Together () Apart

by

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Abstract

Together () Apart explores social, physical and political notions of borders manifesting and being revealed through movement, somatic practices, social experiments, collaborative process and interdisciplinary performance making. The concept of border is investigated both as a subjective line of division and as a third space of encounter located inside the body, outside the body and in-between bodies. Informed by a series of workshops and laboratories between six dancers, two architects, a musician and a lighting designer, the practice-based research process of Together () Apart developed into a performance installation with seven performers and live one-on-one encounters. Designed after the concept of border as a space that can potentially both divide and unite, each performer occupies a separate space, intimately connecting them to each audience member. The format of one-on-one performance offers an opportunity to explore our connection to 'an other' and to negotiate the space in-between bodies.

Keywords: Borders; Liminal; Hybrid Identity; Interdisciplinary Collaboration; Interactive Performance; Contact Improvisation

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Artist's Statement:
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During my time at Simon Fraser University as an MFA student, I conducted and presented research on interdisciplinary performance through laboratories, workshops, performances, conversations and writings. I used this framework to focus on exploring the notions of social, physical and political borders manifesting and being revealed through movement, somatic practices, social interactions and collaborative interdisciplinary performance making. This research process culminated by the presentation of my graduating project *Together () Apart*, a public workshop and performance installation with seven performers and live one-on-one encounters focused on borders.

My interest in the notion of border has emerged from my personal experience working and travelling abroad as a freelance artist, continuously crossing national borders and dealing with structures of authority while learning to be at home in a constant state of transition. I am interested in the concept of border both as a subjective line of division and as a third space of encounter located inside the body, outside the body and in-between bodies. The border can be seen as a liminal space where cultures meet, where identities are constantly being defined and redefined, and where movement emerges as a negotiation between differences. Each person, side by side with a multiplicity of others, learns to negotiate differences through collaborative decision-making, allowing for new possibilities. Through this collective period of transformation, a new common sense of meaning or purpose is established.

I first began exploring the concept of border through the research and creation process of my full length performance called *Borderlines,* which was created in collaboration with an ensemble of six American and Canadian performers and presented both in the US and Canada. *Borderlines* investigated the political, social and physical

impacts of border by exploring themes of power and vulnerability, security and surveillance, proximity and distance, trust, identity, connectivity, tension and exhaustion. These ideas were developed and communicated through recorded and spoken text, live improvised music, framed audience interactions and movement scores inspired by Contact Improvisation and Post/Contact[1].

Figure 1: ***Borderlines***

While most of my performance work does not portray the aesthetic of Contact Improvisation, its technique and practice have been at the core of my artistic process and embodied research on borders. Contact Improvisation explores the space in between a series of binaries, such as the self and the other, similarity and difference, active and passive, etc. It investigates the living and moving border through the act of relating. While encountering one another in the space in between, the dancers

[1]Experiments in dancing and performing under the influence of Contact Improvisation defined by Keith Hennessy in *Contact Quarterly* 37, no.1 (2012): 35.

simultaneously differentiate and connect. The point of contact provides a bridge between bodies, from where a dance of negotiation can emerge. While offering a structure to collaboratively negotiate differences through touch, it allows the dancers to challenge social modes of behaviour and navigate states of unfamiliarity, confusion and uncertainty in search for new possibilities. This process encourages the performers to trust the unknown, to take risks, to be responsible for their own choices and to cooperate with others. This willingness to share, investigate a heightened state of presence and explore the tensions that move us is central to the development of my artistic work and shapes the choices I make as an interdisciplinary choreographer.

My interest in this dance of negotiations led me to create a performance installation called *Together () Apart,* in which the audience and the performers would meet and share space. The practice-based research process leading to the presentation of *Together () Apart* involved a series of open-ended explorations in collaboration with an interdisciplinary ensemble of performers and designers. Together, we investigated a series of tasks, improvisation scores, somatic explorations and social experiments establishing connections between movement, sound, space and the concept of border. We explored physical boundaries such as the envelope of the skin; the threshold of pressure, weight and balance; orifices as entrance and exit points; orientation and disorientation; zones of tensions inside the body; movement trajectories; proximity and distance; presence and absence and the process of negotiation between bodies. We also studied the social aspects of borders such as empathy and telepathy, as well as architectural, environmental and political boundaries. Informed by this phase of research and training, each performer developed a short solo performance for an audience of one, to be repeated or improvised twenty times per night, for a total duration of three hours. In *Together () Apart*, each audience member is invited to travel through a set trajectory, encountering each performer one by one. The format of one-on-one performance offers an opportunity to explore our connection to 'an other' and to negotiate the space in-between bodies. Designed after the concept of border as a space that can potentially both divide and unite, each performance occupies a separate space, intimately connecting a performer to an audience member, while simultaneously isolating them from the rest of the participants. Operating in a particular mode of interaction ranging from proscenium performance to tight and open interplay, each performance

holds the potential to be affected by the audience's response. In some cases, the interaction is simply based on a process of reflection and internal reaction while in other cases, the audience is invited to actively participate in a series of choreographed interactions or to join live improvisations that will inform the performer's choices. The durational aspect of this performance, while only experienced by the performers, challenges and transcends the notion of border as a fixed space and reveals its ability to become a mutable space of negotiation. In *Together () Apart,* each performer reinterprets their own score twenty times each night. Each score holds the potential to evolve and transform over time, influenced by each spectator's responses, the state of the performers and an ever-changing music score. In addition to this performance installation, I offered a public workshop to share my research with the larger community. This workshop gave each participant the opportunity to experience the work from within and to explore ideas and scores that, while being integral to the research phase of *Together () Apart*, were not integrated into the performance. Each workshop participant was invited to share his or her reactions to the work, which greatly contributed to my research.

Figure 2: ***Together () Apart* 1**

Figure 3: ***Together () Apart* 2**

Figure 4: ***Together () Apart* 3**

Figure 5: ***Together () Apart* 4**

One of the challenges I have experienced while exploring the notion of borders through performance making has been a tendency to fix the material and control the final work, while simultaneously working from improvisation and attempting to give the audience agency. Aiming at offering the audience more responsibilities by allowing them to make embodied choices that could shape their own experiences, the repeated schedule of events was intended to create a set container that could potentially invite them to respond more freely. Similarly to compositional rules in dance improvisation, the set structure of the piece offers a safe space for the spectator to play, take risks and investigate the nature of meaningful experience. Simultaneously, the practices of improvisation and somatic experiencing proposed as a training method for the development of *Together () Apart* prepared the performers to be attentive to the audience's subtle reactions, to trust their instincts and to learn to negotiate each encounter.

The notion of border while often being portrayed as a space of division also implies an act of relation, which allows for ever-changing possibilities. It involves a process of transformation that calls for a spontaneous negotiation of contradictions and

ambiguities arising from an encounter in the in-between space. Meeting in this ‘third space’ reshapes the organization of body politics by inspiring us to take more responsibility and to cooperate in the creation of new encounters. Driven by the urge to create artistic work that calls into being and holds a transformative potential, my artistic practice aims to provoke dialog and shared embodied experiences from which we can learn new ways of experiencing the world, relating to one another and perceiving our daily lives.

Appendix A.

Dancing in the Borderland: Beyond Identities and Territories

Introduction

In this essay, I am interested in exploring the concept of border, not as a line of division, but as a non-fixed space of encounter and of contestation: a liminal space where cultures meet, where identities are constantly being defined and redefined, and where movement emerges as a negotiation between differences. Drawing from postcolonial philosophy and postmodern dance theories, this interest will be examined through the lens of Contact Improvisation, which can be described as a spontaneous and non-hierarchical process of cooperation and negotiation between distinct bodies. Through looking at the practice and development of this dance form from its origins to its recent growth, I propose to look at the border as a 'third space' of encounter which inhabits contradictions and ambiguities, simultaneously located inside, outside and in-between bodies. Carrying the potential to transcend social boundaries, cultural habits and stable identities while investigating the unknown and rejoicing differences, the practice of Contact Improvisation can offer a transformative potential that reshapes the organization of body politics. In a globalized world where borders are in a constant state of transition, where the movement of migration increasingly spreads, and where subjects are forged by multiple positions, how does today's socio-political context impact the practice of Contact Improvisation and the experience of the dance? How does it affect the development and articulation of Contact Improvisation as a form? Simultaneously, how can the practice of this dance form encourage one's sense of agency in their own lives and their greater participation in society?

My interest in the notion of border has emerged from my personal experience working and travelling abroad as a freelance artist, unceasingly crossing national

borders and being at home in a constant state of transition. Having been practicing and teaching Contact Improvisation internationally over the last ten years, I have been interested in examining how the basic principles embedded in this dance form connect to the idea of border as a transformative 'third space' of encounter. As an artistic director and choreographer, my practice has been drawing from Contact Improvisation and Post/Contact as points of reference, encouraging each performer to take risks, to be responsible and to cooperate with others. I have been attempting to create a space where performers and spectators meet, simultaneous questioning their social status, identities and sense of belonging. This essay will attempt to unpack the notion of border in relationship to the practice of Contact Improvisation, intentionally leaving behind notions of performance and spectatorship to deeply focus on the study and impact of the form which has inspired the growth of my performance making.

The border as a liminal space of encounter

The concept of borders offers a few different narratives, but all seem to connect with notions of otherness. On one hand, a border can be seen as a division between two places: "a border defines. It structures space by establishing a point of reference that immediately and consequently positions people and objects in relation to itself."[2] In this sense, a border can be defined as a line of separation between political, social and economic spaces and can act as a barrier, which hides the unknown or the invisible on the other side. However, these lines are never fixed. They are constantly being transformed and redefined. On the other hand, the word border comes from the Latin word *ora* (shore, bank, border), which also means 'to speak'. In this sense, the function of border is to be spoken, to be called into being. It suggests a process, an articulation and negotiation of identity, a place of transition where people and ideas encounter each other. This encounter with the 'other' provides a space to be challenged and to rupture habitual modes of behaviour. Being-in-difference becomes a creative act that allows for a renegotiation of one's very own sense of identity: "the person in transit from one place or group to another undergoes a process of acclimatization and acculturation as he/she

[2]Ramon H. Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young, *Performance in the Borderlands*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

moves through the zone of transition, so that the shock of meeting the 'other' is not as great as he/she feared."[3] This zone of uncertainty between here and there, between them, and us can be referred to as a liminal space.

The notion of liminality originated from Arnold Van Gennep, who applies it to rites of passage in small-scale societies. The liminal phase "implies an actual passing through the threshold that marks the boundary between two phases."[4] In traditional societies, a leader and a supportive community hold the structured container of the ritual, allowing the participant to let go of social relations and expectations. Through the support of a stabilizing structure, the participant abandons himself to disorientation, which creates an opportunity for growth. The action of leaving something behind makes space for the forging of a new identity. In this sense, liminal phases are both destructive and constructive.

As liminal rituals are becoming transformed in industrial societies, Victor Turner adapted the concept of liminality to contemporary situations, which he referred to as *liminoid*. While the liminal performs religious and social functions through rituals, the liminoid breaks from society and enters the realm of play: "one works at the liminal, the other plays at the liminoid."[5] Liminoid events, such as theater, sports events, carnivals, etc. create a context for transgressing social norms. When this liminoid moment is shared with others, a strong sense of community emerges, which Turner refers to as *communitas*. Each person, side by side with a multiplicity of others, learns to negotiate differences through collaborative decision-making, allowing for new possibilities. Through this collective period of transformation, reshaping identity and foregrounding agency, a new common sense of meaning or purpose is established. This moment of being-in-common, in and out of time, is embedded in the practice of Contact Improvisation and in the process of interdisciplinary collaboration, both of which are central aspects of my artistic practice.

[3] David Newman, "The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in Our 'Borderless' World", in *Border Poetics De-Limited* (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2007), 39.

[4] Arpad Szakolczai, "Liminality and Experience: Structuring transitory situations and transformative events", *International Political Anthropology* (2009): 141.

[5] Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology", *Rice University Studies* (1974): 55.

Practicing Contact Improvisation: dancing the moving border

> *The open horizon of my body. A living, moving border. Changed through contact with your body.*[6]

Like borders, dancing bodies are constantly on the move: "their movement blurs the *here* and *there*, constantly reorganizing spatial relations and negotiating the consequences (political, social, economic, cultural) of their crossings."[7] Contact Improvisation explores the space in between a series of binaries, such as the self and the other, identity and difference, active and passive, inside and outside. It investigates the living and moving border through the act of relating. While encountering one another in the space in between, the dancers simultaneously differentiate and connect: "This is a paradox of the frontier: created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable (…) Of two bodies in contact, which one possesses the frontier that distinguishes them? Neither. (…) The frontier functions as a third element. It is an 'in-between', a 'space between'."[8] The skin itself, rather than a boundary that separates the inside from the outside or one person from another, becomes a 'frontier region': a "space created by an interaction."[9] The point of contact in between bodies is a "temporary 'center' and 'edge' common to both movers yet outside of both."[10] It is non-hierarchical and can go in all directions. The point of contact provides a bridge between bodies, from where a dance of negotiation can emerge. While sharing weight and sensing their partner and the floor through touch and proprioception, each dancer must be attentive and adjust to the subtle changes of speed, direction and/or pressure. The active act of listening leads to an instantaneous and collaborative decision-making process that shapes the dance. While the dance might lead to awkward situations, such as falling abruptly or getting into surprising positions, exploring these unfamiliar pathways may be an opportunity to

[6] Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 51.

[7] Rivera-Servera and Young, *Performance in the Borderlands*, 7.

[8] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 127.

[9] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 126.

[10] David Williams, "Working (in) the In-Between: Contact Improvisation as an Ethical Practice", *Writings on Dance* 15 (1996): 24.

discover new territories and movement possibilities. The practice of Contact Improvisation is a liminoid event. While offering a structure to collaboratively negotiate differences through touch, it allows the dancers to challenge social modes of behavior and navigate states of unfamiliarity, confusion and uncertainty in search for new possibilities: “here movement with and toward an/other, the constitution of collective action and the skin’s surface as thoroughly relational, avails subjects with a capacity, perhaps even a necessity, to traverse boundaries en route to becoming.”[11]

To touch together, traversing the border of the skin

The word *Contact* comes from the combination of the Latin prefix *con* (together with) and the Latin verb *tangere* (to touch). *Tact* is defined as a “skill or judgment in negotiating difficult or delicate situations; the faculty of saying or doing the right thing at the right time.”[12] Contact Improvisation is a spontaneous and co-created encounter with another body through touch and proprioception: "you are sensing your partner's level of potential, he [*sic*] is sensing yours, so you are moving (...) mutually sensing by touch what is available to you through that medium.”[13] Open and attentive, the dancers notice what is happening in each moment. Each dance arises from a series of possibilities and choices that are never imposed, but negotiated as they arise. The dance emerges from cultivating a heightened sense of listening and an acute awareness to sensations. Contact Improvisation is a movement-based somatic state: “if both parties' intent is “minimal’, and their sensing of intent ‘maximal’, then cooperation becomes the subject.”[14] The dancers train to feel their bodies three dimensionally in space and to develop their proprioceptive sense. Moving in relationship to one another while being responsible for themselves, they must adapt, let go of expectations and be willing to dive into the unknown. Without an agenda, simply through the process of paying attention, a mode of communication emerges, which is neither here nor there, but somewhere in between. Never completed, never exhausted, the future of the dance can never be grasped. Its trajectory has no stability and no pre-established point of arrival:

[11] Rivera-Servera and Young, *Performance in the Borderlands*, 3.
[12] The Compact Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)
[13] Steve Paxton, “Contact Improvisation”, *Theatre Papers* 5 (1982): 7-8.
[14] Steve Paxton, “Contact Improvisation”, *The Drama Review* (1975): 40.

> Improvisation as I understand it, is an attentional practice: the more you attend to movement and memory and sensing and intention, the more you play (improvise) with all the elements of what we call living - and the more you come to understand that reality itself is based on the relationship between our attention and the world. You sense that your attention is both selecting and forming your experience in real time, but that what is being selected and formed is not completely of your choosing, because the world is improvising too; and that dance, your interaction with the world, forms you just as you form the world.[15]

Contact Improvisation is a dance of active presence, during which the movers simultaneously sense and respond to each other and their environment. This process of cooperation suggests a method for being-in-difference: "changes and exchanges of identity (are) possible without sacrificing one's own experience of physical groundedness."[16] Through sharing the dance, "the other is not consumed", but "risk and ambiguity are possible."[17]

The sensing body in motion challenges the active/passive dichotomy between the one who touches and the one that is being touched: "The proposition is that touch—every act of reaching toward—enables the creation of worlds. This production is relational. I reach out to touch you in order to invent a relation that will, in turn, invent me. To touch is to engage in the potential of an individuation. Individuation is understood throughout as the capacity to become *beyond* identity."[18] This reciprocal sense of re-defining oneself through interacting with another is embedded in my artistic practice, which is highly collaborative and informed by my practice of Contact Improvisation and my interest in the somatic possibilities of touch and human interaction. Contact Improvisation resists the stability of bodies by encouraging the dancers to remain off-balance, challenging the verticality of the body, democratizing body parts and

[15] Kent de Spain, "The Cutting Edge of Awareness - Report from the Inside of Improvisation", in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, ed. Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 37.

[16] Ann Cooper Albright, *Engaging Bodies, The Politics and Poetics of Corporeality* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 223.

[17] Vida Lesley Midgelow, "Nomadism and Ethics in/as Improvised Movement Practices", *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 8 (2012): http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/view/2001/2705.

[18] Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), XV.

questioning the role of gender in dance partnering. The stable body, a coherent and independent entity, separated both from its surroundings and other bodies, reinforces the myth of a 'secure border'. The idea of an individual normative body sets limits to the reinvention of oneself and refutes the possibility of meeting-in-difference in the space in between. Unstable bodies challenge the organization of body politics. If politics work by invention, bodies must resist being pinned down in "preordained categories, such as citizen, refugee, man, woman, homed, homeless."[19]

Disrupting the social body, destabilizing boundaries in American culture

First established in the 1960s by American choreographer Steve Paxton, Contact Improvisation originated from a desire to free the body from social and cultural habits and hierarchical structures of authority in a social context characterized by the resistance to the Vietnam War, the rise of feminism, community living and the integration of art in everyday life. The mainstream American school system tends to encourage the disciplinary body by telling the student what to do and when, as well as asking him/her to sit still for long hours, without moving or sensing peripherally. Similarly, ballet and modern dance techniques promote docility and hierarchical power relations by asking the dancers to reproduce a series of pathways and to follow technical and organizational rules pre-established by a tradition of choreographers. Contact Improvisation "disrupted deeply embodied and institutional habit."[20] It was created as an attempt to empower the dancers to make their own choices rather than to listen to external rules dictating and inhibiting their movements: "this is a kind of rigor, one that requires the dancer's self-reflection and critical choice-making, placing high value on personal responsibility and individual investigation."[21] The freedom of taking responsibility for oneself in the dance, inevitably translates into taking more social responsibility and having a better sense of agency in everyday life.

[19] Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty,* XV.

[20] Keith Hennessy, "Post/Contact, Seven Class Descriptions Proposing Ongoing Experiments in Dancing and Performing under the Influence of Contact Improvisation", *Contact Quarterly* 37 (2012): 35.

[21] Miriam Wolodarski, "WCCIJAM 2013: Talking Bay Area Contact Improvisation, Past Present & Future", *Dancers Group* (2013): http://dancersgroup.org/2013/06/wccijam-2013-talking-bay-area-contact-improvisation-past-present-future/.

While encouraging passivity towards hierarchical structures of power, the social body in Western culture often promotes a divide between oneself and the other. Protective of their personal space, individuals avoid touch and proximity, which are almost exclusively associated with sex and violence. This undermines the more subtle need to engage with physical contact, which can enhance healthy psychological and physical development: "In a mainstream culture that is so tragically disembodied, that continues to objectify and commodify the body, and in which so many people are unhealthy and unhappy in their bodies, CI offers a way in."[22] In the majority of Western dance classes, the dancers are isolated and learn competitively and individually. Contact Improvisation was originally intended to break that line of division and redistributes power between individuals. While diving into somatic explorations and exploring the laws of physics in motion, the dancer moves away from his/her socially constructed identities and boundaries. Instead of reinforcing cultural habits, Contact Improvisation encourages the investigation of touch and sensations, breaking down the body-phobia in mainstream American culture. In many Western dances, such as ballet, sensation is hidden behind the execution of the form. Here, movement arises from it. In order to sense, the body must learn to release unnecessary tensions and inhabit an in-between state of readiness: "not too loose, not already committed."[23] The social tendency is for the body to either tense in order to control, or to let go by collapsing. One way or another, it exposes a fear reflex that hides a subtler and more unpredictable mode of relation. The dance of Contact Improvisation emerges from exploring this precarious state between holding on and letting go.

From process to form: how to resist a fixed space of agreement?

Over the last few decades, as Contact Improvisation practitioners have been getting more comfortable and familiar with the form, a tendency to codify and refine specific movement patterns has emerged, conditioning habits, which encourages a previously denounced state of docility. However, while Paxton's original proposal to investigate physics, gravity and to heighten awareness to sensation has been diluted by

[22] Wolodarski, "WCCIJAM 2013: Talking Bay Area Contact Improvisation, Past Present & Future".

[23] Sara Pozzoli and Germana Siciliani, "The Poetics of Touch: Nancy Stark Smith, a Pathway into Contact Improvisation", YouTube video, 2007. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6Pt0OXK7es.

a growing quest for ease, flow, and a vanishing desire to take risks, it has had a great influence on contemporary somatic approaches and aesthetics.

Despite a growing tendency to value familiarity and complacency over rigorous research in Contact Improvisation, a fair amount of practitioners are still looking for ways to push boundaries, explore new territories and access the political potential of the dance. Keith Hennessy, whose approach has highly influenced my artistic work, suggests the term *Post/Contact* to encourage a practice that, while acknowledging the applications and possibilities of Contact Improvisation, encourages the dancers to "celebrate the resistance to Contact Improvisation in today's dance and performance."[24] While dancers get familiar with a pre-established movement vocabulary, a sense of grace and flow is cultivated. However, "in the hyperawareness of improvisation, there are microseconds of stillness between movements (a feeling I might call 'hovering') where I sense an actual muscular tension that feels like my body wants to go in several directions."[25] These moments can be seen as opportunities to struggle, to ask questions and to negotiate, as opposed to diving into comfort and passivity. Inspired by the risk-taking aspect and political engagement of Paxton's proposal, Hennessy encourages failure rather than flow, and struggle rather than ease, looking at how today's socio-political tensions can shape the dance. Driven by the urge to create artistic work that speaks, that calls into being and holds a transformative potential, my artistic practice attempts to explore these ambiguous, uncomfortable and risky spaces, avoiding complacency and raising questions in order to move forward.

Borderless bodies: beyond territory and identity

> *People need straightaway to pinpoint where they are. It is as if they are pursued by doubts suggesting that they may be nowhere. Surrounded by so many abstractions, they have to invent and share their own transient landmarks.*[26]

[24] Hennessy, "Post/Contact, Seven Class Descriptions Proposing Ongoing Experiments in Dancing and Performing under the Influence of Contact Improvisation", 35.

[25] Danielle, Goldman, *I Want to be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 107.

[26] John Berger, *Hold Everything Dear* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 121.

A border defines notions of exchange and movement in relationships to "the politics of contemporary, global society." Migration has always been a fundamental element of human behaviour, but it is now accelerating due to the emergence of globalization: "Emigration, forced or chosen, across national frontiers or from village to metropolis, is the quintessential experience of our time."[27] Most Western artists are now self-employed, living in between gigs and travelling around the globe to follow opportunities, living in a perpetual liminal state. Migratory and nomadic border crossers, they carry their territories in their bodies. The body becomes a place of belonging: a mobile territory within shifting geographies. Home becomes a shelter made of habits, repetitions, memories and relationships; it "is represented, not by a house, but by a set of practices."[28] Nancy Stark Smith notes: "Often over the years I've felt 'home' when I was in the same room as my dancing pals, my next of skin – more so than when I was in my own apartment. That sense of homecoming seems to have less to do with geography than with people."[29] This home made of flesh and bones, is constantly revisited. It is a point of reference. During the act of dancing, the body draws from its kinaesthetic memories, an accumulated knowledge such as walking, standing, rolling, going on all fours, crawling, etc. in order to begin locating itself in space. From there, it begins to make connections: to bridge borders. Home is a body in flux. It is not static: "our cells are replaced; our muscles work, rest, ache: we survive traumas as we age. In every revisiting, every new experience, different layers and connections are formed in the body-mind, fashioning a subtly ever-changing body as home."[30] Migrant bodies and dance improvisers carry a symbolic sense of home that embraces constant change and values the process of becoming. As they "inhabit that risk-taking space, identities become relations between things, things become other things, place becomes space."[31]

[27] John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 55.

[28] Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photo,* 64.

[29] David Koteen and Nancy Stark Smith, *Caught Falling* (Northampton: Contact Editions, 2008), 42.

[30] Midgelow, "Nomadism and Ethics in/as Improvised Movement Practices": http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/view/2001/2705.

[31] Emilyn Claid, *Yes? No! Maybe….: Seductive Ambiguity in Dance* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 213.

In an era of globalization, the movement of migrant bodies across state boundaries transforms social identity. As a travelling artist working abroad and often not belonging to one single community, I no longer identify with a single place of origin, but with a multiplicity of places, encounters and experiences. Territories no longer belong to one nation, but to different ethnic groups sharing an in-between culture. In this global context, even if solid roots are centralized in one body, no single origin can be traced: "putting down roots takes time. Hundreds of people may pass through an airport together on the way to their flights. They do not have roots there because as a group they have no past or future."[32] Territories are made of physical bodies that live side by side and have an impact one each other's life. To belong is to be recognized as part of the place by its habitants: to actively participate in a community. If social identity is a creative act of cooperation:

> What should one assume to be the basic source of identity? Is it one's national birthplace or citizenship? Is it religion, age, gender, economic status, work, or styles of cultural expression? Identity operates now on so many levels that it has become a matter of individual choice rather than something assigned according to national and cultural associations. Recent decades have been labeled a time of 'identity politics' because of the many public assertions of and changes in self-identification.[33]

Identities simply based on national status, place of origin and destination, gender, class and race, create troublesome simplifications. In this time of cross-pollination, one is never entirely located or positioned anywhere. Rather than unitary and singular, each subject is forged by multiple positions. Living in between cultures, race, gender, class and sexual orientation, subjectivity becomes hybrid. According to Gloria Anzaldua, "living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien element (…) And yes, the "alien" element has become familiar – never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable, but home."[34] Living simultaneously between multiple cultures cultivates a tolerance for ambiguity and

[32] Jonathan Glover, "Simone Weil Lecture: Uprootedness, Narrative and Conflict" (Lecture presented at State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, August 6 2008).

[33] Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 177.

[34] Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 19.

contradictions. Traversing the chasm of the liminal, home becomes a state of transition. While reimagining a fluid relationship between the self and the other, beyond territory and identity, politics are being redefined.

Nevertheless, the self is often set in opposition to the other, echoing the colonial model. While using the colonized/colonizer binary in order to locate oneself, a situation of conflict emerges, which does not take into account the subtly complex connections between subjects. Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha critiques the binary model, which creates a stereotypical divide between self and other, male and female, first world and third world, and reinforces the split between active/inactive, and privileged/unprivileged subjects. It portrays the self and the other as fixed, rigid and unchangeable. However, culture is permutable. It is constantly being transformed through the perpetual negotiation of differences "which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew."[35] The accumulation of contraries provokes a state of uncertainty, which holds a potential for change. This "willingness to descend into that alien territory (…) may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism or multiculturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity."*[36] We can find "those words with which we can speak of ourselves and others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'third space,' we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves."[37]

[35] Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences", in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. B.Ashcroft, G.Griffiths, H.Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 208.

[36] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 56.

[37] K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences", in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 209.

Contact Improvisation across and beyond national borders

Following the movement of globalization, Contact Improvisation is now practiced internationally. However, as Guillermo Gomez Peña articulates in his article *Zones of Silence*:

> The international art scene is not truly international. Most countries are not represented. It is a certain elite, VIP club that includes some countries of the EU, the US and a few gravitating forces like Canada, Australia, Japan… and some occasional 'seasonal partners' like Mexico, Brazil, Russia (…). We are allowed to perform our stylized 'difference' with an obvious understanding of Western 'sophistication' and current art trends.[38]

Even if Contact Improvisation "offer(s) a relatively neutral vehicle for exploring the exchange of movement and impulses through the touch—not particularly clinical, not necessarily social, but human and physical— (…) we're never completely free of our cultural assumptions and patterns."[39] Each individual, while unique, embodies the others that preceded him. Sharing the dance is not a neutral act: "Not all people give weight in the same way, even if they share the same physique. There are differences in the intensities of weight and support. People can be said to have intensive or extensive, flowing or blocked, centered or peripheral energy. Their physiques, experience and individual psychologies will go some way to determining the manner in which they use and are used by their bodies."[40] Acknowledging these cultural habits and complexities, how does the encounter with "the other" shape and transform the definition of the form within and across national borders?

Since the practice of Contact Improvisation does not primarily rely on words, dancers from different cultures and origins don't need to share a common verbal language in order to dance together. According to Nancy Stark Smith, "a contact practitioner develops a trusting relationship with his or her partner, even if that person is

[38] Guillermo Gomez Peña and Gabriela Salgado, "Performing in the Zones of Silence", *E-misférica* 3.2 (2006): http://hemisphericinstitute.org/journal/3.2/eng/en32_index.html.

[39] Koteen and Stark Smith, *Caught Falling*, 8.

[40] Mark Minchinton, "Delirious Notes towards Improvisation as a Body without Organs", *Writings on Dance* 10 (1994): 48.

a complete stranger who speaks another language (…) Contact Improvisation is, in itself, a language through which people can communicate that is not partial to economic standing, politics, or race."[41] Nevertheless, while teaching Contact Improvisation abroad, the impact of verbal communication needs to be considered. Here, words often direct the dancer's attention to sensation, directly affecting the emergence and experience of the dance. Often not relying on vision to learn choreographed sequences, the dancer listens to the teacher's words for guidance. In 2010, I was invited to teach a Contact Improvisation class to a small group of Palestinian woman in a village located a few kilometers from Bethlehem, in the West Bank. Since the class was conducted in English, a local interpreter translated my words into Arabic. Translation became a subtle process of collaboration, allowing the interpreter, most aware of the complex cultural resonance of each word, to tailor the content of the class to its participants. On one hand, in Orthodox Muslim cultures, the word *dance* is often associated with devotional practice. On the other hand, the term *Contact Improvisation* instantly evokes a set of American references that are, for the most part, irrelevant to the Palestinian context. Even if both of these terms first appeared to be central to the transmission of the form, neither was emphasized. Focusing on the process of the dance, rather than attempting to convey a specific definition of the form, words were used to guide movement explorations and to express the experiences we shared. Action verbs, such as sensing, cooperating, questioning, etc., preceded static nouns. Rather than fixing the form into a connoted term, the principles of the dance were directly investigated, transformed and reinvented, offering an opportunity for every participant to inscribe their current experience into its definition: to become "active interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves and make their story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators."[42] In order to move beyond borders, "culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates the sense of the now as an insurgent act of cultural translation."[43] When finding oneself in a territory where a system of classification

[41] Erin Leila Stahmer, "(Dis) Connected: Segmenting the Elements That Constitute Contact Improvisation as a Form of Communication" (Senior Thesis, Barnard College, 2011), 18.

[42] Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator", *in Artforum International* (2007): 275.

[43] Homi K.Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 10.

does not allow for the complexity and nuances to arise, the process of constructing a new space in-between, free from a desire to control, becomes a small act of resistance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the notion of border implies an act of relation, which deconstructs fixity and allows for ever-changing possibilities. In this sense, dancing in the borderland involves a process of transformation that calls for a spontaneous negotiation of contradictions and ambiguities arising from an active encounter in the in-between space. The practice of Contact Improvisation, constantly shaping and being shaped by these moving borders, offers an opportunity to investigate this process of cooperation, which manifests through reimagining a fluid and dynamic relationship inside and outside the self, and in between the self and the other, drawing from the complexities of bodies in flux: "It is a space of resistance, (…) an intervention (…), a site of creativity (…), that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category of colonized/colonizer. (…) Enter that space. Let us meet there."[44] In this era of globalization where "travelling, both geographically and culturally, becomes an intrinsic part of the artistic process, particularly for those of us who see ourselves as migrants or border crossers"[45], meeting in this 'third space', beyond territory and identity, reshapes the organization of body politics by inspiring dancers and performers to take responsibility, to claim agency and to cooperate in the creation of new encounters. This process, which turns fear into curiosity, encourages more active participation in everyday life, inevitably leading towards social change. At the core, this desire to transform and connect despite differences is what inspires me to move forward as an artist and performance maker.

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Appendix B.

Video Files

Together () Apart

Filename: togetherapart.mp4

Description

A 3-minute excerpt of the interactive performance installation Together () Apart, a series of live one-on-one encounters between each audience member and each performer. Together () Apart examines our relationships to borders as a space of hybridity where differences meet, simultaneously dividing and connecting us and our environment.

Artistic Director: Isabelle Kirouac
Performers/Collaborators: Ashley Whitehead, Emma Garrod, Emmalena Fredriksson, Hailey McCloskey, Kat Single-Dain, Michael Undem, Willoughby Arevalo
Music Composition/Instrument Design: Willoughby Arevalo
Sound Design: Kivanç Tatar
Set Design: Chelsea Louise Grant, Steve Gairns
Lighting Design: Kyla Gardener
Video Design: Paul Paroczai
Camera: Dan O'Sea
Video Editing: Isabelle Kirouac
Photography: Layla Marcelle Mrozowski, Chelsea Louise Grant, Steve Gairns

Appendix C.

Poster Image

Together () Apart

Design and photography: Isabelle Kirouac