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The Poetics of Pleasantness: A Relational Dance Project and Artifact of Feminine Resignification

ABSTRACT: The objective of this article is to present an analysis of the relational dance project The poetics of pleasantness, considering that this creative process and the product constitute an artifact of feminine resignification and a personal transformative rite, given that this scenic proposal elaborates with criticism on pleasantness as a mandate of hegemonic femininity. We propose that this initiative is inserted in the recent feminist approaches about care, the need for personal deconstruction and the formation of an affective community among women. Based on a qualitative methodology, the video art of the work as the interviews with the participants in the project are analyzed. The conclusions suggest that the symbolic efficacy of the scenic proposal resides in its congruence with feminist stakes and in the representation of a feminine *ethos* built collectively during the creation process.

KEYWORDS: Femininity; contemporary dance; creative process.

La poética del agrado: un proyecto de danza relacional y artefacto de resignificación femenina

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es presentar un análisis del proyecto de danza relacional La poética del agrado, considerando que este proceso creativo y la obra artística constituyen un artefacto de resignificación femenina y un rito de transformación propia, dado que esta propuesta escénica elabora críticamente sobre el agrado como un mandato de la feminidad hegemónica. Proponemos que esta iniciativa se inserta en los planteamientos feministas recientes acerca del cuidado, la necesidad de la deconstrucción personal y la conformación de una comunidad afectiva entre mujeres. A partir de una metodología cualitativa analizamos el videoarte de la obra, así como las entrevistas a las participantes del proyecto. En las conclusiones planteamos que la eficacia simbólica de la propuesta escénica reside en su congruencia con apuestas feministas y en la representación de un *ethos* femenino construido colectivamente durante el proceso de creación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Feminidad; danza contemporánea; procesos creativos.

HOW TO QUOTE

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Introduction

The main goal of this article is to present an interpretative analysis of an artistic work and its creative process in which the resignification of femininity is proposed from the creation of a contemporary dance piece entitled *La poética del agrado* (The Poetics of Pleasantness). The idea of femininity and its resignification is a constant in the scenic production of the contemporary world; recently in Mexico, as an example, are the one-woman shows: *Cielito Sweet* and *Wilma* by Briseida López and Itzhel Razo, respectively, the anonymous choreographic piece by Melva Olivas or the program *Cuerpos Disidentes* (Dissident Bodies), part of the scenic cycle *Dramaturgias Ambulantes* (Ambulant Dramaturgies) 2022, where seven female choreographers presented works that reflect on women's bodies and the feminine aspects. However, we are interested in framing this proposal in a context characterized by the resonance of feminist actions and discourses in the world and in Mexico, as well as by different creation dynamics due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this situation of social change, the proposal resizes and updates several approaches of feminist thought about women's liberation, even though the director does not self-identify as a feminist. In this way, the creative process proposed by the group convened by Rocío Reyes, congruent with her initiatory interest in questioning one of the roots of hegemonic femininity, which is the constant search for the recognition of others, is experienced as a rite of self-transformation, that is, of the members who participate in the project. As a starting point for this project, which is both a personal exploration and a creative process, we start from the investigation of the participants' experience of pleasing, bringing to the present the sensation and memory of the moment in which they first recognized the need to seek the liking of others.

Valcárcel (2010) argues that the law of pleasure is a duty, a mandate of femininity that is above other duties such as obedience, sexual purity, abnegation, and modesty. It is an imperative that has been transformed but maintains its validity today. This law has been expressed in how femininity is represented in different media. On the other hand, Zafra points out that pleasing "is usually directed to the one we like, or with whom we do not want a confrontation, or to the one who has some power over us" (Zafra, 2021, p. 95),

revealing an asymmetrical relationship between the one who wants to please and the figure on whom the pleasing is directed. In this case, it is the asymmetrical relationship between women and men.

This creative project questions this law, proposing a reflective work and personal search, to re-signify from the awareness of the origin in personal history to such an imperative. It also poses an answer to the question with another question: what would happen if never again, as a society, would a woman be taught to please others without first pleasing herself? This idea illuminates a path centered on self-knowledge that ultimately seeks to reconfigure gender-related inequalities. Hence the importance of giving an account of this artistic project that seeks to re-signify femininity and the configuration of new horizons for those for whom art is political.

The analysis we develop is based on two perspectives that we are interested in combining: studies on feminism and gender identity and anthropological theories of the performative and the role of art in the processes of subjectivation. Likewise, taking up the idea of artifact from Mukarovsky's aesthetic theory (Jandová and Volek, 2000), we envision *The Poetics of Pleasantness* as an artifact of feminine resignification, since it emerges as an experiential proposal that gives form and content to the staging that would allow the reconstruction of identity.

The first part of the article covers the presentation of the background and aesthetic premises of the work. It is followed by the second part, which presents the theoretical approach that is situated between gender studies and performance theories. The third part contains the methodological strategy, and the fourth part analyzes the symbolic efficacy of the project through the interpretation of the video of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* and the experience of the dancers in the creative process. Finally, in the conclusions, the findings are synthesized, and the elements that allowed this creative experience to outline a feminine ethos, as a prefigurative bet of the social becoming, are proposed.

Background and Aesthetic Premises of The Poetics of Pleasantness

To understand the scope of the project *The Poetics of Pleasantness*, it is necessary to situate this proposal in space and time. First of all, it is important to consider that it is inscribed in the work of dance in Mexico City, which is the capital and political-economic-cultural center of the country. It is a metropolis that has been considered cosmopolitan due to the confluence of diverse cultures and its high global interconnectivity. It is a cultural center that gave rise to the emergence of the field of Mexican stage dance (Tortajada, 1995, p. 28), home to the first ballets and the first independent contemporary dance groups. It is there where we find a consolidated field in constant expansion and diversification. The above coincides with the data of Guadarrama (2020, pp. 195), who points out that by 2015 the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City concentrated 32.5% of the creative professionals in the country.

On the other hand, the field of contemporary dance has historically been characterized by its feminization in a double sense: by the increased presence of women and by the social devaluation of this occupation. In addition, dance presents an anthropologically feminine condition, since it is originally part of a sexual division of labor, in which male domination gave rise to the sexualization of dance. Thus, women by being looked at become objects of desire and dependent on the gaze of others (Fort, 2015).

The above helps to understand the scarce recognition and the difficulties to have an economic life from this occupation, which leads to processes of precariousness and multiactivity, as also occurs in other fields of artistic activity (Solís and Brijandez, 2018). Therefore, as Juárez (2018) shows, female performers and choreographers live between tensions and distensions, in their trajectory to follow their vocation and have economic resources to survive.

This tension was accentuated by the COVID-19 crisis, which globally affected all dimensions of social life. Although the effects of this pandemic are yet to be understood, it is possible to point out that, in the field of cultural activities and the arts in Latin America, it has had devastating effects (Guadarrama, *et al*, 2021, p. 41). And Mexico City was no exception, since during the quarantine, the closure of non-essential activities, and the

generalized uncertainty, affected the creative research of a project imagined to be realized in contact and joint exploration. Instead, its development had to be paused for almost a year, between 2020 and 2021, to continue unexpectedly and translate what was initially intended as a staging and a collaborative workshop into a virtual result through video art.

This coincides with what the global community of artists experienced, where the ways of thinking and conceiving creative processes had to be adapted. Thus, in the field of contemporary dance, "...not only have the strategies for thinking and feeling the body and its possible expressive routes changed, but also, and very importantly, the language through which we can name the corporal exercise in art. The material presence of bodies becomes mediated presence; the physical stage of representation is now a grid, and the conviviality, technovivio" (Sotelo, 2021, p. 17).

In addition to the above, society in general and dance artists in particular were immersed in a convulsive field of life transformations:

[...] the whole world was fighting important battles as part of the feminist struggle against patriarchy and the systematic violence exercised against women from all spheres of daily life. An important dispute was already taking place on the world scene for gender equality, our reproductive and sexual rights and the democratic participation of women in all territories of contemporary life [...] (Sotelo, 2021, pp. 15-16).

It is in this context that the work of *The Poetics of Pleasing* and the experience of the participants is inserted to reflect on the importance of pleasing, in their condition as women. The proposal is defined from the need to transcend the traditional forms of staging, where directors take distance from the performers, promoting unidirectional processes with emphasis on the formal. On the other hand, *The Poetics of Pleasantness* is part of the current of relational art, which consists, according to Bourriaud (2004), in producing relationships with the world, with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects, it is interested in generating a link with the spectator that transcends the simple

communicative act and manages to disrupt and incorporate a new meaning in the imaginary and the feeling of the audiences.

Rocío Reyes defines her proposal as relational dance, in the midst of several crossroads derived from her experience as an artist and woman: firstly, it crystallizes as a result of her motherhood and the pause it meant in her life as a dancer; secondly, because of her interest in the creative process rather than the product; thirdly, in her concern for human relationships, for transmitting emotions and provoking transformations, for content rather than form, for the very experience of the people involved in the projects. In her words:

[...] for me relational dance must respond to the public, that's why I no longer name my projects as contemporary dance, because from my point of view contemporary dance has moved away from the public [...] that's why I like to name the project as relational dance, because although the search does respond to certain guidelines of the contemporary, [...] it has to do with how to get out of the canons and contemporary language in terms of movement, I think it responds mainly to the relationship that is generated with the possible public, with the space, [with the performers] (Rocío, 2021).

It is significant how Rocío Reyes frames her proposal as a countercultural form, since after several years of working as a performer in very hierarchical creation processes, she proposes to undertake a process where horizontality and co-creation are privileged, in which a meaningful relationship is built with the work team. That is why she names the participants as creative collaborators, alluding to their more active role in the project. In this regard, she comments that:

[...] it makes me question a lot how we confuse direction with tyranny, it is literally radical and in dance it happens a lot [...] It causes me a lot of conflict to think that we confuse direction with shouting, with chains of power, sometimes for me direction tends to a more maternal place, more loving, more from the listening [...] (Rocío, 2021).

This proposal updates feminist approaches to the ethics of care, which, according to Gilligan (1985), is a set of principles that recognize interdependence, imply social responsibility, and call for consideration of the other in his or her particularities. These ideas arise from listening to the voice of women in their moral development, which had been absent in previous studies, in which only men were considered as referents.

Such an approach becomes relevant in a context where care is a central concern. This results in the elaboration of a system of care that extends the limits of our bodies in medical records, official documents, virtual profiles, among other ways of extending our materiality. These extended bodies, according to Groy (2022), become symbolic bodies where emotions, feelings and contact fade or are relegated to the background. *The Poetics of Pleasantness* critically confronts this system of care, proposing to pay attention to the experiences of bodies within a creative process that enables a collective dialogue that is woven from the stories and feelings of its participants.

At the same time, Rocío Reyes' proposal questions the hegemonic forms of exercising power in patriarchy: power over others. On the other hand, the feminist proposal puts forward other forms of exercising power, such as power with others, power for others and power from within, all of which would be part of a process of women's empowerment (León, 1997).

Feminine resignification and the political subject of feminism

Gender studies have argued that feminine identity is constructed under the premise of putting the gaze of others before one's own recognition. Women construct a life project for others, based on the centrality of the traditional imposed roles of mother and wife, and in general on their role in the care of others. Likewise, in the social history of women, they have been conceived as dependents, so that economic, emotional, and sexual autonomy has been a horizon that implies a struggle against gender inequality that prevails to this day.

According to Sánchez (2002), women have been conditioned in their desires, activities, and values as persons, through primary socialization processes, to assume the roles of housewife, wife, and mother in the family. In these socialization processes, what Bourdieu (1999) calls symbolic violence plays an important role, that is, the set of mediations that allow the dominator to exercise coercion as part of the instituted, therefore, as a "natural" condition of life.

This coercion is expressed as a symbolic matrix that conditions the construction of the feminine from the outside, as a model structured under a patriarchal logic. According to Butler, the construction of the feminine is materialized as a temporal process "that operates through the reiteration of norms" (2002, p. 29). Thus, identities around the feminine are configured through their discursive reiteration and practice throughout history, defining boundaries on what it means to be a woman.

However, this symbolic matrix presents certain openness by implying the possibility of destabilizing the notions of the feminine, considering that in "...this very reiteration opens gaps and fissures that represent constitutive instabilities of such constructions" (Butler, 2002, pp. 29-30). Moreover, nowadays this situation is potentialized in a context of media exposure where "everyone is subject to an aesthetic evaluation; everyone has to assume an aesthetic responsibility for their appearance in front of the world, for the design of themselves" (Groy, 2014, p. 32). This, on the one hand, has become a way of presenting ourselves to the world: avatars, filters, presentations in virtual profiles as new forms of self-production. However, although we are all affected by this new aesthetic imperative, it is also true that the asymmetries and forms of inequality mentioned above do not disappear, but, on the contrary, find new spaces for their reproduction.

From Dubar's (2002) perspective, we are witnessing a crisis of gender identities due to the transformations in women's status, which have taken place because of different processes that have promoted women's economic and sexual autonomy, such as: accelerated incorporation into the labor market; greater control over procreation and sexual liberation; as well as advanced recognition of their human rights. Although the author puts forward this idea based on what has happened in France since the end of the

last century, it seems to us that it is valid in social contexts such as Mexico, where the feminist movement dates to the beginning of the last century. In addition, the 1990s saw the beginning of the institutionalization of the gender perspective, both through feminist action in various spheres and with varied scopes, and through the signing of international agreements derived from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Resistance to change mostly explains the context of gender violence and femicide in the country, while at the same time allowing us to recognize that these inequalities and violence are still far from disappearing. In response, in recent years we have witnessed a growing effervescence of the feminist movement.

During the last months of 2019 in Mexico, particularly in Mexico City, a growing and vigorous mobilization of young women took over the public space (streets, squares, universities, mass media and social networks) and have led the resurgence of one of the most innovative, radical, and stimulating movements of recent decades. The central core of their demands has been to denounce and stop violence against women, which has become increasingly visible and persistent in many different areas, reaching scandalous and unacceptable extremes, such as the increase in femicides in different regions of the country, with particular emphasis on Ciudad Juárez and the State of Mexico (Álvarez, 2020, p. 148).

Women's struggle is waged both at the collective and individual levels, precisely because of the normalization and invisibilization of inequalities and injustices. The reconstruction of identity is therefore a process that women undergo in the shaping of their autonomy and that implies a work on themselves. It is in this process where we recognize with more clarity the conformation of subjectivities that are placed in dissent to the patriarchal order. When considering identity as a resource, in the sense proposed by Dubet (1989), it becomes a symbolic reference that the subject uses strategically in her social interactions, giving rise to a particular way of facing the world, that is, to a subjectivity that dialectically and historically articulates the inner world and the outer world. The acts of identity reconstruction imply in turn the reconfiguration of subjectivity itself, which can be

part of a collective process of construction of a political subject, in this case the political subject of feminism.

The creative initiative of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* is inserted in these social dynamics of change, by proposing a creative process that confronts the feminine condition of dependence on the gaze of others and questions the fulfillment of a mandate of hegemonic femininity. In this way, we can conceive *The Poetics of Pleasantness* as an artifact of resignification, which seeks the emergence of counter-hegemonic subjectivities, both for those who participate and for the spectators who come into contact with it. Likewise, in Brzovic's (2018) perspective, dance as a language can be conceived as a performative act that produces the effects it names; therefore, it has the potential to transform realities as proposed in this project. It is following this analytical proposal that we will further analyze the symbolic efficacy of *The Poetics of Pleasantness*.

Nevertheless, we approach creative processes as experiences loaded with a symbolic dimension that contributes to configure meanings about individuals. It is in this sense that we understand these processes as rites of passage (Turner, 1988), through which it is possible to blur social norms and move towards new ways of conceiving oneself as a person. Also following the ideas of this author, Schechner (2000) suggests that the transformations that occur in the theater take place at the level of the drama or plot, in the actors who experience a re-arrangement and in the audience for whom the change may be permanent or temporary.

This is of interest, since our hypothesis is that in the work of creation of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* a process was configured in which its participants, immersed in reflections on their personal experiences in relation to the ideas of the feminine and the woman, as well as in the momentary distancing and dislocation of the normative structures, find themselves in the possibility of re-signifying their femininity. While the argument of the work is based on a questioning of the gender order and an opening on the staging towards the revaluation of other qualities of femininity, it is also expected to influence the spectator. Likewise, we can think of this creative project from the idea of performance

pedagogies as aesthetic-political strategies that produce embodied knowledge that allows other ways of understanding gender relations (Gutiérrez, 2022).

In the development of the field of performance studies, Schechner (2000) has built bridges between Turnerian observations of rites of passage in tribal communities and the experiences of artists in the modern world, which has made it possible to account for how performance makes it possible for transformations to occur in the consciousness of the actor and the spectator. Another central concept for this proposal is *communitas*, this notion allows us to observe the symbolic resources that are used to oppose the hegemonic discourses that hierarchize life (Turner, 1982); this is not only a symbolic resource, but also a set of actions that can unsettle social hierarchies. Community is not only the evocation of a world without structure but also a resource that directly confronts the idea of pleasing others.

On the other hand, the rite of passage can be successful if it has symbolic efficacy, that is, if it succeeds in convincing those who participate in the vision of the world that is presented and represented, in this case by the duality of the performers and the audiences. The proposal of the creative process and the product of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* constitute a set of experiences that have a practical purpose: to investigate and reflect through the body the mandate of hegemonic femininity; therefore, it can be conceived as an artifact of feminine resignification.

Methodological Strategy

The methodological strategy consisted of an interpretative exercise of qualitative data on the work and the creative process. In this way it is possible to account for the symbolic efficacy achieved in *The Poetics of Pleasantness*.

Through methodical observation and a set of semi-structured interviews, information was gathered in two complementary phases: the first consisted of analyzing the video art of *The Poetics of Pleasantness*, the result of several choreographic creation and research residencies, which was presented in the framework of the National Encounter of the Arts 2020. The second phase involved a series of interviews with the members of

the project. The creative process and the production of the video art were also accompanied.

The interpretative analysis was carried out through the observation of the video art¹ and in a dialogic way we sought to have a joint reading that would make evident the underlying narrative of the work and the symbolic resources that are intertwined as an aesthetic argument. The purpose of highlighting these elements is to help understand the symbolic efficacy of this work for both its collaborators and the public. The reading we make of this piece takes as a reference the idea that we are active observers since we agree with Rancière when he points out that whoever is in front of an aesthetic fact "observes, selects, compares and interprets" (2010, pp. 19-20), and that in this active exercise can elaborate a new work, his own work. In this sense, we are aware that our reading of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* is the result of this active exercise, and therefore there may be other readings of the same piece.

On the other hand, interviews were carried out to get to know the individual experiences of its members regarding *The Poetics of Pleasantness*. We propose as axes of interest the forms of approach and the degree of involvement, as well as the personal implications of their participation in the project. In total, five interviews were conducted. Table 1 shows the main socio-demographic data of the creative dancers.

Table No. 1 Main sociodemographic characteristics of the persons interviewed.

| Name | Age | City of origin | City of residence | Degree |
|-------------------|-----|----------------|-------------------|---|
| Rocío Reyes | 34 | Monterrey | Mexico City | Bachelor's degree in contemporary dance |
| Kesia Herrera | 28 | Mexico City | Mexico City | Bachelor's degree in contemporary dance |
| Andrea Garay | 31 | Mexico City | Mexico City | Bachelor's degree in contemporary dance |
| Ana Paula Oropeza | 35 | Mexico City | Mexico City | Bachelor's degree in classical dance |
| Marlene Coronel | 29 | Mexicali | Mexico City | Bachelor's degree in dance |

Note: Own elaboration based on online interviews conducted during the summer of 2021.

¹ <https://rocioreyes.com/portfolio/la-poetica-del-agrado/>

The dancers interviewed have a degree in dance; they are young, none of them over 35 years old, and have a high degree of consolidation in the field of contemporary dance in Mexico City. In short, they share a relatively homogeneous profile, which to a certain extent explains their collaboration within the project, while at the same time facilitating the reading of their personal and professional experiences as they are part of the same generation and the same artistic field.

The Symbolic Efficacy of *The Poetics of Pleasantness*

In this section we take up -as an analytical framework- Brzovic's (2018) proposal on what he calls the triangularity defined by: 1) the experientiality of the participants, that is, the experience in and through the performance; 2) the state, as the internal coherence of the work, and 3) the agency, as an act with consequences. The conjugation of these elements is what would allow an exponential productive becoming in the body.

This led us to consider an interpretative analysis on two tracks: 1) from the reading of the audiovisual representation of the work (which allows us to examine its internal coherence), and 2) from the narratives of the creative collaborators of the project (associated with the state and agency). In the first part, they bring into play our resources as scholars of culture and feminisms to unveil the meanings of the work, understood as a poetic and political discourse. Next, we make a description and analysis of the personal experiences of participation in the work, which resulted in the delimitation of thematic axes that account for the meanings derived from the process of creation of *The Poetics of Pleasantness*.

1) *The Poetics of Pleasantness* as an Artistic Work

In this subsection we are interested in showing the internal coherence of the work, through the interpretation of the video dance of *The Poetics of Pleasantness*. From a general appreciation we can point out that the work condenses the imperative that has been taking shape among some women about the need to recognize and invoke the Feminine Divine (Shinoda, 2017), especially, in the face of a world in which an inexorable tendency towards

the masculinization of life has been presented. The piece consists of different movement sequences, and the video dance was recorded in a not at all fortuitous setting: the wooded area in the vicinity of the Cerro del Tepozteco, in Morelos, Mexico. A mystical place, recognized worldwide, where an archaeological zone is located, and which is considered a sacred valley by the shamanic tradition.

In this environment the five young women go through a ritual, which begins with a sequence that by its repetitive and rhythmic character seems to be oriented to seek an altered state of consciousness. It is a sequence in which the movement of the torso seems to be anchored to the earth, as if it were spreading roots like a sacred tree. Such metonymy is also achieved with images of tree trunks, of leaves on the earth, which are interspersed with images of the dancers.

In the first seconds, in which close-ups of the performers' faces are shown, it is possible to accompany them in a slow breathing that lets us glimpse a swaying of the body with each inhalation and exhalation, a subtle mantra that seems to serve as a path to introspective evocation and to the encounter with themselves. The mantra seems to transmute the bodies expressed in an embrace, in a sign that the doors of ritual have been opened to establish a connection with the interiority, but also with the earth, with the air, with the other bodies that occupy the space and with the cosmos itself (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Fragment of the video art *The Poetics of Pleasantness*.



Note: Image compiled by authors in January 2021.

Another sequence goes from a container position with the arms, forming a cradle, as if emulating motherhood, to the self-embrace, which reaffirms the idea of starting from self-care, from personal motherhood, these being the main qualities of a Feminine Divinity and of a specific femininity that refer to care and compassion, as well as to empathy and the construction of the loving bond. The shots open up and place us in a collective dimension, in which the performers move between imaginary rails that evoke their personal histories. The coming and going, the gathering and bringing to the present space of memory induces a trance-like state that gives way to the next scene: we see the performers with open arms spinning on their own axis in a spiral generating the image of a whirlpool or a galaxy. Subsequently, a sequence unfolds the dynamics and even some tai chi and yoga postures, such as the warrior's pose.

Thus, the work proposes a hybrid or new age conception of spirituality, which combines Eastern elements with recent postulates of Western science that recover Gaia, the Greek goddess of the earth, to account for the planet Earth as a self-regulating system (Lovelock in García, 2007, p. 81). We also find, in the choreographic compositions, references to the constellation Virgo and the star Spica, representing harvest and

abundance, or to the Mesopotamian myth of Ishtar, associated with love and war (Pryke, 2019).

Thus, the landscape presented in the video, including images of the universe and its relationship with the earth through the forest as background scenery, invites us to think about the proposal about the divine as part of nature, of which the five protagonists are an integral part: "we are a constellation".

In the last shots, the focus is extended to integrate the dancers into the landscape where a sunset is observed from the top of a hill (Figure 2). In this last sequence in fast motion we see, in a few seconds, the performers repeating the choreographic sequences. Also, as part of the ending, we read brief comments about the work selected by Rocío Reyes from her social networks, such as: "I wanted to change my body [...]" and "I wanted my cousin's group of friends to accept me [...]".

Figure 2. Fragment of the video art *The Poetics of Pleasantness*.



Note: Image compiled by authors in January 2021.

2) The creative process

This subsection is organized according to the themes that emerged during the interviews with both the director of the work and the creative performers.

A transcendental work

The members of the group carry out their artistic activity within the framework of multiactivity, a characteristic feature of the configuration of occupational fields in the arts (Menger, 1999). They carry out diverse work activities with which it is possible for them to generate individual and family economic sustenance, while at the same time it has been a path of professionalization that allows them to collaborate in diverse projects. This is relevant -as will be seen below- to understand multiactivity as a condition that allows them to get involved in projects with motivations outside purely economic and instrumental logics, as Marlene relates:

What I do is a little bit of everything: teaching, dancing here and there and generating my own projects [...]. But that doesn't pay my bills, what pays my bills is the sale of cookies or projects that pay me in some way or another, among other things. (Marlene, 2021)

For her part, Kesia explains her recent entry into freelance work:

[...] the last two years of my career [I danced with a company], then after that came the question of saying, am I going to stay here forever? and I decided to start freelancing, and I was working on various projects [...] and although I was invited to other companies, it never caught my attention and I preferred to keep looking elsewhere. And so far, I have been working with projects that come in, projects that for me it is also very important that they have an affinity with me [...] (Kesia, 2021).

It is common for income to be obtained from various activities, although occasionally working as a performer may represent the main income, as in the case of Ana Paula. Finally, in the case of Rocío, the work of direction and creation is added to this multiplicity of activities: "I currently work as a freelance dancer, teaching classes on various subjects. I am a teacher and I currently teach anatomy and kinesiology, choreographic composition, and contemporary techniques" (Rocío, 2021).

It is possible to observe that the openness to freelance work, personal interests, and the search for personal affinities, gave rise to the possibility of getting involved in a project whose duration and structure was proposed as open, long term, and at first, without economic retribution.

Insertion into the project based on trust

The positive perceptions that those involved have of Rocío, as a convener, facilitated their involvement in *The Poetics of Pleasantness* as a space for exploration and creative research:

Since I met Chío I have admired her a lot for her work as a dancer, as a woman, as a mother. I love it, so I said "yes, I'm so down to do the project", she told me about it and I found it very interesting, both in my process [as an artist and a person] and in the process of the girls. (Andrea, 2021)

Likewise, Marlene comments that she got herself into the project practically blindly, trusting in the perception she had of Rocío:

[...] I had already met Rocío, and I liked her quite a lot, she seemed to me to be an extremely loving person, dedicated and passionate about her work, [...] congruent with herself. So, she seemed and seems to me to be an extremely reliable woman, so when she told me: "Marlene, I want to invite you to a project" I said yes and [...] I blindly ventured in the full confidence of sharing with her and thus discovering how far we can accompany each other. (Marlene, 2021)

On the other hand, and as she had previously expressed, Kesia describes how the affinity with Rocío and the search for projects that reflected her personal interests led her to accept the invitation:

[...] I know Rocío from previous projects, precisely from projects where it's just dancing for the sake of dancing [...] and when we were in the dressing room talking about life we came to the same reflections: "what are we doing here if [...] we are just dancing for the sake of dancing, if we want to say more things", and we started

to question each other like that. And I remember that at one point I said to Chío, verbatim: "Chío, do something of your own, after so much time and the experience you have, the person I admire, and who I know is capable of many things, why don't you do it? And [...] about half a year later she wrote to me and said "you know what, it's time for me to do something. I'm going to enter [a choreography] for the INBA-UAM award and I want to invite you". And well, at first, I didn't even ask her [...] (Kesia, 2021).

This perception of admiration and previous friendship coincides with Rocío's search for the members of the project when she points out that *The Poetics of Pleasantness* is formed by "a team with whom I have full confidence, since I must say that the cast [...] are mainly my friends, that was one of the factors of choice" (Rocío, 2021).

The testimonies presented so far show some of the existing conditions of possibility prior to the project in which the participants have collaborated throughout three creative residencies and the realization of a video art, between September 2019 and January 2021.

Technologies of friendship in relational dance

We have taken from Krochmalny (2008) the notion of technologies of friendship as forms of sociability that sustain a community (*communitas* in the Turnerian sense that emphasizes horizontality), in this case we refer to the set of actions of care, both creative process and of those who participate in it. In this regard, two dimensions appear as significant in the narratives: time and personal attention.

The time dedicated in a personal way to the research and creation process with the collaborators is in itself a care that is perceived in a positive way, as Andrea points out:

I really liked the temporality that Chío handled in terms of his rehearsals. I do think she was the first [person] to call them residences. From the moment she named them, they were like moments of immersion in a bubble, and she was dosing them. She was having personal sessions with each one and that also generates closeness,

a connection is established as performer and dancer, and then she integrates you into the group. I think it was a very cozy moment, very accompanied (Andrea, 2021).

Time also meant a rupture with the temporalities commonly established for a project of this type, and in that sense allows the encounters to accumulate, generating not only information for the work, but personal experiences that translate into affection, as described by Ana Paula:

I feel that a lot of time has passed from the first residence to the last one, it is a very nice process because it has not been like these express processes that are suddenly done in three-month companies: we rehearse, and function and it is forgotten. With *The Poetics of Pleasantness*, the process has been very long because there have been different residencies. So [...] they have been, as I call them: small nuclei of honesty. And they are not forgotten, they stay there, they continue to throb and then we get together again and take up again what we saw and add new things. I think that every time we get together there are many more things to say, more personal experiences are generated, more members appear in the family. I already call it an artistic family, so it has been very enriching (Ana, 2021).

Finally, care is also reflected in sharing outside of work time, giving importance to meetings that are not necessarily productive for the project, but for those who participate in it. This is especially important in times like the one experienced during the pandemic, when for long periods face-to-face contact was very limited. In this regard, Andrea points out that Rocío:

[...] procured her team, and I think she has had the sensitivity and care to give voice to each one and give space to each one to be heard and consider the contributions of generating spaces for coexistence outside the process, because the processes are also nourished by the day to day. For example, during the pandemic when we were not so active, she was very present in the WhatsApp group, like "hey look I have this reflection", "hey look I have worked here". And I mean, everyone was dealing with

their own pandemic and the world crisis in their own way, maybe there wasn't much response, but she was there [...] and I think the model she proposed for *The Poetics of Pleasantness* is the kind of model I look for and it makes me feel good when I enter a job like this. (Andrea, 2021)

As can be seen in these testimonies, the time and personal attention inside and outside the work and creation process imply significant actions that nurture and potentiate affectivity and commitment among the artists involved.

The affective community as the main contribution

The elements that were part of this project, particularly the theme of femininity and its approach based on personal experiences, set the tone for the construction of a community of affection that generated feelings of friendship, complicity, support, and accompaniment. Thus, we found multiple memories that show a strong affective charge, as expressed by Andrea:

I love the processes where you talk because it is not easy for me to open up. It's hard for me to get into these layers of memories and things that stir up sensations and memories. And nothing, I believe a lot in creative processes and personally they have healed me, they have confronted me a lot and have been very enriching [...]. (Andrea, 2021)

This intimacy and confidentiality also appear as a space that cares for and embraces its members: "in each of the girls I found a very beautiful space because they are divine human beings, and when there were some ups and downs there was also a network of containment" (Marlene, 2021). Thus, complicity and support are paths to friendship that enrich collaborative work and generate experiences beyond the objectives of creation:

[...] I remember well having that feeling of thinking and saying "Kesia, breathe, you are in a safe place, nothing happens if you open up or get angry". I mean, I don't know, at first, I felt vulnerable when I had to share something tough. But then I said

"well, maybe they can listen to me and understand what I'm feeling". The fact of having accomplices who listen to you opens a lot of things. Then this "oh, I don't know" turned into "well, okay, I'll take a chance" and I gave away what I had to say, and bonds were generated. Now I see the girls of Pleasantness, and I feel more confident, I see them now as my friends because they know things that maybe in normal life, I would not have shared with them, and that makes complicity, a friendship. It makes us have affection (Kesia, 2021).

Friendship, as a result of openness, complicity and shared experiences, derives in different ways of conceiving artistic work, beyond the fulfillment of objectives and economic remuneration:

[...] within all my artistic trajectory it is the first project that I do only with women, and that started, well, from femininity, right, and from wanting to please the other and from something that we all at some point experience. So, first of all, there are these bonds that make us like sisters. I think that is the most important thing because one also values one's work for the human quality that exists in the projects. So, I value very much those bonds that came about with these powerful and talented women, and that emerged from this much more sensitive place. I think it also helped a lot with this artistic opening. It is no longer about competing or wanting to do my best so that the teacher sees me. It's like "let's share and show what each one of us has to teach". To generate bonds, not from competition but from seeing that all the girls come from very different places. That's what I keep in my heart (Ana, 2021).

The project of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* generated strong bonds among its members, which resulted in a different way of generating creative processes looking for their meaning in places related to sharing, trust, and complicity.

***An act with consequences: Re-signifying
femininity and dance practice***

We observe how creative processes can derive in significant transformations beyond the artistic work itself, because of an exploration that puts in dialogue sensitive and political aspects about life. About this, Kesia comments that this project allows her to intertwine reflections on the processes of creation and her identity as a woman:

[...] it has changed me as a person, since recognizing my femininity and being able to think about it, not for the benefit of a work, but to be what I am because I am a woman and to be able to express that in a work is very beautiful. Also, how you approach the discourse to create a work. I mean, until now I had never been with someone who wanted to listen to you, who wanted you to contribute and feed the discourse of the work itself. So, it made me question many things, like where I want to be and with whom I want to continue creating and participating. (Kesia, 2021)

Similarly, Marlene expresses that this project was a space to reflect on her personal reflections and processes that she was going through:

[...] every process is an adventure, so [*The Poetics of Pleasantness*] is an adventure about the learning, echoes, or repercussions that the work generated in me. And, since the previous year I had been in a process of [personal reflection] and my themes turned towards femininity and the idea of being a woman. So, when I arrive, I can't help but find myself in a zone of conflict because I'm right in those hypersensitive places. I incorporated *The Poetics of Pleasantness* into my personal exercise, it was... a terrain to test the decoding of what I understood being a woman implied and to bring the ideas I was already reflecting on to reflection in the body. (Marlene, 2021)

On the other hand, in the field of dance, where it is considered normal for women, from a very early age, to seek the acceptance of others, this type of project can mean a break with ingrained patterns of seeing themselves and their place in the world:

I connect with the first sensations of pleasing, which for me was being in the National School. I studied when I was very young, let's say 10 years old, and what you want is for the teacher to like you, to tell you that you are doing well, [that is], the search for a stimulus of "very good". So, we are so used to seeking to please the other that I had not thought about it so deeply. This project arrives and asks you: "when was the first time you tried to please? and I said, "oh boy! well, since I can remember" because with dance what you are trying to do is to please, right? Especially at the beginning you don't realize it [...], you don't realize it so much when you are a girl, and you have 20 other girls competing and you want to be the best and you want the best role. It was like facing a reality that I had not perceived in depth. It wasn't until this project came along that suddenly I said, "Yes, we have been working to please other. (Ana, 2021)

This coincides with Andrea's experience and the expectations that have always been placed on her body:

As dancers there has always been a focus on the body: how fit you are, how thin you are, how much your leg goes up. Those physical things become a stigma that the dancer must do certain things.... [but] it wasn't something I was thinking about constantly, rather it was something that said "that's the way it has to be and that's it" [...]. And I think that opening these spaces for reflection, because at the end of the day I think that art is built from reflections of things that happen in the world. I do believe that this space was opened with these women who were feeling, from other sides, those moments of vulnerability, of insufficiency or imposition and sharing it is always going to change it. I do believe that there is a before and an after [...] (Andrea 2021)

Tensions Within the Process

Now, in the interviews it was also possible to glimpse the limitations faced when exploring new paths for creation, which we can identify as follows: 1) the work with each of the

performers was insufficient in some cases and, given the psychosocial nature of the exercise, there was a lack of appropriate emotional containment work; 2) the rupture with models of direction generated some misunderstanding and different expectations that led to certain tensions in the group; 3) the pressure of time before an institutional commitment hurried the closing of the project and made evident the tensions inherent to the assemblies at the time of a presentation, which occurs due to the need to fix movement schemes that in another phase of the process were more free; 4) the disagreement associated with the subjective interaction defined from different positions and life experiences and 5) the contradiction inherent to the artistic activity in the face of the need to earn a living and the scarce resources to finance these projects, which implies a daily life of negotiating between vocation and necessity.

Despite these vicissitudes, the creative performers insisted on the importance that this experience left on their lives, highlighting the relationships built through intimacy, solidarity and the deep friendship developed.

Conclusions

The creative process of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* can be understood as a rite of passage, as it implied for its members a significant change in the notions that each one of them had about the idea of femininity and how each one of them experienced it on a daily basis. In this way, the encounter meant a space outside the conventional norms of creation, making possible other forms of choreographic research based on dialogue, listening and care. On the other hand, it implied a long-term work, in which the blurring of hierarchies and social norms opened the door to creative exploration and open dialogues. This made it possible to explore femininity through the throwing of personal experiences into a common space, and from there to move towards the reconfiguration of its meaning through collective work, elaborating a space of *communitas* as a basis for the transformation of its members, that is, of horizontal relations and reciprocity that favor the temporary suspension of structures and of the pre-established belief system.

In this sense, we can affirm that *The Poetics of Pleasantness* is a relational artifact that achieves symbolic efficacy at a significant level, as the narratives of its members show the experience of acts of resignification and creative opening in different dimensions:

- The reconstruction of one's own femininity.
- The successful affirmation of the proposed creative process as relational and dialogical.
- The commitment for the construction of an affective community through different technologies of friendship.
- The affirmation of a collective sense of the meanings of being a woman.
- The collective rethinking and reconfiguration of the meanings of being an artist from a critical perspective.

In addition to this, we also find reflective elaborations related to the forms of organization of creative and artistic work in the world of contemporary dance in Mexico, which also imply a commitment to the feminization of the processes. Here we outline some of them:

- Possibilities of working and creating from affectivity and affection, rather than from competition and recognition.
- Modify the demands and the way in which work times are organized: research, rehearsals, functions, among others. With the intention of generating friendlier processes for the artists.
- To think that creative processes are also human experiences, and that these can be nourishing for those who participate in them, beyond economic retribution (while considering the importance of the latter).

The proposal of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* can be thought of as a prefigurative act of social becoming, in which the hegemony of instrumental rationality gives way to a more collective and humane way of organizing work. This, in turn, configures a feminine ethos.

Thus, it is possible to point out that the result of *The Poetics of Pleasantness* as video art also carries with it a symbolic efficacy that invites us to recognize the power of a holistic

bet on the human, based on bodies in movement, visual evocations, and diverse testimonies on femininity. This is reflected in the interpretative exercise of the video piece, through the decoding of the discursive and symbolic elements of the performance, such as: the evocation of a type of feminine divinity, the back and forth between the individual and the collective, the connection with water and earth, as well as introspection as a path in the search for a dissident or countercultural feminine subjectivity.

Finally, studies on artistic practices have pointed out that there is, on the one hand, a configuration of artistic fields that associate certain types of activities as feminine and others as masculine, resulting in a hierarchical organization that privileges the latter over the former (Buscatto, 2014, pp. 46-48). Thus, activities such as dance, considered not only as an activity occupied mainly by women, but with features of its activity considered feminine (Mora, 2008, p. 11), is undervalued in relation to other types of activities considered masculine.

However, although dance falls into this categorization, within this activity, at least in Mexico, there are masculine and patriarchal patterns and behaviors that aggravate the devaluation of the work and voices of women artists; this, in the daily practices in the field of contemporary dance imply, among other things: the sexualization and abuse of women, as well as the production and reproduction of an artistic field thought mainly from and for men. This is observed in the testimonies of the interviews when talking about competition, domination, tyranny, and power, all these concepts that, from feminist positions, are linked to patriarchal schemes and ways of understanding and inhabiting the world.

This paradoxical situation is fundamental to understand the power of projects such as *The Poetics of Pleasantness*, which from a non-hegemonic position outline and carry out proposals that destabilize the forms of organization and understanding of the field of contemporary dance in the country, by stating differently their work, their creative processes, and their positions on the arts of the body. Thus, sensitivity, accompaniment, motherhood, and care become political positions that, from individual experiences, are collectivized on the margins of normative structures to become symbols that configure meanings and different ways of feeling and experiencing life.

We can also conclude that *The Poetics of Pleasantness* as an artifact of feminine resignification reaffirms the prefigurative character of the current feminist movement, which seeks to replicate in the present the horizon of society it seeks to achieve (Longa, 2017). In Mexico, there are several examples in this regard, the performances that take place in the high school Francisco Villa 128, in Ecatepec, State of Mexico, as pedagogies against feminicide (Gutiérrez, 2022); and the collectives that are organized in Mexico City and Guadalajara to open feminist bazaars. Likewise, in Rolnik's (2019) logic, it would be a micropolitical insurrection of women that proposes individual transformation at the same time as building a sense of collectivity.

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