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SOMATICS *of*  
Contact Improvisation

Somatics of Contact Improvisation

*To the community  
To those I have danced  
organized and shared with  
To the words the hugs the eyes  
To the teachers  
To the thousand sweaty t-shirts  
To the dancefloors  
the studios the spaces  
To joy  
Yes  
Especially to the joy  
Dance can give*

# Introduction

In these pages, I aim to explore Contact Improvisation, how I've experienced it, my understanding of it, and my attempts to dissect, analyze, and grasp what is, by its very nature and history, already complex.

With twenty years of experience, extending far beyond the realm of dance alone, my journey has been shaped by meaningful encounters, inspiring spaces, and profound insights.

For those who engage with Contact Improvisation, it often becomes an all-encompassing experience, drawing them into a rich web of stimuli that touch the body and mind, as well as the social and political realms, transforming it into a truly holistic life practice.

This text is just one reflection of my deep immersion in the dance, a series of questions and answers processed through movement, digested by the body.

I've had experiences that I would describe as ecstatic. Improvisation has taken me to altered states of consciousness, all while keeping me fully present and aware. I've danced through joy, sadness, and anger, allowing even the smallest emotion to resonate deep within my cells. Over time, I realized that to truly immerse myself in the dance, my body needed not only physical coherence, but a holistic harmony. It called for an alignment that went beyond the muscles and limbs, reaching into the depths of my psyche. The dance, then, became an intimate dialogue between body and inner self.

Through this process of integration, a kind of bodily alchemy emerged, where the various dimensions of being blended into a single expression. Coherence became the key to unlocking the dance's full potential, transforming it into a pathway for inner exploration and authentic communication.

During the jams, I felt nourished by skin-to-skin contact, by meeting different bodies, and by absorbing the energy of the surroundings. This led me to the realization that I, too, was offering nourishment to others and to the spaces I inhabited.

My perception has become fine-tuned to the point of allowing me to dance with the earth, with a tree. My body has learned countless ways to connect, define its boundaries, and manage its vulnerability.

And then there was the music, an energy I've come to feel with a depth that surpasses simple listening. This experience has enriched and deepened my role as a musician, making it more dynamic and interactive. Though I'd love to write about every detail, I feel it's necessary to leave some aspects untouched, preserved in the realm of pure sensory experience.

Since my first steps into the world of dance, I've passed through various phases, including periods of resistance and boredom, which, paradoxically, have reshaped my perspective in new and unexpected ways. I believe this fluidity in viewpoint has helped sustain my natural curiosity. Moments of monotony turned out to be invitations to move forward in my research, each phase requiring a deeper awareness of somatic aspects. It has been more than just learning a dance style; it has been, above all, a journey filled with questions that demanded transformation in order to be fully understood.

I devoted particular attention to observation, both of myself and of others, with an increasingly investigative eye. Using these observations as valuable material for deeper inquiry, I pushed myself beyond conventional limits. Finally, I was fortunate enough to share this knowledge with various groups, which allowed me to recognize the value and significance of my research. I want to emphasize that I do not consider myself solely a dancer, just as I have never fully identified as a musician.

My interests have never been confined to one specialized field or discipline. My attraction to these expressive forms has always been shaped by my unique perception, and I've never followed conventional or universally accepted viewpoints.

What truly inspires me is not the form itself, but rather what the experience can bring, how it can enrich who I am. In other words, I am not passionate about Contact Improvisation in and of itself, but rather about the opportunities it offers to explore something stimulating and innovative through its practice. This distinction may be subtle, yet it reflects whether the "self" is present or absent in what we do.

It's about viewing dance more as a lens through which we engage with reality, rather than as the object of reality itself. Whether I'm dancing, playing music, or engaging in any other art form, on a deeper level, there is no essential difference. This realization was likely the spark that ignited a series of questions that needed to be explored within the somatic processes of body-mind functioning.

With this text, I hope to offer an analysis from both the perspective of the dancer and the observer of body movement dynamics (a passion and focus of my work for many years). Acknowledging that this dance form can be approached in various ways, I aim to codify certain aspects which, though supported by physiological and historical elements, remain open to further exploration and debate.

Contact Improvisation, of course, is just one of many valuable experiences that the broader landscape of practices offers, without positioning itself as superior or inferior to other equally significant practices.

At first glance, this book might give the impression of an obsession with technical details or an exclusive focus on physiological and somatic processes.

However, I'd like to reassure you: for me, Contact Improvisation, something I've shared many times, remains an art form rich with poetic and creative expression.

The reason I address it here in a more specific, technical way is simply because my intention is to focus on certain other aspects. Additionally, I will not delve into the physical preparation necessary for Contact Improvisation, though I consider it fundamental. On the surface, CI might appear to be just about physical contact and body movement, but in reality, there is a quality of movement that requires not only awareness but also proper physical training. This misunderstanding often leads people to participate in jams without adequate preparation, which can cause them to lose interest or disengage when they don't feel fully connected to the practice.

While these pages may seem like a breakdown of internal processes, it was, in fact, my felt experience that led me down this path. Often, we use physical exercises to heighten our perception. In this case, the process was reversed: perception was the starting point, and it led to the creation of a more concrete physical foundation, which then provided explanations. What you will find here, therefore, is the result of direct experience, with theory and understanding emerging later.

As this understanding deepened, it gradually transformed my dancing. Initially, this transformation happened unconsciously, but later it became a more deliberate part of my research. It turned into a continuous cycle of experimentation, observation, and deduction. In short, I allowed my body to express itself freely, while I observed and reflected on the feedback.

Even more interestingly, this focus never diminished the joy I experienced during the practice, quite the opposite, it led to an even deeper, more creative enjoyment.

It intensified the pleasure I felt in the dance. I read Steve Paxton's (founder of Contact Improvisation) writings and listened to his interviews only towards the end of my study, and I was pleased to discover that my findings were perfectly aligned with his words, even though he expressed them in a more philosophical and metaphysical way. It was a gratifying confirmation.

Before writing this book, I went through a period of contemplation, as I wanted to clarify my objectives. Until they were fully clear, I limited myself to writing a few articles, without embracing a broader or more descriptive approach.

*So, what are the real reasons behind writing this text?*

First of all, I wish to express my gratitude to those who conceived, developed, and spread this practice. Over the years, I have witnessed an extraordinary manifestation of joy springing from the dances and the sense of community that permeates this discipline. I feel a sense of duty to contribute to it.

Another objective is to encourage research, as Paxton emphasized that inquiry is at the very heart of CI. This investigative mindset significantly alters our relationship with our perceptual systems, drawing us into a continual process of change and growth.

Contact Improvisation is far more than a discipline to be learned; it is a profound tool for *self-exploration*. Because of its intrinsic connection to both physiological and mental systems, it inevitably reverberates into our daily lives. This aspect has inspired many to explore CI's interconnectedness with social, emotional, and even political spheres.

My third goal is to highlight the depth of this dance, with the hope that people will approach it with greater attention and curiosity.

This collection serves as a guide not only for beginners but also as an in-depth resource for more experienced dancers.

It offers a valuable tool for navigating those inevitable moments of crisis when one feels trapped in repetitive dynamics. In such times, this book aims to open new possibilities by offering fresh perspectives and ways of perceiving the dance, helping to rekindle enthusiasm.

While much has been written about the history and evolution of Contact Improvisation, as well as its social, relational, and political dimensions, relatively little has been said about the somatic aspects. I hope to bring new inspiration or at least some fresh ideas to explore and grow with.

This text includes a series of articles I have written over the years (the first dating back to 2011), many of which were published online in scattered fashion. With this book, I've reorganized and connected them into a more comprehensive and structured discussion. I hope that having them available in paper form will make them easier to follow and absorb. Ultimately, I hope that dance remains an analog activity forever.

To help facilitate a clear understanding and connection between the various concepts, I suggest reading in the order provided, keeping in mind the division of topics into chapters.

*Wishing everyone an insightful and enjoyable read.*



## What is Contact Improvisation

I doubt that this volume, being fundamentally technical and specific in nature, will end up in the hands of people who are completely unfamiliar with the subject. However, since this could still happen, I'll dedicate a few lines to give a general outline, true to its standard definition, of what Contact Improvisation (CI) is. My personal description follows.



Nancy Stark Smith and Alan Ptashek, 1979, photo. Erich Franz

Contact Improvisation is a form of contemporary dance and cooperative movement that originated in the 1970s. It is based on exploring physical movement and communication through physical contact between participants. Developed by a group of dancers led by *Steve Paxton*, CI emerged from a desire to experiment with new forms of movement and physical interaction. The central idea of the practice is to move spontaneously and intuitively, responding to the movements and actions of other participants.

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

The practice involves physical contact, supporting, rolling, lifting, and other bodily interactions. However, it's important to emphasize that CI is non-competitive and has no predefined movement patterns. Participants are free to explore their movements and co-create a unique experience together.

CI is appreciated both as an artistic practice and as a means of creative expression and interpersonal communication. The nature of physical contact in this dance can be both playful and profound, providing an opportunity for many to discover new connections with their own bodies and those of others.

The history of Contact Improvisation began in the 1970s with Steve Paxton, an American choreographer and dancer who was part of the legendary Merce Cunningham Dance Company and had extensive experience in contemporary dance and the performing arts.

In 1972, Paxton organized a series of intensive workshops where he started to formalize and teach the principles of Contact Improvisation to a group of dancers and performers. During these workshops, Paxton and the participants explored movement through physical contact, using body weight, muscle tension release, and balance play to build a unique vocabulary of movement.

The practice of CI quickly spread throughout the United States and around the world, as many dancers and artists were fascinated by the freedom and spontaneity of this form of movement.

In the years that followed, CI has continued to evolve and adapt according to the needs and interests of its participants. Various styles and approaches to the practice have emerged, and the CI community has grown to include people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and levels of experience.

Today, CI is still practiced and taught worldwide, with festivals, meetings, and workshops bringing dancers and artists together to share in the experience of collaborative movement and physical exploration. The practice remains open to anyone who wishes to experience a dance based on trust, connection, and creative expression through contact with others.



If I had to formulate *my own personal description*, I would say that Contact Improvisation is a practice that gives individuals the tools to establish a connection with an external world that is in continual and unpredictable flux. Simultaneously, individuals become dynamic and changing environments for others.

In this context, an internal world (the self) emerges, actively seeking to intertwine and flow with an external world made up of other dancers, the surrounding space, sounds, and everything with which it can interact.

Unlike the traditional custom of seeking a fixed agreement to establish connections between two entities, in CI, the agreement is dynamic and unpredictable because it is subject to improvisation.

Metaphysically, the aspiration is to weave connections between the inside and the outside, recognizing the intrinsic changeability of everything that is animated. As Emilio del Giudice (theoretical physicist) wisely states, “Immobility in nature is an abstraction.” *Unpredictability*, a fundamental characteristic of all natural phenomena, reigns supreme.

The environment, largely created by the other dancers, is not perceived as an adversary, but rather as an accomplice that stimulates the adaptation skills and challenges that a dancer can meet.

The concept of “dynamic agreement” in CI opens the door to a perspective in which negotiation between participants is continuous and fluid. It is not merely a matter of reaching a pre-established agreement but rather of navigating the unpredictable waters of shared creation together, accepting the unexpected and surprises as an integral part of the journey.

In attempting to connect our internal world with the external one, we find ourselves living a sort of dance that, even if performed with a physical body, activates more energetic and subtle spheres. Through CI, we strive to overcome the dualism between the self and the surrounding world, recognizing that every movement, every sound, and every space is intrinsically interconnected and constantly evolving.

In this scenario, everything is permeated by new perceptions, and as we dance, understanding, transformation, and integration manifest themselves synergistically. In the most salient moments, you feel a sense of union that transcends mere physical contact.

What I am illustrating finds its vehicle in movement, a material dimension that, at first glance, seems unable to embrace the immensity of the connections described. The real key to everything, as we will see, lies in the *nervous system*, the place of sensory integration and coding of subtle, often not so obvious messages.

The awareness with which we act substantially changes the sensory feedback and the information we obtain from it. The manner we observe and translate Contact Improvisation, in the same way, will lead us to a certain quality of dance. Observing, reflecting and researching are not only intellectual processes but concretely define the way in which we will physically move and interact with other bodies.

## What is Contact Improvisation

*“The mind can travel inside the body.  
I have an idea that this experiment was the  
experience that turned my mind toward  
dance or at least the kind of dance that i  
have done”*

*Steve Paxton*

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

## Somatics

The term “somatic” comes from the Greek word “soma,” meaning “body,” and somatic practices focus on the perception and understanding of bodily intelligence. Instead of emphasizing only physical movement, these practices invite individuals to develop a deep awareness of the sensations, emotions, images, and thoughts that arise during the exploration of the body and movement.

Specifically, the “Somatic Nervous System” transports all information regarding movements and the expression of the senses from the central nervous system to the whole body, and vice versa. In discussions about the somatic dimension of Contact Improvisation, we often encounter a certain ambiguity. There tends to be a propensity to incorporate other somatic practices into dance (*Somatics into Contact*) rather than investigating the intrinsic somatic aspect of CI itself.

To clarify, numerous somatic practices exist, such as the Feldenkrais Method, Body-Mind Centering, Authentic Movement, Axis Syllabus, and others. Each has its own structure, teaching methods, and defined language. Exploring somatics within Contact should not, in my opinion, translate into the direct adoption of one of these techniques, as *Contact Improvisation is already a somatic practice in itself*.

While all somatic practices can enhance body awareness and improve dance, they can sometimes create a sensation of forced adaptation, leading us to apply patterns where we should avoid them. The brain’s tendency to operate through pre-packaged and known movements may hinder our ability to approach the unstructured territory of Contact Improvisation with the openness it requires.

The somatic aspects of Contact must be scrutinized from within the practice itself, using its own perspectives, vision, and language.

The founders of this discipline did not intentionally delimit its boundaries, allowing the practice to express itself and evolve while encouraging a continuous spirit of research. It is almost as if they invited us to define our personal research framework within the broader container of Contact Improvisation.

We should also understand that somatics, in itself, does not typically constitute “research” but rather serves as a tool for exploration. Somatic awareness, while fundamental, is merely the springboard for undertaking real research, which represents a next step.

In Contact Improvisation, “*Somatics and Research coincide*,” and the reason lies in the intriguing process of improvisation. The body’s responses to our partner are both a somatic process and a fresh understanding that nourish the dance impulse. Researching, much like improvising, is a condition that does not necessarily require a goal to make sense of itself.

The invitation is to return to the cornerstones of proprioception, to the foundations of movement development and sensory growth, and to continue evolving through dance. This approach translates into a path that, although not easy, can stimulate the depth of our being even before influencing our actions. What happens to the soma during a dance characterized by these elements is what I mean by “*Somatics of Contact Improvisation*.”

Obviously, I do not presume to cover the entire scope of this topic in these few pages; this is just the beginning of a journey I hope will be interesting and stimulating. The elements I propose here can serve as a foundation for your personal research.



# The Nervous System

I'll begin this book by outlining some essential physiological concepts. Although these will be explained briefly and in a general way, they are indispensable for understanding the research discussed throughout. By starting with these basics, I aim to equip readers with the tools they need to engage deeply with the material that follows.

The human nervous system is divided into two main components: the Voluntary Nervous System and the Involuntary (or Autonomic) Nervous System. These two systems serve different functions and control various activities within the body.

## *- Voluntary Nervous System*

This system is responsible for the conscious control of muscular and skeletal movements. It enables us to perform actions such as walking, speaking, writing, lifting objects and other motor activities that are under our conscious control. Sensory information is transmitted to the brain, where it is processed, and motor responses are generated to activate the muscles. These motor signals control desired muscle movements.

## *- Involuntary (Autonomic) Nervous System*

The Autonomic Nervous System controls the body's involuntary or automatic functions, such as heart rate, digestion, breathing, blood pressure, and many other vital processes. This system operates largely outside of conscious control, automatically regulating these functions to maintain stable physical conditions essential for survival. It takes care of many functions related to the body's reactions to stimuli.

In summary, the Voluntary Nervous System manages voluntary muscle movements, while the Autonomic Nervous System regulates automatic body functions that maintain health and homeostasis. Both systems work together to ensure well-being and physiological efficiency.

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The Autonomic Nervous System is further divided into two subsystems: the Sympathetic Nervous System and the Parasympathetic Nervous System. These two systems often work in opposition to regulate various functions of the body, maintaining a delicate balance. Together, they ensure the body can adapt to changing conditions, responding to both external and internal demands. Their dynamic interaction is essential for preserving overall stability and health.

- *Sympathetic Nervous System:*

This system is known for its role in “fight or flight” responses. It is activated in stressful, dangerous, or emergency situations, preparing the body to respond quickly and effectively.

Typical responses of the Sympathetic Nervous System include increased heart rate, dilation of pupils, heightened blood pressure, adrenaline release, decreased digestive activity, blood concentration in the limbs (to facilitate fighting or fleeing), and glucose release into the bloodstream for additional energy. This system is essential for preparing the body for emergencies and enhancing physical performance in stressful conditions.

Interestingly, the word “freeze” is often added to describe the complete range of responses (*fight, flight or freeze*), as shock can lead to a total immobilization of the system.

### - *Parasympathetic Nervous System*

This system acts as a counterbalance to the Sympathetic Nervous System. It activates during rest, relaxation, and digestion. Typical responses include a reduced heart rate, lowered blood pressure, improved digestive function, and energy restoration. The Parasympathetic System helps return the body to a calm state after the Sympathetic System has responded to stress. A common issue associated with stress is the failure to transition back to Parasympathetic activity after a tense event or period.

The Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Nervous Systems work in tandem to ensure that the body can adapt appropriately to various situations. It's important to note that both systems are always active, but their activities fluctuate based on immediate needs. In stressful situations, the Sympathetic Nervous System dominates, while in calm and restful moments, the Parasympathetic Nervous System prevails.

During intense Sympathetic activation, the body does not move in an integrated manner; the various parts may not collaborate holistically, and one might even hold their breath. Additionally, blood vessels in the prefrontal cortex constrict, which can make us “less intelligent” in terms of movement. The potential for integrated, safe, and conscious movement decreases significantly. The various parts of the body lose their ability to communicate and work together harmoniously.

The Sympathetic System creates a sensory fragmentation, both internally and externally, leading to diminished perception and unclear information processing (as Nancy Stark Smith notes, “*Tension covers sensations*”).

In contrast, the Parasympathetic System gives a sense of unity, allowing the body's systems to function in harmony and enhancing overall strength in a holistic way.

## The Proprioceptive System

The Proprioceptive System is one of the sensory systems in the human body responsible for perceiving and controlling position, movement, and muscle tension. It plays a fundamental role in maintaining balance, coordination, and spatial awareness. Here are some of the main components of the proprioceptive system:

- **Muscle Spindles:**

Located within the muscles, these spindles detect muscle tension and length. When a muscle contracts or elongates, muscle-tendon receptors send signals to the brain to inform it of its position and state.

- **Joint Receptors:**

Found in the joints, these receptors provide information about the relative positions of the joints, which is crucial for precise control of joint movements.

- **Skin Receptors:**

These receptors detect touch, pressure, and temperature, contributing to the overall perception of body position and movement.

- **Golgi Tendon Organs:**

Located at the junction between striated muscle fibers and tendon fibers, these organs can detect even the subtlest movements, such as *Intentions*, and bring them to awareness (*pag.55*).

The brain receives and processes information from these receptors to maintain control over the body. For instance, when walking on an uneven surface, the proprioceptive system plays a vital role in regulating balance and preventing falls. Another clear example is its ability to inform us about our body position; even with our eyes closed, we can discern whether our arm is bent or straight.

## THE PROPRIOCEPTIVE SYSTEM

*"I think that one of the reasons i got involved in dance is to finish my movement development, because I have a hunger to find and to finish and to explore essentially what babies do when they begin to move, a hunger to find out more of what movement is or can be. I think it provides a service to keep the search alive".*

*Steve Paxton*

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

## What to Do, How to Do It

Most studies in Contact Improvisation primarily focus on the art of “*how to*”. This includes exploring techniques such as managing the body, grounding it, rolling, falling, utilizing the center, and more. This set of essential information is undoubtedly crucial and deserves practice, exploration, and study.

However, before addressing the “how,” it is essential to consider what precedes it: the “*what to do*”. This refers to the conscious (action) or unconscious (reaction) decision to activate an impulse to move.

As you now know, our nervous system is divided into a voluntary branch, subject to our control (will), and an involuntary branch, known as the Autonomic Nervous System. The latter governs vegetative functions, those generally outside of voluntary control, and plays an important role in our *reactions* to stimuli. Within movement, we therefore have two possibilities: action or reaction.

Body movement actions and reactions are complex processes involving a combination of sensory input, neural processing, and motor responses. The human body can perform a wide range of movements, from voluntary to involuntary, creating infinite nuances between the two approaches. We will never attain a state of pure action, nor will we find ourselves completely in a state of reaction.

In short, the act of making a choice to move involves the activation of the Voluntary Nervous System, while in reactive situations, we find ourselves in a state where the involvement of the brain and will can be reduced to a minimum or even absent. We can't decide how to react but we can train ourselves to have a different type of reaction.

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

Here is an overview of movement actions and reactions:

### - *Voluntary Movements*

Decisions to perform a voluntary movement originate in the brain, which processes information from various body parts. The brain sends signals through the Voluntary Nervous System to activate the specific muscles involved in the desired movement.

### - *Reflexive Movements*

Some movements are triggered by external stimuli without involving conscious awareness (e.g., the knee patellar reflex with the hammer). The response is instantaneous and involves the transmission of nerve signals through specific neural pathways, with minimal involvement of the higher brain.

### - *Involuntary Movements*

Some movements are controlled by the Autonomic Nervous System, such as heart rate, breathing, and digestion. These movements are automatic and occur without the direct involvement of conscious will.

### - *Reactions to Environmental Stimuli*

The body reacts to stimuli from the surrounding environment, such as a slippery surface or a gust of wind. Reactions may involve postural corrections, balance adjustments, and movement adaptations. These responses may be automatic or may involve a conscious control component.

### - *Motor Learning*

Through experience, the body learns new movement patterns and adapts motor responses. Motor learning involves the adaptation of neural pathways to improve performance and reduce the need for conscious control. It requires focus and consistent concentration.



*What kind of Action/Reaction do we have in CI?*

Now, let's delve into the essence of how a CI dance actually takes place, beginning with a definition of "Improvisation".

*"Improvisation is the act of creating something spontaneously or randomly as you perform it. It involves an unfolding or execution that materializes with immediacy and ease".*

Improvisation comes from the concept of "*sudden*", which is opposed to "*predictable*" or "*planned*". In CI, improvisation manifests as spontaneous and dynamic bodily interaction between dancers who adapt to circumstances in real time, challenging predefined choreographic conventions. Dancers are faced with something unpredictable, with which they must find a way to flow in order to keep a connection alive through contact, weight exchange, and more. They cannot predict their partner's movements, and vice versa.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the most effective methods manifest in "*Reaction to environmental stimuli*" and in "*Motor learning*". In these states, we move with both full awareness of our will and flexibility when adapting to external stimuli. We act and react simultaneously, regulating this balance according to different situations. The bodies we dance with become our environmental stimuli and, what is even more interesting (Paxton's words return here), dance becomes to all intents and purposes motor learning, that is, a tool for growth and evolution.

The Voluntary Nervous System must necessarily give up some of its control to meet the demands of the stimuli that require adaptation.

## Follow, Adapt

Let us continue with the same theme by exploring a dynamic that clearly highlights the mechanisms described in the previous chapter.

### - **Follow**

This can be understood as the act of chasing after someone, led by whomever takes the initiative or leadership at a specific moment. Following requires us to actively bring our attention to the point of contact. When we follow, we do not change our energy; we simply remain as we are and pursue the proposed stimulus.

### - **Adapt**

Adapting involves the ability to modify or change our response based on the circumstances or needs of the moment. It is broader than the concept of following, as it entails flexibility when responding to changes in the environment. Adaptation changes our behavior, increasing our capacity to respond fluidly. It is usually not planned, but manifests itself instantly as a response to stimuli.

In concrete terms, adapting requires us to modify ourselves and, guided by our perception, align more closely with the movement quality of our partner. The fulcrum no longer resides exclusively in the point of contact; it involves our entire body. The voluntary system surrenders part of its ego to the dance, which effectively becomes a third entity to which both dancers adapt. There is a fundamental openness in adaptation that is not required when simply following. I often define “following” as a kind of slavery, while “adaptation” represents a form of connection.

As is implicit, in the context of adaptation, the Autonomic Nervous System increases its level of activity, immersing us in a state of greater reactivity while keeping the voluntary system constantly active, fundamental for any expression of movement. We respond to our partner with adaptation which effectively represents a state of body/mind.

This approach not only promotes integrated physicality but also leads to various fascinating side effects:

- *Reaction Speed*

The traditional process of understanding, making decisions, and then acting can often be too slow to maintain a connection with a partner in motion. By adopting reaction systems, which bypass prolonged cognitive processes, we respond more immediately.

- *Less Effort*

Following requires effort, which can compromise energy expenditure and risk creating tension, inevitably lowering perceptual quality. In contrast, adaptation fosters relaxation, amplifying our ability to perceive.

- *Connection*

Openness, as a holistic state, allows our partner to perceive us as a unified entity. Every action we take, even beyond the point of contact, becomes perceivable. Flowing with each other gains a renewed sense of naturalness and simplicity.

It is essential to underline that all these dynamics are made possible by the activation of the Parasympathetic Nervous System. The state of relaxation is the lifeblood of all the processes outlined here; a state of tension would inevitably block perception and, consequently, the possibility of connection.

## Weber-Fechner Law

We can begin to understand how *listening* is crucial in Contact Improvisation by exploring, contextualizing, and extending a biological law from 1860 that analyzes the relationship between the weight of a stimulus and human perception.

*The discovery of the relationship between stimulus and perception was made through an experiment that involved increasing the weight of an object supported by a person. The findings showed that the perception of this stimulus (the increase in weight) was less pronounced the heavier the object became. In other words, adding 1 kg to an object weighing 5 kg was perceived differently than adding 1 kg to an object weighing 30 kg.*

Greater pressure translates into reduced perception, and considering that Contact Improvisation is fundamentally based on the exchange of weight, this dynamic is of paramount importance.

This is because an individual's perceptual system is inherently designed to process a finite amount of *information*, whether it comes from movement, tension, pain, sensory awareness, or mental effort. Weight, inherently accompanied by some level of tension, contributes to this informational load.

When this limit is exceeded, the central nervous system becomes overwhelmed, struggling to process information effectively. This overload disrupts its ability to function with clarity, leading to confusion and a breakdown in coordination. Additionally, tension activates the Sympathetic System creating even less communication. Dancers should work on their own personal threshold, which I recommend training and extending for the benefit of dance.

Generally, when we aim to improve our listening ability, we often tend to stop moving. This optimization of data management from movement frees up the load on our perceptive system, allowing us to focus better on listening.

To illustrate, consider that we can precisely perceive a fly landing on our hand, but this perceptive acuity decreases significantly if we are simultaneously under a waterfall of stones. The more subtle the stimulus, the cleaner our listening mechanism, the perceptive system, must be.

Essentially, what this law suggests is that weight (due to the tension it entails, even if minimal) reduces our ability to listen. This leads to two crucial considerations in Contact Improvisation.

First, we need to practice managing weight in a relaxed manner, developing strategies to be both strong and relaxed simultaneously (as discussed in the chapters on Fascia and Weight in this book). Secondly, recognizing that the body parts subjected to weight pressure become less sensitive due to the tension generated, it is essential to cultivate an internal perception that allows us to remain connected to our partner even when certain areas are under pressure.

Moreover, we will aim to limit tensions without affecting the overall sensation. Not all contractions necessarily engage the nervous system, but if they do, an effect similar to that of the waterfall of stones is registered at different levels. The Sympathetic System acts as a messenger of high-volume data, which can be extremely distracting for perception.

Contact Improvisation challenges us to be active, strong, and relaxed all at once, which may seem like a paradox. However, this state is common in many martial arts. Actually, one of the main inspirations for this dance form is aikido.

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

## The missing step

Let's delve deeper into the essence of Contact Improvisation, a unique dance form characterized by the constant flux of movement and the unpredictability of partners.

Unlike other dance styles, CI requires dancers to adapt to the spontaneous movements of their partners, as these partners become integral components of the surrounding space. This necessity to improvise is crucial; without it, maintaining a connection with one's partner becomes an impossible challenge.

"Contact Improvisation" transcends merely combining the terms "*Contact*" and "*Improvisation*". These elements converge to form a new experience, which doesn't confine improvisation to an individual journey. Instead, it activates a shared flow among multiple dancers, transforming each individual into a stimulus that catalyzes a collective dance.

As we've previously discussed, the human body is equipped with a multitude of receptors that gather information and transmit it to the central nervous system. These receptors are vital for informing our brain about the state of stretching, compression, relaxation, flexion, and extension in tendons, ligaments, muscles, and joints. This information allows us to process our proprioception and determine our position in space.

A significant aspect of the proprioceptive system is its ability to prepare the body for the next movement. For instance, when we take a step, our body organizes itself for the subsequent step to create a smooth and continuous walking pattern.

To illustrate this concept, consider the act of climbing a staircase. Each time we ascend, our body subconsciously prepares for the next step.

However, if the light suddenly goes out and we reach the end of the staircase without realizing it, our system, expecting another step, could lead us to experience a feeling of emptiness, resulting in a fall. Similarly, lifting a suitcase we believe is full but is actually empty can catch us off guard. Thus, projecting future movement patterns can leave us unprepared for unexpected events, leading to misalignment between our anticipation and reality.

When unexpected situations arise, the nervous system typically responds by activating the Sympathetic System. Reflect on how you react when confronted with a critical, unforeseen circumstance.

If you have ever faced a critical situation and, contrary to expectations, remained calm, you probably noticed that you managed the reaction more effectively, and you might have even smiled at the new way in which you “*improvised*” a solution.

A strong sympathetic response to the unexpected often generates chaotic decisions. In contrast, when we approach such situations with a relaxed disposition, we can evaluate our options more accurately, maintaining a fluid organic movement throughout our body. This relaxed state minimizes tension in the prefrontal cortex, allowing for greater adaptability.

This raises the question: how can we maintain a relaxed attitude in the face of the unexpected? One training recommendation for CI practitioners is to familiarize ourselves with surprises and unforeseen events. This practice helps to keep the Parasympathetic system active, promoting openness to the inevitable novelties that dance presents. In theory, CI encourages us to be ready for unexpected events, prepared, yet not on high alert.



Like the staircase example, we should be aware that a step could be missing at any moment. It's important to note that a missing step can symbolize potential risks, but it's merely a metaphor; *not all unforeseen events are dangerous*.

A "relaxed attitude towards the unexpected" may seem paradoxical, but it can generate a powerful physical state. This body-mind state embodies a balance between relaxation and alertness, maintaining a softness while remaining poised to react without succumbing to tension. Our proprioceptive awareness should be anchored in the present moment, free from striving, and ready to reorganize swiftly as the dynamics of positions change.

During a jam session, if two dancers unexpectedly find themselves in an unfamiliar position, they can choose to:

- 1 - Correct the situation, viewing the unexpected as a mistake, thus interrupting the flow of the dance.
- 2 - Embrace the unexpected, transforming it into a new sequence of movements through spontaneous improvisation and creativity.

The second choice necessitates that both partners share in the resolution; any obstruction from one participant can disrupt the connection.

Obviously when dancers agree on a specific movement pattern, the need for adaptation (and improvisation) diminishes. However, countless nuances exist within each situation.

In CI, each dancer acts as both the staircase and the climber. The steps may deviate from expectations, but they still provide support to each other. Furthermore, each dancer should take into account the adaptability level of the partner.

Dancing involves playing within a realm of adaptive capacity that aligns with or slightly exceeds (paragraph on Flow) the capabilities of one's partner.

Sometimes, magnificent dances are created that we feel are particularly inspired. It happens when the staircase is made by both dancers, in the present moment, shared, and absolutely original. Both are stairway and climber at the same time, in a Parasympathetic representation of the unexpected.

The proprioceptive system, like any other, must be trained. This training should occur in a safe environment, pushing the boundaries of our comfort zones just enough to demand presence and prevent reliance on unconscious autopilot (pattern). As mentioned, we can react to sudden events in a relaxed way. This response enables us to maintain body alignment, integrate movements, keep the brain well-oxygenated, and enhance perception, systems that typically suffer under sympathetic activation, resulting in the sensation that *time is lengthening*.

Regarding this last power (time that stretches) we could also translate it as “using time in a more constructive way”, perhaps taking half of that second that we have available to organize, observe, evaluate, perceive and decide with greater clarity.

As we will explore further, there's no such thing as 100% improvisation; likewise, not every dance is rife with unforeseen events, or rather perceived as such. What we are analyzing here represents an extreme scenario to investigate the mechanics involved, which, in real dance settings, exhibit many facets and adjust according to the participants' abilities.

We want to strive for that 100%, but it's essential to find a balance where we challenge ourselves without slipping into repetitiveness or chaos. ensuring our efforts remain dynamic and focused rather than rigid or disorganized.

# Patterns

This is an approximation that science offers us on the relationship between the activity of the conscious and unconscious mind. The statement “5% *conscious* and 95% *unconscious*” is a simplification that, however, gives the idea of a notable imbalance, even if functional to our daily life. The unconscious mind (40 million bits per second) is a computer 10 million times more powerful than the conscious mind, allowing us to automatically carry out many actions simultaneously. For example, we can drive a car (automatism) and at the same time talk to a friend at our side.

CONSCIOUS	UNCONSCIOUS
Speed: 40 b/s	Speed: 40M b/s
Slow	Fast
In the present	In the past
Creative	Repetitive
Evolution	Stasis
Motor learning	Execution of motor patterns
Awareness	Automatism

Right, but when we were learning to drive, where was our attention then? What was our speed? Could we do anything else at the same time? We were probably conscious, slow, in the present moment, and in a state of learning. We were in the left column of our table. After having learned, however, the now written program ended up on the right, becoming a Pattern. Which column would you put Contact in? On the left (I hope!). The conscious mind can never be 100%, which is why there is no such thing as 100% improvisation, but it is what we want to aim for.

In Contact Improvisation, it is as if we have to generate new patterns moment to moment, one for each new situation, as quickly as possible, never to use them again.

Projection into the future, discussed in the chapter “The Missing Step,” finds very fertile ground here. When there is an onset of movement that recalls a pre-existing pattern, our brain automatically tends to complete it, regardless of what is happening in the present moment.

To clarify further, if during a dance we accidentally come across something that resembles a “step,” the nervous system will unconsciously activate the “climb the stairs” program, even if the staircase is not there.

“*Inviting*” in a dance, with the aim of making a certain gesture, is very often an invitation to use a pattern.

Patterns are like motor routines consolidated in our repertoire; they represent a sort of program stored in the nervous system. They are automatisms, unconscious mechanisms that act without the need for our complete attention. It is the repetitive execution of previously written programs (past). While we can attempt to prevent them from taking over, this serves more as a preliminary step toward building awareness than a true accomplishment (*avoiding patterns can become a pattern*).

As mentioned, patterns are not to be considered negative (except in the creative moment); in fact, they are essential for our very survival and support a functional life at all levels. Patterns that I consider functional to dance are those that are *able to vary based on an unpredictable present moment without creating tension*.

It all depends on how we learned this pattern, since the type of learning can make it more or less flexible to variations (next chapter).

## Perceptual Learning

I will begin this chapter with a memory. We are in the 80s, an era in which the predominant audio media were vinyl and audio cassettes. For us aspiring musicians, unless we were on a classical path, musical scores were not so easy to come by. Especially regarding modern music, finding material was very rare, and in order to play our favorite songs, we found ourselves having to extrapolate them “by ear,” directly from records, or rather, from audio cassettes, as rewinding the tape made it easier to listen to the individual parts.

I remember endless discussions about playing certain guitar riffs. The perception of certain nuances was not uniform, and each of us was convinced that we were playing them in the correct way. As with colors, sounds are not experienced in the same way by different people since perception is a subjective process. To top it all off, *everyone played in their own style*.

Today, you can find tablature for practically the most widespread repertoire, and you just need to access the internet to understand exactly how to play this or that guitar solo. Now we play it the same way and the result is that we now have numerous excellent “instrumentalists” (also thanks to the development of teaching), but, in my opinion, fewer “musicians” and even fewer “artists.” The production of new and innovative ideas has declined, while efficiency and executive perfection have increased disproportionately.

A middle school teacher friend of mine claims that in recent years there has been a worsening of children’s processing ability. They have a very hard time elaborating concepts on their own. An approach that has become increasingly concept-oriented is limiting the ability to undertake new initiatives.

Learning, therefore, can go through subjective coding or become uniform (with small differences). This example in the field of music reflects a mechanism that applies to the entire world of learning since it is a process that occurs in the nervous system even before manifesting itself in a specific activity.

I believe that the creative process is extremely connected to one's self, a transmutation that requires a profound connection with our uniqueness. We are unique beings for different reasons (DNA, soul), and what distinguishes us on the level of internal and external awareness is certainly perception, which is why it is subjective. Every dancer should move and improvise in his own way.

*Perceptual learning*, as I define it here, differs from mental learning (even if it uses the body as an instrument) and incorporates this uniqueness, resonating with what we are, encouraging self-recognition and authorizing our personal way of interpreting reality. Where imperfection and mistake can be considered as wrong in mental learning, they actually constitute an authentic guide in Perceptual Learning.

What I have said so far concerns a pseudo-philosophical level, but it is not the only one involved. Perceptual learning is also characterized by some processes of the nervous system, for example, that of registering information from the body's responses rather than from the source itself. We therefore do not learn from the technique but from the feedback we receive from our body during this study.

Only in this way does information pass through perception and therefore our self. In this way, what we learn seems to go deeper into the nervous system to the point of involving all the manifestations of our actions and also modifying the reactive systems.

A clarifying example is the following: when we learned to ride a bicycle, we did not receive much specific information on how to do it; much of the learning occurred through experience, improvisation, mistakes, and repeated trials. Basically, *we got there on our own*. For all intents and purposes, it was perceptual learning; we didn't learn it, but *integrated* it. As time passed, we were able to ride different bicycles (variations and adaptations of the pattern) and, even if we no longer cycled for years, our body (mind) retained all the necessary information. Here's the good pattern I talked about a few pages ago. What has been integrated is therefore more flexible and ready to adapt to the variations in the present.

To explain better, for example, if a pattern is made up of a series of elements such as "XYZ," perceptual learning will also allow them to be used in the form "ZYX" or "YfdsXaZ" (integration).

Here lies the difference between "learning" and "integrating." Integration (much easier through perceptual learning) does not have the effect of adding something, but of modifying the entire system. In improvisation, only truly integrated tools, which enter the reactive mechanisms, allow for Flow; being faster and adaptable, they prove to be more functional in dealing with the sudden variations required by this practice. The techniques must therefore not only be studied but explored and understood through attempts and *improvisation*. Paradoxically, if the teacher provides too many indications and guides the student excessively, they take away that opportunity for self-exploration. The real objective for perceptual learning is not to perform the technique but to investigate, with all the information that this experience will consequently bring. This produces an expansion of perception (even if the technique is unsuccessful).

There is no growth in what succeeds right away. The success of a technique represents the end of the learning process. From an educational point of view, I strongly believe in labs, spaces where there is time to try and try again until you find the solution independently.

I would remind you that dance is a learning process, and consequently, it is the dance itself that needs to be trained in, not the success of this or that pattern (which will magically emerge spontaneously during the dances).

In CI, we are effectively immersed in a continuous flow of learning, without ever achieving success, as this would represent the end of improvisation.

There is also a more emotional aspect that is activated in this type of learning; you have the feeling of having lived an experience. New stimuli can intertwine with those previously acquired, opening up space for new connections and potential. It is growth. From the integration process, we emerge altered, unlike simple learning, which does not lead to substantial change.

In conclusion, perception is the basic learning tool, the *hardware*, let's say. I have seen dancers grow and evolve in their art up to a certain point and then, despite study, remain at the same stage for years. I think that at a certain moment on our path as a dancer, we reach maximum performative capacity. To continue to grow, we need to change the hardware, i.e., the perception, i.e., what we are. The cause of the widespread moments of boredom amongst dancers is nothing other than the request of this system to evolve. It is good that these moments arise, even better if they are understood. If, as mentioned, the "*what to do*" precedes the "*how to do it*," then even before that, we have the "*who we are and how we perceive*".



*“I want to push the idea of self-initiative in the arts. What I’m afraid of is passivity in the arts. What I’m afraid of is people who learn the craft or take 10.000 hours or 10 years to learn the craft and lose their initiative”.*

*Steve Paxton*

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

## Improvisation

First of all, I would like to point out that, from my point of view, music, dance, painting, theater, etc., are mere “portals” through which the process of improvisation manifests itself. The primary spark originates at a neurological level, in the mechanisms of the nervous system and in the complex dynamics of the mind. The body-mind system is fundamental, since improvisation is an attitude which, even before manifesting itself in movement, words, or sounds, has roots in the depths of our being.

If so far I have addressed the topic mainly from a physiological point of view, now I will focus more on the mental aspects. We are, in fact, faced with a real “*mental state*” which, as such, is affected by all the influences and variations typical of this sphere.

My curiosity was awakened by the need to find answers to some questions. Actually, the starting point was what improvisation should absolutely avoid, namely thinking and trying to understand. However, doubts had now come to light, and research had become a necessity.

Other factors pushed me. I recognized with regret that this satisfying state of “almost grace,” as I will define it at the end of this chapter, was not continuous. Losses of concentration and exits from Flow were numerous and often without any apparent reason.

Why do we get lost? What can you do to get back into the Flow? These were some of my most frequent questions. This investigation directed me, as it proceeded, ever closer towards the attempt to understand the “here and now,” an element which is also essential for improvisation from a physiological point of view. I realized that the mind and the body have similar mechanisms.

*"You can't be conscious of the fact that you're improvising. The moment you realize it, you separate yourself from what you are doing, and the magic ends".*

It is precisely when we experience this separation that questions, doubts, and uncertainties arise. That magnificent sensation ends or fades when we try to rationalize the unfolding. "Looking at oneself from the outside," although prestigious in many paths of self-realization, is not sufficient here. We must sublimate the quantum concept in which the observer influences the phenomenon, to the point of making the observer coincide with the action itself. We don't consciously decide what to do; we simply fall into action, confident that we will land with a sense. It is a real "altered state" in which we seem to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

*"The most beautiful improvisations always happen when we are alone, without even a recorder or a video camera turned on".*

Maybe because improvising is a game we play mainly with ourselves? Any external eye, even a recorder, seems to alter the process, leading us to think about a possible future reproduction and modifying, even if on an unconscious level, the purpose of our execution. The purity of the moment is lost, and the possibility of "judgment" presents itself, especially on our part. In reality, it is precisely when we are not trying to prove anything to anyone that we are in the best position to express our potential. There is no fear, we welcome mistakes, and we even appreciate ourselves more.

All this is the consequence of another parameter: time. By definition, improvisation is the instant resolution of something that manifests itself suddenly, unexpectedly. The unexpected event and its resolution should ideally occur at the same time

Improvisation is an experience that aims to happen only in the *present* moment, exactly as we have seen for the proprioceptive system. Recording is a process that takes us into the future, to the moment when it will be played, moving us energetically forward on the timeline.

*“Improvisation is insatiable; what has been done loses, a second later, its uniqueness and now belongs to the past”.*

Therefore, everything that improvisation discovers and accomplishes risks becoming a pattern and therefore a distraction for the next session. The brain is by nature lazy and likes what works. So it will try to re-propose, through the powerful computer of the unconscious, what it has succeeded in and/or liked (even if no longer contextual).

The fact that the present moment is “unique and unrepeatable” would also suggest that it makes no sense to reproduce an improvisation (performance) except within the exact same mental, physical, and environmental conditions. So, never.

*“The present of improvisation is discovered in all those moments that we usually consider transitions towards something else”.*

This was my first attack on the enemies of improvisation. Our nervous system works largely in structures and considers the transition from one pattern to another as a rather insignificant step towards a precise future goal. We therefore project ourselves towards achieving a goal, neglecting the present moment in each step (sensory feedback, in patterns, is concentrated at the beginning and end of the movement). By deepening our listening during the interval that is normally considered “not very significant”, a whole world of new, unexpected and creative possibilities opens up. That’s where the “here and now” resides.

*“A certain technical ability can handle a certain amount of improvisation”.*

To express oneself, the ability to manage the “instrument” is necessary, even if not sufficient. This does not mean that those without technique are unable to improvise, but the creative power of the mind may be too free and imaginative to be managed by the real capabilities of the body. One could easily fall into a state of chaos.

Can chaos also be improvisation? It might be, but let’s define improvisation as a resolution. Furthermore, remaining in a state of extreme disorder for a long time can be very dangerous for our physical and mental health. It is true that in improvisation order loses its rigidity and oscillates, in search of a new way to balance, but to maintain a safe condition, destructuring should never exceed the threshold beyond which we are no longer able to recover our physical/mental center.

Although technique facilitates the channeling of improvisational impulses on the one hand, on the other it creates a minefield of traps linked to known gestures, patterns, and familiarity, thus running the risk of obtaining the exact opposite of what we would like to achieve. Not infrequently experienced dancers prove to be very repetitive giving the dance little improvisation. The famous saying *“learn the art and put it aside”* is perfect here.

*“Pure improvisation is on the razor’s edge between the known and the unknown, a space where the possibility of mistake is high”.*

Great scientific discoveries are the result of mistakes; considered not as such, they give access to new information that otherwise would not have appeared. But what is a mistake if not “something new,” the perfect sugar-candy for improvisation?

We have defined improvisation as a resolution, so the idea is to “solve the mistake”. It would be better to “integrate” it through a movement. This implies, first of all, removing its negative connotation of “mistake”.

In the technique of Soundpainting (musical improvisation), one proclaims “Wrong Strong!!!”, that is, if something is done incorrectly, but with conviction and determination, it is effective. This statement reflects a profound truth: the state of improvisation suffers most from indecision (too many confusing stimuli that overload the perceptual system) rather than from error. Many jazz musicians suggest “if you make a mistake, repeat it over and over again until it doesn’t feel like a mistake anymore.”

Enrico Fermi said: *“There are only two possible conclusions: if the result confirms the hypotheses, then you have just made a measurement; if the result is contrary to the hypotheses, then you have made a discovery”*.

A good improviser is one who manages to resolve and integrate as many errors as possible (considered not to be errors) into a continuous Flow. This is only possible if the nervous system is not in a state of stress, so in the Parasympathetic. Therefore, unexpected events should always be faced with a relaxed approach and a willingness to make the most of them creatively. So, in a state of “perceptual learning” (the best approach for integration). In practice, we learn from mistakes.

If a mistake is a good opportunity, the fear of making a mistake is a bitter enemy. Generating anxiety, tension, and expectation, as is now clear to us, does not create the ideal conditions for an improvisational dance.

The fine line we tread, therefore, has on one side the risk of chaos and on the other the safe and comforting ground of knowing (patterns) and of the structure acquired through study.

In this last area mentioned, improvisation is absent, but we perceive ourselves as safe, stable, and relaxed. If we lose the fragile balance within improvisation, it is undoubtedly safer to fall towards structure (here the importance of technique) rather than into disorder (chaos), from which we would probably not be able to rebuild the foundations to start again. Returning to a pattern represents a refuge, of course, but we must not forget that the trap of repetition can bring about an absence of novelty and, in extreme cases, conformism.

*“The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, and relaxing ones; rather, they often occur when our body or mind is stretched to their limits in a voluntary effort to achieve something challenging and meaningful (Csikszentmihalyi)”.*

The connection to “Flow” theory, developed in 1990, is particularly relevant here. Improvisation shares characteristics with what Csikszentmihalyi describes as Flow, a true mental state linked to a deeply satisfying experience that gives a sense of happiness. This state is marked by complete absorption in an activity, where the challenge feels just at the limit of our capabilities. If we go beyond that, we risk entering a chaotic state, which disrupts the flow.

Mere “letting go” cannot be considered improvisation; rather, it is the dominance of unconscious activity in that state that can lead to the opposite effect. While this letting go can be useful at an early stage, since we often tend to be overly structured, successful improvisation demands an active, concentrated, and focused attitude. Buddhists encapsulate this idea well with the term *“joyful effort”*. The condition of being active and reactive but at the same time relaxed and receptive, even if it seems like a paradox, is the best one to approach CI.



In conclusion, I view total and continuous improvisation as a *state of grace*, an awareness of one's existence within the flow of life.

Granting ourselves permission to express ourselves in a creative space allows us to recognize our uniqueness. We respond to every stimulus we encounter, translating it into an expression of movement through our bodies. There is no, or rather there should not be, one dance that is the same as another, just as there should not be identical dancers.

In this state, the concepts of order and disorder lose their significance, as there is no external judgment, only what is. When improvisation succeeds, it yields a profound sense of pleasure and accomplishment, reinforcing the feeling that everything is as it should be.

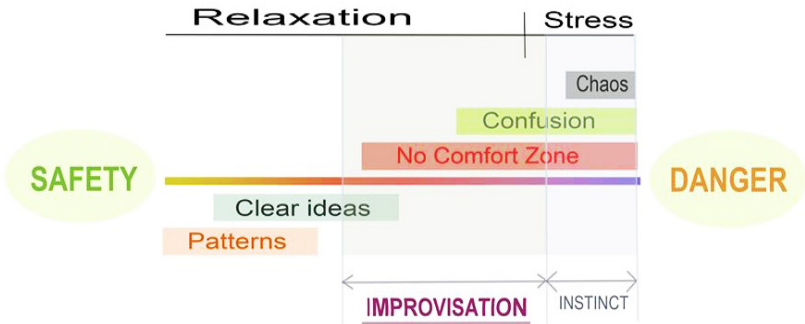
Exploring the unknown entails a small loss of control, a surrender of established patterns or beliefs. Like any growth process, this exploration carries a degree of risk. We learn to improvise when we take our first steps, pedal a bike, or play a game of ping pong. Every time we explore or search for a solution and keep our nervous system relaxed despite mistakes, we are developing our proprioceptive system. On the contrary when we stop challenging ourselves and stay in our comfort zones, we hinder our growth, the proprioceptive system stops evolving and we begin to lose awareness of ourselves.

Improvisation is a captivating avenue for discovering who we are and realizing our potential. It serves as a vehicle for self-realization, free from judgment and recognition. After a beautiful improvisation, I often reflect on "how I feel", noticing changes that extend beyond the physical and mental realms. Allowing the mind and body to rest in the present moment fulfills an innate spiritual need for evolution.

Somatics of Contact Improvisation

Behind every act of improvisation lies an individual in exploration, meeting themselves and uncovering their potential. I am continually fascinated by musicians who transform their instruments into extensions of themselves, actors who become scenography and jugglers who manipulate objects with such mastery that they seem to become part of their bodies. In these moments, the artist, the instrument, and the performance merge into a single essence, a truly mystical experience.

In various contexts, improvisation can serve as a wellspring of inspiration for creating works, be it songs, choreographies, or other forms of art. This delicate balance incorporates new discoveries within a framework that, while potentially rigid, is also reproducible. The synergy between technique and improvisation manifests in many ways, allowing us to become “teachers of ourselves.” I believe this approach lays the foundation for self-taught learning, a path many artists have naturally followed.



*"I felt the need to change because i had been working on improvisation and it seemed like it really couldn't be taught, it seemed like it was something that somebody had to teach themselves".*

*Steve Paxton*

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

# Fascia

In 2004, I introduced the concept of Fascia to Contact Improvisation dancers for the first time. After participating in the workshop, a well-known teacher suggested that an understanding of this connective tissue could serve as an excellent tool for enhancing dancers' listening abilities. At that time, I was not yet familiar with Contact Improvisation, but his observation led me to realize that the dancers on the platform were not merely connecting physically or engaging in weight-sharing exercises.

As I began my own study of dance, I didn't encounter any links between "Contact Improvisation" and "Fascia" until 2011, which made me wonder: had the Contact community only recently acknowledged Fascia? Probably not. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's Body-Mind Centering approach had already referenced it a few years earlier.

It is important to note that the concept of Fascia has only spread widely in the last 20 years, and the early dancers were probably only aware of it on an experiential level.

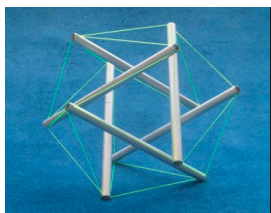
I would like to emphasize that the concept of Fascia is not universally understood among those who work with it. Various theories and approaches exist. In this book, I will refer to my interpretation, shaped by the study of release techniques and personal experience.

Fascia is a connective tissue that exists within different layers of the body. It envelops muscles, fibers, organs, and bones, acting as a glue that fills the spaces between them. Representing about 70% of our body, Fascia's remarkable elasticity plays a crucial role in posture and movement. It is also vital for physiological functions and the transmission of biochemical signals, thus affecting tissue health.

Being a continuum (note that “Fascia” is singular), every point of Fascia is interconnected with others. Any movement in one area reverberates throughout the entire system. Fascia extends, contracts, and adapts, actively participating in the activities of muscles and organs. In movement dynamics, Fascia can contribute to making a gesture complete, integrated, protected and less tiring, as it provides support and engages the whole body while enhancing control and awareness.

To determine whether our movement engages Fascia, the best approach is to isolate our awareness of it, experience its presence, and then integrate this awareness with other levels. Osteopathic and craniosacral techniques are helpful in this regard, as they cultivate a type of listening that allows us to focus specifically on the evolution of Fascia.

Connective tissues, due to their intrinsic elasticity, play a fundamental role in the body’s tensegrity, a structural configuration in which compressed elements (bones) are held together by tense elements (Fascia). This arrangement creates stability through the interplay of compression and tension.(*fig.1*).



*fig.1*

Thanks to its elasticity and tensegrity, Fascia generates energy that propagates throughout the body in the form of “tone.” A relaxed tone very similar to the oriental concept of “Ki” or “Qi” (vital energy). In the context of move-

ment, the goal is to minimize tension created by excessive muscular effort, opting instead to utilize the intrinsic strength of Fascia.

This approach not only enhances movement power but also places the nervous system in an optimal condition for action, reaction, and perception.

# Intention

In addition to imparting qualities to movement, Fascia is extremely reactive to stimuli and serves as a powerful means of perception. With a receptor density six times higher than other tissues, Fascia can discern extremely subtle information (thanks to the “*Golgi Tendon Organs*” that expand the perception of very subtle movements), including *Intention*, whether it originates from the mind or from external stimuli (a partner during dance).

This extraordinary holistic tissue not only registers stimuli but also moves in the direction of the impulse itself. Even minimal activation transforms its powerful elasticity and continuity into an impetus of considerable importance for the entire system. In summary, “*Intention moves Fascia.*”

It’s worth noting that the distinction between the body and Fascia, from a physiological perspective, is purely schematic. For convenience, I refer to the body as everything that is not Fascia, ideally isolating what is actually interpenetrated and physiologically complex. However, this differentiation is real at the level of perception, creating a well-defined quality of movement.

We can experience three types of intention:

## - Mental

Every time we express the desire to perform a gesture, Fascia begins to move. Due to its strong elasticity, it provides direction to the entire system. The mind creates a kind of projection field (*body of intention*) that engages Fascia and invites the body to move physically. Generating an intention to move in one direction while physically carrying out an opposite movement requires considerable effort, as we would essentially be moving without the support of this powerful tissue. Coherence between mind and body brings strength, elasticity and integrated movement.

**- Internal**

From its depths, the body expresses multiple intentions linked to tensions and needs. These impulses set directions and influence the entire fascial system. The direction of internal movement always prevails over the mental one; we cannot intentionally guide the tissues in one direction if the body is orienting them in the opposite direction. This highlights the importance of maintaining good physical condition. As mentioned, Fascia is also crucial for body chemistry. A healthy body, properly nourished and trained, translates into freer Fascia, which is predisposed to respond or adapt to impulses from other sources.

**- External**

This type of intention involves all stimuli coming from the outside, such as touch and sound. For instance, through Fascia, we can perceive our partner's intentions even before the movement begins. Physical contact allows our skin to detect the direction of movement, enabling it to organize itself accordingly. This dynamic significantly amplifies opportunities for connection and synchronization. Additionally, the *adaptive* approach discussed earlier creates a framework in which an extraordinarily rapid and deep understanding can develop.

Naturally, these different forms of intention operate synergistically, intertwining in a complex interplay that translates in dance into “how we are internally,” “how we relate to the outside,” and “how coherent the body is with mental intentions” .

Applying these principles helps us understand how *indecision* can generate an intention that is not fluid and fragmented. A similar effect occurs with “fear” and “expectation,” which can create gaps in our intentional path and movement quality.



When faced with the unexpected, we should not react with indecision but rather dive in with conviction (body/mind coherence), even if it feels unsettling. A more metaphysical translation of this state is *Presence*.

The connection of Fascia to the nervous system, due to its high receptor density, essentially identifies it as the primary means of communication between mind and movement, between intention and action.

It is important to emphasize that Parasympathetic activation is fundamental. In a state of tension, we cannot perceive this tissue as a whole (sympathetic fragments perception) nor maintain the clarity required to discern intentions (Weber-Fechner).

Intention, Fascia, and the musculoskeletal system should ideally work together in a Parasympathetic and adaptive state when faced with external stimuli. These elements should maintain their coherence even in the face of potential threats posed by sudden events.

We thus witness dances where the couple appears as a single being (a single Fascia) that flows in an ever new and creative dynamic. The dancers do not merely adapt to each other but to a third entity that seems to emerge from intersections, chance, and mistakes. In every moment, there exists presence and conviction.

Another remarkable quality of Fascia is its ability to influence body *density*. By compressing and expanding the Fascia with intention we can vary a physical condition which translates into a different state of the body. Although this variation of density is not physical in nature, it is perceptible enough to make us feel significantly lighter when lifted by a partner and noticeably more anchored when we occupy the opposite position.

As it is starting to become clear, Contact Improvisation is not just about movement but also about the *state* of the body/mind, that we can change according to the needs of the dance.

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

*“Contact Improvisation provides a kind of platform, but many people when they get into contact follow the rules as it’s explained to them, so it has to go through this filter of language which provides guidance and at the same time creates limitation. Improvisation i think has to be almost unmoored from language or dance improvisation”.*

*Steve Paxton*

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

## Weight

One of the fundamentals of Contact Improvisation, in addition to “contact” and “improvisation”, is weight exchange. We have seen how weight can create tension (influencing our perception ) and that Fascia serves as a tool for drawing on relaxed strength. I would like to share an additional strategy that has been very effective with the groups I’ve worked with.

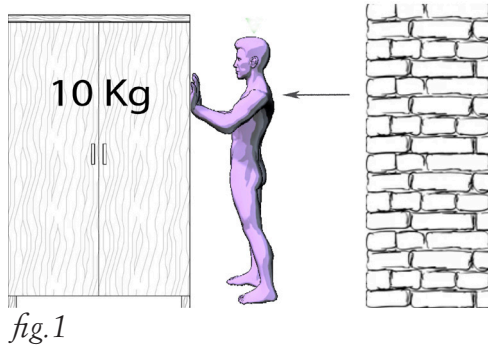
This chapter applies not only to Contact Improvisation but to any situation where the body needs to use strength to interact, move, lift, or support a load. Strength, as will be highlighted, is not limited to the musculoskeletal system alone; it is interconnected with other factors, including posture, quality of movement, grounding, and the image we hold of ourselves while executing certain actions. Here, I will focus primarily on the last aspect while briefly mentioning the other essential parameters because they are already very well known.

Most importantly, the participation of the fascial system is crucial, as its holistic characteristics connect the supporting points to the weight.

Creating an image is not just a mental activity; it translates through body-mind dynamics into a series of physical adjustments, both subtle and significant, that influence the deep alignment of our physical structure. Furthermore, the imaginative process, as a tool of intention, organizes the entire fascial system in a complex vector of forces, positioning the body for optimal performance. It is essential to note that Fascia will respond to our intentions only to the extent that our proprioceptive system is adequately trained to activate it. In general, using images as a bridge to hook the intention and thus move the Fascia can be used in many ways. This is just one example.

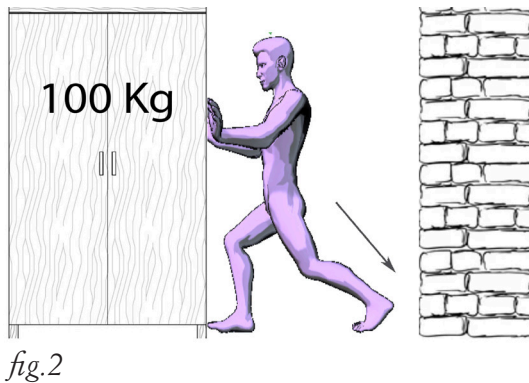
## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

Let's consider a practical example to illustrate these principles. In *Figure 1*, we see a man moving a very light wardrobe.



In this posture, he stands upright with straight legs, concentrating most of his effort in his upper body. He relies almost exclusively on the strength of his arms, engaging little from his lower body. His legs appear almost ready to slip, forcing him to contract them slightly to maintain balance. Due the light load, the action remains effective.

Let's increase the weight of the wardrobe as shown in *Figure 2*.



The previous upright position is no longer functional. The man has spread his legs and bent them to lower his center of gravity. Instinctively, he looks for something to lean on, realizing that muscular strength alone is insufficient. He grounds himself to find stability, anchoring into the earth.

It's interesting to note that the body knows how to behave spontaneously but usually only takes action when there's a real need. If the position in *Figure 2* provides him with more strength, why didn't he adopt it when moving the lighter wardrobe and thus save some energy? Unfortunately, he changes strategy instinctively only when he has reached his strength limit, which can lead to muscle tears or skeletal injuries.

In *Figure 3*, as we further increase the weight load, the man instinctively uses the wall behind him for support. The wall, given its verticality, will be more stable and less slippery than the floor. The position of fig. 3 is just one of the possibilities, for example he could lean with both feet or with his back if the wall was closer.

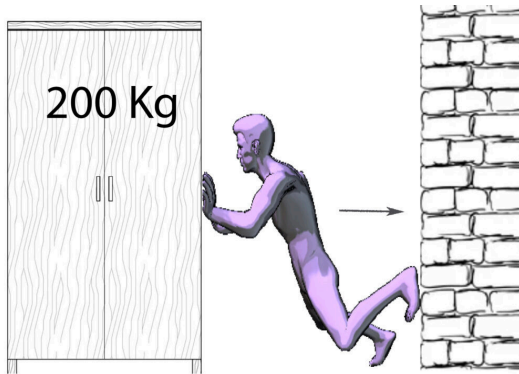
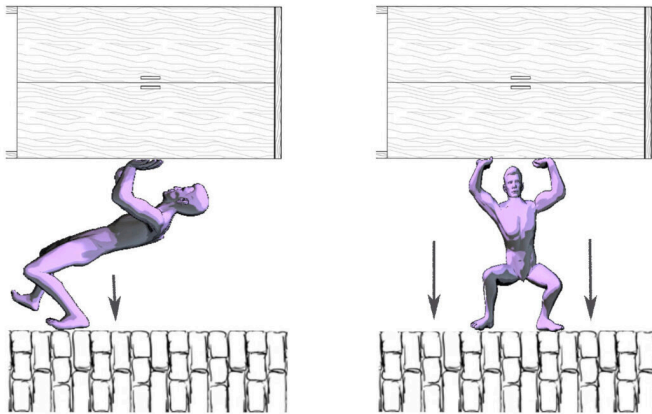


fig. 3

However, simply leaning against the wall won't be enough; he could still engage only his upper body. What truly enhances his strength is the idea (the image) of creating space between the wardrobe and the wall rather than merely moving the wardrobe itself. By focusing on this image, his attention and strength distribute evenly across his arms and legs. The more body parts he engages, the more muscles he can utilize.

The habitual notion of moving objects solely with our hands limits access to the significant strength of our legs. To rebalance this tendency, one can focus more attention on the wall rather than on the wardrobe.

Rotating *Figure 3* by  $90^\circ$  gives us *Figure 4*, where we adjust the man's position. Here, the wall represents the earth, and the mechanism remains identical. Just as he pressed against the wall to move the wardrobe, now he pushes against the ground.

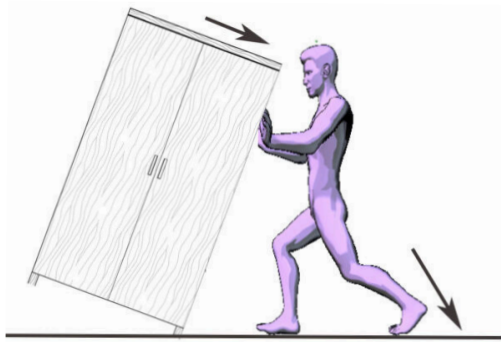


*fig.4*



For optimal performance, he must press down into the floor rather than solely thinking about lifting the wardrobe. To utilize his entire body structure, he must clearly feel the connection between the top and the bottom, perceiving that the wardrobe's weight rests on the soles of his feet, and push from that foundation.

In *Figure 5*, we can see that the concept of “giving support” or “holding” a weight follows the same rules.

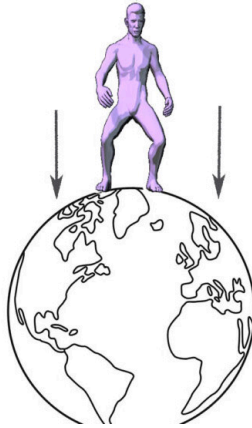


*fig.5*

A wardrobe that we want to stabilize while it falls towards us must be supported by the ground. In this example, the left leg exerts a downward push. To return the wardrobe to a vertical position or tilt it further, we must always engage through the ground, regulating the downward force of our legs. The rest of the body maintains a relaxed tone (through Fascia), connecting the earth with the wardrobe.

Now, let's replace the wardrobe with a partner, and we find ourselves in a familiar CI situation.

Let's go further, not only by exerting a downward force, but even by imagining pushing the terrestrial globe away from us with our feet, throwing it into the space below (*Figure 6*).



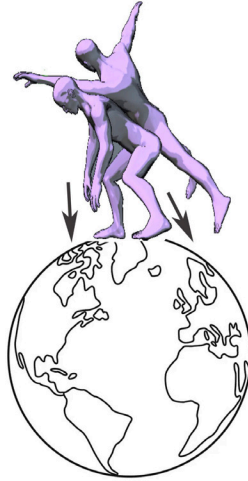
*fig.6*

We create a sort of *optical illusion*. Ideally, we remain still while the earth beneath us moves away. Compared to the case of the wardrobe, we are not moving the weight away from the earth; instead, we are moving the earth away from the wardrobe. Although this is physically impossible, the effect is remarkable. This concept involves channeling the counter-thrust from the earth, which we can exploit.

We can apply this same vision to walking, standing, bending, or moving freely in daily life. By pushing ourselves away from the earth, we project our body mass (the wardrobe we always carry with us) upwards, creating a sense of lightness.

*We ourselves are the first partner we lift every day.*

And here is a picture (*Figure 7*) applied to CI which shows a rather eloquent summary of the concepts just explored.



*fig.7*

We see a dancer embodying the concepts just explored. The dancer should focus on pushing the earth away rather than physically lifting his partner. In a CI dance, the minimum number of dancers is effectively a trio: two dancers plus the earth, considering the latter as a living entity. It is essential to relate to the ground as more than an inert surface to which we drop our weight. As dancers, we should always be prepared to support a weight load when moving through space. Since it is improvisation, this weight may arrive unexpectedly and in varying amounts. Consciously activating the downward push, even when there's no load (besides ourselves), initiates what is often called "rooting."

This physical and mental state reflects both centeredness and readiness for movement and improvisation.

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

*“No one can speak of how long it takes to  
develop the mind of the dancer”*

*Steve Paxton*

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

## CI - Yesterday, today

There are numerous approaches within Contact Improvisation, and over the years, various facets have emerged, some of which, in my view, are considerably distant from the fundamentals. Those who conceived Contact Improvisation did not deliberately create a brand or precisely define its form.

This absence of definition, as we have seen, opens up ample space for research but also becomes fertile ground for interpretations that do not align with the origins of CI.

Everyone is free to decide on their own form and interpretation, but I believe that, for a proper definition, Contact Improvisation should at least maintain “contact” and “improvisation” as its core principles. While there is no obligation to adhere to the approaches of the early years, I hope to convey, through this book, the value and depth that such a vision brings. It’s just a matter of choice.

During my journey, I have observed multiple transformations even within the *mainstream* channel of Contact Improvisation. These changes are not unrelated to the societal and cultural evolutions, where form is taking on increasing relevance at the expense of substance.

I have had the opportunity to study with some second-generation teachers, and I can affirm that even today, they retain a certain purity of vision that aligns with the origins and ideas of the founders, such as Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, and others.

Now, let’s analyze a video from the 80s, such as “Contact at 10th and 2nd,” which is easily available online, using the tools I have shared with you so far. In this video, we observe seven dancers in a 45-minute jam.

Over such a long period, there is no repetition of gestures or movements; the dancers are constantly faced with something new (improvisation). A continuous exploration of “what is possible and what is not” develops, allowing for the fluid resolution of errors and unexpected events, giving rise to creative and unique movements.

Patterns are rare and often broken down, used in their infinite possibilities. There is no clear entrance or exit from the movement; it feels as though they never truly come out of the flow. The dancers maintain constant connections, even if not physically, influencing each other through communication linked to weight and space. The personal project is of little relevance; intention and impulse are present, but the resolution is always shared. There is no forcing to make things proceed according to an individual’s idea, nor is there the “*invitation*”.

The beauty that emerges is not conventionally defined and cannot be, as the focus is not on form but on lived experience (some positions may even appear clumsy). They exist on the razor’s edge between what can and cannot work, as it is in that uncomfortable space where systems evolve and something new can be born. There is no escape from discomfort; instead, they stay with it, observing what emerges without giving in to the temptation to return to what is already known. Acceptance of what doesn’t work is resolved collectively, fluidly, and is never viewed as a mistake but rather as new information to be explored. There is always conscious attention to space and randomness, attributing value to and transforming accidents or unexpected events into dance.

We can see how the dancers develop their ability to adapt through dance, an endless game of research and experimentation. Essentially, the dancers are exploring themselves.



Now, let's compare this to a contemporary jam, possibly involving advanced dancers as well. How many repetitive gestures can be observed? How many back or shoulder raises appear virtually identical? How many couples isolate themselves?

I want to emphasize that this observation is not a criticism; I am merely highlighting a difference that, as you may have understood, carries broader implications for the actual experience we can gain from dance.

The famous concept of "flowing" centered on an excessive use of spirals and the habit of "inviting" to a form, has contributed to a considerable standardization of the dances. From my perspective, flow should not refer so much to the shape of moving bodies as to the state of their nervous system.

What has happened over the years is precisely what Paxton warned us about: the creation of a shared language that has become recognizable and, therefore, predictable. The establishment of *aesthetic* or *functional* canons has limited possibilities, confining movement to familiar patterns and forms.

I believe that a significant contribution to this transformation has also come from the introduction of contact performances (more or less official). Originally reserved for connoisseurs or specific contexts, today they are more widely shared, even with people who, not knowing the process, primarily appreciate aesthetically pleasing shapes. Seeing people fall or make mistakes, an integral part of improvisation, is not rewarding for those who do not fully understand what is happening.

To truly appreciate Contact Improvisation, one must understand the experience. Improvisation is inherently unfamiliar. The spectator who wishes to follow it is challenged outside their conditioning in a continuum of unexpected events and surprises to which their attention must adapt, just like the dancer.

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

## Music in CI

I now wish to outline and explain my vision on this widely discussed topic. I believe that it is not necessary to find a ‘one size fits all’ solution for every situation, but it may be useful to focus attention on some key aspects. Freedom of expression and creativity are fundamental values in both dance and music; however, we must exercise caution. While one dancer may find it difficult to influence the entire group, the sound that pervades the space has the potential power to do so.

I also hope that these thoughts can be beneficial to musicians intending to approach CI. A few years ago, during the same jam, I found myself alternating the roles of musician and dancer multiple times. On that occasion, I realized a concept I have previously elaborated: the initial impulse to improvise, regardless of the type of expression, is always the same.

Observing accomplished improvisational musicians, we notice how physically active they are, maintaining a state of relaxed tension (like dancers) due to their senses being always awake. Their engagement stems from the concentrated activity of the nervous system, which physiologically influences every part of their body. The musician who improvises during CI should be physically engaged, actively observing the movements and, thanks to mirror neurons, experiencing sensations similar to those of the dancers. Not infrequently, we see musicians moving within the jam space, sometimes even joining in the dancing.

The musician’s gaze must often remain on the dancers, sacrificing the opportunity to look at their own instrument, of which they should have a solid mastery. For obvious reasons, the dancer cannot look at the instrument but connects through auditory listening.

Dancers and musicians improvising are, therefore, at a primary level of intention, in the same state. Collaboration requires resonance, essential for true connection, and a common goal. Given that we are in a CI jam, this objective is obviously linked to dance and not to music, which serves as an additional element that enriches the experience. The typical dynamic of people dancing to music is certainly out of place here, but are we sure that, even if to a lesser and less conscious degree, this doesn't happen? If energy rises and falls based on music we should ask ourselves this question.

What happens when numerous dancers share the same space? I believe that when multiple people engage in the same space with willingness, openness, and common goals, the resonant essences create an atmosphere of unity with which the musician can relate. The musician can contribute, without imposing himself, to the creation of group unity or concentrate at different times on one or more dancers. If his goal is to support the group, his sensitivity will guide him in the best possible way. Perception takes on a crucial role, on par with that of the dancers.

*Music occupies space.* It carries an energetic, often shared, feeling. In many situations, we feel the air seems saturated and incapable of containing further sounds. The notes can become confused and less distinct, creating a sense of chaos, and we may feel the need for silence.

Unlike a body, music expands throughout the room, giving it considerable filling power. Music and dance should share the same space without completely filling it, which is essential for freedom of movement and new possibilities.

What I describe here pertains not to the temporal level or the interplay between music and silence, but rather to density and presence.

Too many sounds can alter auditory perception, preventing it from registering more subtle stimuli (remember the fly and the stones?) and predispose it to only hear louder sounds, which will inevitably pollute the space and the dancers' sensitivity. An interesting image could be of bodies finding space between the notes to move and dance.

A large chapter deals with the type or genre of music. I am reminded of what Nancy Stark Smith said: "Rhythm alters our relationship with gravity." This is true; rhythm gives us a cadence that pulls us into its dynamics, making us lose perception of our bodies and our relationship with our partners and gravity. While rhythm supports us, it can also create uniformity and repetition, the antithesis of improvisation, ultimately taking away a certain freedom. We can interpret rhythm, of course, but we can never completely ignore it in favor of following our internal feelings. Rhythm and melody draw on our past experiences, shaped by years of listening to music.

They move us, and we recognize a supportive energy in this, yet they can also distance us from the present moment. They are too familiar to be ignored, powerful in evoking a well-defined energy, making us feel good and comfortable, offering a sensation of pleasure, a comfort zone that does not belong to CI.

If you observe improvisational music again, you will notice its unpredictability, mirroring what Contact Improvisation should be. It is interesting to note what occurs in jams when more classical music, with structured rhythm and melody, is played.

Great energy is felt when the sound is present, followed by a collapse when the piece ends. When the influx of stimuli subsides, it becomes clear that the energy was created almost exclusively by an external source. Music should not compel people to dance, nor should it emotionally capture them.

In my view, there should neither be a beginning nor an end to the music, but rather an ever-present essence that may sometimes be more intense, sometimes less so, and at times enveloped in silence. Silence as a quality of sound.

Attending Silent Jams (without music) frequently is valuable training, especially for beginners, to avoid becoming overly accustomed to the comforting support provided by music.

From what has been said so far, it is evident that the loop system (pattern), which is widely used, represents a negation of improvisation, embodying predictability and filler. We aim for a creative, non-repetitive process.

The risk of over-influencing the dancers is greater when there are multiple musicians, who naturally prefer not to sit idle. Listening to each other and understanding their impact on the group environment is not easy; it requires a panoramic view and attentive listening.

One thing that can help is recognizing that time and the relationship between silence and sound are perceived differently by musicians and dancers. A pianist, for example, might feel bored playing a note every ten seconds, which, however, does not disturb the dancer, who fills that void with movement. This discomfort can easily lead the musician to overplay, taking away space for the dance. The solution, which also alleviates boredom, lies in connecting with whomever is in the jam, resonating with them and their perception, vibrating with their body, and finding meaning even in silence.

I believe it is a significant art of sensitivity to play for moving bodies. Creating a world of stimuli from which dancers can freely draw inspiration, other possibilities, represents a wonderful gift that musicians can offer to the space. *Sounds are like other bodies dancing.*

Contact does not need music, just as a musician does not need Contact; perhaps this is why an enriching connection can develop for both.

For me, the best jams are those where I don't remember the type of music played, but I know for certain that it was present. I no longer recognize it for what it is, but for how it brought richness to space.

The role of music in dance has changed considerably compared to its origins, where it was often absent or expressed through acoustic instruments played in a minimal and experimental way. Rather than discussing 'music,' a term that encompasses too many definitions and patterns, we should talk about "sounds", elements that are more interpretable and adaptable to different perceptions.

Interaction with sound is challenging to codify; it is the art of managing *atmospheres*, a skill that undoubtedly requires supreme sensitivity.

I would like to point out an interesting piece of writing that is useful for musicians and can complement my thoughts. It provides specific advice on playing music at jams:

<https://contactimprovblog.com/can-you-give-me-some-guidelinesuggestions-for-playing-music-at-jams/>

Live music is always preferable, but if you wish to use recorded music, I recommend tracks that are not too short (to avoid an energy drop at the end of the song) and, as mentioned, not too rhythmically and harmonically defined.

I have recorded several hours with this type of setting, and you can find them here:

<https://www.youtube.com/@michelemarchesani/playlists>

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation



# Conclusions

I believe I have condensed a good part of my vision on Contact Improvisation in this book. Naturally, it cannot be exhaustive, as it lacks the practical aspect; what has been described here essentially constitutes the theoretical side. Numerous exercises can be directly linked to the concepts presented in these pages.

Over the past few years, I have shared this material, and much more has emerged from the lessons themselves. I believe that information comes from the body, from its movements, from its expression, and from listening which is ultimately the heart of awareness.

I sense a coherence between my research and observations within this vision. The dances of the CI founders, their writings, their interviews, the feelings expressed, and the physiological aspects resonate with one another and with my exploratory journey. Each chapter could merit more extensive coverage, and much more unfolds in practice; however, I do not find it beneficial to delve deeper without adequate experience in the field.

With CI, growth is inevitable. Motor development cannot bypass the mind. This dance demands such a profound mental process that it inevitably transforms us. We can choose not to welcome the challenges, of course, but in doing so, the dance stops; it does not evolve.

Becoming accustomed to the unexpected, not reacting with tension, transforming rather than judging mistakes, flowing, and adapting, these are all training exercises for the nervous system, which ultimately guide us in our actions, reactions, relationships, and decisions outside the dance hall.

Of course, we are free to study CI without this level of engagement, but I believe that in doing so, we miss the essence of what Contact Improvisation truly is.

## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

*I have danced* intensely, from the beginning to the end of each jam, overcoming physical tiredness but never mental fatigue. Curiosity has been my driving force. Not knowing how it will unfold, where it will lead, or what may arise from a specific moment, space, or those particular dancers, and knowing that I'm part of it, creates an incredible experience.

*I have danced* for myself and for others, and I believe I have been generous. I have given a lot and received a lot from Contact Improvisation and from the people involved.

*I have danced* outdoors, indoors, in very small spaces, in duos, in trios, in groups, with the earth, alone, with myself, with music, in the cold and the sultry heat, but above all with the breaths, the apneas, the rustles and the screams of sudden joy.

*I have danced* when sad, happy, angry, in love, thoughtful, tired, sleepy. I have danced at night, during the day, on wood, on concrete, in water, on lawns and dressed in clothes of all colors.

And *I have always danced* in my own way, usually a little uncomfortable for others, provoking, breaking the patterns, stimulating the new and welcoming the unknown. In short, I have danced with the same approach I have written about in this book.

*See you on the dance floor.*



## Somatics of Contact Improvisation

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