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Proposal for Graduate Paper Workshop on International Migration

Affecting humanity, challenging exclusion, moving-with stories of deportation

For the Graduate Paper Workshops on International Migration, I propose to present my work on the digital storytelling project Humanizing Deportation and the contact improvisation technique I co-developed for *moving-with* these stories. During 2016, I conducted fieldwork in Tijuana as part of this UC Davis Border Studies project, which uses digital storytelling to give a human face to experiences of deportation. In collaboration with community participants, we created an ongoing open-access archive (www.humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu) that makes visible a range of personal narratives, from crossing the border in hopes of a better life to growing up in the US, serving in the US Military, the challenges of being undocumented, the atrocities of immigrant detention, families separate by the 'wall', unbreakable bonds of love, struggles with addiction, making a new life and building community. With this paper, I reflect on my community-engaged performance practice-as-research exploring the ways in which audiences in California can *move-with* these digital stories, and how this can become a humanizing experience that amplifies both speakers' and listeners' capacity to affect and be affected.

I understand dehumanization as containment, exclusion, isolation and individuation - the intended effect of hegemonic state discourses that "criminalize" and "racialize" certain bodies so that they can be exploited and subjugated, even to the point of death. Neoliberal governments determine who has the right to mobility through the selectivity of borders that free some and immobilize others (Mau, 2010). The mobility regime is predicated on the classification of identities according to perceived threats and risks and constitutes certain subjects' inherent 'illegality'; those who do not 'belong' to a specific place become suspicious to the state, leading to incarceration and deportation being the only perceived way to 'deal' with these 'hateful others' (Shamir, 2005; Haritawarn, 2016). Nationalistic discourses attempt to dehumanize 'unwanted' migrant bodies, in order to deny their citizenship and human rights, through criminalization, racialization, confinement, and expulsion. Immigrant detention, in particular, revokes prisoners' right to liberty of movement and intends to cut them off from society, infringing on their right to affiliation - "being able to live for and in relation to others" (Nussbaum in Garrett, 2008). However, the human capacity of connection perseveres.

I am essentially interested in how we care, for one another and ourselves. This means attending to the difference between a passive "moral intention" to "care about" and the maintenance work to "care for" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The narrators in our archive affirm their connectedness to networks of care that are limited and fragile, enduring and adaptable, and that entangle us all. What can *feeling* how we are moved by these stories of detention and deportation teach us about the experience of being "human"? I believe, beyond self-containment, we can gain a sense of relational responsibility. I view the humanizing potential of expression/witnessing these digital stories through the lens of *embodiment* and *affect*. Csordes defines *embodiment* as the condition of *being* bodies in *relation* to the world (in Citro, 2015). In terms of affect and its many elusive definitions, I find Manning's perspective helpfully nuanced for the purpose of considering how contact improvisation, as a technique for *moving-with* digital stories, might bring about an embodied understanding of "human" experience (2012). The

continual process of becoming-human is inherently relational; it is the reaching beyond “self” towards feeling the *affective attunement* between individuals that animates *all life* as bodily relation (Manning).

In order to better understand becoming-human as an embodied experience in relation to each other and the world, I look to contact improvisation as a creative approach to witnessing stories of self-determination as *more than* discursive re-articulations of individual identity. The aim is to facilitate a process of *affective attunement*, through heightened attention to how we affect and are affected by complex dynamics of care (in a delicate, embodied balance of precarity, pressure, resistance, and support) inherent to humanity’s interdependence with *all life* – as in Bautista’s decolonial understanding of humanization as the revindication of life-affirming relationality (2017). I began my practice of *moving-with* the Humanizing Deportation digital stories, in collaboration with Juan Camilo Cajigas and Maria Ceja, as part of an interactive installation at Sol Collective, a Chicax cultural center in Sacramento, in April, 2018. We continued developing this methodology throughout the summer and fall and then facilitated a second workshop at International House Davis that November. We invited participants from the local community to pause and listen, take time to connect and move together. Our initial questions were: How can we *listen-with* the body? By *moving-with* these voices, can we amplify their resistance to dehumanization? How can we *feel* the affirmation of humanity as a condition of inalienable interdependence?

In my analysis of this practice-as-research, I find that *moving-with* offers a way of not only disseminating narratives of deportation by authors in Mexico but also explores how our digital story archive can resonate in different body-minds in California. Expressing experiences of detention and deportation through digital storytelling can be a humanizing speech act of self-determination; witnessing these stories, by *moving-with* them, can become a shared experience of *affective attunement* (not feeling of, but *feeling-with*) (Manning, 2012). Through contact improvisation techniques, we can express how hearing them impacts and changes us, paying attention to our senses and impulses, points of connection and departure. *Moving-with* thus potentiates the experience of witnessing beyond the individual self, reaching past passive spectatorship to *feel-with* individual narratives as a collective experience that implicates witnesses’ *response-ability* (responsibility and ability to respond). In order to counter processes of dehumanization, these creative acts of expressing/witnessing can reaffirm the humanity of both narrator and witness as inherently interdependent.