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## Video Article

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**VIDEO ARTICLE**

## **Embodiment and Social Distancing: Practices**

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A collection of five video essays on embodiment and social distancing, with a focus on practices. RAFFAELE RUFO, "Dancing Together Alone: What Can Be Learnt About Connection When Touch is Forbidden?" (00:10): This video essay reengages the experience of leading a dance improvisation practice on *Zoom* during the Coronavirus lockdown. As a tango and contact improvisation dancer confined at home, I felt urged to ask: what can be learnt about embodied connection when we are not allowed to physically touch each other? ANAT BEN-DAVID AND CATHARINE ANNE CARY, "What's the Matter?" (05:54): Performers, scenographers, musicians and wordsmiths Anat Ben-David and Catharine Cary improvised via *ZOOM* every Tuesday from March to May 2020. Embracing latency, *zoom's* affordances, limitations and distortions, they show here excerpts of a transformed body of work. Separated by 5218 km, given the Covid-19 situation, it could have been 200 meters. DEANNA BORLAND-SENTINELLA, LOUISE GWENNETH PHILLIPS, AND ALICE OWEN, "Virtually Embodied: Remembering the Sensations of Connection" (12:04): This film is an exploration of the body: Being present to place and time; being aware of connection with others, whether that be in reality or through virtual connection and sensorial memory. NATHALIE S. FARI, "Notes from a zoom 5Rhythms® session" (17:10): By using a three-hour 5Rhythms® online workshop as basis, this video sheds light into the ways in which the practitioner interacts and engages with both one's own bodily awareness and the new technology of *zoom*. AMBERBECKYCREATIVE, "Sheltering in Spacetimematterings: Audiovisual Considerations of Social Distancing" (22:42): Two socially distant authors glitch audiovisual intra-actions through embodied (dis)orientations of space, time, and matter in past/present/future collapsed to (re)present what it's like to shelter in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**Keywords:** Tango; Contact Improvisation; video art; embodied practice; memory; sensation; Zoom; 5Rhythms; somatics; intra-action; shelter in place

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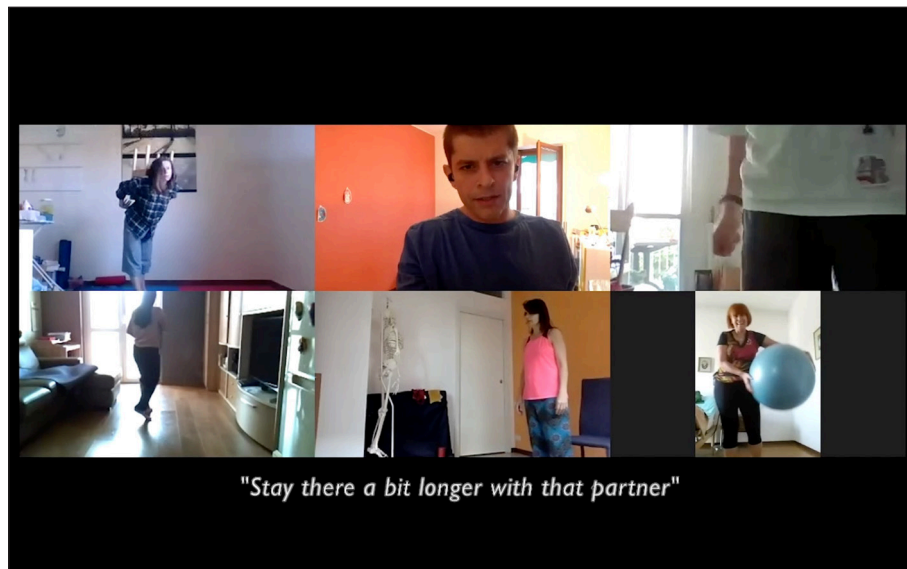
## VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.66>.

Available for download here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.66.s1>.

## VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[00:10]



## Dancing Together Alone: What Can Be Learnt About Connection When Touch is Forbidden?

Raffaele Rufo

This video essay documents the author's experience of leading a dance improvisation practice on *Zoom* during the Coronavirus lockdown and reflects on how somatic tools

and strategies can help us engage video conferencing as a window for connecting with distant bodies.

[Raffaele Rufo:]

During the Coronavirus lockdown I felt the urge to deepen my understanding of movement and to keep moving with others. I responded to this urge by leading a group practice online. The group met every Sunday afternoon for two months, with the participation of a live musician. The practice was inspired by the tango dance, by contact improvisation, and by the Feldenkrais method of awareness through movement. My goal was not to teach an existing technique. I wanted to explore whether and how working with these three forms of embodied knowledge could be helpful for facing a condition of forced isolation.

Dancing tango and contact improvisation involves feeling and expressing the kinaesthetic and affective energies that emerge in the moment, in the space between bodies.

“Tango is an exchange that depends on the closeness of two bodies willing to engage with one-another. It is a pact for three minutes, a sensual encounter that guarantees nothing but a listening.” (Manning, 2007, p. 4)

In these practices, the process of connecting the inside and the outside worlds is engaged through the medium of touch. As a tango and contact dancer, the lockdown forced me to ask: “Could we feel connected in a world where we are not allowed to physically touch each other?”

[Instructions to participants:]

Adesso state ancora un po' con il vostro partner. Sentitelo ancora un po', non lasciatelo in maniera violenta. Restate un po' lì con quel partner. Sentite un

po' cosa vi ha dato il pavimento e cosa vi ha dato il partner che avete tenuto nelle braccia.

“Stay a bit longer with your partner. Don't let go of the connection violently. Stay there a bit longer with that partner. What have you received from the floor? How did you feel holding that object in your arms?”

During the lockdown, video conferencing became a window into the outer world. But the question of connecting with distant bodies through the mediation of a screen turned out to be mainly a question of connecting with the dancing body in the confinement of the domestic space. Week by week, I shared with participants the exploration of tools and strategies for listening to the internal impulses to move. In this work, “Extending the conventional use of the word listening, the emphasis is placed on the direct perception of how the soma is listening, of how the soma is having a directly felt sense of touch and movement.”

“By reducing all stimuli to their bare minimum, we also reduce to its lowest value any change in our muscular system and senses. We thus increase our sensitivity to its maximum and can therefore distinguish the finer details that escaped our notice before.” (Feldenkrais, 2010, p. 72)

From this somatic journey outside-in, I would then ask participants to explore how movement impulses travel across the space between the inside and the outside: not only to reach a chair or a wall in their room, but also to reach another body on the other side of the screen.

[Instructions to participants:]

E lasciate che sia la dinamica a stabilire chi parte e chi segue. Lasciatevi andare e improvvisate insieme.

[3:50]

“Let the roles of initiating and following emerge dynamically. Let go of the need to control and improvise together.”

In her research on contact improvisation Nita Little argues that “embodiment cannot start and stop at the flesh.” According to Little, feeling someone’s attention inside their own body, involves engaging the permeability of our experience of the environment.

Meeting on Zoom was a window to extend the boundaries of the quarantined body by allowing others to access the privacy of the domestic space in a time of deep vulnerability. Working on the feeling of movement through the body and the screen opened up new pathways for connecting with the memories of touch. There were moments when I had the sensation of being physically in the same room with others.

However, online meetings reflected the claustrophobic feeling of separation and loneliness. Being together meant being enclosed in little boxes with the doubt that what was being felt was not comparable to the ideal of touching a human partner. This contradiction is the source of an interesting insight. As the social aspect and context of dancing became less dominant, the experiment offered a glimpse into the empowering effects of re-engaging the space between self and others with freshness and curiosity.

Written and Narrated by

Raffaele Rufo

Raffaele Rufo (PhD) is a dance artist and scholar working on the critical somatic nexus between Argentine tango and contemporary dance improvisation practices.

Dance Improvisation Practice on *Zoom* Led by  
Raffaele Rufo

Participants:

Valentina Vitolo, Stefania Casucci, Paola Macchi, Fulvio Petino, Francesco Talò,  
Milka Panayotova, Claudio Carpana, Ruffi Osvaldo, Antonella Birriolo, Angela  
Lanzolla

Filmed on *Zoom* and Edited by  
Raffaele Rufo with Valentina Vitolo

Music (performed live during the online practice) by  
Emanuele Pescia

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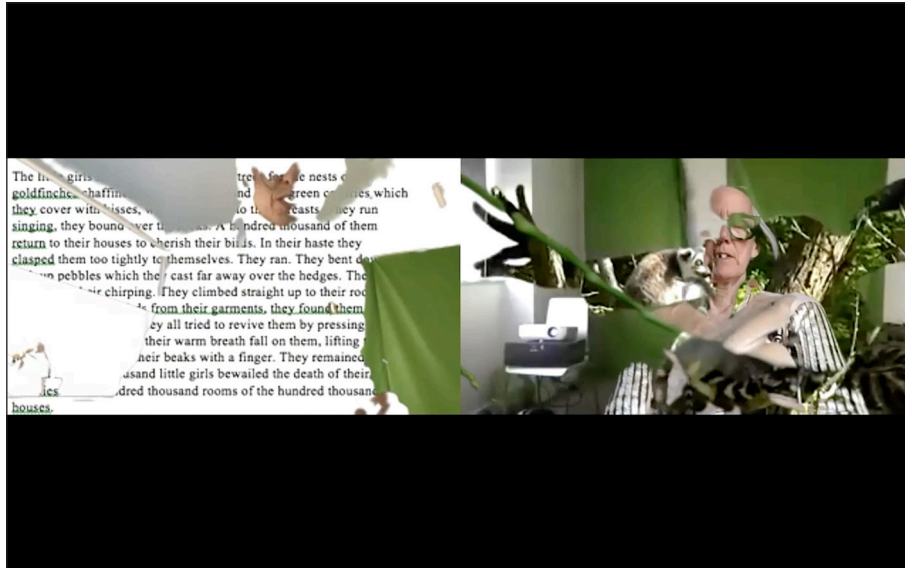
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[05:54]



## What's the Matter?

Anat Ben-David and Catharine Cary

Improvising during lockdown

March–May 2020

The little girls search in the bushes and trees for the nests of goldfinches chaffinches linnets. They find some green canaries which they cover with kisses, which they hug to their breasts. They run singing, they bound over the rocks. A hundred thousand of them return to their houses to cherish their birds. In their haste they clasped them too tightly to themselves. They ran. They bent down ... pebbles which they cast far away over the hedge ... chirping. They climbed straight up to the ... from their garments, they found ... all tried to revive them by ... warm breath fall on them, lift ... their beaks with a finger. They remained ... thousand little girls bewailed the death of the ... hundred thousand rooms of the hundred thousand...



[Anat Ben-David:]

what's the matter?

i'm so happy! good.

glaaaad.

It was nice ... thank you.

It was nice.

thank you

[Catharine Cary:]

thank you

like you just the way you are like you just the way you are

les filles ont trouvé des oiseaux,

des oiseaux qui n'avaient de plumes des oiseaux qui n'avaient pas de coeurs

des oiseaux qui étaient malade

des oiseaux qui avaient besoin d'aide

ils ont pris des oiseaux entre leurs mains ils les ont écraser contre leur  
coeurs

pour les rechauffer

en espérant les rendre, les re rendre en vie

ils ont courus

elles ont courus jusqu'a chez eux

en tenant très fort très fort très fort ces petits oiseaux qui avait plus de coeur  
qui battaient trop fort même

en arrivant chez eux, ils sont monter dans leur chambre directement  
sans arrêter par al cuisine  
sans dire bonjour à maman ni à papa ni bonjour au petit frere ...  
ils sont montés dans leur chambre  
et la, ils on découvert, elles ont découvert qu'ils avaient serré trop fort ...

What's the matter?

Anat Ben-David and Catharine Cary  
Improvising during lockdown  
March–May 2020

AFFORDANCES/LIMITATIONS

LATENCY/DISTORTIONS

EMBODIMENT NOW/LATER

During the COVID 19 lockdown/isolation/quarantine, performers, scenographers, musicians and wordsmiths Anat Ben-David and Catharine Cary improvised via ZOOM every Tuesday from March to May 2020. Embracing latency, zoom's affordances, limitations and distortions, they show here excerpts of a transformed body of work. Separated by 5218 km, given the COVID 19 situation, it could have been 200 meters. What's the matter?

special thanks to the text "Les Guérillères" by Monique Wittig - whose original in French was translated into English then improvised back into French. We have chosen not to translate it in the video -- preferring sonority to comprehension.

The authors declare no competing interests. 2020

[12:04]



### **Virtually Embodied: Remembering the Sensations of Connection**

ABSTRACT: THIS FILM IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE BODY: BEING PRESENT TO PLACE AND TIME; BEING AWARE OF CONNECTION WITH OTHERS, WHETHER THAT BE IN REALITY OR THROUGH VIRTUAL CONNECTION AND SENSORIAL MEMORY.

Feel your body settle and begin to connect with your embodied self. Feel your feet on the floor.

Connection to the body and to earth is

Like how

“The caress is a reawakening to the life of my body:

to its skin, senses, muscles, nerves and organs,

most of the inhibited, subjugated, dormant

or enslaved to everyday activity,

to the universe of needs,

to the world of labor,

to the imperatives or restrictions necessary for communal living.”

(Irigaray, 2001, p.25)

And just gently shift your weight around your feet on the floor so you can feel that you're not leaning backwards, forwards. All your weight should be even on both sides of your body. And from there, grow roots down to the earth. Breathe out deeply. And each time you breathe out extend those roots down to the earth. Feel the possibilities of that exploration. As you are moving, let those movements head towards infinity.

“..there is a virtual exploration of every possibility. And this infinite set of possibilities, or infinite sum of histories, entails a particle touching itself, and then that touching touching itself, and so on, ad infinitum. Every level of touch, then, is itself touched by all possible others.” (Barad, 2012, p. 210)

Even the tiniest movement will affect the molecules in the room. There are infinite possibilities. Feel the boundaries of your body. Feel the air that you're moving through. Feel the molecules that move as you move. And when you're feeling a sense of disconnect in these extraordinary times that we're living in. Just come back to your body.

The barrier dissolves. It's not as solid as you think, and you can still reach through the barrier, with movement and begin to connect to the space around you. Reaching out, let that reach extend, out through the walls, out to the trees, out to the gardens, up to the sky. And feel. Imagine the winds that you can shape with your hands and your arms and your whole body.

“...to a touching between us which is neither passive nor active, it is an awakening of gestures, of perceptions which are at the same time acts, intentions, emotions. This does not mean that they are ambiguous, but rather, that they are attentive to the person who touches and the one who is touched, to the two subjects who touch each other” (Irigaray, 2001, p.25)

And try and think back to the time when you could actually make contact. So, explore that feeling where you could actually contact someone else's hand. Think about things other than hands, other body parts. Just let the movement flow.

#### MIND THE GAP

Advisory on Safe Distancing Measures at Retail Establishments

#### CROWD AND QUEUE MANAGEMENT

Space out the queueing of shoppers (at least 1 metre apart) for fitting rooms and cashiers

Use floor stickers to mark queueing positions

“So much happens in a touch:  
an infinity of others—other beings,  
other spaces, other times—are aroused.”

(Barad, 2012, p. 206)

And so we come to sense the intimacy of touch and movement in other beings, other places, other times...

Video article by:

Deanna Borland-Sentinella Ph.D Researcher and performer with a focus on embodied practices @ [www.d-create.me](http://www.d-create.me)

Louise Gwenneth Phillips Ph.D SFHEA

Associate Professor in Education (James Cook University, Singapore) with a focus on children's citizenship and storytelling @ <https://louptales.education>

Alice Owen

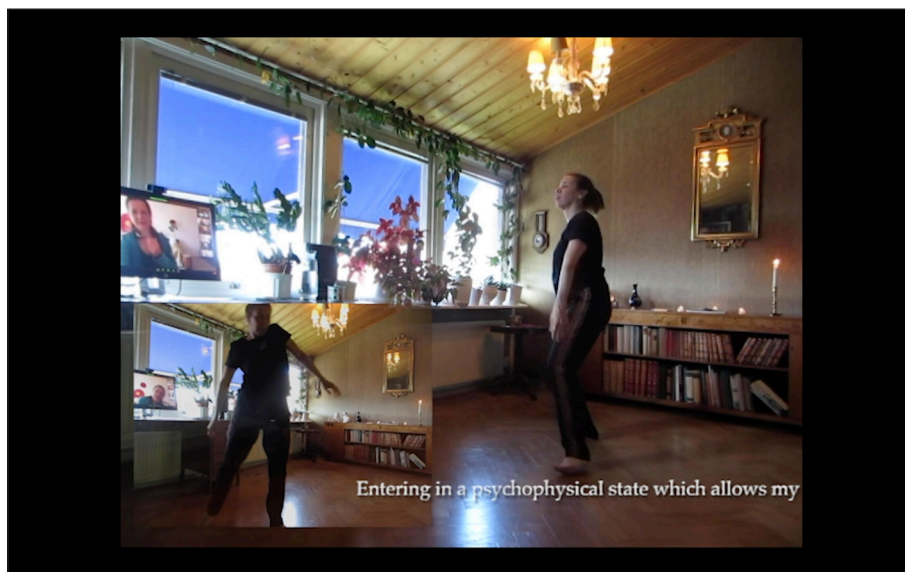
Improvised movement theatre director, performer, deviser, collaborator and trainer with 40 years' experience @ [www.aliceowen.com.au](http://www.aliceowen.com.au)

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[17:08]



## Notes from a *zoom* 5Rhythms® session

09.05.2020, Gothenburg

by Nathalie S. Fari

Abstract:

By using a three-hour 5Rhythms® online workshop as basis, this video sheds light into the ways in which the practitioner interacts and engages with both one's own bodily awareness and the new technology of *zoom*.

Short Bio:

Nathalie S. Fari works across the fields of performative arts, artistic research and somatic education. Her research lies in exploring a site-oriented performance practice through a phenomenological, post-humanist and documentary approach.

[Nathalie Fari:]

Tuning into today's moving meditation practice and the so-called *wave* of the 5Rhythms®: flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, stillness.

[Bettina Leuckert:]

Erlaube Dir Deinen eigenen Körper zu spüren. In Deinem eigenen Raum, in  
Deinem eigenen Körperraum anzukommen.

Allow yourself to feel your body, really in your own space. To arrive in your own body-space.

[Nathalie Fari:]

For me, this practice is a way of connecting to my body and to the others.

“Unstable internet connection” ..., do you know this feeling?

Entering in a psychophysical state which allows my body to unfold freely in the space, while letting the sound take over and create meaning.

I would like to take this moment, or the peak of this wave, which is usually induced by the rhythm “chaos,” to state that even though I am having the pleasure of practicing at home, I still feel disconnected from the others.

I have been hearing from some 5Rhythms practitioners, that they are feeling much safer dancing through zoom than in a physical space. This worries me a bit, as this might compromise the sense of taking care of each other and

of supporting one's own development. Can you imagine a shamanistic ritual being streamed and done on the internet? What kind of embodiment would be needed to still be able to access not only oneself, but also the powers of nature?

Rhythm establishes not only a temporal structure but also an emotional/cultural framework of expectations and ways of 'being-in-the-world'. (2017, Morris, p.151)

[Bettina Leuckert:]

Wenn Du magst komm näher zum Bildschirm und schaue ob sich ein gemeinsames *grooven* ergibt, wie wir uns über die Bewegung verbinden können.

If you like, come closer to the screen and see if there is a common *groove*, of how movement can connect us.

If the past is something, we encounter in the future tense of our yet to be realized interpretation, we must realize the cast of that re-temporizing. One of the most alarming features of the discourse of the new technologies, for example, is the tendency to repress the existence of previous technologies. Yelling, "I'm new", "I'm new", this new discourse, like most born-again devotees forgets the technologies that preceded it and helped bring into being. (1998, Phelan, p. 9)

Written and narrated by Nathalie S. Fari

5Rhythms® teacher: Bettina Leuckert

Camera and editing: Nathalie S. Fari

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Music

Dolphin by Sundari

Chen Rezi by Gabrielle Roth and The Mirrors

Joy by Avital Califa

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Special Thanks to

Katxerê Medina, Robert Ansell-Ravenrecording

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[22:40]



### **Sheltering in Spacetimeatterings: Audiovisual Considerations of Social Distancing**

Adapted from "Summer Breeze," by Seals and Crofts, 1972, *Summer Breeze*. CC BY-NC.

[Amber:]

So... it's possible that we're just going to have three different materials... like, all throughout.

[Becky:]

Yeah.

[Amber:]

But this is the constant.

[Becky:]

Right.

So... it's possible that we're just going to have three different materials... like, all throughout.

Yeah.

But this is the constant.

Right.

[00:10] ["Rewind" sound and "clock ticking" sound]

Sheltering in Spacetime matters:

Audiovisual Considerations of Social Distancing

by ABC (AmberBeckyCreative)

Two socially distant authors glitch audiovisual intra-actions\* through embodied (dis)orientations of space, time, and matter in past/present/future collapsed to (re)present what it's like to shelter in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

\* See Barad (2007).

[Glitching begins and continues throughout video with, for example, (il)legible dates; (in)audible conversation, noise, and music; and (in)visible images and videos]

[Static sound]

["Summer Breeze" (Seals and Crofts, 1972) plays in the background]

March 18, 2020

We need more rubber bands...

Ok. Ok. Yeah.

[Laughter]

...more twisty-ties. I got twisty-ties.

We need more rubber bands...

April 14, 2020

But this is the constant.

...more twisty-ties. I got twisty-ties.

That's what I'm wondering. Is that? And, then, is that enough...

Ok. Thank you

[Seals and Crofts:]

Summer breeze...

... makes me feel fine.

[Hawk calls/screeches]

But this is the constant.

Right. That's what I'm wondering. Is that? And, then, is that enough unity?

[Static sound]

March 22, 2020

[Rain sound]

[Static sound]

[Static sound]

[Static sound]

Summer breeze. Summer breeze.

What other thing am I going to use?

...feel fine ...makes me feel fine.

[Plastic crinkles as it is braided]

[Static sound]

[Laughter]

my mind...

I know.

Ok. I'm gonna... I'm gonna...

Ok.

Oh, is this all one piece?

Uh... but this is the constant... I think [clears throat]... it's various.

Right. That's what I'm wondering. Is that? And, then, is that enough unity?  
...that's what I want to see...

But this is the constant.

Right.

That's what I'm wondering. Is that? And, then, is that enough unity? ...that's  
what I want to see... This is also a different size ...looks like...

[Static sound]

[Rain sound]

[Static sound]

So... it's possible that we're just going to have three different materials... like,  
all throughout. But this is the constant.

Right. That's what I'm wondering. Is that? And, then, is that enough unity?  
...that's what I want to see...

...different materials... Yeah... like, so, all throughout... it's possible that we're  
just going to have three different materials... like, all throughout...

...that's what I want to see...

But this is the constant.

[Static sound]

Yeah.

Constant.

Right. That's what I'm wondering.

Is that? And, then, is that enough unity? ...that's what I...

...want to see.

Yeah. I think that's a really good idea.

Ok. Ok. Yeah.

[Weather forecast plays]

[M. McCall (2020):] If, uh, if you know someone that's in the area... If, if you've lost power... If you can let friends know that they can continue to watch us. If you don't have a way to watch television online through, uh, streaming serv...

...makes me feel fine...

Ok. Ok. Yeah.

Excellent.

We need...

...more rubber bands...

[Birds chirping]

...or twisty ties. I got twisty ties.

Ok. Thank you.

Summer breeze...

But this is the constant.

Right. That's what I'm wondering. Is that? And, then, is that enough...

...unity? ...that's what I want to see...

...makes me feel fine...

I know.

Ok, I'm gonna... I'm gonna...

Ok.

Oh, is this all one piece?

Um, I think [clears throat] it's various. Like...

Ok.

There's still more...

Summer breeze...

...makes me feel fine...

But this is the constant.

Right. And that's what I'm wondering...

Oh, is this all one piece?

Um, I think... it's various.

Like, but this is the constant.

Right. That's what I'm wondering.

Is that? And, then, is that enough unity?

Yeah.

A different thing in the braid.

Mmm-hmmm.

So... it's possible that we're just going to have...

...three different materials... like, all throughout.

Yeah.

But this...

...is the constant.

Right. That's what I'm wondering. Is that? And, then, is that enough unity?

Mmm-hmmm.

Uhhhh.

[Amber:] And we still don't have a conclusion.

[Becky:] We still don't have a conclusion... Is there a conclusion? ...I mean...

[Amber:] Is there *ever* a conclusion? Have we ever written a conclusion?

[Becky:] Should we just use those words: Is there ever a conclusion?

[Amber:] May... Maybe we do. Maybe this is... the reason that we recorded this, is to have this conversation. Like, is there really ever a conclusion?

[Becky:] I don't think there is, but...

[Amber:] I mean, there's certainly not a conclusion to Covid... that we know of.



[Becky:] Right.

["Summer Breeze" plays over references and acknowledgments]

Summer breeze makes me feel fine...

[Becky:] What other thing am I going to use?

Blowing through the jasmine in my mind...

[Amber:] I know.

[Becky:] Ok. I'm gonna...

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Ryan Albritton, artwork on photographed postcard.

Edgar Sanchez Cumbas, *Brown* exhibited at The STARHOUSE in Tampa, Florida.

Bretton Varga, photographs from Gumbs's (2020) *Dub: Finding ceremony*.

[Amber:] Like, maybe... I don't know. Like, maybe we end the video... with the audio from this... this part right here.

[Becky:] Yeah. Ok, done.

[Amber:] Ok! Cut!

["Summer Breeze" plays over author bio]

Summer breeze makes me feel fine...

Becky: What other thing am I going to use?

### Author Bio

AmberBeckyCreative (ABC) is an ongoing collaboration between Amber Ward, PhD (Florida State University) and Rebecca C. Christ, PhD (Florida International University); we (both together and independently) explore pedagogy and qualitative inquiry using critical, postcolonial, poststructural, and posthuman concepts for the purpose of inspiring new ways of be(com)ing, doing, and knowing.

### Note

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### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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