



THE HATCHERY PROJECT FINAL REPORT YEAR THREE

by Claudia La Rocco

In the final 365 days of the Hatchery Project's three-year pilot program, four artists and their collaborators were given 563 residency days: a year and a half of time to work, think, daydream, edit, get bored, make a mess, change their minds and refine their practices...

For example, in the time Reggie Wilson and his cohort spent at the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography at Florida State University, he delved into early research for *CITIZEN*, a work inspired by Zora Neale Hurston which will have its premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2016. Wilson worked in the studio with only two of his dancers to hone individual characters (a departure from his full ensemble process), and also brought the Israeli video/photography artist Aitor Mendilibar, allowing for an atypically early exchange with visual technologies, as opposed to the late-stage arrival that often happens in American dance productions—as MANCC director Carla Peterson notes, this early conversation can help avoid “the rushed and unresolved integration into the whole” that often befalls these productions.

Wilson also met with FSU scholars and personnel and shared work with students, offering these young artists vital access to the methodology of a mature and rigorous choreographer.

Though Craig Peterson is now director of programs and presentations at Gibney Dance in New York, he has continued to organize Hatchery residencies in his initial location of Philadelphia. This year he worked with the artist-run Mascher Space Cooperative (which contributed an additional fee of \$1500) to facilitate luciana achugar's visit, in which she conducted group research with 12 local choreographers and dancers, as part of her ongoing inquiries into and beyond the processes of her *Otro Teatro*.

“Luciana, in particular, wanted to explore how to develop a more formal pedagogy around her practice and invite new dancers into her thinking,” Peterson explained. “It was important for her to have a teaching element to the work at this stage as she was desiring to explore how to develop language around the practice itself. She also wanted to work outdoors and so some days culminated in site-specific ‘performance’ with participants, a continuation of her summer research in NYC in 2014.”

The great bulk of The Chocolate Factory's residencies took place in this third year, with all four of the artists working in the theater and various connected satellite spaces.

“I am reporting back after a hyper generative, schizo, brain-like-scrambled-eggs week at Brian and Sheila's church,” Annie-B Parson said of her residency. “Many Big Dance vets, plus a new exciting performer, and two smart interns, gathered to try out a plethora of material that Paul and I had been thinking about for months. Herein we gathered and threw the proverbial spaghetti on the wall. The pieces that fell will live forever in the secret history of the private walls of that hallowed room. Those pieces that stuck will be further developed in a month long residency at BAC this March.”

Additionally, Chocolate Factory co-founder Brian Rogers said, Parson and her partner, Paul Lazar, “expressed a strong desire to convene with the other participating Hatchery artists for a low-stakes, agenda-less conversation.” Wilson was unavailable, but Rogers, Parson, Lazar, luciana achugar and Beth Gill shared a long and productive dinner in May, allowing for a moment of collectivity that some of the artists said they would have liked more of (the Hatchery partners had not wanted to

foist obligatory gatherings on the artists, understanding that many programs can place onerous extracurricular demands on artists).

Vermont Performance Lab as well hosted an artists' dinner, when Gill and two of her dancers came up for a 10-day residency (in which the artists had 24-hour access to a studio at Marlboro College) that overlapped with a visit by the veteran choreographers Jennifer Monson, Wally Cardona and Jennifer Lacey. The occasion was VPL's Open Lab, which gives audiences rare access to artists' rehearsals; as one VPL guest wrote to co-founder Sara Coffey, "We've both been through 'arts' educations where work gets pinned up or displayed and then there are critiques of it and you need to try to explain your intent, etc., so it was cool to see how it worked with performance in a public setting."

Orchestrating such encounters often requires delicate maneuvering, and Coffey remarked that at first there was some tension between VPL and Gill, with the artist desiring more private studio time with her lighting designer.

"Beth felt that the residency was imposing an uncomfortable engagement activity, and we felt like she was designing a residency that was not a good fit with our resources (lighting design) and program," Coffey said, but this tension led to a fruitful compromise. "We felt good that there was a two-way exchange: Beth got the resources, time and support to experiment and develop a new piece and she inspired us to try something new."

Though coincidental, it is perhaps not surprising that the third year of a collaborative residency program yielded an emphasis on exchange and dialogue among the artists; as another example, achugar's MANCC residency also included the writer Jennifer Krasinski, who is working on a Hatchery-funded in-depth profile of achugar's methodologies, and who was introduced to achugar while an embedded writer at The Hatchery Project's daylong symposium "The Art of Supporting Dance-Making," at the Alliance of Artists Communities annual conference in Charleston, in the fall of 2014. Such evolving connective tissue is one of the benefits of having four progressive, artist-centric, knowledgeable arts organizations brainstorming around the needs and desires of individual artists.

It is ironic, but also perhaps inevitable, that this connective tissue frayed among the partners themselves this year. The strains of working closely together as a true collective became increasingly apparent. As Chocolate Factory co-founder Sheila Lewandowski, who served as the grant manager, put it, not having a project manager, something she initially argued for, led to certain systemic difficulties: "We all have a healthy skepticism about consultants and this was one of those times when the room said no... the lack of a shared understanding of outcomes and outputs became a challenge without a mediator helping everyone to stay on the same page. Questions like, 'What should a residency look like?' 'What is public engagement?' and 'What should the culminating reporting look like?' were there at the beginning and there was never consensus so the same questions pervaded the project....I saw it as my responsibility to support each site in the way that seemed appropriate as the fiduciary but resisted being pulled into programming questions. I felt and heard frustration from the partners and accusations of checking out while simultaneously I was accused of trying to control things."

Having left her position as MANCC director, original Hatchery partner Jennifer Calienes took over the role of project manager in the project's final months, streamlining communication efforts as the partners worked to finalize the pilot's goals (including building a detailed web site to gather archival materials) while ultimately deciding that, moving forward, they would form two cohorts. This split was painful—but also productive, yielding a whole new set of questions and possibilities. "Ultimately, when do you know all of what comes of an experiment?" Carla Peterson asked. "One can say what one sees at the moment. But it's not always clear where it all might go. I would say

that that is true with the Hatchery, why it needs more incubation time. But there are already identifiable new directions radiating out of the experiment. That may or may not be enough for a funder for the Hatchery—but then, this isn't a funding proposal."

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Having had a front and second-row seat throughout the initial Hatchery Project, I agree with Carla ... if you're in the trenches, any overview you give must necessarily be speculation. It will be for others, and time, to say and show what this work will yield. In the meantime, here are some parting thoughts from the four individuals who, at its closing, ran the Hatchery collective:

We have done so much more than simply provide a string of residencies for artists. The funding and the production support has been substantial, but as important have been the collective and independent efforts to advance the work of these artists and the practices of the field. As imperfect as this has been with the changes in leadership and the differences around the value of engagement in dance to resistance in creating a model, I do think that the Hatchery has modeled a new and refreshing behavior that puts artists first and values art-making in our society and culture. –Sara Coffey

The Hatchery, by nature, is an experiment. As part of its research around practice, it purposely has lacked a central leader in order to minimize hierarchy and equalize input within its frame—and it was both onto some very good things and splintering by the time I got to the party. But how do you learn without trying different methodologies, and/or political structures? For a long time I have held that the act of experimentation and research undertaken by artists has to also occur on the administrative/creative side. Those in administrative positions must pay attention to how we heed the call to provide responsive and strategic support for progressive artists. In running our small and mid-size organizational ships, if there isn't an ongoing dialectic between administrators and artists, the old hierarchical model of presenting takes hold, and the work of artists is reduced again to product, entertaining at best. –Carla Peterson

If we are honest with ourselves, deeply collaborative projects never last. The strain becomes too pronounced and provocative. Eventually people fade away or become overwhelmed or march away from the conditions of collaboration. Until December, I thought we had more or less avoided one of these fates—but alas, we were not impervious to these human conditions. Nor should we be, I suppose. I could list all of the should have's or could have's—but ultimately it doesn't really matter. What matters most is that four artists + one writer got to dive deep into R & D work in ways that, though not without some struggle or tension, absolutely would not have happened otherwise. And so did I. When luciana said: "Hatchery support enabled me to do more research than I have ever done on my own work. I have never been able to go this deep with my work. Ever."—I am pointedly aware (and grateful) that I feel the same way. –Craig Peterson

Though it is abundantly clear that the Hatchery cannot continue in its present form, I believe strongly that this work is really, REALLY important and should continue. Moving forward, I'd focus even more singularly on the artists: allow the work to make itself, speak for itself, find its own public, and determine its own impact. It's too soon to know how the artistic research we supported will or will not manifest in future works, but to my view, it's the perfect outcome. The project's stated intent was to separate artistic research and investigation from the demands of rehearsal and production cycles; and though that has proven to be a complex challenge (it turns out: artists work on projects, there is always a finish line), I saw—and continue to see—real investigation and real self-reflection happening by the Hatchery artists.

–Brian Rogers