is interested in a true collaboration aimed at raising the visibility and value of the developmental process, and another to shift away from business as usual, when you have a way of working that works for you. (As well, some of the partners are questioning their own motivations, in terms of how much they are asking from these artists, and why.)

The Hatchery Project was in large part created to offer more holistic and flexible support, and yet the larger realities shaping how artists (especially experienced artists) have been conditioned to deal with organizations have continued to be felt by all, leading the partners to consider whether it makes more sense to work with younger artists, or artists who are more open to a give and take. As Coffey put it: “Access to artists and their process is critical to building value for the research and development process—an argument which is necessary for us to make if we are to sustain a practice of paying artists for their R&D time. To do this we need artists to actively collaborate with us to co-design the best places for audiences to access or engage with an artist and his/her creative process.”

As The Hatchery Project moves to its final year, key areas of inquiry include:

1. What would a second round of The Hatchery Project look like? As Calienes moves away from MANCC and Peterson moves into his new position at Gina Gibney Studios in New York, how would these four nodal points function in the future?

2. What of the role of administration? Speaking to her role as the money manager, Sheila Lewandoswki noted how important it is “to acknowledge the tension that will always exist around money and programming. I am very glad the artists are being supported as fully as they are by the existence of this project and I enjoy some of the policy related discussions, but, by structure, I am an outsider - insider. Something to think about going forward is the importance or structure of this role. How could it be handled differently?”

3. In the American system how is the investment in R&D made visible—how and where does the investment get credited when a project reaches the public?

4. How best to talk to the field at large about what The Hatchery Project is about, and what it is teaching its participants?

This last point brings us to the AAC Conference in South Carolina this October, where the partners will host a daylong intensive, extending their learning community by engaging colleagues who are invested in dance and gathering more perspectives on the larger topics and challenges of this work. This is a major endeavor, reflecting the partners’ shift in thinking around how best to document their efforts and disseminate this information—i.e., moving away from the static presentation of a blog or report toward a less controlled and more inclusive attempt at engaged research. Another experiment.

Of course, with inclusivity comes disagreement. To end with a quote from Peterson, relating to the editing of this very document: “We are not going to reach full consensus on some of these finer points—and that’s probably a good thing. We are four separate entities, five individuals all with different missions and operating structures. So I kind of like the subtle misalignments—we don’t have to work exactly like one another to advance residency work and raise the profile of creative process.”