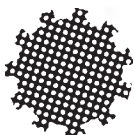


# <proximity>

contact improvisation, new dance,  
movement improvisation

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(won't you?)

# editorial

*Ann-maree Ellis*

Welcome to another fabulous <proximity>

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\* **Front cover illustration/drawing by Edgar Jansen, 2004. Many thanks to him. More of Edgar's work can be viewed at his website. See link on next page.**

editorial team - David Corbet, Paul Roberts, Ann-maree Ellis

Is this a particularly fine issue, or is my appreciation just more finely tuned due to editorial involvement? I suspect it's the latter. What you do becomes so much richer when you engage your *whole* self in it. That's why I love CI, it's training in wholeness. And that's why I urge you to submit to <proximity>, you too can feel complete! After all, when you can't actually be dancing, wouldn't you rather be thinking and writing about dance?

In this issue **Rachel Thorne Germond** takes us on a tour of touch and its central role in CI. Lo and behold, she reveals that our skin cells started life as brain cells. No wonder Contact gets you thinking! Send in your thoughts.

**Grace Walpole** is sure to get you thinking as she explores the existential phenomenology of performance improvisation. How do you understand your own improvisation practice?

**Alys Longley** is evocative and poetic describing her experience of Contact and Butoh. If you are similarly inspired with words, do send some our way.

Also, long-time practitioner and teacher of CI, **Martin Keogh**, shares some of his teaching research notes. We give you half in this issue, with more to come next issue. Martin also shares his thoughts on dancing and ageing. I've found myself quoting the last line of his essay to all and sundry. I won't spoil your reading by quoting it now, but it is good cause for reflection. And what will you do with your reflections? That's right. Give 'em up, we wanna know.

Happy reading, happy thinking, happy dancing. Remember the 3 easy steps to wholeness: Dance, Reflect, Submit!

Don't be shy we'll accept anything, even the poetry on page 15!

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# old growth

a free association on dancing and aging

*Martin Keogh*

I used to roar into the dance studio and begin by jumping off the walls – becoming sweaty and energetic and frothy. Then I would slow down and shift into sensation. Now, as I near my 50's, I slide into the studio and start slow, steeping in the ale and gradually working up to the froth.

The words “young” and “old” have never made sense to me. But I appreciate now the notion of aging, of time passing and changes in the body and outlook. I live with more physical limitations than ten years ago, when I had more than twenty years ago. I used to identify so much with my physical prowess and agility. As those have lessened I've had to adjust how I see myself. And I've had to pull back my desires - I'll probably never do that back handspring again.

The elder dancers whom I respect have each blazed their own way. The image from the tales of King Arthur comes to mind – “Every Knight shall go out and enter the forest where there is no trail.” Dancers like Remy Charlip- in his elegance he's brought the designers eye from his costume design into the dance. Anna Halpern has ridden the wave of what's popular, been shamelessly a decade ahead of others. Bill T. Jones has brought the raw edge of human interaction and the emotional body into his work. Steve Paxton rolled a pebble and then got out of the way for the avalanche that followed. They've each blazed their own way.

When I look at my wrinkles, the accumulated scars, the skin that doesn't pop back right away- a reality sinks in. When I started dancing in my early 20's, I felt immortal, convinced I would never grow old... or conservative. I hitchhiked 25 thousand miles with the full knowledge that I would be safe, and I was.

I don't hitchhike cross-country anymore – though I still hitchhike locally on occasion to put myself back into that sense of time – standing, not knowing who will stop, or if it will be three minutes or three hours. I don't sleep on the floor anymore, or futons when I can help it. I prefer a mattress – a pillow-top mattress. And, oh god – I'm more conservative. I support a family. I need to care for myself so that I can care for them.

As I'm less reckless with my physicality, I have also become less reckless and more disciplined with my ideas and language. Now when I teach I rarely toss out ideas just to see the effect they have on people. I hone more so that what I do convey, has the benefit of my experience.

My view of teaching has evolved. I used to believe I needed to be at the center of everything to teach a good class. As my body has changed, I don't demonstrate or partner as much as I used to. “Teaching” is about showing our students the ways we have found – whereas “cultivating” dancers is about helping them blaze their own trails. Now the role of “mentor” is more important. I see myself nurturing future dancers and performers, and cultivating communities of dancers. The paradox is the more I focus on others and entire communities the more recognition I receive.

When the up and coming, the young hotshot dancers, vault and spring through the studio – I sometimes feel a tinge of envy and loss. Mostly, they keep me fit – I'm moved by them to stay in shape and creatively engaged so that I continue to have something to offer – so the treasury continues to overflow. Contact Improvisation is a magnanimous form. It allows people to teach as they age. The form is not about someone's abilities, it's about modeling the inquiry and investigation into what's possible.



On one hand I'm romantic about the idea of getting older. Rather than considering myself older, I like to think I have more rings in my tree. And then I say – what kind of bullshit is that? It sucks to get older. The body becomes more limited, organs and muscles fall apart, we see more of the insides of hospitals, we lose energy, courage, our abilities. Aging is about loss.

We know the boat is sinking and it all comes down to the attitude we bring to that descent. Do we go down numb, or screaming, or singing? I miss not worrying about my health, the late nights, the excess. I'm glad I fully lived my youth. What is it that King Arthur's Knights seek anyway? The Holy Grail – the fountain of youth, of everlasting life. Don't most of us, somewhere in ourselves, want that? Isn't that why people head out in the first place to enter the woods where there's no trail? While I feel like I have found my grail through my work, that I've created something that will live past my own life, I want to be young ... damn it.

I remember being in my 20's and having a sense of invincibility, of immortality. I was going to live forever and change the world to boot. I cannot say that now. Talking about aging is humbling – it demands confronting that indelible piece of everyone's life called mortality. I will, sooner or later, die.

I love my life, and love life more each year. I feel mostly good about the choices I've made along the way. I've been passionate, truthful, and I've spent my life being true to my muse rather than popular culture. I don't want life to end – I want to see how history unfolds – that of the world, of my family, and my own.

My body has given me a great life; I don't want it to end in a slow, painful breakdown. "Aging gracefully," is a concept I've heard about. I believe it has something to do with acceptance. And then there's Dylan Thomas in his poem to his father – "Do not go gentle into that good night... Rage, rage against the dying of the light..."

My fear for the earth and humanity grows with each passing year. I look out the window of my study. I see trees. It's a quiet suburban neighborhood, with trails into the forest at the end of the block. We are in walking distance from the center of town. We have two fireplaces and an above ground pool in a big yard.

We have the American dream. We have our castle and grounds. We live in a safe, wonderful place. But, then I travel and read the news and "out there" the world is a frightful place filled with suffering, environmental degradation, and injustice. What



have I done to change any of this? What am I doing now? If I were to tell the truth right now I would say that as I age I'm most afraid of the world that I'm leaving my children.

When I was a teenager we were told our generation was the one that could make the difference – that it was in our hands. God knows we tried, and the world is still a very fucked up place. I want my children to have the opportunities to live at the edges of their potentials and creativity and not at the edge of their personal and global survival. I feel regret that I haven't done more to make a difference. Then the other voice comes in – this energy I'm putting into regret I could be putting into making a difference right now...

One morning last year I picked up a bag of concrete that had hardened. I did everything right – got low, pulled the bag to my center, lifted from my legs – and still my back went into a spasm that felt like I was being speared for shish kabob.

I immediately laid down on an ice pack with my legs up. The next day I was worse, and the following day worse again. I wept because I couldn't put on my own pants and I didn't want to ask for help. My wife took me to the hospital where I was given anti-inflammatories, anti-spasmodics,

painkillers, and an MRI. I was told that I absolutely must not pick up anything, including my toddler or his toys.

There was good news and bad news in the MRI results. I had no blown out disks – I can keep dancing. But I have degenerative disk disease, or premature "old man's back". The MRI report included lines like: "There is a congenitally slightly narrow lumbar canal due to congenitally short pedicles."

Since my injury I have not been visualizing myself dancing as much – I used to regularly imagine dances which kept my body constantly in a warmed up state. Now, the thought of dancing can seem far away from the act of dancing.

When I do dance now, each dance feels like I've received an 11<sup>th</sup> hour reprieve from the governor. I've been saved! It feels so enlivening to dance. With each duet I savor the exhilaration, the personal unfolding, and the joy of relating to other people this way. I've become re-committed to finding new pathways so that I can dance even when the body grows less able. I want to do the work now, to put myself on a trajectory that keeps me dancing, and experiencing the rapture of Contact Improvisation.

But I am afraid – not so much that aging will keep me from dancing – but that I'll lose my livelihood. I'm passionate about teaching people to dance. It allows me to travel and see the world and meet people, and bring gifts to their lives. If I don't teach how will I support my family with even half as much fulfillment and delight? The thought of a 9-5 fills me with terror. That is not what I want to model for our children. I want them to see their father creatively engaged and being rewarded, not for his toil, but for his development and creativity and connection to a community.

I remember a panel of professional dancers talking about money and aging. The subject created a storm of anxiety. One dancer said that when she could no longer work, her retirement insurance policy would be to take her own life. This stunned a lot of us. Later, she confessed that while she thought this for years, she no longer could commit suicide because it would be too wounding for her now grown daughter. She was in anguish about what to do, as she was closing in on her retirement years.

It saddens me that our culture offers little support for the arts. It makes it such a struggle to go forward and blaze – especially when we have to consider details like healthcare and retirement. But on the other hand, I see in countries, where there is more funding for the arts, a certain dampening of the artistic spirit. When you live in a cycle of getting a grant to live on for half the year, and receiving unemployment the other half, there is a certain indignity that accompanies this lifestyle. And yet, when there is little support for dance and the arts, there is a certain hardening of the spirit just to persevere.

The body has its losses that need to be grieved, but there is another loss that comes from living in a youth focused culture. I know, as a man, I only feel a sliver of this. I've heard from several older women that when a woman loses her looks there is a way in which she is not seen, she's looked over, not consulted. The attention goes to the young. If an older woman dancer is not in her role as "master teacher" she has to work hard to be seen and noticed.

I've made a practice of watching older athletes as they compete. People in their 60's, 70's and 80's playing tennis, basketball, volleyball, and other sports. I sit at the edge of the court and watch them with a question – what do I need to do so that I can dance full out when I'm their age? What steps can I take now to be on that trajectory?

I've noticed in older athletes, that their rib cages can freeze up and this limitation leads to less mobility throughout. So part of my training is to have attention on an increasingly released rib cage. I consider this my practice, my "dojo" work.

I'm often struck by the vitality and glow with which these athletes leave the court. I've sat in on numerous conversations where they grumble about their current ailments. This is often accompanied by their gratitude for ibuprofen for sore muscles, and herbal concoctions for aching joints. I listen carefully. My intention is to join this clan.

I still take pleasure in adrenalized dances where I sometimes finding myself moving with my head below my pelvis, my feet somewhere up in the air, not quite knowing what will come next. But along with this pleasure I recognize I have less resiliency and less capacity for recklessness. To safely have adrenalized dances I'm finding that I need to dance with less muscling. Being ready for this kind of yielding and potentially high energy dancing means being willing to expend less effort and will.

Rather than use muscle when I'm dancing with someone who brings a lot of vitality to the dance, I'm trying to develop a body that is porous like a living sponge in the sea. The strong currents move the sponge but can also simply pass through the permeable interior.

I'm surprised that my investigation so far into long term dancing has not suggested more control, but a body that is more awake to the possibilities of the effortlessness of abandon.

As I age, it's easier to be still. My capacity for noticing details increases. I can sit in nature and be alone for longer periods. I'm less driven to be creative, to entertain, to receive adulation. I can

lie down and observe a square foot of forest floor, seeing layers upon layers of life, with less self-consciousness.

I'm less driven by my hormones. While I sometimes miss the energy that the amplified sexuality brought into my life, I don't feel as compelled by them now. I love my sexuality and I'm glad that I've had a wonderful big canvas to express it on. Now, I'm less driven, and the dissolution in lovemaking is more full.

When I'm dancing I bring over a quarter-century of body investigation that informs the movement. When I'm in a duet I might not be as recklessly acrobatic, but I can create a sense of listening in my body that is contagious.

I miss the ability to do full splits and fall from great heights. What I don't miss is the self-doubt and chatter that used to rankle me part of the time. I'm not saying that my flexibility is completely gone,

and certainly not saying the chatter is all gone, but both have diminished over the years.

What about legacy? The dance is ephemeral. When a person creates a movie or a piece of art, it goes into the world accompanied with a name in the credits, or painted into the corner of the canvas. Each dance dies as it's born and only sends out a diminishing ripple of what it once was. A dance might change us, and the resonance might live on, but it is not signed. My legacy carries on through my writing, and somewhat through my teaching, but even these are fleeting.

We sometimes hear about the beauties of old age – but I've noticed that the old age that is beautiful, is the one a person has been preparing for by living a beautiful life. Each one of us, whatever our years, is right now preparing for our old age. The beauty and reach of our questions in the end, determines the beauty and reach of our lives.



# fresh water pearls

teaching research notes

*Martin Keogh*

Who can teach Contact Improvisation? There is no licensing body. No degrees or black belts are handed out. Nobody with a magic wand exalts us with their blessing. How do we know when we are ready? Since ultimately we are teaching and modeling our *inquiry* rather than a set of techniques, I feel anyone who is in an active and committed investigation into the form can teach.

If somebody knows the alphabet from A to P, they can teach it to P. If they are honest with themselves and their students, and don't try to teach T,U and V, they are going to teach a safe dance class, especially since the first ten or so letters of the alphabet are about learning to soften and be safe.

It's a matter of each person teaching at their level of investigation. Students learn from the teachers who put themselves in a state of inquiry and then transmit that state.

\*\*\*

The marketplace has a way of deciding who will end up teaching. When a person decides to hang up their shingle and call themselves a teacher, do students show up and do they return?

\*\*\*

I'm seeing more teachers actively mentor their students into teaching by inviting them to lead warm-ups, and assist as co-teachers. These invitations are creating an informal system of mentoring where the investigations of both student and teacher get enlivened. And younger more athletic students help to keep their mentors on their toes.

\*\*\*

I learned a lesson from another teacher about how people arrive at the first day of a workshop. It can take a lot of effort just to get through the door and it often helps to acknowledge that effort in order for the student to fully arrive. At the beginning of a workshop or intensive she says something like, "You've done the hard work by getting here – you made the decision, carved out the time, paid the money, and arrived, now the hard work is done and the rest is about ease." I see faces soften, shoulders drop, and hear people's exhalations when their effort has been acknowledged.

\*\*\*

When I teach a workshop where I'm entering uncharted territory I often say to my students "Your good will is appreciated." This one small phrase helps get people behind the investigation rather than simply expecting to be fed material.

\*\*\*

It's not true to say there's only one rule in Contact Improvisation. But saying there is only one rule makes people alert to what you are about to say.

At the beginning of every workshop I say some variation of this: "There is only one rule in C.I. and that one rule is – take responsibility for yourself. Your partner can't be in your body. I, as the teacher, can't be in your body, so it's important that *you* be in your body. Please keep a part of you awake, able to communicate what you need and desire. At times you might need to slow down, or sit something out. That's fine. Please keep that part of you awake that knows your limitations and can communicate what you need."

\*\*\*

At some point almost everyone attending a workshop experiences what I call the train of self-

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doubt. Each person in their own way can hear the engine coming down the tracks, hauling freight cars with their voices of “I’m not good enough,” “I’ll never learn this form,” “I’ll probably break my neck,” “Nobody, just nobody, likes to dance with me.” Or conversely: “I’m better than anybody here,” “There’s no one I want to dance with,” “They are not good enough for me.”

When teaching, especially in longer workshops, I like to say something about this train. By acknowledging it (normally on the third day), it seems easier for people to simply wave it along, and not climb on board. We begin to anticipate the train’s schedule and recognize that at some point the caboose also passes.

The most common time for the train to come barreling down the tracks is when we are at the edge of what we know, nearing the unknown. It can be a good sign to hear the train then, because it can mean we are close to learning something new.

\*\*\*

I like to invite people to welcome and embrace their feelings of awkwardness, to take this as another sign that they are at the edge of what they know.

\*\*\*

At a teacher’s conference at Earthdance, one teacher talked about a student who came in late to class. At the end of class that student said, “I’m just so glad you didn’t yell at me.”

A community of trust gets built in a workshop. It becomes a little village. When someone comes in late it’s like the village seeing a stranger coming over the hill. The first impulse of the group is to grab the weapons and see the person’s intentions. Groups want to kill the latecomer. And vice versa, chronic latecomers can have the secret desire to be killed. When someone comes in late it’s important to do something to welcome them in.

\*\*\*

As a way to remind myself, I often say to the class – “Enter without the answers. Let it be an investigation.”

\*\*\*

Leading is 90% listening.

\*\*\*

When we return to a single theme repeatedly with a group, it can be like digging a well. By digging in the same place the hole gets deeper, the light of the entrance gets farther and farther away and it gets darker. The ground gets murky and our hands get muddy just before we unearth water.

It helps to go into an inquiry knowing there is the potential for boredom and anxiety. There’s less chance of giving up just before you dig the shovel full that unearths the artesian spring.

\*\*\*

When people ask what they can do outside of Contact that will support their dancing, I recommend anything that will develop flexibility, strength and release. I sometimes add anything that will develop imagination, levity, and increased capacity for sensation and joy.

One way to expand trust in our dance abilities is to develop overall body strength. I’ve often heard people say “C.I. is not about strength, it’s about passing your partner’s weight through your bones.” Passing weight through the bones is one of many abilities a person can bring to their dancing, but being strong brings additional colors to the improviser’s palette.

\*\*\*

Contact Improvisation is an athletic dance form. People occasionally get injured, or more likely, reactivate old injuries. It’s a delicate time when someone in class gets injured. A primary feeling around injury is shame. I try to get some attention to the person but not by the whole group. There is also the shame or feelings of guilt and responsibility of the person who was partners with the injured person. I make sure someone checks in with the partner too- “how are *you* doing?”

When a person is injured it affects everyone in the room. At some point before the end of class I will sometimes ask the person who was injured if they want to give an update to everyone as a way to complete the loop.

\*\*\*

I've sometimes imagined that there is a student union somewhere that sends one challenging student to each workshop – the one that when you say “find a partner,” everyone flees and that person often ends up partnering with the teacher.

Strategies with these individuals – Demo with them to set an example. Work in small groups rather than in pairs to dilute the experience with the person. Use ways to pick partners like eye color, for example that is not about choice but about destiny. And sometimes choose your partner before you tell people to find a partner so you don't *a/ways* end up dancing with the student union representative.

\*\*\*

When one or a few students are being disruptive in class you can employ the technique elementary school teachers use— go and teach from the part of the room where the disruption is. Your physical presence will often cool things off. I find it's also helpful to demonstrate with the people who are asking for the attention.

\*\*\*

I often tell my students that reviewing a class by writing it down afterwards is like getting to take the class twice – the synapses shoot off all over again. And days or years from now when you are teaching you can adopt the material and make it your own.

\*\*\*

More than one of the founders of the form has said the sign of a master dancer is not their ability to dance with other skilled Contactors, but their ability to dance with beginners. This form is not about a batch of skills dancing with a batch of skills. It's about one person meeting and dancing with another.

\*\*\*

In the same way that each of us has an inner template of an ideal mate, we carry a template for an ideal contact dance. When we wish to enter a dance we look through the room and

consciously or unconsciously match people up to that internal template.

A valuable exercise is to identify and articulate our ideals in the dance. This allows us to see who we might otherwise skip over because they don't fit the paragon, and possibly find new, surprisingly compatible dance partners. Identifying our template also makes it more likely to find that partner who might give us the dance our ideals seek.

Contact teachers teach their inner template to their students. Covertly or overtly we are teaching people to be our ideal dance partners.

\*\*\*

Years ago I took the Copper Canyon train in Mexico and a barefoot woman sat beside me with a baby wrapped in her *rebozo*. Vertical cliffs, trestle bridges, and cascading waterfalls could be seen as we wound our way up through the Canyon. At the top the train was relieved to speed its way through the arid central plateau.

I remarked that the scenery was bland compared to when we were below inside the canyon. With a look of disbelief the woman beside me asked, “What about the birds?” I searched the landscape and didn't see any birds. She told me they were in the trees beside the tracks. I looked and the trees were empty. She nudged me, “open your eyes and look again.” I looked through the greenery and there were no birds.

I was about to smugly inform her that she was mistaken when I had the realization that these trees had no foliage. What I had mistaken for leaves fluttering in the wind were thousands of little green birds sitting on the bare branches.

Because of this woman's view of the world, and our rubbing shoulders on that train, my perceptions changed.

When we dance, when we rub shoulders and press torsos and lean heads and glance fingertips with another person, we are inviting our perceptions of the world to change.

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# an existential conundrum

**Grace Walpole**

*Grace Walpole explores the experience and meaning of performing improvisation, through concepts of Existential Phenomenology as discussed by Andrew Morrish in 'The Improvisational Space'. Grace is studying Dance Animateuring at VCA. This essay was written as part of her improvisation studies within this course.*

Andrew Morrish opens his article *The Improvisational Space* with a quote from Blom and Chaplin, lamenting that while “the nature of improvisational performance practice is much discussed, little has been written about improv because it is so elusive.”<sup>1</sup> The elusive nature of improvisational performance makes articulation of the experience difficult. In this essay I will discuss only the experience of performing improvisation at a *Conundrum*<sup>2</sup> in March 2004. For brevity and clarity I will not address the other ways in which I use improvisation: as a practice<sup>3</sup>, in class exercises, and to generate choreography; nor will I address perceptions of the performance.

Andrew's definition of improvised movement-based performance is worth mentioning here:

Directed towards open-ended performance this form uses movement and movement sensing as a primary source of locating and developing content during performance. Content is never consciously pre-planned, although previously generated content is not excluded if it spontaneously emerges during a performance.<sup>4</sup>

Andrew taught two improvisation classes with us at VCA. At this time I was invited to perform a short solo at the *Improvisation Interchange Conundrum* at Dancehouse. I read Andrew's article on improvisational performance and existentialism *The Improvisational Space* before his classes, and I think my performance related strongly to his

thoughts. My thinking before the performance was that the audience had come to see me and all I had to perform was myself, so I aimed to be true to myself at each moment in time by being open to my consciousness and simply perform that: to perform 'me, now'.

In his article on existentialism and improvisation, Andrew addresses three aspects of existentialist philosophy: authenticity, intentionality and consciousness. Authenticity is defined as trueness to self, particularly in relation to the engagement of a performance with the uncertainty of an unknown future. Uncertainty is fundamental to improvised performance, and is something humans are inherently wary of. Learning to embrace uncertainty, “to deal with what emerges, including the possibility of nothing emerging”,<sup>5</sup> was central to my development as an improviser.

A major leap in my development came with a score Al Wunder and Martin Hughes introduced me to, which Andrew taught in his workshop as well: 'moving on and sticking with'. I wrote in my journal:

Andrew presented this score in the context of never being 'stuck' because you can either keep doing what you are doing or you can just do something else. Actually there are only these two choices: either to stick with it or to move on. I hold, however, that for a satisfying performance a sense of coherence is required, and that is why I “stick with”; yet what I do is constantly evolving, hence “moving on”. So I simultaneously, and constantly, stick with and move on; I deepen and explore; I move both horizontally and vertically - the resultant vector force is 45 degrees.

Within the security of this score, one can be true to one's self, and deal with each moment as it

occurs. During the *Conundrum* piece, I felt no distance between my consciousness of self and the emergent material – the material was me at that moment. By being thus engaged in the performance, Andrew would argue, I was engaged in its emergence, “committed to the expression of [my] own content”.<sup>6</sup> This particular state of awareness is what authenticity in improvisation is.

Intentionality is described by Merleau-Ponty as an “implicit relatedness between our awareness and the world”<sup>7</sup> – that is, consciousness is always directed, and it is in this way we encounter the world. Therefore, Andrew argues, we must be open to the world for this encounter to occur. Andrew spoke in class about the importance of attention in improvisational performance: what one attends to is the fundamental choice of the performer, as it is through attending that options are noticed, through our directed consciousness meaning emerges.

I found a state of open attending during the *Conundrum* performance: material arose from places I had no notion I had access to – for example I recited the first 16 elements of the periodic table, something I haven’t done since first year chemistry. The material that arose during the performance simultaneously related to and created emergent meanings.

Intentionality also refers to “action with a purpose”.<sup>8</sup> I find it important for the generation of meaning that the movement arises from a place of intent. This place may be based in imagery (including themes, aesthetic and specific images), kinaesthetic awareness, or structure (e.g. narrative, journey, character development, pathway through space). During the *Conundrum* performance images and aesthetics of old medical practices (such as phrenology) arose, a personal theme of frustration within the medical world was explored, I followed momentum pathways sensed kinaesthetically, moments of repetition arose and were explored through the ‘sticking with’ score, a pathway downstage evolved, I explored different levels and speeds – the piece accelerated and moved into and out of the floor.

As I write down these actions, each seems incomplete and insufficient. Perhaps the elusive nature of describing an improvised performance comes from its sheer complexity, and its utterly transitory existence – I am unable to catch it. The layering of scores, the capturing of material as it arises, the clarity of intention, the openness of awareness and sharpness of attention are intrinsic to the performative state, and belie sufficient description.

Meaning arises simultaneously from all these actions. In a lecture earlier this year, Professor Andrew Benjamin asked how art might be differentiated from nonsense.<sup>9</sup> I wondered how improvised performance avoids being nonsense: improvised dance can risk becoming nonsensical, what I term ‘arm waving’, if it lacks meaning. Benjamin answered this question by arguing that by situating a work, it becomes *not* nonsense. An artwork must refer: because nonsense does not refer to anything, it does not have any meaning. Without intentionality, without awareness or directed consciousness, without reference, my experience of improvised performance is empty, dissatisfying.

The final aspect of existentialism Andrew addresses is consciousness. Consciousness is defined as the contents of our awareness, “the dynamic that creates our relationship with the world”.<sup>10</sup> The improvisational performance is, Andrew posits, “a tangible sample of our consciousness.”<sup>11</sup> This was my understanding of improvisational performance when I decided that all I had to perform was myself, at that particular moment in time: ‘me, now’. What then, I asked, is ‘myself’? In my journal I wrote a list: “imagination, personality, memories, history, beliefs, knowledge, movement vocabulary and skills, aesthetic choices, approach, responses, power sources.” I then listed elements I was responding to at that time: “historical medical artifacts, anatomical etchings, the body (clinical, physical, thematic), limitations of the body, old things, tango, accordion music, detailed moments, a physical challenge, body part isolation.” These elements were the substance of my performance: through previous articulation of my current stimuli, I was able to recognise them as they arose, and to

shape them in the moment. My consciousness is my position in the world. It is 'me, now'.

The complexity, subtlety and vastness, of what it means to allow spontaneous expression of one's consciousness exacerbates the elusion of description. Further, Andrew states that "as performers we are always (*as a matter of principle*) ignorant of some of what is emerging there are layers of our own consciousness which will surprise, remain elusive or confuse."<sup>12</sup> At the heart of the existential concept of consciousness, Andrew argues, is Merleau-Ponty's neatly expressed paradox: "a thing can be present, given and known in one sense, and still be absent and unknown in another sense."<sup>13</sup> By authentically performing my directed consciousness, by performing 'me, now', I presented an existential improvised performance, however, this performance remains inherently unknowable to me.

In his article Andrew frames authenticity, intentionality and consciousness as a set of criteria by which a sense of satisfaction might be defined. A large component of my satisfaction derives from aesthetic organisation. As adjunct to the definition quoted earlier, Andrew adds: "personal aesthetic choices, identified by terms such as 'the external eye', 'following impulse', and 'interactive content', direct the progress of the piece."<sup>14</sup>

I find a sense of watching my self to be intrinsic to my performance. It is almost subconscious – it does not split my consciousness from engagement with the emerging material. Satisfying

this outside eye – enjoying my own performance – is one aspect of satisfaction. Another is an engagement with a conceptual basis for the piece, as it arises and evolves. However, this is another essay in itself. Within this short discussion of existential phenomenology, I find satisfaction in improvisational performance from experiencing my very existence at such a heightened level. There is a sense that I do not have to work during the performance, I simply do it as it arises. Conversely, every sense is working at its peak.

The elusive and paradoxical nature of improvised performance is both its fascination and frustration for me. Blom and Chaplain say "not only is it ephemeral, but at its best improv is a constantly changing phenomenon."<sup>15</sup> It is a phenomenon that can only be captured in the moment, that exists only in perception. Deborah Hay says; "your perception is the dance."<sup>16</sup> It is through my perception, my authentic attention to my consciousness that I allow movement material to spontaneously emerge, and make aesthetic choices about the shaping of that material.

Despite all this theorising, I concur with Andrew's closing statement that "improvisational performance is a good deal more 'normal' than many practitioners would like."<sup>17</sup> Existential phenomenology is a philosophy which locates the creation of meaning *within the moment of lived experience*. This was my experience of improvisational performance as I engaged with my task to simply perform *me, now*.

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1 Morrish (1995), 'The Improvisational Space', in The Journal of Improvisational Practice 1/1, p.3

2 Monthly forum of improvised performance at Cecil Street Studio

3 This includes Contact Improvisation, improvisational play with others, and training in Bodyweather images

4 Morrish, p.3

5 Morrish, p.6

6 Morrish, p.5

7 Morrish, p.5

8 Morrish, p.6

9 Benjamin, A. Eyes, Ears and Hands, Lecture for VCA CFI, 11 March 2004

10 Morrish, p.4

11 Morrish, p.6

12 Morrish, p.7

13 Morrish, p.7

14 Morrish, p.3

15 Morrish, p.7

16 My notes from a workshop with Deborah Hay at Dancehouse, June 2000.

17 Morrish, p.7

# suspension

suspended  
in motion  
speed of movement  
scored through with stillness  
stretching time  
in the instant  
of a second

*Ann-maree Ellis*

momentary dwelling  
in transitional territory  
where the base of my ribcage  
catches the edge of your hip  
the crook of my neck meets your shoulder  
the back of your arm pushes against me

momentary meeting that cuts through the chase  
staring into the roots and anchors of gravity  
connecting there  
with the solidness of truth  
the certainty of knowing  
this moment will always be here

here  
as I ride the movement following ribcage & hip  
into a vast world of space  
compressed within skin and bone  
where flight is contained  
inside a dance of presence  
commitment  
curiosity  
trust

uncertain  
where I am  
I locate the place  
a mere point  
where our bodies are travelled in dance

and reaching into that point  
and connecting there  
we suspend time  
amidst flight  
mid fall  
curious

trusting  
uncertain

<proximity>



# the other bodies beneath this body

## writing about contact improv and butoh

*Alys Longley*

**one.**

I am thinking about the need to scrape the surfaces of things, to find another body beneath this body. The need to find other dimensions of skin and of flesh, to find edges of tissues, bones, and verticality, the selves which are always a step or two away.

To write something about how the dance forms of butoh and contact improvisation create states that allow the nerves of the body to articulate something other than “this”.

“This”, by which I mean the body that is mainstreamed, the body that we are taught to know, the limited possibilities for bodies that are presented to us in most places where we source the materials of human behaviour (the media, most public spaces, etc).

And then also to acknowledge the limitations of words, that as a writer I hope to create a space that involves the nerves and kineasthetic senses. A space that demands you, as you read, must use your instincts and intuition to create meanings that work for you.

So to write about the alternative physical bodies offered by the dance forms of Contact Improv and Butoh. And to try to squeeze meaning out of words in such a way that the experience and sensations of dancing are alive in the moments of reading – so your body might dance these written reflections.

**two.**

*the falling series*

Beginners contact with Grace and Joey. Learning to fall, the felt language of momentum, touch, sensitivity, risk – the particular deep lightness of falling upward.

We talk about dance as a metaphor for life – a group of dancers not yet at home to this form, how each week something within us, in our dancing, shifts.

We often return to the exercise of ‘filling the touch’- it is a beginning point in early classes, and a constant place of return throughout.

*I am lucky, and get to work with someone who is very new to this form, I can sense her doubt, her nerves ring with this physical proximity. It is not long before she has leaned her weight through the nervous edges, for the first time finding a sense of her bones in movement, in relation to another’s bones, and also her skin, her muscles, her tissues. Soon we are dancing and the focus is on that meeting through skin, past skin. Engagement with gravity, with slips of weight. Curiosity emerges. As our duet comes to a close her face is disbelieving at this perception she never knew she had.*

Becoming more and more at home in contact improv is a deeply personal and (I think) intense process. Because it demands un-learning. An openness to shedding my habitual patterns has been the thing that has continually drawn me and most challenged me in any development I have had in this form. And as much as I try to fluidly move to inhabit new elements of the contact improv vocabulary, my subconscious demands the stability of the known patterns - so contact for me is a very gradual surrender into possibility and risk. There is a lot of writing about how great, healthy and life affirming contact improvisation is, yet as a relative beginner in the form, I wonder if I am alone in my sensation of uneasiness at reading these articles - not because I disagree with them, but because allowing habitual movement patterns to slip is not always easy, simple and a release of positive feelings.

There is something I want to write about vulnerability, about the strangeness of entering a beginners body, about how contact demands a lot of its' beginning dancers, and that becoming fluent in this form demands that we look closely at our holding patterns, and commit to allow momentum to move through them. That this is an emotional, psychic and kinaesthetic challenge that is difficult and often threatening (even terrifying and a harbinger of despair) inasmuch as it is an extraordinary leap into extraordinary perceptions of a body each of us can be.

### three.

Butoh was once described to me as the dance of the dark soul.

*We are working on a walk. The image is that once we start walking we must know we will walk forever. We are walking in an open landscape, surrounded by ice. We are walking toward light on the horizon. Our feet press into the earth, there is a sense of pressing through and into the ground, yet our upper bodies remain light, without tension. Our faces are neutral. We walk in a straight line, 'til we reach a wall, and without changing our focus, we turn, and walk again. Once you start walking, you must know you will walk forever.*

*The next day. The warm up. We image the atoms that make up our bodies constantly moving us. Millions of worlds, of universes, contained within our skins – Tony - "if you want to slow down your movement, create space between the atoms..."*

Here I sigh and return to the impossibility of words catching this work that can become an improvised meditation on mortality, living, grief, the endless colours of emotion this body can contain. And that creates such room for the expressivity of the soul to surprise the body's capacity for imagination.

Yet I am drawn to discuss Butoh as a form that deeply engages with this need to quench a physical thirst for possibility, for the extraordinary within this body.

My experience with Butoh is limited to a couple of short term projects in New Zealand, about three

months of Saturday classes with Tony Yap, and the beginnings of rehearsal for Tony Yap and Yumi Umimare's new piece for the Fringe Festival, *The Night Within the Day*. I am drawn to this work because it offers something incredibly different to any other kind of performance work I have come across.

### *Beyond Vocabulary*

It is the willingness to go to the depths, to the edges of our skins, to the less trustworthy or known recesses of being that makes this work stand out for me. We often work with a sense of mortality, of shifting or fracturing time - very slow, or very broken rhythms, or a sense that time has stopped and we are caught in a zone of forever.

And what can you do there? What will you do?

No-one can tell you. You wait, and you find that your nerves know, your emotions know, it is all there if you can allow yourself to go past what you know, past what you think, past what you can do or feel

and become your response to where you find yourself, without really performing anything finding the difference between acting and becoming and allowing myself to become new things.

As directors and teachers Tony Yap and Yumi Umimare remind us that it is keenly obvious if we are not engaged in the inner world of the movement. This process could be compared to an actors work of being "in character", but here, we are not working with a character, we are working with states of being stored within our cells, and ways in which we can engage in particular images to understand and present this dance. Butoh is a modern dance form that originated in Japan, with originators Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, influenced by the violence of the twentieth century.

For me there is something in Butoh about repair-honesty, grief, expression, release, renewal.

Both contact improv and Butoh are dance forms that demand honesty, focus, commitment and surrender to the unpredictable. While contact is a purely improvisational form, Butoh is not fixed



into being improvised or set. This form is so diverse, performances range from improvised to choreographed, to detailed understandings of the feeling states to be worked with, without a detailed knowledge of where they will go. It is difficult to generalise about any universal Butoh practice.

A lot of my past dance and theatre work has been centred in myself, this body, these organs, how to return to this safe and efficient centre of gravity, the reaches of this mind. It feels like the work I'm doing with contact and Butoh is about letting that go – entering another space - releasing the grip on my periphery, where I am, what can be, leaving past, future, memory, connectedness behind for here. And finding a centre as quick and full as my nerve responses – the shifts of mind that surprise and open out spaces you would never have known were possible.

#### **four**

*to rest your sense of conclusion with the ambiguities of poetics*

I'll end this article with a poem I wrote out of a contact duet with Ann Maree this July. Hoping that these images convey a sense of the intangible other body that emerges as we continue our dance improvisation practice.

peeling through  
the grape eyes  
of  
old desire  
wooden with breathing  
revealing  
raisin skin and baby bones  
and the space between us  
as blanket  
as tissue  
So many places to go  
And the softest,  
Softest

beginnings.

# understanding the sensing that leads to momentum

*Rachel Thorne Germond*

This essay is an exploration into the physiological and psychological underpinnings of the emphasis on the sensation of touch which is inherent in Contact Improvisation. I have explored several texts that define and describe this dance form as well as others that deal with elements that are its primary components such as the sense of touch and the physiology of the skin, proprioception and the kinaesthetic sense. Much of my information was gleaned from my experiences teaching workshops in Contact Improvisation to major and non-major dance students at the university level. After one particular workshop I asked the students to give written responses, which were extremely helpful in terms of identifying the main components of this dance form.

The basic principles of Contact Improvisation can be better understood when viewed in relation to the research and writings by both Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Mabel Todd, pioneers in Developmental Movement. The premise of the analysis of Developmental Movement patterns relates to the emphasis on natural, organic movement and the use of both the hands and feet as having equal importance as weight bearing supports.

A lot of the research done on touch has also had to do with the handling of infants and the relationship of mother touching the baby to provide sensory information necessary to survival. In Deane Juhan's book, *Job's Body*, he describes in detail many of the experiments that were done on animals and the findings and reports of the handling of infants that relate to the nature of touch as not only a healing force, but necessary to the neurological development of both animals and humans. This provides another connection to the physiology of the body's neurological patterning that is inherent in the form of Contact Improvisation.

Touch provides information for the neurological system of the developing infant and the mature adult that is unparalleled in its sophisticated nature yet remains primitive and essential. The body needs to touch and be touched. We need to touch others and the environment we live in to receive information vital to our orientation towards the world we inhabit. As dancers, the sense of touch is a vital navigator for distally initiated movements (reaching past the fingertips, past the toes out into the space around oneself) as well as for smaller, more detailed movements of our immediate kinesphere.

In Contact Improvisation, it is our sense of touch that stimulates us to interact with our partner and leads us into momentum as we grapple with the force of gravity in this context. The structure of the dance is fixed in the point of contact between the dancers as they move with one another and between the dancer and the floor, wall or other surface against which they can respond, react to, rebound off of, or yield into. This structure requires a sort of focus and attention oriented primarily towards the sensory receptors of touch.

A typical warm up for Contact Improvisation class will usually include some sort of tactile stimulation relating to the awakening of the skin organ. One such exercise is the following:

*Tapping* - Tap the surface of your body or your partner's body lightly with your fingertips. Start with the upper back area between the shoulder blades and across the top of the shoulders and neck area (usually these areas hold the most tension) and move down and up the back, also tap the extremities, the arms and hands, then the buttocks and thighs, calves, ankles and feet and then make your way back up the body and tap again at the top of the upper back. Move the



fingertips up the neck to the back of the skull and then the top of the skull. Hold your hands on top of the head, pressing gently, compressing the head so that it feels a bit like a hug might feel. Release your hands. Then lightly brush your hands down the body, tracing the energy lines and connection to gravity, emphasizing the release of tension into the atmosphere surrounding the body. This movement also emphasizes the body's connection and energetic extension into its environment.

This exercise was done in both my modern and jazz non-major dance classes. It was done towards the beginning of the class and received very positive results in terms of helping the students to relax and feel free and motivated to move in the space around themselves. It also helped to bond them emotionally with the other students in the room, creating another sort of psychologically "safe space" for them to move in. In this case, touching in the form of tapping provides tactile stimulation that innervates the entire surface of the body and thereby accesses the entire muscular, neuromuscular, bone, and joint systems. The combination of relaxation and innervation is key to its success as part of the warm up for a dance class. This is especially relevant in the warm up for Contact Improvisation where students will be relying on tactile information as the primary source for their orientation during the class.

Another exercise that is typical of a Contact Improvisation warm-up is to massage the feet, starting with the surfaces of the bottoms of the feet which will be coming into contact with the floor. In an essay on proprioception in Louise Steinman's book, *The Knowing Body*, she refers to having studied with a master of t'ai chi chuan who related to her that the five secrets of becoming a master

of the form were: "the top of my head, the palms of my hands, and the soles of my feet". (*The Knowing Body* pp.15)

The sensory receptors in these peripheral locations are what help us to feel where we are in space, in relation to others around us. In Contact Improvisation, we are touching the floor or others with the surfaces of our feet, our hands, our head, receiving powerful stimulation for movement and the next step of the interaction. We are in a sensory dialogue with our environment that allows us to move in specific and spontaneous ways. This is also an important facet of the improvisational aspect of Contact Improvisation. You are dancing "in the moment", you are responding to stimuli as they arise - there is no preconceived idea of what the movement will "look" like, of what shape or visual design it will make. Essentially the body is used in an entirely functional manner - with the pelvis, limbs, shoulder girdle used as levers and fulcrums and the head used for its approximately fifteen pound weight which can be maneuvered to balance in a certain way rather than for its expressive capacity of emotion.

### **Student Responses to a Workshop in Contact Improvisation**

Freshman dance majors at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana were asked to write about what they thought Contact Improvisation was about and also their own individual responses to the workshop. The following are some of the written responses that relate the powerful movement and sensory experience that this dance form taps into:

*"Trust, experimentation, collaboration, intrigue, communication... to me these are only a few of the important components of Contact Improvisation... it is not a set style, but an exploration, a*

*conversation between dancers. During this conversation, there are moments of insecurity, not knowing what will come next, yet there are also solid moments of assuredness, a satisfying flow. There is an unspoken language involved through touch, eye contact, shifting of weight, breath, and those mysterious moments of mutual impulse. This conversation is a necessity. I feel that through contact improv. people can let down the walls they may construct around themselves on a daily basis.” (Anonymous Student #1)*

This particular student encapsulates very articulately what the new student of Contact Improvisation is confronted with that is somehow different from the usual concerns of formal dance technique as taught at a university. The implication of this response is that an “unspoken language” of touch, weight, breathing, eye contact (and peripheral vision), psychological sensing (“those mysterious moments of mutual impulse”) all provide stimulation for a movement dialogue of essential meaning and profundity. (Note that this student listed touch first in her list of the components of this unspoken language).

Another student describes Contact Improvisation to be: *“An entire mental state of being, especially with oneself... one of the most important aspects of the learning process is truly knowing your own body, getting in touch with your own body.” (Anonymous Student #2)*

It is interesting to note also the use of the word “touch” as a synonym for “knowing” as this student repeats herself to emphasize her point. “Touch” is equivocated with “know”. This knowing is the perceptual, sensory stimulated knowing - knowing that is deeply felt on the body level because it is experiential. Later in her paper she says that through this knowledge we will learn to “know its

limits” and that another important aspect of the experience of Contact Improvisation is learning to “know your environment.”

Some of the classes that I taught in the workshop would begin with the students lying on the floor in a supine position, gently rolling from side to side to feel the sense of the body moving its weight in increments rather than in one great mass - of learning to give one’s weight to a partner (in this case the floor) in a way that the body weight is “poured” into another container (a body, floor, wall) which will in turn rebound or yield to that weight. The sense of touching first in a gentle and explorative way was conveyed as being an important part of the experience of encounter with another. It is important to communicate first through your touch, much the way an octopus might use its tentacle to reach out and assess an object placed before it. This sort of “knowing” is thus primarily a knowing that is informed by touch. This student’s description of also implies the psychological as well as sensory /kinaesthetic aspect of her experience:

*“...the exercises done at the beginning of class are so helpful in preparing us for later material. Knowing the floor, and becoming one with it, as well as feeling other people’s energy is so important to prepare yourself for improv class. I also feel that there is a whole entire different aspect to improv that is so very intangible. The word is trust. Contact improv is also a game of connections, on both the physical and the mental sense. The physical is obvious, the mental game I find more challenging to figure out...” (Anonymous Student #2)*

Touch is a very intimate action between two people (or can be). In Contact Improvisation touch is used primarily for its functional purpose. Touching someone helps you to know their body

mass, where their weight is and where it's going to go next. There are many positive side-effects of the constant and heightened use of touch in this form. Through sensing with the skin we let someone know that we will be there for them, to support them in a lift or jump, or that we are going to fall now to the floor or move very slowly. The usual range of space between two partners is approximately that which would be considered to be 'intimate' space of lovers or wrestlers. You find yourself in awkward positions where suddenly there is a crotch in your face or you are nuzzling your head into someone's belly or jumping onto their back like a small child asking for a piggy-back ride. Trusting that A) your partner will be there to support you , and B) You can touch each other intimately in a non-sexual but sensual and caring manner (creating a non-invasive safe space for the participants involved) is a necessary and functional aspect of this work. It is also very emotional to touch and be touched in the way that Contact Improvisation presents. This is perhaps the "mental game" that "anonymous student #2" referenced.

#### NOTES:

It is also interesting to consider some of the physiological underpinnings of these visceral responses to Contact Improvisation: Touch informs our perceptions and stimulates our reactions - it creates sensations which the Contact Improvisers respond to and must develop an awareness of and intention towards. The skin is one of the largest organs of the body. Amongst its many physiological functions, it is a sensory organ. It is also the most varied and constantly active source of sensations in the body. "No other function of the skin is more critical to survival than these sensations because they contribute more information than any other source to the assessment of and response towards the environment." (*Job's Body* pp. 28)

This information helps both mental and physical functioning. There is a concrete anatomical connection between the skin and the central nervous system, which can be explained most simply by the fact that the skin and brain of the developing embryo are formed from the exact same cells. The skin can, in fact, be considered to be an extension of the brain's surface. The external

surface and the innermost core of the body spring from the same original tissue. Tactile experience is also directly related to thinking and the mind of the organism. Every touch initiates a variety of mental responses. (Contact Improvisation does not stress this aspect of touch, but just lets it be there if it needs to be).

Because of the complexity of the neuromuscular feedback mechanism, one's tactile experience is as important to one's thinking processes as language skills and categories of logic. Some experiments have been done with animals and studies of human fetuses that confirm that it is the cutaneous layer of the body that, in the developing embryo, initiates the organization of the parallel circuitry of the brain. During the 3rd or 4th week of development the ectoderm begins to differentiate skin tissues from the neural tissues. The skin layer separates from the central neural tube and migrates outward. The developing muscles, bones, and organs push it away from the core. Properties of the skin continue to influence the development and organization of the Central Nervous System. In *Neural Mapping*, in order to accurately locate a stimulus on the body's surface, the brain will rely on the precise spatial arrangement of its circuitry (*Job's Body*, pp. 36). In other words, the nerve endings on the skin, on the periphery of the body, actually helps to organize the connections of the CNS.

The opposite idea, that the core maps the periphery was previously heretofore believed. What actually happens when you sense something tactilely is that "local qualities of the skin, joints, deep tissues "tag" nerve ends which contact them with subtle chemical messages. These chemical "tags" direct axioms growing inward, towards the appropriate connections in the spinal cord and brain." (*Job's Body*, pp. 48)

Deane Juhan, in his book for hands-on body workers, *Job's Body*, says that "Tactile stimulation appears to be fundamentally necessary for the healthy behavioral development of the individual", and that "no organism can survive very long without externally originating cutaneous stimulation." This research serves to support the vitality of the work of Contact Improvisation that

stresses physical touch first and foremost as a gatherer of information that inspires one to move and to interact with their partner. It simply feels good - to touch and be touched in the appropriate context, and touch often seems like an essential need like food and sleep.

Dancing is one activity which relies heavily on touch receptors to aid in spatial orientation. Our feet, torso or other limbs touching the floor or other bodies provides crucial information that is taken further into dynamism with the kinaesthetic sense of motion and the proprioceptive receptors. Contact improvisation also deals with balance and the unexpected.

Bonnie Cohen, in her book *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*, explains that basic off-centre balancing is a function of the cerebellar-pons area of the brain. She writes that Contact Improvisation actually stimulates certain areas of the brain, such as the "low brain" which controls our most animal and basic instinctual functioning. Cohen also refers to developmental movement and the importance that touch plays in developing coordinated movement patterns in the baby. She writes that "touch plays a major role in the opening of the child to itself. Tactile stimulation (helps to) organise the baby's attention so that it can exercise intention." In Cohen's book she discusses in detail the physiological benefits of Contact Improvisation which she says is "a clear example of opening up one's perception and thereby one's options (pre-motor focus), sensitivity awareness, and ability to respond. When tactile stimulation is combined with falling, there is a feedback system that is extremely informative. This information allows one to respond automatically and "in the moment" as one of my students wrote. When you fall at the same time as touching someone, you are receiving a "wider feedback mechanism for orientating yourself in space." (*Sensing, Feeling and Action*, pp.58).

Contact Improvisation embraces the aesthetic of falling, of accident, of being out of control. It is also a highly sensitive "self and other" awareness developing dance form. Sensing your weight dropping into the floor, sensing the walls around you, your partners' weight and mass,

their momentum and movement dynamic through kinesthetic, proprioceptive and touch receptors and working with all this information in the context of gravity and other human beings is the challenge presented by this form. Contact Improvisation provides a sense of community and inclusion for dancers and people of all shapes and sizes and people communicate powerfully and directly through the non-verbal language of touch and movement experiences.

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Choreographer and Dancer Rachel Thorne Germond has dual degrees from Cornell University (BA and BFA) in Comparative Literature and Fine Arts. Drawing on her background in fine arts and literature and an interest in 20<sup>th</sup> Century cultural history, Rachel is intrigued by a wide range of random and disparate inputs from modern life. She employs a range of strategies in her choreography, creating ambiguous juxtapositions and new, unfamiliar languages.

From 1998-2000 she achieved her Masters Degree in Dance and Choreography at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana where she was a fellow and taught contact improvisation, modern and jazz dance techniques. While at UIUC she took a class called *Somatics in Teaching Dance Technique* with Professor Rebecca Netti-Fiol. This paper was a response to one of the assignments for this class.

# upcoming events

## Melbourne CI Jams

Every Tuesday from 6 - 8pm  
@ Cecil Street Studio  
66 Cecil Street, Fitzroy  
\$5, ph: (03) 9443 0640

## Sydney CI Jams

Every Wednesday 6:15 - 8:30pm  
@ Omeo Dance Studio,  
1-3 Gladstone St, Newtown  
\$5, ph: (02) 9519 3430  
studio@omeodance.com

## Adelaide CI Jams

mostly every fortnight  
contact Kat  
dancingkat99@yahoo.co.uk  
or Helen  
nomand90@hotmail.com

## -- NSW --

### Release, Contemporary, +

see www.omeodance.com  
for details of classes

@ Omeo Dance Studio, Newtown  
ph: (02) 9973 1768  
studio@omeodance.com

## -- VIC --

### CI Classes

with various teachers

Tuesday nights, after the jam  
@ Cecil Street Studio, Fitzroy  
phone (03) 9443 0640

### 2 for 5 in 15

Two teachers for five classes in fifteen hours.  
Contact Improvisation with Pen Dale & Martin  
Hughes

Friday 1st Oct to Sunday 3rd Oct  
@ 66 Cecil Street, Fitzroy  
phone (03) 9443 0640  
email: martin@smartworks.com.au

### Classes at Cecil Street

Classes running throughout the year in  
Improvisation, Performance, Technique,  
Contact, Skinner Releasing and more.

@ 66 Cecil Street, Fitzroy  
phone (03) 9443 0640  
Fiona Cook, Martin Hughes  
call for more info + mailing list

### Alexander Technique

with Noelle Rees-Hatton. Individual Lessons  
50min - 1 hour

@ Cecil Street Studio  
\$30/\$25 conc.  
ph: (03) 9531 1236

### Theatre of the Ordinary

with Al Wunder. Performance Workshops,  
Motional Improvisation, Extended  
Performances.

@ Cecil Street Studio  
Call for dates and information  
ph: 03 9415 9344 or 03 5343 4224

### Text & Improvisation

with Peter Trotman.

Mondays 7 - 9pm  
@ Cecil Street Studio  
ph: (03) 9417 1140

### Summer Improv Feast 2004

at Cecil Street Studio. Two weeks, loads of  
workshops, plenty of teachers, movement,  
dance, music, percussion, song, voice,  
theatre ... You name it, we got, they teach it,  
come do it, you'll love it!

17th January to 30th January 2004  
@ Cecil Street Studio  
martin@smartworks.com.au  
ph: (03) 9443 0640

## -- NZ --

### 'Nelson Lakes Mountain Jam' - NZ

a seven day Contact Improvisation Dance  
Retreat at Rotoiti Lodge, St Arnaud, Nelson  
Lakes National Park. Workshops taught by  
State of Flux.

8th - 15th January 2004  
Rotoiti Lodge, St Arnaud,  
Nelson Lakes National Park, NZ  
Michael Baker : nomads.hat@snap.net.nz

## --international--

### Choreography & Improv

with Janis Claxton. Check her website for  
classes and workshops in the UK. Ranging  
across improvisation, choreography, release  
and more.

ph: 07813 864 778  
info@janisclaxton.com  
www.janisclaxton.com

### BodyCartography

with Olive Bieringa and Otto Ramstad. These  
workshops will focus on deepening our dance  
practice and our dance making in direct  
response to the environment.

www.bodycartography.org  
olive@bodycartography.org

### In The Eye Of The Hurricane

Intensive Workshop in Contact Improvisation  
with Martin Keogh. 5 days of intensive  
study with one of the most in-demand and  
respected contact teachers around

November 17-21, 2004  
Seattle, WA, USA  
www.danceartgroup.org  
info@danceartgroup.org  
ph: + 1 206 686 7323

## --performances--

### Rushing for the Sloth

A monthly evening of improvised performance  
curated by Tony Osborne, Eleanor Brickhill  
and Nikki Heywood.

last Sunday of the Month, 7pm  
@ Omeo Studio, Newtown  
(02) 9519 3430

### Conundrum

State of Flux and Five Square Metres hosting  
their regular improvised evening in Melbourne.

last Sunday of the Month, 7pm  
@ Cecil Street Studio, Fitzroy  
(03) 9443 0640

### Cracking It Open

Presented by Dancehouse, Cracking it Open  
is a forum for discussion and showing by  
dance improvisation artists.

contact Dancehouse for details  
(03) 9347 2860  
info@dancehouse.com.au