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### **Sensuous Contagion**

Three months ago, my child Samuel entered hospital for a bone marrow transplant. Imagine us together in a sterile room. I was confronted every day, every minute with the same dilemma: the closer I get to him, the higher the risk of contagion. The further away, the lower the chance to help. The story reveals a difficult aspect of a fundamental question: what is it to be 'us'?

Take the situation of a crosswalk in the heart of the city. Place yourself there, in stillness, like I did a couple of years ago. People are walking across. You listen with all the senses. What do you hear? I heard so many inputs but couldn't connect with any of them. What's the point of standing there, together, if our society has stripped the body of the potential for cultural meaning? The point is: to develop sensuous knowledge, you need to get entangled in the material fabrics of life. And this is what my research, led by the practice of tango, aims to do.

Tango, danced all over the world, is deeply influenced by the imagery of an encounter between a man and a woman, under the spell of dramatic music, in old-days Buenos Aires - very different from Melbourne city. Here comes the challenge of the PhD: how do we make tango speak to other dances of life, if the art form cannot be translated without losing the invisible traces of 'us'?

After the crosswalk experiment, the fieldwork moved to the studio. We explored ways to 'undress' the dance and find its basic elements through a process of shared improvisation. We took away the music. And opened up the space between 'initiating and following' to investigate what is perceived in those moments of not knowing. What's left of tango, though? An answer is emerging from the underbelly of the research: the impulse to play. The creative task is to anchor that impulse so that the body can become more aware of what is experienced in the encounter.

It's quite uncanny that the reality of being a father in a critical situation has helped unlock the potential of the PhD. There can be no dance and no encounter without taking the risk of a contagion.

