

Colectivo A.M. Responds to Critical Correspondence



In response to *Critical Correspondence's* initial set of questions about the interaction of dance and the visual arts, [Colectivo A.M.](#) composed a round-robin diary based on the creation and performance of their 45 hour-long piece, *Arrecife*, presented over three weeks in August-September 2013 at the [Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo](#) (University Museum of Contemporary Art/ MUAC) in Mexico City.

Responses originally in Spanish follow the English version below.

Nuria

Part I / Day 1: Nobody knows what it is, including us.

The room is ready. 00:00:00 is up on the screen.

4 months without documents and 1 drive that holds all the sound files that are now activated. A microphone hangs from the ceiling in the center of the space. On the floor there is another, one close to the table, and one that Eduardo holds and moves towards the bodies that appear in the space.

We have a five hour choreography, no, it's a 45 hour piece divided into nine days. The work is the same each day. What changes is the document produced daily by the work. Today, the first day, we have the "on the go" sound document. Eduardo is our sound man.

At first glance, it is simply a piece. There is someone documenting the work while it takes place. What it will be is a commentary on the work and, until now, only Eduardo knows what will result from this document he produces as the choreography unfolds.

Part II / Day 1: The sound should be heard to be experienced in a meaningful way... Eduardo has become part of every act that makes up the piece. Suddenly, we have solos, duet, trios, later we are all there, later solos, duets and quartets and all together again. Eduardo is there. If you only observe him, the subtlety of the things he hears with those earphones that encase his head, you can sense it by the gestures he makes, but it is only an approximation, a space of uncertainty that, at the same time, provokes certain certainties within the piece.

Part III / Day 5: 03:32:00. I am in front of the video screen. The sound document is on the table in front of me, audible on two pairs of headphones. People look for the microphones at the corners of the room.

There are none.

Nadia

The meeting that the world of visual arts and choreography are experiencing does not much differ from that of two people encountering each other. With points in common and immense differences, we are tapped to learn to negotiate in order to be able to engage in dialogue. If one attacks the other, no dialogue is possible. In the case of *Arrecife*, one has to understand how the MUAC functions. It is an institutional space and extremely bureaucratic but, at the same time, it flirts with challenging the ways museums of the same size function in other parts of the world. The museum's seductive invitation means one has to be triply cautious; one has to enter the museum with choreographic weapons at the ready, with a clear logic, and with an awareness of the problematics that have come before. Since the museum (for as contemporary as it believes itself to be) is a space that historicizes, that transforms objects into historic objects, we decided to tackle a project in which history would be written, questioned, repeated, or erased moment by moment, in which there would remain no trace other than the memory of those who experienced it.

We have enormous bodies. And many times we are inclined to give them everything. But we are not inclined to prostitute ourselves to everything... (A little bit, yes, because it is a way to negotiate, to feel rich and manipulate the other, but only as suggestion.) We direct a more informal type of economy. Here things have distinct values, and the quality of things depends on you, on the weather, on the humors, the retrograde of Venus, on the amount of time you are willing to give us.



Invitation to performance at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, 2013.

Magdalena

Arrecife: Total concentration in the body. The body without an image, the body that wants to let go of everything to be only a body in movement. The body before the one who documents. The body of the one who documents, trying to trap what it reaches in a lasting form. The body is body in its nakedness. The concrete body is an archive in itself. It is formatted and educated to move in a specific way and it contains all the corporeal representations that it has learned and inherited. The naked and concrete body representing representations archived on celluloid that will be documented in turn in a Borgesian game of mirrors.

Esthel

There is a danger for choreography to fall in the logic of objecthood and distant contemplation that the museums usually deal with. Maybe before saying yes to a museum's invitation, one should think in what way one could play with its time-space conventions. It is really easy to end up objectifying choreography or a dance or, worse, a body. Looking at recent examples of dance entering the museum, I notice a tendency to somehow fit to its logic: If the museum is a place that archives, then let's archive dances. Or, if the museum spectator usually comes and goes, then let's just dance when there is someone in the room, or let's activate the choreography only when there is someone there to watch it.

One thing I appreciate about Arrecife is that I think we manage to avoid some of the museum's logic: If we have three weeks to occupy a room, why not make a choreography that actually lasts all the 45 hours that we will be there. You can come and go, but during that time the choreography will not stop, and we actually need all 45 hours to complete it. It was a long action, and only the ten performers lived it for the full time. We could not assume a spectator would watch it through, but several visitors came back to see how the work was changing. I don't believe that is typical behavior for a museum visitor.

Juan Francisco

The role of the curator is a very tricky one in general, but perhaps even more so in relation to choreography. Talking to Ale [Alejandra] Labastida, the curator of the recent project we developed for the MUAC—the contemporary art museum at the Autonomous University of Mexico—she was very insistent in the problematics of a likely colonizing gaze of the curator towards dance and choreography, being, as most museum curators are, ignorant of the subject, or at least not used to thinking in choreographic terms. I use curatorship as an example because it does have a sort of authoritative voice in the matter. But I think that this colonizing possibility is dangerous in general, and that its responsibility is shared by all involved in the choreography/museum affair. Respecting the fundamental conditions of dance and choreography while they enter a zone that was not conceived for them, not forcing them into an already existing and tested template, we may give space to a lot of interesting problems, both in this relationship itself, and in the internal dialogue of each player, namely, choreography and the museum. Coming back to the particular experience we had, having the curator “on our side” (a.k.a. her awareness of the colonizing danger and not wanting to be trapped by it), it was very interesting to see how the project (that was not only choreographic in form, but whose structure also responded to a choreographic logic), produced a very specific resonance in an audience used to more museum-like propositions, and especially in the staff of the museum themselves. What I am trying to say is that, in this situation, there is the potential for a shift of perspective, and therefore for a displacement of very deep subjectifying structures embedded in

the bases of the museum's idea. I believe that this potential can be realized if we "stay true to choreography", which of course doesn't mean to fight against the so-called epistemic laws of the museum, but rather to identify them and, therefore, to sway and dance our way around them.

Esthel

I think it is important to consider disciplinary specificity, rather than disciplinary boundaries. Pre-determined boundaries will usually lead to a pre-determined idea about the discipline's potential and will, therefore, limit it in some way. By contrast, thinking about specificity does not imply the necessity to deal with limits; it is rather a way to broaden differentiation and, so, to avoid homogenization. In Arrecife, the people that made the documentation came from several different disciplines (photography, physics, primatology, visual arts, among others). What I liked about the encounter between us and them was that we proposed a very specific way to make a document of the dances—one that responded to the choreographic dispositive of the piece—and that made them explore their discipline and medium in a way they usually don't. At the end of the process, some of the documenters spoke of how this collaboration made them discover new facets of their medium and work.

Nuria

I celebrate the chance to go beyond our usual territory as a dance community. By having the opportunity to inhabit the space of different disciplines, specialization breaks down because it will disseminate and push a radical consciousness in approach to artistic work. Additionally, I think personal background always determines the way you relate to anything, but boundaries in a sense are there to be transited. So the considerations to be taken into account are very specific of what a project proposes to use as a tool to engage, in particular with a specific discourse. The goal is to bring elements through discourse into a wider context of work.

Nadia

Necessity, retro-necessity, 60's, 70's, 80's... it's already been done. Bodies, intangible resources, responsibilities, trends, history, spaces, the domino effect, "cultural capitals", architecture, truism, exhaustion, crises (artistic-political), claims, body-to-body, relief, breath, archive, document, death of the archive, archive that does not kill, archive that creates possibility, reinterpretation of the archive, archival resources, durational occupation of space, ambiguous space, neither belonging to the visual arts nor to dance. Spectators working. Curators rethinking. Movement and more movement.

Magdalena

I wonder how real this coming together of dance and the visual arts really is. To think of it this way keeps putting us in an ordered reality, in closed categories that move together. But, if we analyze the situation carefully, it seems that something else is going on. If a certain type of dance can enter the museum comfortably, it is because it has assumed the concerns that were before only the purview of the visual arts. It seemed that these concerns responded to a defined mode of thinking and feeling that we might call "contemporary." This way of thinking and feeling would be validated by authoritative sources, such as philosophers, critics, market tendencies, etc. The museum did not care what form these expressions took, as long as they responded to the aesthetic and conceptual tendencies deemed relevant to the current historical moment. Therefore, it is not a coming together so much as a response to an orientation that is attractive to the museum right now. It has little to do with artistic disciplines.

Juan Francisco

It's not so much about the discipline—fiddly word—but about the position of thought, a phrase I prefer to calling it perspective. Beyond the body as a topic, choreography as a way of thinking is practically inescapable. Take architectural thought, for instance. Architectural thought could be, in very brute terms, reduced to a combination of choreographic, sculptural and economic thoughts mixed together. In designing a building, you have to organize the way it will be inhabited or transited, walked through: you have to think about proportions, aesthetics and physical problems of the thing as object; you have to think about the way it negotiates with the environment, both the one it is embedded in and the one it produces. In choreography, although you can relate, rely or use other ways of thinking, its basic needs and tools are strictly choreographic, which makes it a very wide ranging "toolbox."

So, yes, more than talking about disciplines or genres, I think it would be important to consider positions of thought, or ways of thinking. I'm not talking ideology, but mechanics and their relationships with contexts / context production, and whatever springs from those tensions and frictions.

Nadia

The conditions were already in place. They "gave us a chance" to present our work on the legitimating, monstrous, and marvelous platform that is a contemporary art museum (in our case, associated with the university.) Now, finally, we are able to call ourselves Contemporary Artists, debate with curators, speak of vernissage instead of première. And if

everything goes well, we can leap from the MUAC to the Palais de Tokio, to PS1, to the Tate Modern and end up in the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niteroi...

Although we have not yet decided how we are going to charge for this, nor who is going to pay. This, however, is not just a problem of the museum but of our general human-dancing-choreographic condition.

Colectivo AM came to life after a funeral ceremony at the closure of Sala Tomada (Taken Hall), a choreographic self-curated project in the Teatro de la Danza, Mexico City, at the end of 2010. The current members of the collective are choreography and live-arts related artists. Thrilled about history, defenders of reflection, and critical towards their own work... Though different nationalities are mixed here, the members are based and develop their work in Mexico City, and they think an artistic practice tied up to them from a social, political, artistic and regional reality (understanding region as a fluid concept, applicable in some cases to a city, to Latin America, to the international dance community...) All of the members have a creative project of their own (choreographic / performative / theoretical...) but in AM, each one of them has found a platform to exchange and negotiate, share processes, question results, propose academic activities and eventually, to work around performative proposals as collective.

In 2011, AM presented its essay-performance MEXICAN DANCE inside the frame of Re/posiciones, contemporary live arts forum, Teatro el Milagro; and inside *Des per specti vi zación*, in the frame of the program *Choreographic Perspectives*, at the National University of Mexico (UNAM) dance direction studio. In 2011, AM received funding support from the PADID (Programa de Apoyo a la Docencia y la Investigación y Difusión de las Artes) for the creation of a publication made of creative process materials from specific works by 14 choreographers who currently develop their work in Mexico, with the title: Recetario coreográfico A Roadbook. This book is to be released during the winter of 2012.

Respuestas en español

Nuria

Parte I/Día 1: Nadie lo sabe por ahora. Tampoco nosotros.

La sala está lista. 00:00:00 se mira en la pantalla.

4 mesas sin documentos y 1 que alberga todos los dispositivos de sonido que ahora están activados. Del techo pende un micrófono -en el centro del espacio-, por el piso hay otro, uno cerca de la mesa y el que Eduardo lleva consigo más cerca de los cuerpos que se presentan en el espacio.

Tenemos una coreografía de 5 horas. No, de 45 horas repartida en 9 días.

La obra es la misma cada día. Lo que cambia es el documento que ese día la obra produce. Hoy que es el primer día tenemos el documento sonoro 'on the go'. Eduardo es nuestro 'sound man'.

A simple vista es una obra. A simple vista es un documentador en acción con la obra. Lo que será, es un accionar sobre la obra y que hasta ahora sólo Eduardo conoce la resultante de ese documento que se produce al tiempo que la coreografía sucede.

Parte II/Día 1: Y el sonido debe ser oído para ser experimentado de una manera significativa...

Eduardo se ha vuelto parte de cada uno de los actos que componen a la pieza. De pronto tenemos solos, duetos, tríos, luego estamos todxs, luego solos, duetos y cuartetos y todxs otra vez. Eduardo está ahí. Si lo observas sólo a él, la sutileza de las cosas que él escucha con semejantes audífonos que cubren su cerebro, pueden intuirse por los gestos que hace, pero es sólo una aproximación, un espacio de incertidumbre al tiempo que provoca ciertas certezas en la pieza.

Parte III/Día 5: 03:32:00. Estoy frente a la pantalla de video. La mesa de enfrente tiene el documento sonoro activado por 2 pares de audífonos. La gente busca los micrófonos en los rincones de la sala.

No hay.

Nadia

El que el mundo de las artes visuales y el de la coreografía se encuentren no difiere mucho de que dos personas se encuentren. Con puntos en común e inmensas diferencias, nos toca aprender a negociar para poder entablar el diálogo. Si el uno agradece al otro, no hay diálogo

posible. En el caso de Arrecife, hubo que entender cómo funcionaba el Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, espacio institucional y extremadamente burocrático, y que a su vez coquetea con el funcionamiento de museos de la misma dimensión en otras partes del mundo. Esta seductora invitación implicaba ser triplemente cuidadosos, había que entrar al museo con armas coreográficas, con una lógica clara, y con conocimiento de problemáticas que nos antecedían. Siendo el museo (por más contemporáneo que se crea) un espacio que historiza, que transforma los objetos en objetos históricos, decidimos emprender un proyecto en el que la historia que se escribiera, se cuestionara, se repitiera o se borrara en cada instante, en el que no quedara más rastro que la memoria de quien lo vivió.

Nosotros tenemos unos cuerpos enormes. Y muchas veces estamos dispuestas a darlos toditos. Pero no estamos dispuestas a prostituírnos del todito... (Un poco sí, porque es una manera de negociar, sentir rico y manipular al otro, pero sólo como sugerencia). Le manejamos un tipo de economía más informal, acá las cosas tienen valores distintos, y la calidad de las cosas depende de usted, del clima, de los humores, del retroceso de Venus, del tiempo que está usted dispuesto a dedicarnos. Al fin que su tiempo y el mío, van a ser compartidos.

Magdalena

Arrecife: Todos concentrados en el cuerpo. El cuerpo sin imagen, el cuerpo loopeado, el cuerpo que quiere despojarse de todo para ser solo cuerpo en movimiento. El cuerpo frente al documentador. El cuerpo del documentador que trata de atrapar lo que le toca en un soporte durable.

El cuerpo es cuerpo en su desnudez de cuerpo. El cuerpo concreto es un archivo en sí mismo. Está formateado y educado para moverse de determinada manera y contiene todas las representaciones corporales que ha aprendido y heredado. El cuerpo desnudo y concreto representando representaciones archivadas en celuloide que serán documentadas a su vez en una suerte de juego de espejos borgiano.

Nadia

Necesidad, retro-necesidad, 60's, 70's, 80's... ya se hizo. Cuerpos, bienes inmateriales, responsabilidades, modas, historia, espacios, efecto dominó, "grandes capitales culturales", arquitectura, turismo, agotamiento, crisis (artística-política), reivindicación, corps-à-corps, relieve, respiro, archivo, documento, muerte del archivo, archivo que no mata, archivo que posibilita, reinterpretación de archivo, bien de archivo, ocupación duracional del espacio, espacio ambiguo que no es el de las artes visuales ni el de la danza. Espectadores trabajando. Curadores repensando. Movimiento y más movimiento.

Magdalena

Pienso en cuán real es este acercamiento de la danza y las artes visuales. Pensarlo así nos sigue colocando en una realidad ordenada en categorías cerradas que se acercan para ir juntas, cuando si lo analizamos cuidadosamente, parece que lo que está sucediendo es otra cosa. Si cierto tipo de danza puede entrar con comodidad al museo es porque ha tomado como propias las preocupaciones que antes solo atañían a las artes visuales. Pareciera que estas preocupaciones respondieran a una manera de pensar y de sentir definida, que podríamos denominar como contemporánea. Esta manera de pensar y sentir estaría validada por las voces de autoridad (como filósofos, críticos, tendencias de mercado, etc) y al museo no le importa el soporte en el que se exprese, siempre y cuando responda a las tendencias estéticas y de pensamiento relevantes para este momento histórico. No es entonces un acercamiento sino más bien sucede que se responde a una misma subjetividad que es atractiva para el museo y que no tiene que ver con disciplinas artísticas.

Nadia

Las condiciones ya están puestas. Nos "dieron chance" de montarnos sobre esa plataforma legitimadora, monstruosa y maravillosa que puede ser un museo universitario de arte contemporáneo. Ahora, finalmente podemos llamarnos Artistas Contemporáneos, discutir con curadores, hablar de vernissage en vez de *première*. Y si todo sale bien, podremos brincar del MUAC, al Palais de Tokio, al PS1, a la Tate modern y terminar en el Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói...

Aún no decidimos cómo vamos a cobrar, ni quien va a pagar. Pero este problema no es sólo del museo, sino de nuestra condición humano-coreográfico-dancística.

A finales del 2010, el **Colectivo A.M.** se integra después de una ceremonia fúnebre, llevada a cabo durante el cierre de la presentación del proyecto coreográfico Sala Tomada en el Teatro de la Danza de la Ciudad de México. Los actuales integrantes de este colectivo son artistas vinculados con la danza y las artes escénicas, apasionados por la historia, defensores de la reflexión y críticos de su propia labor. Si bien se mezclan aquí distintas nacionalidades, todos ellos están basados y desarrollan su trabajo en México D.F. y piensan quehacer artístico que les atañe, a partir de una realidad artística, social y política, regional (entendiendo *región* como un concepto fluido, aplicable en algunos casos a una ciudad, o al continente latinoamericano, al gremio dancístico...) Cada uno de los integrantes tiene un proyecto creativo propio (coreográfico/interpretativo/teórico/...) pero en A.M., cada uno, ha encontrado una plataforma para intercambiar y negociar, compartir procesos, cuestionar resultados, proponer actividades académicas y eventualmente, para trabajar en torno a propuestas escénicas en colectivo.

En 2011, AM presenta el ensayo escénico MEXICAN DANCE en el marco de Re/posiciones, foro de escena contemporánea, Teatro el Milagro y Des per specti vi zación. Visiones coreográficas, en el Salón de danza UNAM. En 2011, AM recibe el apoyo del Programa de Apoyo a la Docencia y la Investigación y Difusión de las Artes (PADID) para la realización de una publicación compuesta por materiales del proceso creativo de 10 obras de coreógrafos, que desarrollan acutalmente su trabajo en Mexico con título: Recetario Coreografico. Un roadbook. Texto en proceso.

<http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=8804>