

Leaving the figure vacant_what if we let go of being [artists]?ⁱ

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In the same year (2012) of the temporary occupation of *Puerta del Sol* in Madrid, the choreographer Paz Rojo held a workshop together with a group of non-professional participants with the title: *Choreography: a problem to practice*. The workshop was not just a workshop, it was an attempt to leave certain comfort zones of the choreographic practice and of certain conditions of the art marketⁱⁱ. This activity was part of a broader and more complex research framework that had begun in 2010 with the project *A Piece... Together?*ⁱⁱⁱ. This project gave form to different artistic practices and experimental methodologies both done in different contexts and with different collaborators. The problem to be practiced was *the ways of being / thinking / working together*. The idea was to test ways of suspending our pre-established and self-determining identities, particularly the identity of “We” and the representation of the body and space in certain contexts, so corporalities could emerge with the purpose of opening holes and creating crossings that would sustain the question of how to create discourse from a plural perspective^{iv}. Between 2011 and 2012, Paz Rojo provided a continuous and relational research framework called “C O R E Ó G R A F X S”. It consisted of itinerant workshops, actions and / or choreographic experiences, meetings and documentary interviews^v. One of its starting points was the critical update (in the current market-oriented democracies) of certain aspects of the New York dance culture of the 1970s - such as the creation of tools to activate new collective forms -. They were based on the figure of the “body-work-brand”. This triple figure was interesting because it responded to processes of precariousness and mobility that prevented the dis-appropriation and / or production of other alternatives of the common understood as sensitive, affirmative pluralities, and based on the desire for an autonomy of WE as an open condition. Both frameworks proposed strategies and tools that linked the practices of the singular and plural body with the most urgent political and social context, with the purpose of experiencing ways of inhabiting, opening and sustaining “a problem” from within and, consequently, testing out new implications of choreographic practices in their own lives and other proliferations of the common.

It was in this context that *La Casa Encendida*'s invitation arose to occupy the space left by the *In-presentable*^{vi} festival at the end of its cycle in 2012. Paz Rojo was the first interlocutor. Attending to the situation and the possibility of acting in relation to this set of problems, she opened the proposal to a small group of collaborators, who extended this invitation to more artists, and finally becoming a group of around forty people including artists, collectives, philosophers, researchers, academics, humanists and architects, among others. This project was developed as an attempt to provide a framework and a space for practical research to address those issues. A body / community / strategy / counter-festival that could dialogue, even if they were ephemeral, with a specific economic and political situation, with the ways of producing a scene, of understanding the perception and value of the artistic experience and with the figures and the roles that are usually activated when a spectacular apparatus emerges. This attempt should be designed and constructed

from the artistic proposals of those involved so that they could determine the form of the project and not, as is often the case, that the structure of the project determines the participation of the work and the artist. Thus, in mid-2013 from it *what if we let go of being [artists]?* emerged.

[*little green bears are everywhere*]

In June 2013, at the end of *what if we let go of being [artists]?*, the anonymous collective *Perro Paco* published a post on *Teatron* with the name *Did they let go of being (artists)?*:

“Throughout the festival, and especially the first days, a reoccurring conversation was:

X: Hey, something is happening, isn't it?

Y: I think so.

X: And what is happening?

Y: I do not know.”

During the seven-day program, the project offered workshops in the morning, meetings and conversations in the early afternoon, and, after eight o'clock at night, a *Sequence Shot*. Many people got involved during those days in *what if we let go of being [artists]?*, for example: extras, secondary actors, extras, Norberto Llopis, Jaime Llopis, Terrorismo de Autor, Carolina Boluda, Juan Calatayud, Vicente Arlandis, Hipólito Patón, Luis Alberto Zamorano, Jaron Rowan, Jara Rocha, Silvia Nanclares, Rafa Tormo i Cuenca, Paz Rojo, Gerry, Jaime, Anna, Peter, Costas, Caroline, Amanda Piña, Daniel Zimmermann, Paulina Chamorro, Miguel Guzmán Pastor, David Grácia, Ester Jordana, Emilio Tomé, Ali&Cia, Fernando Quesada, Cualquiera, Sandra Cendal, Rafa SMP, Esther Blázquez, David Pérez, Wanda, PKMN, Laura Bañuelos, Play Dramaturgia. Como invitados, Peter Pál Pelbart, Jordi Claramonte, Aitor Erce, Marina Garcés, Amador Fernández Savater...

As a whole, *what if we let go of being [artists]?* proposed a context of research and creation, whose principle was a sustained question that was not supposed to be answered, but rather to be sustained in common. Each aspect of it could be experienced as a potential interruption, open and compatible.

But *little green bears* are everywhere and it is going to be very difficult and problematic if a project is based on the expectations of success demanded by institutional procedures, artistic goals or just the audience. The difficulty of this tension is not in *what happens* but in *expecting something*. Assuming that any radical criticism will be absorbed by some of the capitalist procedures that we mechanically execute every day, we had to put in brackets *what we are* to prove *what we are not*, accepting that *we are* and *are not* necessary for the institutional, social, and artistic context. This sort of *zero point of expectation* - if it is possible to experience it at all - expected to affect on the

one hand what an institutional space can exert on the potentiality of a project, and on the other, it expected that the blurring of the formats and procedures themselves would cause a general critical reflection about the value of the artistic experience in a context of crisis. But we did not count on the fact that another neutralization would be given from our own horizon of expectations, from our experiences as brands and workers, from the learning process and attachments that we know work in the circuits of artistic exchange and the difficulty of suspending and displacing all this.

However, that margin of maneuverability that we gave ourselves, which can also be understood as the willingness to affect or be affected, manifested itself not only as a possibility, but as a double condition that always operates together. By affecting something the whole context is exposed to being affected in some way. Each one involved, each action, each encounter with other slightly experiences a displacement or a transformation that can be experienced in different degrees. This was also due to a predisposition within the context that allowed the appearance of a margin of unpredictability. From that moment on, it was not possible to control the predetermined trajectories which ended up arriving in unpredictable zones. Testing indeterminacy affects expectations and facilitates, if desired, certain ethics related to the ways in which we inhabit uncertainty together. Waiting for something to happen implies placing oneself in the closing of expectations. It involves measuring situations by the parameters of success and failure and within that binary logic we know that we all lose simply because we exclude the possibility of something else happening, something unexpected. Affecting (us) is a relational form of communication that exposes us. However slight it may be, it can lead to a threshold, a change in power, potentialities or even an opening to experience.

In short, *what if we let go of being [artists]?* consisted of creating a swarm of conditions for *other* possibilities to happen. When a number of factors are brought into play, interfering with each other, the resulting mode does not have to be understandable at first sight. Some of the aspects that gave to the project the appearance of a festival, they were horizons that were always accompanied by uncertainty and not everyone was willing to assume the risks involved. That uncertainty experienced was the closest thing to freedom - although that word is today almost completely distorted - and it was always beyond our possibilities to organize and control it. There was an opening, a fissure that made it easier to experience ourselves interconnected with others and with different situations in a broader process than our individual brands and knowledge. Experiments that stimulated the thinking and artistic practice, and that certainly gave us the possibility of *letting go of being* like a mechanism of maneuverability, of openness, that offered access and a passage to a potentiality: that of being exactly there where we were most intensely.

The original title in Spanish is: [des] ocupar la figura ¿y si dejamos de ser [artistas]? The translator has decided to translate “desocupar” as “vacate” since there is no English word for “de-occupy”.

ii This workshop began with *Acción Inaugural*, presented in October 2011 in the Festival Sismo 2011. Full vídeo: <https://vimeo.com/41110837>.

iii More information: <http://apiecetogether.blogspot.com.es/2009/12/crearjuntos.html>

iv One of the pieces created within the project *A Piece...Together?* was *WE THINK, WE LIKE THAT* (2010) presented in the Sao Paulo International Dance Festival in Sao Paulo. The idea behind this piece was to cancel out the dominant representation of a public space, working space, theatrical space by making a collective useless construction.

v Some of the actions were: *Lo que sea moviéndose así* (2011); *Acción Inaugural – We are gerrying* (Festival Sismo 2011); *EX POSICION UNIVERSAL (democracy is a psycho-kinetic training)* (2012); *YES WE CANNOT a pre-formance in the age of confusion* (2012); *I don't like community in the same way I don't like contact improvisation* (2012).

vi The festival *In-Presentable* has been curated by Juan Domínguez since 2003.