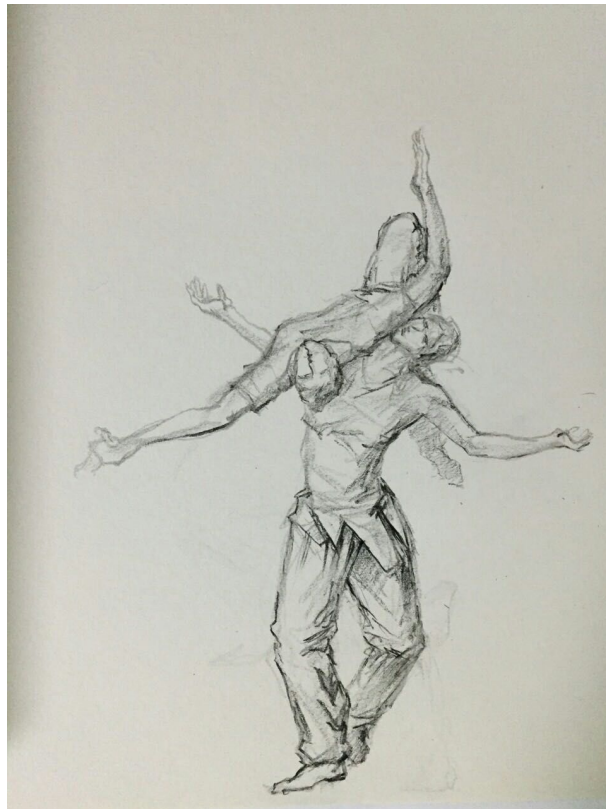


Contact Book

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*Moving in unity.
Guided by the moment.
In eternal spirals.*

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About

So what is this book about and who has written it? For whom is it written and where is its emphasis? And also some general remarks as a form of a disclaimer before continue reading.

Book

The following pages were initially written for the sole purpose of taking **personal notes**, but then it started to grow further and further, and now it reached a level where it could also be of use to others; whether to those which consider themselves **beginners or more experienced** practitioners. Everyone who is interested in getting more acquainted with the **theoretical background** – next to their regular practice in the dance studio – of the fine art of Contact Improvisation Dance, or simply **CI** for short as of now may find something useful.

Whatever is written here does not claim to hold any absolute, objective truth, but merely is a manifestation of a very **personal, subjective** collection of experiences, thoughts and opinions which were gathered along a single person's journey. Some parts are summaries of sources found along a path of exploration, whether they might be (direct or indirect) oral teachings, or written information found in books or on the internet. The content is of course also **partially biased**, although the best attempts where made to free oneself from one's own limitations of perception of reality, and thus, the content will sometimes be colored by a personal background – I shall be forgiven for my flawed human nature.

The book uses the **masculine version** when using examples for the sake of simplicity, in case both can be applied, and of course always implying that the female version could have been equally used as well.

Myself

My background lies mainly with internal **Martial Arts**, and as such, my focus lies more on a practical approach (*“Good Kung-Fu looks bad, only bad Kung-Fu looks good!”*), where *“form follows function”*, and less about the aesthetics of movement which might be more important to a dancer. “Right” is what works in the **most pragmatic** way, meaning efficient in time and space (physics/biomechanics), and as well whatever is within principles of CI.

Besides those more physical aspects, the **psychological aspect** also has an important role to me: The benefit for one's mental health, the ability to get to know oneself and others more deeply, and of course a more philosophical/spiritual path which can also be walked with the help of this deep art.

Also, as a body worker, I emphasize the importance of the non-verbal communication aspect of movement between two people. The slowness, the gentleness in establishing a **deep connection** through listening, and the expressions of our personalities through this practice.



Definition

Without a proper definition of what something is, without capturing its **essence**, it can't be properly talked about. How does it relate and especially separate itself from other similar systems? What are its **goals and principles**, so we can always check whether a specific method or direction is in alignment with these goals and principles. Not necessarily that it would be wrong, but just to be aware when we step out of our system, and step into something (completely) different. Communication usually is loaded with **misunderstandings**, and by having a clear, mutual understanding of what it is we are actually referring to, we can create more **harmony** in our interaction through clarity (of words).



So what is CI (sometimes also called “*contact*” or “*contact dance*” in the community) **compared** to other systems? A dance, a sport, a (visceral) art-form or art-sport, partner acrobatics or martial arts? Well, maybe all of it or none of it; or maybe depending on how you approach it and what your background is and where you put the emphasis on. Let's have a look at the different views on it, and by also looking at its history it might get more clear what it is, or what it can be for you.

By Comparison

Most of the emphasis is put on the following areas:

- Experimental dance** – practice-based research in dance laboratories
- Theatrical form** – improvised performances and lectures-demonstrations
- Educational tool** – training for professional dancers in improvisation
- Awareness practice** – being able to listen to the subtleties in contact
- Social dancing** – at informal gatherings called “jams”

At its core it involves **mindfulness**, sensing and collecting information which requires full presence and attention. And yes, it is even related to other improvisation practices like improvisation acting: the “Yes, and ...”-concept expressed just physically.

Dance

It could be considered a form of improvised partner dancing, embedded in contemporary and (post-)modern dance form. Dance improvisation existed already before CI, but it didn't have the **contact** aspect as CI has, and most of it all the “*shared point of contact*” principle. The development in dance history started with ballet, to modern (Martha Graham, John Cage, Cunningham), and then towards contemporary – improvisation became not only a research tool, but a performance itself. Those are mostly vertically, meaning standing, without any floorwork involved; whereas in CI we roll over each other on the floor, something which would be seen as rather unusual in other styles. We use a **three-dimensional** spherical space, where every body-part can be a foot – and be pushed against the ground.

CI is an **improvised** “art-form” (or “art-sport”), thus without any predefined choreography. Sometimes CI is used in choreographies, which is then called “partnering”. CI is an exploration, a way to try to “break the system” as it is improvised. Nevertheless, CI is not something you would see in the professional dance world, a world where they are walking with very “nice movements”.

It is not so much that as a CI dancer you are serving the **audience** (in a performance), but rather that the audience is joining you. It’s about getting a visceral reaction from the audience of an improvisation art-form, that they want to join. Ultimately there is no difference between dancers and the audience, no hierarchy is existing.

It is distinct from other partner dance styles, as those are more focused on the social aspect, whereas CI comes from the art world. Many other dances are also very much **gender-rolled**, where usually the man would lead, and the woman would follow (exceptions exist like for example Lindy Hop). In CI, everyone dances with everyone, without any clearly defined role.

CI has a strong focus on the **physical** aspect: How to survive a high impact volume, which leads to either to crash or to fall? Lindy Hop is for example also very strong in acrobatics, which Zouk also does a little. Thinking about taking/lifting people on your body, on your core, your center.

There is also a difference in styling, as many **aesthetically** pleasing dance styles would “dress to impress”. In CI, we would typically come wearing our pyjamas, sloppy, cosy, comfy, pragmatic.

Martial Art

It is also combined with some minor aspects of eastern philosophy and a few things from the 1960s hippie culture. Reason being that some founders of CI had their background in the Japanese martial art of **Aikido**, which is similar to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Gently receiving incoming force and deflect it in circular movements, not resisting but rather listen, perceive, interpret and work with what’s there at the moment.

Yet of course CI totally lacks the intention of it being even remotely applied in a contest or let alone in a street fight. There is no emphasize put on practicality during a physical conflict, still having skills in for example rolling (Judo) can be extremely handy.

Applied Physics

CI is an exploration of **physical forces** of one’s body in relationship to others by using the principle of sharing weight, touch, and movement awareness, while moving in contact and on the ground. To play with the artistry of falling off balance and counterbalance, with gravity and physics. To learn the mechanics of the body to handle someone’s weight or to be lifted, along with breathing techniques. Alternatively it can be stated:

“CI is a three-body-problem with two dancers, being shaped/moved by momentum, gravity, and force, dealing with the third body, the ground/earth.”

Acrobatics

The main founder, Steve Paxton himself was a **gymnast**, and that might be the reason why still some of CI resembles more partner acrobatics than dancing. The many (demanding) lifts, and the high velocity and high impact movements can require a high level of fitness of the practitioners, just like acrobatics does. Whereas proper partner acrobatics goes way beyond what CI is doing, in terms of physical demands and risky techniques.

Community

The term “community” is in some areas used for people living in the same place, something hippies would do who strive for a more “natural” approach to life, people who drop out the system, sharing knowledge about each other, rather than about a specific **practice**, and helping each other in times of need. And there is even a current trend in our society that companies are using phrases like “Come, join the family!” which even deludes the word family very much.

We use the term “community” here for a group of people **sharing** the same passion for this practice, and getting curious about the other person, from a very basic physical connection. Sometimes this curiosity goes to their life, experiences, and ideas, which sometimes can lead to afterward also sharing food; from their, friendship can happen. Sometimes it is also just a great dance partner, but personally we might have nothing in common, and we also do not want to become friends. We see each other as “only dance partners”, and the depth of care we feel is a bit less than for example for our beloved neighbour.

In the CI “community” this is a bit off though (compared to regular dance scenes), as when someone discontinues to come to classes or jams after a while, we might not be real friends, yet we would still reach out for each other, asking where he is, **helping** each other out (with health issues, financially) and support if needed. This happens especially in smaller classes, where there is more of a sense of community. These silos also happen according to the attitude of the teacher or the jam, where people will converge into specific places; norms will differ based on that.

People who practice or teach CI believe in what they do, in the goodness that it gives the world. They want to expand the pool to reach more people; and that’s why you will see little competition and more **collaboration** in the scene. Maybe there will be a bit more competition if it’s one’s only source of income, a scarce modality; instead of CI being a livelihood, a hobby, a passion. Some teachers will invite guest teachers, or send their students to another teacher, to a different city, or a teacher who is more technical or in some other way different. There is not much “fighting” among CI practitioners happening, but also collaboration are not so often happening, as it is a very **individual practice**. There are festivals, where (abroad) teachers are being invited, but usually when invited, then not by other teachers but by schools, institutions, or organizers. The norm is nevertheless a “city-based” teacher who offers 2–3 classes a week, and sometimes there are “travelling teachers”. And there is also a win-win-win in having different student-teacher relationships in one’s own workshop.

Stereotype

There is no clear stereotypical, **physical appearance** for so-called “CI people”, as we might have when thinking of people who do Yoga, Hip Hop, or Tantra. CI practitioners are nevertheless very quickly spotted on the dance floor, not so much based on their looks but how they move, how they engage, their behavior with weight. There seems to be a mutual, unconscious ability to spot each other on the dance floor which makes them find each other rather quickly -like magic.

A stereotypical CI practitioner is often wearing common **dance clothes**, nothing too casual or street clothes, but also nothing too fancy. The age range is rather big, yet for the technical part it’s usually around 25–45. Socioeconomically it’s a little bit on the higher end, meaning people who are **financially** a bit better off. Teachers might be willing to give a discount to people who can’t easily afford paying for the classes/workshops, so in case needed, feel free to go ahead and ask, as the worst thing you could get is a “no” and in the best case you can afford going for your dream. Also, strictly **religious** people seem not to be attracted by it, most likely because of the touch and the physical proximity.

CI people have no need to attach themselves to a **subculture** and shape their personality around it; there is no need for “another stamp” as is seen so often in other practices. CI is about the **physicality**, and less a “spiritual practice for personal growth”, or a community, as stated above. Still, the way we move might influence our personality; similar to the increased sensuality when moving Tango, but that’s not a big thing in CI. It’s very **egalitarian**, meaning no roles, and a plain physical form. It’s more **technical**, more raw, and no (moral) values are being conveyed -whereas the egalitarian approach might be a value in itself. It is **independent** of sex, gender, age, and body; there is no leading nor following based on sex or gender -just play. It doesn’t convince others of the greatness of CI, although everyone is invited and welcome to join -it’s fun.

Jams

There is a broad, global community which organizes social dances, so-called “jams”, on a regular basis and practitioners often overlap with the Ecstatic Dance ¹ communities. They are **social gatherings** without a leader, yet sometimes with someone who facilitates it; similar to jazz jam sessions or Milongas in Tango. It’s an opportunity to practice **freely**, where people can meet and negotiate together their dance, or observe the practice of their partners. It’s an occasion to meet other fellow practitioners, friends or strangers, old, young, experienced, and novice. It’s a hybrid between bodily meditation, psycho-kinesthetic therapy, sports training and a dance improvised session. They can be regularly in a studio for a few hours, or longer retreat jams for several days in spring resorts where it can be practiced at any hour of the day.

Sometimes you will encounter that the **facilitator** takes a bit more the lead, by hosting sharing circles at the beginning and/or at the end, and by providing some warm-up exercises. Sometimes you will have a playlist providing musical

¹Many people from Ecstatic Dance often claim to have done “contact” but actually have no idea about CI. This confusion is about “touch based partner dance” versus the art-form of CI (sharing weight). These people might also bring in a slight different (sensual-sexual, maybe even Tantric) attitude which is not welcome in CI.

background throughout, sometimes you might even encounter a live musician. Yet, traditionally jams are being kept **silent**; to let fully unfold of what is alive at the moment between the dancing partners; to not let the music dictate externally but allow for full expression of what's present, as one of my dance teachers once said: "*Music makes a dancer stupid*".

At the end (also sometimes in classes/workshops), you will sometimes find that people engage in an exercise called "**round-robin**", which means that a few couples (or half of the people) are constantly in the center of the room, all the other people sitting on the edge holding space, being present, observing and learning or at least get inspired, giving in their energy, and when you enter/join a couple, another person is leaving, so the amount of people stays constant throughout.

Historically

In the early beginnings, in the 1970s, everytime the founding members practiced CI, they would redefine it, asking the very same question over and over again: "What is CI *now*?" An early definition by **Steve Paxton** and others was (source: CQ Vol. 5:1, Fall 1979):

"A continuously evolving system of improvised movement. Two bodies, communicating with each other in physical contact, creating a relationship with the physical laws (motion, gravity, momentum, inertia). Sensitive, thus relaxed of unnecessary muscular tension, and willing to experience a natural flow. Techniques may include: Rolling, falling, being upside down, following, supporting and giving weight.

A physical dialogue ranging from stillness to highly energetic exchange. Alert enough to stay in an energetic state of physical disorientation, trusting your survival instincts. A free play seeking for balanced movements, leading to a physical and emotional truth, shared at the moment, leaving you informed, centered, and enlivened."

Possible Definitions

Definitions, and the same with any terminology, are time-, space- and person-dependent. Just as with the improvised nature of CI, it is a constantly moving target. By asking the same question a week later, the answer you receive will already be different.

There is still a rough **body of agreement** – a congruent understanding – of what it is, and what it is not, leading to a definition stable across time, space, and practitioner. It's like a tree: The trunk which are the agreed principles, and it's branches and leaves (the styles/adaptations) representing the edges where you can play freely.

Steve Paxton himself stated in 1979:

"The exigencies² of the form dictate a mode of movement which is relaxed, constantly aware and prepared, and onflowing. As a basic focus, the dancers remain in physical touch, mutually supportive

²exigency = A pressing or urgent situation/requirement/need.

and innovative, meditating upon the physical laws relating to their masses: gravity, momentum, inertia, and friction. They do not strive to achieve results, but rather, to meet the constantly changing physical reality with appropriate placement and energy.”

Nancy Start Smith once mentioned:

“It resembles other familiar duet forms, such as the embrace, wrestling, surfing, martial arts, and the Jitterbug (Lindy Hop and swing dances), encompassing a wide range of movement from stillness to highly athletic.”

Daniel Lepkoff states about the core of CI:

“To put focus on bodily awareness and physical reflexes, rather than consciously controlled movements. Precedence of body experience first, and mindful cognition second, is an essential distinction between CI and other approaches to dance.”

Ray Chung once announced in a workshop 2009 that:

CI is an open-ended exploration of the kinaesthetic possibilities of bodies moving through contact. Sometimes wild and athletic, sometimes quiet and meditative, it is a form open to all bodies and enquiring minds.

Beyond CI

CI is for sure not a pure **martial art**, as it has no claim to have any practical fighting application. Nor is it a competitive **sport** in any way, as there are no competitions and due to its artistic nature it would be difficult, or at least without much meaning, to judge one as being better than the other. It has many aspects of partner **acrobatics**, but lacks many technical possibilities due to the nature of its principles.

It is also not really your regular **dance** form like Salsa or Tango, due to several reasons: We don’t dress (nor dance) to impress but rather show up with our authentic selves; we don’t move in order to look good or aesthetically (to others); we focus more on the internal and interpersonal aspects than the external ones; we dance often without music; there are no real techniques which can be learned but only guiding principles from which some specific movements can emerge.

As it is the case with so many (or maybe even all?) disciplines: Once the rule has been understood, and you know what you are doing, it can be broken by the student, thus **becoming a master** of it. Finally, it has to be mentioned that a system³ is supposed to be of service to the user (not the other way round), and its boundaries and dogma should not limit but enrich the applicant. Whenever the purpose is hindered by the system, the system shall be left behind, and we should remember the original goal which was there in the first place, and not to serve the gods we created.

³In this case we talk about CI as a system, but the forementioned wisdom can be applied to our world’s system, politically or economically, to technology, to our endless todo lists ...

Beginning

As a beginner, it can be difficult to get the necessary information to decide whether this art is something for you. You need to figure out what it actually is, and whether it actually fits you in your needs and also in regard to the physical requirements on the body. But also more practical aspects like where and how to find a school, how to find a (good) teacher, and what to look out for when doing so. This section should provide you with some initial directions for taking your first steps into the wonderful world of CI.



Starting Point

To start it's always nice to check some **videos** (see the Resources chapter at the end of this book), but please don't be intimidated right away from what you are seeing. The people you will see on those videos are usually already on a very high level, and that's not what you are going to encounter at first.

Join a **recommended teacher** and go first to some classes (see "How to spot a good teacher" further below). It is not advisable to immediately go to jams, but only after 10–20 classes, to already have the basic principles embodied. And don't give up if your very first experience seems bad; maybe you want to just try another class or another teacher. Be also aware that CI is not only physical, so ask yourself: Why and what are you doing? This will be very beneficial and inspiring for your first steps with CI.

Requirements

You might ask yourself for whom is CI fitted? For whom is it a good idea to join, or not to join? Are there any physical requirements and how to deal with if you feel a bit touch-averse towards strangers?

In general, it can be said that every body is welcome, but not necessarily every behaviour. This art-form is not only for the young and well-trained, as there is no real requirement for acrobatic performance; the body just needs to be mobile and the bones bear some weight. It is not about **age**, neither about body ability; yet some techniques might not be possible to do, or would need some adaption. Students even with the age of 70 would be able to do shoulder lifts, and that person was doing it for many years. Some of the more crazy things, he mentioned, was better to keep for "the next life" though.

Sharing weight, being in contact with another body, exploring what's happening at the moment, where the weight is, the unconscious reaction to balance, ... this, anybody can do. Even with a partially disabled body, with some **physical disability** like being in a wheelchair, it is possible to play together with a physically fit person. Or also with blind people, as they are often also super in tune with weight and different other aspects of perception. It leads to a very different and interesting kind of exploration, and requires us to renegotiate, to re-explore what kind of communication we can play with.

Even with a huge **weight** difference, we just need to be more careful about which kinds of lifts to do, and who is carrying whom how. We need to negotiate what's possible, and sometimes this means no shoulder lifts, and/or no rolling

over. Always respect the abilities of the dance and both bodies by checking each other out, slowly (!) and step-by-step, then it becomes *safer*, yet not necessarily *safe*! When you are about to engage in more advanced (crazy/dangerous) techniques, always do it with a lot of care and a guardian angel who will spot you.

In theory, in an ideal world, everyone is welcome, yet it is not advised for people with severe **touch aversion** to jump into CI, as a solution to their trauma in that field. It is recommended to better “tippie toe” in different kind of forms first, and only then see if they want to continue with CI. Mental challenges sometimes make people join only one (or even half a) class, or sometimes the teacher might even have doubts and expresses that discreetly. People who take too many risks (the “dangerous ones”), which are throwing themselves on unknown partners, won’t be denied access to classes or jams, but dancers will most likely get aware of that and keep their distance to them, as it won’t feel safe.

Good Teacher

Finding the right teacher is special. Don’t expect that it will work right from the beginning at the first attempt. Take your time, have patience.

There are three realms to consider:

1. The **physical** aspect:

- The teacher knows what he is teaching, and also being honest about his limitations in that knowledge; or simply put: **humbleness**. How does he deal with his own weaknesses, flaws and mistakes? Is he able to admit to not knowing something, to be mistaken, or simply, which is very human, to have messed up something?
- What is his educational **background**, and for how long is he doing (teaching) it? Try to look him up on the internet, maybe there are even some videos from him.

2. The **psychological** aspect:

- This includes the ability to **hold space**, in case when internal processes might happen.
- Are common rules laid out transparently and are they comprehensible and challengeable?
- **Safety** is created by the nature of his intention: Does he want to inflate his ego, making himself bigger? What happens if doubt is expressed, or if he is criticized in front of others? Does he claim to have a status of a master or guru, or is he “one of us” and going for a drink with the students, taking off his teacher’s hat.
- Does he want to gain something from you outside the class, besides monetary compensation in a formally agreed transaction? Are personal services and favors expected or even demanded, when you are in individual contact with the teacher?

- Contact him personally. As long as you are not intrusive and stay respectful, a clear, friendly and in-time response to your questions should be possible.

3. The **spiritual** aspect:

- Watch out for the presence of **competition**. Does he genuinely want the student to be as good or even better as himself? Basically, does he have a pure intention to teach, sharing his knowledge (whereas this sharing is also always happening two-way though).
- It is a good sign if your teacher motivates you to also have a look at other teachers.

Becoming Good

What makes a good CI practitioner good can be answered in many different ways. It is for sure not only the obviously physical/technical aspect, but also having the right intention for the dance, a proper attitude and mindset which is led by **curiosity** – the antidote to being judgmental. An advanced practitioner is really happy exploring the smallest thing, being able to keep a beginner’s mind open, and he knows what he knows, and he especially also knows what he doesn’t know.

For many, dancing with total beginners and total advanced is most enjoyable as they show and remind us the different aspects of the dance. Both of them are usually very happy to dance with each other as well. On the other hand, intermediates are usually not happy to dance with beginners; they prefer to only stay with their own level or higher. They are also usually the “dangerous ones”, as they know the pathways and the tricks, the form and the looks, but they don’t know what they don’t know. They are lacking the listening ability. If something happens which was not predicted in their pathways, like quick changes, they don’t know how to handle that. They also often go faster than their level of attention, and especially very often go faster than their beginner-partner’s level of attention. Having that said: Always **respect** what your body is able to do in regard to level, age, and constitution.

A very important tool you must gain in order to get good is the ability to **listen** to small and subtle sensations in the body, the change of movement and weight. An increased awareness of incoming information, inside as well as outside the body via the peripheral nervous system, the so-called skinesphere. It leads us to be able to detect what’s going on, thus becoming “well-informed” and leading us to become a much better dancer.

More generally speaking, we can state that the following personality aspects lead to becoming good (those apply of course also to any other form or practice):

Kindness: Smile, be gentle and soft, with yourself and others.

Patience: Let beginners do their own mistakes, gaining experience.

Humbleness: By not showing off how many years you are doing this-or-that, and not arrogantly teaching beginners.

Everybody learns and everybody teaches; everybody is a student and teacher at the same time. There are no certificates. If you have a lot of knowledge, you will share that by your dancing.

Years of practice itself are not even necessarily a guarantee for expertise or even mastery. Some people get stuck at a certain level; even after many, many years. Lots of experience itself doesn't mean your level of technical practise is going forward. Always keep a **beginner's mind**: Keep on doing the very same thing, like lifts and spirals, yet stay with curiosity and explore deeper, like the small things and changes, where to focus now, to put your attention and intention to. Even if someone's technical level is very advanced: The moment where you stop posing questions, is where you stop developing.

Motivation

“If meditation is the process of being in the present moment, in the so-called here-and-now, then Contact Improvisation is the highest form of meditation.”

Besides for the obvious reason for dancers to expand their skill-set, non-professionals are most likely to start with CI for either simply **pleasure** of doing it – as it is fun –, or sometimes also for **personal development** purposes. We all come to doing the same things sometimes for very different reasons, and all of them are valid, and some of them might be sub-optimal as other methods might be more effective in attaining your goals.



This section might get you inspired to start, or even motivate you further to deepen and dedicate more of your life into this “useful” art. The given reasons might all be indeed valid, yet they are not, and should not be the main reason, the main intention to do CI, there are simply co-existing.

The Power of Touch

The tactile experience is most prominent during practicing CI. To be specific, it’s the activation of nerve fibers in the skin, the so called *C-tactile afferents*, through gentle and slow stroking with body-like temperature. A “warm touch” leads to release of **serotonin**, a hormone which makes us feel happy, regulates our emotions and associated with sympathy and interpersonal affection; “cold touch” is experienced when being socially excluded, as the skin temperature decreases. Such a touch will increase activity in the insular brain region that is responsible for interoception, which is perception of the current body state and facilitation of the sense of self. This touch, which can be soft to slide, or deep to the bones, is used to establish a nonverbal, two-way dialogue process, a form of **communication**.

This kind of touch reduces stress (lowered cortisol levels, which is a biomarker for stress-related diseases), increases oxytocin levels (attachment, connectedness) and lowers blood pressure. If a person lacks touch, disorders like depression, a distorted body image, low self-esteem and heightened aggression and self-injurious behavior might occur. Touch releases endogenous **opioids**, which make us feel relaxed, good, and more resilient. It counteracts a feeling of loneliness and isolation, which is the case in many forms of mental disorders –in the UK alone, about 54% (among 40,000 participants) want more touch in their lives. We live in a low-touch society, and mistrusting strangers became a default.

Yet, touch needs to happen with **consent** in order to be experienced as something positive. To want to touch, and want to be touched. Respecting each other’s **boundaries**, and the possibility to step out of touch at any given moment. A good CI facilitator will address those things, by, for example, introducing “yes/no-exercises”, and safety rules at an event. Especially beginners, who are easily overwhelmed by touch and lost trust in others due to previous bad experiences can benefit from a gender-based group and sharing circles in a safe space to reflect upon.

Psychological Benefits

CI has been reported to have **positive effects** on stress relief, relaxation, well-being, happiness, joy, connectedness, empowerment and feeling more fearless. Also leading to a clearer experience of a “sense of self” and the body; being more aware of one’s own existence.

The massage effect of “sharing weight” seems beneficial against anxiety, depression, ADHD, eating disorders (“better sense of one’s own body”), autoimmune diseases, chronic fatigue syndrome, and more. It also helps with the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system – “*rest and digest*”.

As the attention is attracted to the “shared zones of contact”, it brings us to the present moment, and thus becomes a **mindfulness practice**, distracting us from stressful thoughts. There is no intention to reach a certain goal, but simply **exploring** movement and touch itself. This requires us to be attentive, aware and present.

Finally, the personality gets strengthened, by being more aware of one’s own **needs**, and distinguish oneself from the others. **Patterns** can be broken, not only in movement, but also in behavioral and cognitive patterns, and a positive impact in resilience-building might occur.

Social Bonding

CI helps us **to relate** better to others, to create stronger social connections, **to connect** to other people and bodies. At the beginning, this connection with others might not be so present, as we focus on the technicalities (the bodies, not the peoples); the focus resides on creating a piece, not a community. The experience of giving and receiving support via “sharing weight” for example. The sensation goes beyond the pure physically into the psychological and emotional realm. To trust each other, to feel safe again; presenting our vulnerabilities and instabilities, ultimately leading to a state of **safe intimacy**.

It has been reported that the following experiences during a dance can emerge: playfulness, surprise, curiosity, flow state, feeling free, being alive, vitality, nourished, energized, connectedness, trust, closeness, deep communication, safe, secure. The sensation of connectedness feels like being a new “third entity”, as it is not clear who gave the impulse to move in a certain way. “*By feeling the other person more, I feel my own boundaries better, thus I feel myself more, feeling more home in my own body.*” Yet, negative sensations might occur as well of course, like: boredom, insecurities, doubts, exhaustion, strenuous and being at one’s own mercy.

It can connect people from all backgrounds, as we all have the **same body**, being equalized, moving in space, independent of age, gender, sex, belief, religion, or color.

Soft Skills

Through the practice of CI, many soft skills are also trained and enhanced, such as: teamwork, problem-solving, communication, interpersonal skills, adaptability, dependability, and creative thinking; which are all not only important in our personal, but also in our professional life.

In **teamwork**, we achieve a common goal while supporting the strengths of others. While we dance with a partner, we are looking and seeing where all the other couples are and moving through and around us. Our goal is to have an enjoyable dance, while letting others have one too. By literally supporting our partner, and choosing together how to navigate the space, we form a small team. The so-called big space, the heightened awareness of all the people within a room, we all pay attention to each other, forming a big team.

Every contact is a little kinetic puzzle which requires **problem-solving** skills. Like watching two improvisation actors saying “Yes, and ...” a little too often, and you wonder how they will get out of that; yet with CI the very same happens just physically. Navigating through space, while watching not to bump into others or hit the wall, and all of that while maybe your partner is trying to balance on your body. All of those puzzles need to be somehow solved at the same time.

Good **communication** skills require deep, active listening; yet with CI we mostly stay in silence, so the attentive listening happens only non-verbally with the whole body. There is never an agenda, a script, or a predefined choreography. No one knows upfront what’s going to happen, who is going to initiate what. Yet surprising as it sounds, with good enough listening skills, there will always be clearly communicated what will happen in the immediate next moment; by simply listening and responding.

Empathy is an essential part of interpersonal skills, which is practiced in CI by “feeling the earth through our partner’s feet”. Although you might not know anything about your current dance partner, through this interaction you will experience so much about how they live in this world, as: “*Bodies speak beyond words*”. It’s not only the obvious, physical characteristics like size or weight, but also the techniques being most often used and general movement choices which tell us a story. Through this, we might not be aware of facts like country of origin or the family status, but on a different dimension we still get to know the person.

There is such a vast variety in Contact Improvisation dancers, that **adaptability** becomes actually a very important and common skill which gets acquired very fast due to its necessity. Obviously, the amount of weight you can share with your partner needs to be adjusted. The differences in height make certain techniques, such as lifts, more or less easy, or even impossible. And of course the level of experience with body practices in general, and CI specifically, requires you to adapt to what’s there - and possible - at the moment.

An interesting contradiction in CI is, that on the one hand you have to be able to completely rely on your partner, building up trust (**dependability**), and on the other hand to always stay within your own center, being able to catch yourself at any given moment (**self-reliance**). Always take care of yourself, while being hyper-aware of where your partner is, how he is moving and where he is going; and also knowing what the other people are doing in the room, having one’s awareness spread throughout the space, or big space. Bear also in mind that you can’t know what’s going to happen, predictions are impossible due to the improvisation nature of CI; thus the name.

Lastly, you will also gain some more insights into yourself, knowing more about your personal boundaries and tolerance for risk. How we want to be treated, and how to be heard; our tendency about taking over a conversation; realizing that we are not as heavy as we imagine ourselves to be. We learn to

be vulnerable and to trust others with our vulnerability (“*When I fall, will you catch me?*”).

Other Motivations

For sure there are benefits in the area of personal and social growth. Maybe it could even be considered a philosophical, mental, and/or spiritual practice. Its slowness resembles some meditative state and its fastness to stay in the flow, in the zone, in order to “survive”. Like ballet, where dancers stay in the zone of awareness, a meditative state, by doing for example a plié for more than 15 minutes. Just in CI, instead of pliés, we do the small dance.

As a **body-oriented practice**, it will connect you more to the body, and less to the mind. In case you are not there (in the moment with full presence), the flow will tell you by bumping and falling.

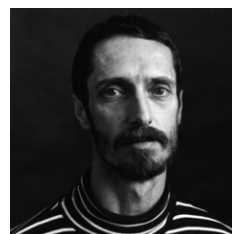
A very pleasant side effect is that it can also act as a form of **workout**. By this, we avoid having to go to the gym and have much more fun in the studio playing with each other. “*Some people lift weights, we lift bodies*”; some people run to lose weight, we go dancing.

Because it sparkles **curiosity** in us, to explore the exercises further. For some it is a starting point of such exploration, whereas less than half stay with CI, others continue somewhere else. The love for the capacity to move in a different and new way. These new pathways are often explored due to its improvised nature, it being part of the dance improvisation world, without any choreography, which often leads to the loss of “why we are doing it”, the reason, and simply following someone else’s idea.

On a much deeper level it is also a way to “handle life”, in a nice, safe environment. A place to see humanity, or better: animality. In a good kind of way, a monkey kind of way, which is very much fun.

History

“In order to know who you are today, I need to know your past, and maybe even can predict something about your future.” This applies not only to individuals, but as well to humanity as a whole and localized phenomena like the art of CI itself. By knowing its origins, we can prevent from diverting too far from it, and reach a deeper understanding of why things are the way they are. And also of course to bring in some kind of attitude of honor, paying our respect to the founding fathers – and mothers. To bring in some tradition; something our society these days so much lacks and yet is so much in need of – even though it might not be aware of it.



Founding Parents

CI was developed in June **1972** in the US by mainly a man called **Steve Paxton**, “the father of CI” – see his picture on the right –, who was an American dancer, gymnastics and choreographer and former Aikidoka (someone who practices the Japanese martial art Aikido) who lived in New York City (by that time mainly performing in the Judson Dance Theater). He wanted to explore and push the boundaries to develop this new practice, some sort of “art-sport”.

Next to him, it is worth mentioning **Nancy Stark Smith** – “the mother of CI” –, who is the one still holding CI, as Steve stopped doing CI about 7 years after its invention, with the intention to giving it to the people. She continued with another partner and started the Contact Quarterly magazine, a vehicle to share ideas, to hold the theme and practice of CI.

Creational Event

In spring 1972, Steve Paxton invited a group of 17 students and colleagues, dancers, martial artists, acrobats, gymnasts and athletes, to explore and research the **extremes of movement and disorientation** – from standing still to falling, rolling, colliding and jumping in the air – in a two-week workshop. While moving with high velocity, running into each other, bumping, trying to survive, and see what the result will be.⁴

He wanted the dancers to work with him on the form he was evolving, and at the end of this week of residency, the group presented a performance named “Contact Improvisation”. To see for yourself how those first steps looked like watch this old black-white recording from 1972: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FeSDsmIeHA>

Out of that exploration, a 20-minutes performance piece called “*Magnesium*” arose, whereas the first quarter-hour was about jumping and bumping, manipulation and clinging. Only the last 5 minutes, the so-called “small dance” was performed: A form of meditation that is practiced standing, where attention is paid to postural adjustments and micro-weight transfers. Videos narrated by

⁴A little bit like what they do at the Large Hadron Collider at CERN: Smashing some particles at each other and be excited about what would happen.

Steve about that are available, which are very much encouraged to watch, to also see the progression from those impactful years of '72, '75 and '87.

Institutionalization

At first, around 1975, it was considered to **trademark** the term Contact Improvisation, but this idea was rejected in favor of establishing a forum for communication, which nowadays is the website of Contact Quarterly and is still co-edited by Nancy Stark Smith herself. So it was never **institutionalised** nor was the name **copyright** protected. Together with ECITE (the European Contact Improvisation Teachers Exchange), those two can be considered the main international forums ensuring the quality and continuation of CI.

The decision was very deliberate to not have any form of legal institute or **certifications**, free of any hierarchy. Remember that a certificate usually doesn't mean that that person is good, but just that the certification was passed.

The downside of not having an authority verifying the competence of the teachers is of course, that when the word was spreading, more and more **injuries** started to happen; that's why: "*One should never teach what one doesn't know properly*".

Further Spreading

A few years after the founding event the very first "Country Jam" was organized in 1979, where about 50 people came together to freely exchange and dance, without any structure. Neither a workshop, conference nor a seminar. Just co-created being, dancing and living in flux. Later on it was introduced in new avant-garde dance schools in the US.

The members of the founding group scattered across the US and started to teach the practice. It became smoother, continuous and **controlled**, yet still avoiding eye and direct hand contact. Much emphasize was put on the experience of flow, which is more of an aesthetic choice (Nancy Stark Smith), yet the central characteristics preserved.

Europe was presented with CI first 1873 in Italy, and later Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson regularly went to the UK and Amsterdam (School for New Dance Development) as the transmission belts for CI in the whole of Europe. Belgium was visited by Paxton since the 1980s, but apart certain outbreaks of fever in successful jams, it didn't leave any lasting traces among dancers.

As founding people could be considered (next to Steve Paxton): Nancy Stark Smith, Danny Lepkoff, Lisa Nelson, Karen Nelson, Nita Little, Andrew Harwood, and Ray Chung.

For more detailed information read books like *Sharing the Dance* and others which you can find in the Resources section.

Then and Now

It was for sure very different back then, and that's why sometimes people would also refer to it as "*Old School Contact*". There was a **high risk** with very high velocity, and it for sure looked very amazing -and very scary too. Good to know though is, that they trained on **mats**, especially at the very beginning (see the

videos) which would make the impact of falling much less. After they started to do the same without mats though, they got – quite a lot of – injuries.

The last few decades, much more emphasizes was put on **flow**, instead on “explosion”, and also on figuring out the **least resistant** pathway. Some people claim that CI lost quite a lot of its characteristic along the way, yet it could be said that it’s nice to have both, to be able to choose what you want. Being able to survive the explosion, and play comfortably in the flow.

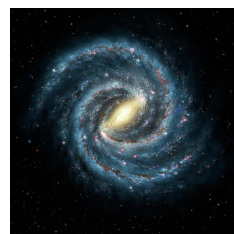
Today there are many different **styles**: more flow, more impactful, acrobatics, dance, acting, ... The differences are mostly based on the uniqueness of the teachers, along with their lineages; but also due to culturally specifics. Some countries may have simply other “body orientations”, resulting in a different CI style.

Future

Hopefully it will keep a very **strong trunk**, meaning: People keep on researching the practice, while still knowing where it comes from, knowing its roots. We are all welcoming the **branches**, e.g. CI combined with other practices like “Contact Tango”, “Contact Beyond Contact”, and so forth; or CI with using substances for *other states of awareness*. Hoping for, as the tree is branching, that the main trunk will stay the main trunk, so that there is no need for the distinction between “I am a CI *purist*” but that it’s possible to simply say: “I’m doing CI”. The trunk has been **stable** for the last 50 years, yet lots of new branches appeared the last 20 years; branches which merge different forms together. It is important that people are aware that those branches and merges are not CI the way it is actually practiced. And lastly, what’s needed are good teachers, jams, and spaces where the ideas and principles are held from CI: Knowing the physical aspect but also keeping the history.

Principles

Many systems (sports, martial arts, ...) are focused around dozens or even hundreds of **techniques** which are given to the student to learn by hard, including their names, and precise definitions of what's the right way of doing it. This is an approach which might work for many instances, but obviously has some serious disadvantages when it comes to quickly responding (picking the right technique from many within a split of a second) and more importantly the ability for individual expression.



In contrast to that, CI (along with many other sports/martial arts systems as well) is centered around a few core **principles**, and every technique which might be taught, studied and practiced is a manifestation of those core principles. The techniques present are based on the principles, the principles are the core. There are therefore no real moves to be learned, but more principles to be embodied and applied in any given moment. Once the principles are well understood, you can free yourself from the limitations of specific techniques, and questions like whether something is “right or wrong” can be easily answered by asking those principles. Yet, as it is with the mastery of any art: Once the principles are fully understood, they can be broken if desired so, as: *“You can do whatever you want, as long as you know what you are doing.”*

In Short

CI being an improvised partner dance (usually, but not necessarily done with two people/bodies), it encourages the exploration together with the ground, while staying in constant physical contact. The dance is supposed to move by itself, according to the participants aims and wishes.

In short, these are the basic principles used in CI, whereas the first two could be considered the physical essential ones:

- Sharing Weight
- Rolling Point of Contact
- Exploration of physical forces
- Spirals and other related movement patterns

Later, once all those principles are embodied, they show up and will surprise you when they happen and change your pathways. Also in high velocity, when going into a risk engaged dance, dancing with a super, super high level of alertness and attention, jumping on each other, yet landing safely back on the ground.

Grounding

With grounding we are referring to some kind of sensation (light) heaviness in the body, which makes the stance more stable, more robust and thus more connected to the ground. Imaginary language like “rooting”, and similar, are

often used to describe this internal sensation, with its very realistic impact on the external. This quality is the beginning of it all, without it, we can't go any further, as without a firm foundation there is no house we can build upon it. To help improving our groundedness we can use visualizations (roots growing into the ground), focusing our attention to where the sole's of the feet have contact with the floor, breathing out and relaxing the muscular tension without collapsing in one's structure, and simply thinking about words which are associated with a grounded, firm, or stable quality.

It should not be confused with stiffness, which so often lead to the illusion of groundedness, which is achieved by simply contracting all muscles; something we don't want to do as it will remove the ability to adapt at the moment, our flexibility.

Lastly, because of the interconnection between body-mind, the fact that you become a more grounded dancer, you also become a more grounded person.

Small Dance

Recognizing and listening to the small dance is a (warming up) exercise helps the practitioner to increase one's body awareness. It is classically done only standing, as it is the strongest way to balance due to the small surface, that's how it started. Which position to take is not as important as the perception of reaction to the process of balance, which is always happening (except when completely lying down), in any position. Ultimately we want to be able to figure out one's own and also your partner's center, as lifts are happening from there.

It could be considered as some form of mindfulness practice, where we focus our full attention to the sensation of standing; especially of the micro movements in our ankles and whole body. How some automatic movements, little contractions and twitches, keeping us standing upright. Something that is beyond our consciousness, but something we can definitely tap into by being more sensitive to it. We can use these unconscious micro movements as a source of movement by amplifying it.

It is also often used as a beginning of a grounding exercise, by shifting the weight, and keeping the center low. Additionally, once the weight was totally shifted to one side, to "double ground" oneself to have a very clear sensation of stability and balance.

Pouring Weight

Once we have established to "gain some weight" by grounding, we can use that to pour it into another person's body. The emphasis here is to slowly increase the amount of pressure where the body's have contact, instead of a quick and sudden shift, which will be difficult and fear evoking movement for your partner; ultimately even potentially dangerous. Instead, we want to "announce" that there is some weight approaching, so that our partner can adjust and adapt posture and internal tension/structure to that poured weight.

Sharing Weight

The first and most important principle is trying to seek a deep (core) connection between two bodies, sometimes also called "*oompf*" in our classes. The body is

stable and grounded, yet its limbs and joints are soft and relaxed; like an iron stick wrapped in cotton wool. Also, the contact is primarily on the box, the upper body, and less on the arms and legs. It is different from actively pushing with muscular force, and also slightly different from leaning by which you shift your center of gravity beyond a point of no-return.

The sensation should lead to a feeling of the ground beneath the partner's feet, right through their center, solely through the single point of contact which can be even as far from the ground as a hand. We constantly try to search for the center of gravity of the other person's body, which might sound familiar experienced Taijiquan practitioners where the given aim is identical. This is also called a *contact quality* (a result of grounding plus sharing weight) instead of a simple *touch quality* (soft feather stroke like a butterfly). The ultimate goal is to maintain this quality throughout (almost) all time, and therefor also leading to acquiring the skill of recognizing weight.

Unfortunately, this is also usually one of the most difficult skills to acquire for beginners. Reasons could be such as fear of falling, fear of imposing one's own weight on another person ("Am I too much/heavy?", being a burden). A handshake or a tap on the shoulder is common in our society, to lean on someone not. It's important to learn this principle, yet without stopping to breathe and without tensing up, which is a very big struggle for beginners.

Another very scary aspect for many people is when going to the ground. Having lots of weight on you or giving (lots of) weight to that person on the ground is something which need to be trained.

We don't only share our weight, but we are also sharing our balance, in order not to be "off-balanced" but "shared-balanced".

The more advanced people, who acquired that skill, can choose to deliberately not give weight (or jump contact-points).

Rolling Point of Contact

We use spiraling and rotating movement pattern to always maintain contact (and amount of pressure) in a rolling fashion, instead of sliding or even jumping the point of contact, e.g. directly from a hand to a shoulder, not passing "through" the whole arm. Sliding or jumping is by no means wrong, but it is added later on deliberately by more advanced dancers.

The contact follows a predictable trajectory, a pathway, which means both partners can anticipate the very next movement, which furthermore leads to a more "fluid sensation" in the dance. There is no disengaging or re-engaging of the point of contact (at least not at the beginning), which sometimes can feel like little bumps during the dance, breaking this fluid sensation. For this to happen, it is required to have a more agile body, bulging out body parts and bending/flexing wherever necessary to keep a clear rolling point of contact. It is also used to correct each other to find balance, to readjust and realign.

The second most important and also second most often principle with which beginners struggle with. Be aware that we don't aim for "intimate body-parts" (buttocks, breasts, genitals), yet we roll over them "coincidentally" without staying there. For example when my head would be at those parts, I will still try to avoid that if possible, even if we know each other very well. We try to desexualize the human body (not the partner, but the body), something which can be difficult in our hyper-sexualized society. The touch should be without

any sexual intention, even if intimate parts are being rolled over (the “how” is more important than the “what”) which will make us both feel comfortable. We play with each other, just like kids are playing “rough and tumble” in the playground; before encountering the wonderful world of sexuality. Just like a doctor touching breast tissue with the intention of finding signs of cancer and without any sexual intention; that’s why it feels safe for the patient.

Pathway Continuation

According to the physical law of inertia, and to be in accordance with it, we should never break an already moving momentum (exceptions for the master applied here). Once spiraling in one direction it should be maintained; it opens up possibility for anticipation, predictability and therefore trust on a psychological level, but also a mere reason of energy efficiency on the physical level.

Movement Patterns

Through a heightened awareness of communication through movement, touch and sharing weight, we explore the space and the connection between through mutual physical cooperation. Fundamental movement patterns are:

- **Yielding:** softening/surrendering into incoming force or to gravity
- **Pushing:** expansion, taking up space
- **Reaching:** extending physically or meta-physically
- **Pulling:** contraction, up til collapsing
- **Releasing:** relaxing into what’s contracted before

All of those movements can be done easily with little muscular effort if basic physical forces are acknowledged and taken advantage of, such as: gravity (falling), momentum, inertia, balancing and others. And all of those while staying in contact.

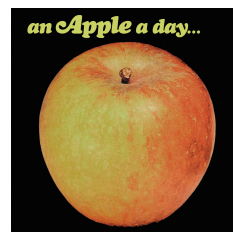
Relaxation

We move usually rather relaxed; a body which is ready for action yet open for receiving tactile stimulus, open for information. We try to achieve that by deep breathing, by keeping a fluid movement quality (“octopus quality”) and also avoid a staring eye gaze.

Yet, a relaxed state should not be confused with a collapsed one. An active state is also not the same as a hyper-tensed one. Within this spectrum of non-extremes, we ought to find the optimal amount of muscle tonus which is appropriate for a given situation.

Mottos

You could also call them (universal) guidelines, which are semantically more specific than principles, yet not as specific as concrete techniques. They help us improve our technique, implement the principles, and embody a CI quality. They are kept short, so we can remember them quickly, and can act as part of our vocabulary (but then just longer): Once we mention it to someone who is also familiar with that saying, we immediately have a common understanding within a very short period of time.



Examples

- *Tension masks sensation.* Imagine your muscles are tensing up so much, they squeeze the nerves which then can't transmit any information anymore. The more relaxed we are, the more sensitive our skin is to touch and pressure/weight.
- *Keep on breathing.* When getting tensed up, physically and emotionally, we humans tend to hold our breath, which is counterproductive to stay sharp, focused and relaxed. Instead, we continuously try to remind ourselves to breathe, and especially emphasize a deep out-breath.
- *We try not to fall in love with our partner, we fall in love with the dance.* Try to depersonalize your dance partner, seeing him as a mere physical object and by that explore the physical realm instead of the psychological, interpersonal realm. It's also not a personal dance, it's a physicality; the experience is because of the practice, not because of your partner necessarily; don't attach that to a specific person. Even when you had an amazing dance with someone, once the dance is over, I'm going to say "thank you, and bye bye". It is nevertheless possible of course to talk to that person later on, but not lingering and dance the entire class or jam with that single person.
- *Keep eyes open and "wide".* Sometimes people tend to close them, or focus them on the partner. Instead, we want to keep an open gaze, perceiving everything around us, staying in connection with all the people in the room and the room itself. Once we start to gaze at the floor, this is usually an indication of a hyper-focus which potentially closes our perception.
- *Dance at the edge of your level of attention, and don't cross the level of your partner's attention.* Try to expand what you are able to do in regard to movement, attention, speed, techniques, and pathways. And very important, listen to what your partner is able as well.

Mistakes

As in general with any improvised art, mistakes are only seen as such as soon as we declare them as being mistakes.

Imagine two improvisation actors on stage. One says mouse, the other house. And then again, the same thing: house - mouse. They actually intended to go on with different rhyming words, but for whatever reason (too nervous?) they are stuck and can't come up with something new, and because they are able to fake it as a deliberate decision (not admitting it being a mistake, something which was not their initial desired goal; when things don't go according to a fixed plan), people in the audience might be amazed by the "post-modern acting skills" and interpret something into it.

Once you are able to let go of any plan, and be truly in the present moment with whatever is happening; once you are able to fully comprehend that whenever there is another person involved, any desire for control is futile ... then you will be able to surrender and use any happening as a source of inspiration. Ultimately being able "to surprise yourself", and be fascinated what happened to you.

Techniques

Although CI is a principle-based system and has those principles at its core, meaning it doesn't follow a strict collection of well-defined techniques, there are certain reoccurring movements which could be considered as techniques. Yet, they should not be regarded as something to be followed literally, and as long as you stay within the framework of the CI principles, any adaption is judged as correct.



Technique or Principle?

The difference between this is like the difference between grammar (principles; universal and abstract) and vocabulary (techniques; specific and concrete) of a language. Even in the United States we will use the same grammar, but the words/vocabulary, and especially style/dialect will be slightly different; expect small hiccups to happen. Nevertheless, we will be able to understand each other as the principles stay the same. And often it will be necessary to stay a few hours with a new teacher to embody his body language, from which the vocabulary comes. Vocabulary, like lifts, is a rather regional expression of the application of the commonly shared principles.

Lifts

The most common, and most impressive, “spice” added to a dance are lifts. Whenever one center is lifted above another person's, a lift can be easily executed by “pouring the weight”, one of the core principles, instead of jumping on our partner with a potentially heavy impact. There are different kinds of lifts; typical ones are:

- **Hip-lift:** Usually ones butt, lower belly or side is placed on the lower back of the other person.
- **Shoulder-lift:** The highest level of a lift when flying on the shoulder of another person.

As a base we tend to ground ourselves to become more grounded and stable, by focusing on our center of gravity, whereas the flyer tries to make himself light and engage in his center of gravity.

Lifting might lead to potentially dangerous situations, which require us to pay especially attention to the following safety rules:

- Not grabbing is a general guideline, using less the hands and more the torso, yet with lifting this becomes especially important; thus no interlocking of the arms.
- Allows keep a hollow back (a.k.a. “good gorilla”) to provide a stable support for your partner.
- Always keep your head above your ass, otherwise your partner will feel unsafe and slide down to the front.

Read more about this in the chapter “Safety”.

Spirals

We use a lot of spirals in CI and how they are perceived, seen and anticipated in different movements in other or one's own body. Moving in spiral patterns is the perfect way to keep the pathway continuation which adds to a more enjoyable, fluid sensation during the dance. Spiraling is considered a core movement pattern in CI and there is much more to say and experience about it.

Spirals can be very visibly be done between two body parts by moving from the distal parts of the body towards the more proximal parts. There is a lot possible with playing with the axis, changing the axis, going within or outside the body, ... the limit is the imagination (and skill). And ultimately spirals can also only be visualized, imagined, with pure intention/attention without any external visibility of movement.

Exercise: Connect two points on the body, and visually move along a connecting line between those by using spirals around that line. Feel free to also play with different planes.

Negative Space

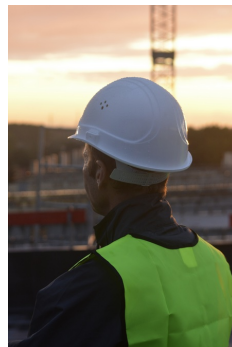
Dancing in the so-called negative space basically means entering, usually by reaching into it with a limb, the kinesphere of another person without, yet engaging in touch. This is a common way to non-verbally invite someone for contact, to dance together, at a jam for example.

Others

- **Body-surfing:** One person rolls on the floor, the other (usually) perpendicularly rolling over.
- **Counter-balance:** As also done in partner acrobatics, where the center is, for once, oppositional, instead of centers being shared.

Safety

We sometimes move in order to keep our body healthy; yet it sometimes happen that while we practice, we injure our body, destroy our health. It seems like a terrible contradiction, that the one thing which is supposed to heal, suddenly harms. And that is why safety is of utmost importance when practicing CI -also because it sometimes, just like acrobatics, includes some more dangerous techniques. Not only the safety of yourself, but we also want to ensure the safety of the other people we are dancing with, which lead us to safety rules there. And lastly, not only physical, but also psychological safety needs to be addressed, whether in individual or the group's emotional and social safety.



Is it safe?

Safety in obvious terms of “free of injuries” should always come first when practicing any potentially risky movement style. Furthermore, respecting and adhering the local, specific sub-**cultural norms** which will also lead to emotional/psychological safety within the group. Besides all these concerns about safety, it is safe to say that CI can be practiced by anyone: professionally trained dancers, recreational movers, athletes, dancers of all abilities and ages.

Yet, if you ask yourself whether CI is safe, then the short answer is very simple: No. It can be “safe enough” though, which is what we aim for. It is for sure less safe than Judo or MMA, but more safe than poetry or running. It is a high intense for of dancing, and also more risky due to the unknown of your partner what they are bringing. Safety just can’t be reached in the outside world, meeting each other; neither injured (physically) nor psychologically in pain. So that’s why it’s important to be aware of the existing risks, yet expanding the boundaries of what’s possible.

Consent

Consent is mainly about being able to express as well as hearing (and appropriately responding to) a “yes” and a “no”, which are both possibly (and preferably) expressed non-verbally.

Of course this starts already when engaging in a dance with someone, but primarily is important when it comes to more advanced lifts. It could be due to lack of trust into each other, fear of being lifted, considering the other person’s weight as too heavy, or other reasons. There are many elegant ways out, so that we can hold ourselves responsible for withstanding our boundaries instead of making others accountable for crossing them, ultimately “self-dis-empowering” ourselves.

Whenever a gentle hint by movement does not have the desired result, we can of course always cough, or lastly simply speak and be very explicit about our wishes.

Technical Safety

There are many, many things which can lead to dramatic injuries, especially when being performed by non-advanced students. Yet, for the sake of simplicity and conciseness, we will limit the list to a few, the most common ones, here:

- **Head above ass:** When lifting a partner, the shoulder always by higher than the pelvis, as otherwise the person will slide down overhead.
- **Don't grab:** When encompassing the partner's limb for example, that part of his body will be immovable and thus prevents him from using it as "landing gear" when needed, leading to a potentially severe injury. Additionally, it removes the agency of the other person and is considered to be simply rude in the CI scene. There is a fine line between "polite manipulation" by pushing a bit, guiding, and even offering a welcomed structure/base for the other person, and a forceful, dominant directedness, which as well can be ok with some dance partners (you know well) and they consented to it. Yet, to be fully safe, especially with strangers or in unknown places, refrain from too much manipulation (or pedipulation, meaning using the feet to change the shape of your partner). And as always: Once you reach a higher level of experience and skill, many of those rules can be (intentionally) broken.
- **Don't interlock:** When people perform a back lift and interlock the arms (and God forbid simultaneously lowering the head below the pelvis line) and they fall, the flyer might get into a state of panic and tenses up his arms, while the base will fall and not being able to use his arms, thus falling on his face with the weight of the lifted partner.
- **Don't jump,** especially when being lifted. Jumping and other techniques leading to (uncontrolled) collisions was an essential part of oldschool CI, yet in today's development more emphasis is being put on safety. The impact of jumping on a partner can lead to injuries, especially on the spine, that's why we prefer to pour our weight softly on our partner, so that he can adjust, shift his weight and readjust his structure.
- **Momentum** is debatable, yet if safety has the highest priority, then it should be avoided as it takes away reversibility because there is no control anymore.

For any more risky technique, it's always a good idea to have someone spotting you, someone we usually refer to as a "guardian angel", who is trying to catch if someone falls onto the ground, usually more concerned about the head and less about the feet. Don't grab, yet stay ready to engage in case something goes wrong and grab them well to make them land as softly as possible.

Intimacy

The psychological aspect of safety usually revolves around the topics of intimacy, sensuality and sexuality, for example when using the entire body and rolling over it. From the outside (imagine people who don't know the practice) this

might seem very intimate, but for is experienced dancers its pure physics and exploration.

Not only on the physical level, the proximity in touch, but also the sensual/sexual level (which is NOT in its core), can be frightening. Advice: Switch of the mind necessary to change that.

Sensuality is a wonderful thing, but it is not really appropriate to go into “melting” into your partner, falling in love, or even sexuality, and expressing this via caressing touch, cuddles and somewhat “Tantric behavior” during Contact Improvisation. This boundary is often crossed as the positive bonding effects of touch easily leads to more. At this moment it is advised to separate, to “cool down” and re-engage with the dance, instead of the partner. Caressing the skin of another person, to “cuddle up” and all of it is great, amazing, and please do more of it, but please refrain from doing so on the CI dance floor.

If sensuality/sexuality still happens, the teacher will take that off very fast; or the jam facilitator, if present. Cuddles, and cuddle puddles, will often happen and are being tolerated most of the time, yet they are not intentional! If your intention is to engage in cuddles, the group will “notice” that behavior, and they might not want to dance with you anymore because of that. There is of course no strict rule about it, no prohibition, and in some jams they totally tolerate it, even few invite it, but mostly it just doesn’t happen.

Often there is a partner bodywork at the end; a typical thing dancers would do. It is meant to be a more technical, medical, or sports massage, than a personal, emotional, intimate touch session.

In classes, it happens very, very, very rarely that certain individuals will look for satisfying their sexual needs by “rubbing their horny body on someone else’s”. The teacher will take care of a safe space for participants, and stop any form of sexual intended or predatory behavior right away, declaring it as a clear “no-go”. That’s also why people should go first to a class to learn the norms and values, instead dropping in a jam right away. At jams without a supervisor no one knows how often such behavior might occur; maybe relatively more often? Most of the time there is an organizer though, which can repeat clear rules and guidelines in an opening circle, minimizing the probability of such non-welcome behavior. Comparing CI to Ecstatic Dance or Tantric Dance, in CI are for sure way way less “horny people” showing up.

Society and Touch

In a very strictly gender-role based society, e.g.: where no same-sex touch is permitted, CI would have big problems to become popular. Our Western World is seen as a non-touch society, yet there are bubbles where it is allowed and even encouraged; e.g. couple dancing, although not the entire body but only holding or embracing arms and the back. Because of the lack of (connection via) touch, and us being **social mammals**, these bubbles might get more and more attraction somewhere in the (near) future. Especially people who don’t have others close to them, like relatives, loved ones, partners, or in extreme circumstances like during COVID; we feel again that basic human need for touch. But be aware that this is not the aim of CI, it’s a very nice additional **side effect**. People who only come for that side effect, won’t stay long in CI. There are plenty other places where you can get touch for that purpose; CI is not being one of them.

Using CI in order to “heal the world” seems a bit...let’s say utopian, or maybe even naive. This approach is more well-fitted for younger people, with lots of enthusiasm, and still being overly eager. That eagerness comes because CI can indeed change one’s life.

“If everyone would do CI, there would be no wars anymore, and it would be the end of capitalism”, says the young. *“CI is a very, very rich, beneficial and amazing dance form, and it might not change the world, but it did change me”,* says the old. The more we **spread it**, the better.

Respectful Behavior

This will be a short list based on observations and personal experiences which seem to be worth mentioning and of course there is no claim of completeness or anything similar.

- **Starting slowly** helps us to get to know each other, before we rush into someone’s living room. It’s like a handshake, to get a glimpse of who the other person is, where he is in regard to skill and experience and then take it from there.
- **Eye gazing** is another wonderful tool to deeply connect with another human being, yet during Contact Improvisation we refrain from doing so for too long. Your partners will tell you that this is not the way. We use our peripheral vision to see, and usually don’t constantly dance front-to-front. Again: We fall in love with the dance, if with anything, and not with the partner.
- Speaking about **front**: It is totally fine to roll over the front side of your partner, and there is no need to avoid certain body parts (breasts, genital area). Once we are able to depersonalize the partner, seeing it as a physical object and letting go of the stories, there is no need to avoid certain body parts, and rather develop a more innocent and reality bound perspective.

Etiquette

In every subculture, there are certain norms and rules established which are not written down anywhere. They somehow float in the minds of the people, implicitly without any mentioning. Yet if they are broken once, there will be consequences of the group as a punishment for misbehavior. I personally find it useful to try to capture those and make them explicit, so we can avoid unintentional misbehavior and establish as much harmony as possible. Just know, that every scene, maybe even every group around a specific teacher, has their own set of normative rules, thus this list is just a possible set of many.

- **Talking** is considered to be a distraction during Contact Improvisation, especially during jams. If verbal communication is indeed needed, it can be so, there is no obligation for total silence, but be mindful whether it is truly necessary at the moment, or is it just some irrelevant chit-chat, and try to keep the volume low, keep it short in order to not distract the fellow dancers. Otherwise, you can always step off the dance floor and speak properly a bit further away if really needed.

- State your **name** when you dance with someone, at least at the very end, and ask for that person's name. It's just a nice way to acknowledge the other person and useful to furthermore possibly create a friendly bond.
- Don't **park** on the dance floor, meaning: Lying on the floor, with eyes closed, and being unaware of the surroundings and the other people.
- Although probably obvious, yet worth mentioning is **body hygiene**: Wear fresh clothes, make sure no intense bad breath, and have taken a shower before engaging in such an intimate movement form with one or more partners. Try to keep it at normal levels, or above to smell nice, yet no too strong perfume!

If you participate in a class, there will be more guidance, and it will be easier for you to spot what's "right and wrong" behavior; yet in a jam it might be a bit more difficult. Take about 10 minutes at the beginning of a jam to sit, simply watch and observe the communal implicit norms. Every jam is different, yet there is a common set of baseline rules as mentioned already above.

Clothing

Appropriate **clothing** is found in every little group, sometimes for very rational, practical reasons, sometimes just in order to establish some kind of norm to agree to, a dress code. If violated, it can even lead that people won't dance with you because of that, and not because of you as a person!

As such, it is recommended to wear long pants and sleeves to be able to slide on the ground and enough friction (and sweat soaking). Clothes which don't limit movements like firm jeans. Button free shirts as rolling on partners with your full weight might hurt them, and also the shirt might break, and also no zippers. In short: Normal, dancing, movable sports clothes.

Obviously jewelry (like big earrings) are not advised as they can get trapped on the other person's body/clothes hurting someone.

In CI we need some friction for grip, and for that matter plastic fabrics will slide more (too much), thus cotton is better. Your beloved Adidas pants are not preferred as they are too slippery; sorry. Speaking of grip: It's better to dance barefoot, without socks to avoid slipping (or socks with those plastic nobs on the sole).

Ultimately, we don't dress to impress but rather prefer to wear our cosy pyjamas.

Jargon

There are no universally acknowledged names for techniques, movement qualities, exercises, and so forth, but different teachers try to invent, share, and give credits to their inventions. Over the time, an **oral tradition** has been established of passing information. The following chapter is a rather class specific one, as the language and images developed in the area “I grew up in” are very local and not universal at all. Yet, they might inspire others, or at least provide some humorist, personal benefit for you while reading it.



Introduction of a jargon, using technical, domain-specific terms, is useful to express an idea, as otherwise many, many sentences would be needed whereas instead a single word can suffice as well. The whole purpose of introducing and using jargon is not to smart-ass, to show off one’s own superiority, an act of ego arrogance, or to exclude others by using an exclusive language, but for an increased information exchange and increase in information **density and precision**.

General

Small dance – The subtle, unconscious micro movements of the body trying to maintain its balance.

Kinesphere – The space which can be reached by the body/limbs without taking a step.

... for further general terms, see the glossary at the end of this book ...

Onomatopoeia

Sometimes, concepts are just way too fuzzy to be properly put into definite words. Or there might have just no proper words yet been established, which made it necessary to develop our own few words, or even better: “sound-terms” (or onomatopoeia⁵) to convey a certain meaning, quality, fuzzy principle or some abstract phenomena closer to what it meant to be:

- **Botsen**: A conflict which arises when the teacher’s instructions lead to a resistance based on an “internal wisdom”; when the “inner teacher” and the “outer teacher” clash, we usually opt for the inner one and trust our gut feeling; e.g. Being told to jump and do a roll, but it doesn’t feel safe and fear/resistance comes up, so you simply don’t do it. (actually a Dutch word, meaning to clash, to collide; “bot” Dutch for bone; like two fists smashed on each other)

⁵Onomatopoeia, which has its Greek roots with the meaning of “name-making”, which is the formation or use of words such as “buzz” or “murmur” that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.

- **Hoopety Di Poop:** Techniques which look overly impressive (good to show-off), yet not necessarily showing much skill though, like jumping on each other; e.g. fancy technical, acrobatic stuff which usually comes with a higher risk for injury.
- **La La Land**⁶: Referring to anything which is more commonly used in the area of spirituality/religion, metaphysics, esoteric, new age talk and superstitions. Yet, sometimes we are still using concepts from those domains nevertheless due to the lack of any other better alternatives; e.g. think about when talking about “reaching beyond the physical body”, which is of course technically not possible, but it gives the right image and intention.
- **Mooshy Mooshy:** (or “Muschi Muschi”) Indicating that during a dance a too sensual, and thus inappropriate atmosphere arises, with no clear intentions; ranging from simply moving very slowly caressing down to *cuddle puddles* where several people like cuddling on the ground. This can especially often be observed when starting with dancing on the ground, often preceded by a body-scan, where things can even end up in a sort of pile of bodies (hopefully not as much as in the movie “The Perfume” in the end).
- **Oompf:** (or “Umpf”) The preferred quality of contact between two bodies which is characterized by properly giving/sharing weight, creating a sensation of considerable amount of pressure, opposed to only slight touch; feeling each other’s groundedness.
- **Weee:** A scream/sung sound usually expressed in moments of heightened levels of alertness/fear, to down-regulate one’s own nervous system, counteracting fear/panic, and allowing the body/atmosphere to relax, release tension, and calm down; also to simply express joy at the moment about a movement, making everyone smile; e.g. when performing more risky lifts.

Animals

Calling things by animal names are beneficial as they have a very visual characteristic, conveying a visceral experience, because of the qualities we associate with those animal. We mostly use their names to refer to positions, techniques and “qualities of body”.

- **Bear:** Similar to the koala, but while sitting on the ground, and the bear hugging around the torso of his partner.
- **Banana:** Not really an animal, but anyway a useful metaphor where the arms and legs are stretched out long, shaping the whole body like a banana; it can be practiced on the ground (a way of movement on the ground, rolling sideways and only the core touching the floor), but applied often while being on the back of a partner to spiral upwards.

⁶Yes, “La La Land” is also the title of a US musical romantic comedy-drama movie from 2016 with Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone.

- **Chicken Wing:** Using a “semi lock” with the arm pit on the partner while being lifted, or similar; often necessary if the centers are not properly stacked and becoming unbalanced.
- **Chicken Leg:** Same as the chicken wing but with the hip being flexed.
- **Crab:** The opposite of the octopus movement quality: Rigid, sharp, direct, and staccato. Think of the exoskeleton of the crab, when it walks sideways with its stiff limbs.
- **Koala:** When being lifted (or better: jumping on the partner’s shoulder) hugging the upper body of the partner sideways and thus being very close to his center, while locking with your arms and legs; either around shoulders (more common) or pelvis (less common). It can be used as a preliminary technique for a shoulder lift.
- **(Little) Elephant:** Although we do like elephants, we don’t like them in our studio, as their name is used to refer to steps/walking, or landing of the feet, which make a loud sound, indicating that there was no control and/or too much stiffness. Landing softly with no sound indicates control of movement, reversibility, precision and awareness, and also is a strong indicator for degree of safety with a partner.
- **Little Monkey:** As a little animal (a.k.a.: “table-top”) but with knees lifted (a.k.a.: “bear position”) with a light and fluent walking movement. Whenever we land silently, it is done so with control and elegance, which ultimately can prevent (serious) injuries.
- **Little Animal:** A table-top position on all fours, yet emphasizing a more dynamic, alive quality than a regular, wooden table. Also, when the painter is performing some movements, the little animal is actively supporting him by shaping his back accordingly, tilting and turning, flexing and extending.
- **Panda:** Similar to koala (and bear), but a more specific way of hugging, with belly to belly; often used while on the ground lying, keeping the centers connected all the time.
- **Snake:** Similar to octopus, but with a slightly different image to connect differently; having lots of movements in hands and spine.
- **Octopus:** A movement quality which indicates aliveness/relaxation in all joints/body parts, each of them being controlled by their own intelligence; fluid, soft and smooth; opposite of the crab.

Anatomy

As with every practice dealing with the human body, a basic **understanding** of the anatomy is mandatory, adding a tremendous benefit for the practitioner-student and also gets handy with **communication**. The field of anatomy is huge, and it doesn't need to be studied in-depth of course. Making yourself familiar with a few, important medical terms and the basic concepts of the human body, to also have a theoretical understanding of what's happening during the dance while enable you to see things in a broader context.



Terminology

The wording used in anatomy/medicine is built from sub-elements (which usually originated from Latin), thus: Learning first the elements, and then putting them together to be able to infer the meaning of more complex, compound terms.

Orientation

Because a person can stand, sit, lie, or be in all kind of positions, it is necessary to have an absolute frame of reference to provide orientation instructions. What someone means with using simple language of “up” or “front” is often not clear, thus these following words lead to a more **non-ambiguous language**.

- **anterior/posterior** = front/back
- **ventral/dorsal** = front/back of the torso
- **superior/inferior** = above/below
- **cranial/caudal** = head-/tail-wards
- **proximal/distal** = towards to/away from center
- **medial/lateral** = towards/away the midline
- **superficial/profound** = more outside/inside the body

Movements

Each body part can move in certain ways and directions based on the type of joint (see below) and how muscles pull on it. Again, instructing someone to “move up” is ambiguous, whereas “flex the right knee” is clear as it can be.

- **extension/flexion** = making the angle of a joint bigger/smaller (or: stretch/bend)
- **internal/external (medial/lateral) rotation** = arm/leg rotating in the shoulder/hip-joint; counter-/clockwise towards to/away from the body
- **adduction/abduction** = moving towards or away the body/midline
- **elevation/depression** = moving (shoulder) superior/inferior direction
- **pronation/supination** = rotating forearm so that palm facing up/down
- **dorsi-/plantar-flexion** = move the ankle towards the dorsum (superior surface, up) or plantar (sole, down) also often called “point”

- **in-/eversion** = move the sole towards/away the median plane
- **opposition/reposition** = thumb and little finger together/spread
- **pro-/retraction** = anterolateral/posteromedial movement of the scapula (move shoulder forward/backward)
- **circumduction** = conical (not really circular) movement of a limb extending from the joint its moved by

Terms derived from lateral movement include:

- **Uni-lateral** = “unus” meaning “one”, on one side of the body
- **Bi-lateral** = “bis” meaning “twice”, on both sides of the body
- **Homo-(Ipsi-)lateral** = “ipse” meaning “same”
- **Contra-lateral** = “contra” meaning “against”, e.g. arm on one side, and leg on the other side, creating a diagonal, like we do while walking; also one hemisphere of the brain is controlling the other side of the body

Sometimes the Latin word for left (“sinister”) and right (“dexter”) are being used instead. Check the next time you have a medical report available, like an X-ray, and you will see these terms pop up; consider yourself a nerd from now on.

Structures

Next to being familiar with the very basic words of positions and directions, we need also to be able to refer concrete structures (bones and muscles) which can be located in relation to each other and moved in a specific way. Make yourself thus familiar with some (by far not all) anatomical terms which help you further understand this medical jargon.

Bones

The human body consists of **206 bones** (usually); yet by birth we have a few more which results to 280. The head and trunk (the axial skeleton) make up 80 bones and the limbs (the appendicular skeleton) the other 126. There are 27 bones for each hand (19 for phalanges plus metacarpals, and 8 carpals), and 26 for each foot (phalanges, metatarsals, and tarsals).

- **atlas and axis** = two top most cervical vertebrae (top part of the spine)
- **clavicle** = the collar bone
- **coccyx** = the tailbone (last part of the spine)
- **cranium** = the skull (cervical = neck)
- **patella** = the knee cap
- **processus** = a bony thing bulging out, usually for tendons to attach to
- **ribs** = true ribs (1-7, sternum connection), false ribs (8-10/12, cartilage), and floating ribs (11-12, no connection)
- **scapula** = the shoulder blade
- **sacrum** = big triangular bone at the base of the spine
- **SIAS** = Spina Iliaca Anterior Superior (front top pointy bone structure of the pelvis)
- **spina** = the spine, consisting of 33 vertebrae: 7 cervical, 12 thoracic, 5 lumbar, 5 fused sacrum, 4 fused coccyx
- **sternum** = the chest bone

Muscles

There are **between 600 and 840 muscles** within the typical human body, depending on how they are counted (and some mutations).

- **abs** = abdominal muscles with 3 layers wrapped around the belly
- **core muscles** = basically everything attached to the spine
- **diaphragm** = muscle for breathing at the bottom of the ribs
- **glutes** = buttocks consisting of gluteus maximus, medius, and minimus
- **obliques** = part of the core, at the sides of the abs
- **pectoralis** = the chest muscle (major and minor)
- **pelvic floor** = similar to diaphragm but at the bottom of the torso
- “**stomach muscles**” = the stomach is an organ, which indeed has (involuntary) muscles, but it’s located on the left side underneath the ribs, and should not be confused with the abs / lower belly!
- **trapezius** = at top shoulder around the neck
- **transverse** = part of the core, like a belt around it

Planes

We differentiate 3 different anatomical planes in which movement can happen:

1. **Frontal Plane:** Also called *Coronal Plane* or *Vertical Plane* and, not surprisingly, represents the plane when looking from the front of the body, dividing the body in an anterior/posterior part. The directions can be medial/lateral thus resulting in the movements of: ad-/abduction, elevation/depression and in-/eversion.
2. **Sagittal Plane:** Also called *Lateral Plane*, *Longitudinal Plane* or *Anteroposterior Plane*, which is going through the midline and shows the body when looking from the side, separating it into a left/right part. The directions are thus anterior/posterior and movements are flexion/extension and pro-/retraction.
3. **Transverse Plane:** Also called *Axial Plane*, *Horizontal Plane* (the other two planes are vertical) or *Cross-Sectional Plane*, and divides the body into a top/bottom part. Directions are thus superior/inferior and allowing movements like rotation, supination/pronation and circumduction.

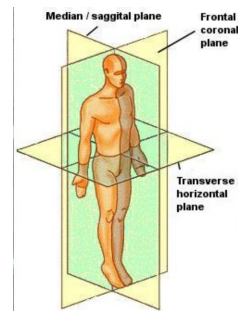


Figure 1: The three anatomic planes for the human body: Frontal, Sagittal and Transversal.

Joints

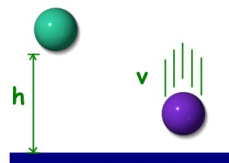
Bones are connected through joints where muscles (together with tendons) can evoke movement. For different movements, **different types** of (synovial) joints are needed:

- **Ball/Socket:** free movement; e.g. hip, shoulder

- **Pivot:** rotation; head (atlantoaxial), elbow (radioulnar)
- **Hinge:** flexion/extension; elbow (humeroulnar), knee
- **Saddle:** fingers-hand (trapeziometacarpal)
- **Condylod:** fingers/wrist (metacarpophalangeal)
- **Plane:** hand (intercarpal) and feet (tarsal)
- **Gliding:** mini bones in feet

Physics

In CI we engage in the exploration of physics, to play with physical forces such as momentum, gravity, friction, direction of movement in its changes in space. We do not go beyond Newtonian physics in motion, not into the realm of quantum physics as this is beyond the human perception and not of use to us. An understanding of physics isn't needed (to use it, to play with it) as it doesn't really help on a bodily level; it might be interesting to see what you learned in physics though, what's yet "embodied". Yet, engineers might smile hearing terminology from the world of leverage/friction/mutual point of contact/center of mass and so on.



Physics is a huge and fascinating science, dealing with the big (astronomy, astrophysics), the small (nuclear and particle physics), the universal (electromagnetism, thermodynamics) and the more complicated (quantum physics, relativity); basically how the universe behaves, or at least how matter moves through space and time as well as energy and force. For our purpose though, we will focus on mechanics and its sub-branches, the fundamental concepts of time, space and how they give rise to higher phenomena encountered during CI. Preferably after that chapter you are familiar with common terms such as: gravity, vector, inertia, force, momentum, kinetics.

Energy

The word "energy" is just too often misused in the spiritual world as some metaphysical, psycho-telepathic mystery. In physics, we define it simply as "the capacity for doing work", and as such different forms exist: potential (position), kinetic (movement), thermal (heat), nuclear (atom), electrical (charges), chemical, and so on. All forms of energy are associated with motion: Any given body has kinetic energy if it's in motion. A tensioned device such as a bow, a spring, or your tendons, though at rest, have the potential for creating motion; it contains potential energy. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but only transformed from one form to another (principle stated in the first law of thermodynamics).

Mechanics

Here we are interested in the relationship between force, matter and motion, as seen from a Newtonian perspective, focusing on motion (**kinematics** or "the geometry of motion") and forces (**dynamics**).

Newton's laws of motion (classical mechanics):

1. "A body remains at rest, or in motion at a constant speed in a straight line, except insofar as it is acted upon by a force."

This law expresses the principle of **inertia**: the natural behavior of a body is to move in a straight line at constant speed.

A body's motion preserves the status quo, but external forces can disturb this.

2. *“The net force on a body is equal to the body’s instantaneous acceleration multiplied by its instantaneous mass or, equivalently, the rate at which the body’s momentum changes with time.”*

This law is about motion, or as we call it nowadays **momentum**.

It depends upon the amount of matter contained in a body, the speed at which that body is moving, and the direction in which it is moving.

In modern notation, the momentum of a body is the product of its mass and its velocity.

The forces acting on a body add as **vectors** (quantities with both magnitude (amount of motion) and direction (of motion)), and so the total force on a body depends upon both the magnitudes and the directions of the individual forces.

When the net force on a body is equal to zero, then by Newton’s second law, the body does not accelerate, and it is said to be in **mechanical equilibrium**.

Momentum is conserved in a closed system, meaning that the total momentum before an event (such as a collision) is equal to the total momentum after the event, as long as no external forces are acting on the system.

3. *“To every action, there is always opposed an equal reaction; or, the mutual actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal, and directed to contrary parts.”*

This relates to the conservation of momentum.

Further candidates for additional laws could be:

1. *Uniformly accelerated motion*, also known as: free fall, when a body falls (in the absence of air resistance), it will accelerate at a constant rate.
The speed with which it falls is proportional to the elapsed time, and the acceleration is the same for all bodies, independent of their mass (law of universal gravitation).
2. *Uniform circular motion*, which contains the centripetal force (required to sustain the acceleration towards the center).
The centrifugal force is, on the other hand, an inertial (fictitious/pseudo) force that is directed radially away from the axis of rotation.
3. *Harmonic motion*, as shown by a spring-mass system or a pendulum.

Momentum vs Inertia

Momentum and inertia are related concepts, yet they refer to different properties of objects in motion.

Momentum measures an object’s quantity of motion, which is calculated based of an object’s mass and its velocity. The result is a vector quantity

Inertia, on the other hand, is about an object’s tendency to resist changes while being in motion. The more massive an object is, the greater its inertia (“laziness”) and the more force is required to change its motion (start/stop moving, or change direction).

In summary, momentum quantifies the amount of motion of an object, taking into account both its mass and velocity, while inertia describes an object's resistance to changes in its state of motion, primarily due to its mass.

Relation to CI

We constantly encounter those concepts during practicing CI: When our bodies, basically also just physical objects, are in motion, they have a certain momentum, which they want to keep (inertia) until a force is acted upon them. Gravity pulls us downwards, and we can use levers to take advantage of it, without having the need to exert lots of muscular force, wasting our energy and making the practice effortful, instead of effortless. Keeping track of the trajectory of moving objects helps us to keep a continuous pathway, making the movements more smooth, and less edgy/clumsy, but also more predictable for our partner, thus resulting in an increased level of trust.

Movement

This chapter is based on the previous ones about anatomy and physics, and how these concepts give rise to higher concepts we encounter while practicing CI. It's about the science of movement, movement theory and a bit of biomechanics and also dealing with more abstract views on movement as maybe known from the dancing world. For more experienced (improvisation) dancers, a lot of the things mentioned here might sound familiar, for the more inexperienced among us this can open a totally new window to movement.



Movement Qualities

There are different “dimensions” we can play with to tap into different qualities on how we use our body, giving it a different touch, allowing us to do different techniques, and by knowing the pros and cons of each quality, we can apply them in the right moment to improve our technical skill and also keep things safe for ourselves and our partner.

We can play a lot with **muscle tonus**, the amount of tension we create in our muscles which make us either more relaxed or stiff. In general, we prefer to maintain the least amount of effort, minimum muscle tension; as little as possible, as much as necessary. By being more relaxed, we are more flexible, can adapt to an ever-changing situation, and also are more receptive via our tactile sense, being able to receive more information, to listen better. In order to have some images to play with, think of moving through air; well, you don't have to imagine that, as we constantly do that; duh! Instead, think of you being a cloud, floating through the sky. Increase tension by imagining moving through water, how it creates a small, continuous resistance, preventing you from sharp/edgy movements, breaking the pathway. The next level could be something like honey, sticky and slowing down your movements, having you to add more muscle effort. And as a final step imagine being stuck in concrete which maybe has not yet fully hardened, still making you almost unmovable.

The obvious one being **speed**: moving on a dimension of slow and fast. The slow can be extremely slow, in order to gain extremely lots of information of internal sensations. And the fast can be released in an explosive manner, like a shockwave through the whole body. Both, and everything in-between, can be alternated very quickly, to gain more control of speed.

The degree of extension of the limbs into the space (without stepping) is called kinesphere with which we can play with. We could segregate it into a small (body), medium (elbows, knees), large (wrists, ankles) and extra large (fingers, toes), and something more abstract going even beyond, the universe (projecting outwards). Each of them creating a differently sized ball, or more like an egg shape, around us in which we are limited to move within and also want to stay in constant contact with.

Next to extension into space, we can of course take different **levels** in space: Up (standing), middle (hinged, or on hands and knees being a “little animal”) and floorwork (lying on the ground). With the help of relaxation and tension, we can quickly change our position on the vertical axis and play with explosive

dynamics. Also mirroring your dance partner, staying in a different level then he is can be an interesting field to explore.

The **isolation** of certain body parts can also be fun to play with. The most simple one being dividing the body into upper and lower, left and right side, same side or cross side (homo- or contra-lateral, see the anatomy section for more).

The **shapes** we are drawing in air can be yet another dimension. Think of straight lines (edgy, staccato) versus roundness (flowy, fluid, air). People who have experience with the practice of 5 rhythms might be familiar with those concepts.

To bring those qualities to a next level, try to combine them in different ways. Often slow, fluid and soft goes together, but how about changing one of them to the other extreme?! Or the legs are in the large kinesphere being soft and staccato, while the arms in the small kinesphere and hard and fluid. Have a partner telling you what parts should be in which quality to challenge yourself and find combinations you would not bring yourself into by yourself.

Partner Dance

Disclaimer: There is lots to tell about dancing with one (or more) partner(s), and this subsection will be far from mentioning all the most relevant there is.

Humans are social animals, and as such we have lots of neuronal networks dedicated for processing social information, hardwired bonding tendencies leading to the ability to read each other, get in-tuned with each other, ultimately leading to harmony in groups. Think of basic empathy, which is associated to mirror neurons in our brain, which for example leads us to yawn once we see someone else yawning, or feel the pain we observe in that funny video clip where someone falls from a skateboard. If we want to feel how someone else is feeling, we might simply want to put our full presence with that person (or even a group) and feel inside our bodies what's happening; there is a high chance what we experience is the other person's state of being. Using a more flowery we could say that this is the ability of "feeling the other person's energy", whatever is supposed to be meant by (mis)using the word "energy" here.

As human beings we also have the innate need to be seen by others; being ignored as one of the worst punishments we can experience leading to feelings of isolation, exclusion and loneliness. The biggest present therefor we can give each other is to mirror each other's movements; explicitly acknowledging the other person's existence, putting one's attention to that person, copying his movements, which is also called "kinesthetic resonance". Of course counter-mirroring has the same effect (you go down, I go up; you go left, I go right), as it still maintains a form of connection we can play with.

Body Awareness

The **vestibular system** is our sense of balance and spatial orientation for the purpose of movement coordination, and is all well known to us. It consists of two components: The (three, as there are three dimensions) semicircular canals (for rotational movements) and the otoliths (for linear accelerations). Signals from those are being sent to the muscles to keep us upright and control posture, allowing us to maintain our desired position in space. Together with

proprioception, we are able to understand our body's dynamics and kinematics in any given moment.

Proprioception allows us, as a sort of 6th sense, the “kinesthetic sense”, the sense of self-movement, force and body position. It makes us aware of our body's position in the space (the relative positioning of neighboring body parts), and the strength of effort needed for movement. Try for example to close your eyes and touch your nose; you will be able to do this without looking (in a mirror, or in complete darkness) because of little cells (little *spindles* which are spring-like protein molecules which get stretched inside your muscles) in your body being aware of the amount of stretch they experience (joint position sense), which is then processed subconsciously by your brain giving raise to a bodily sensation. Everyone is familiar with the knee-jerk reflex, where the patellar tendon is rapidly stretched to an extreme, which leads to an immediate response (a reflex) to counteract that and protect the tissue from injury.

Related sensations are *exteroception*, the perception of the outside world, and *interoception*, the perception of internal sensations like pain and hunger.

Kinesthesia is the awareness of position and movement of body parts using sensory organs (proprioceptors, mechanosensory neurons) in muscles, tendons and joints; it's crucial in muscle memory and hand-eye coordination. It's different as proprioception, yet people sometimes use it (wrongly) interchangeably. If you have an inner ear infection for example and the sense of balance is affected, this would degrade the proprioceptive, but not the kinesthetic sense. Moreover, proprioception is more about joint **position** (more subconscious cognitive awareness of your body in space and balance) whereas kinesthesia is more about awareness of joint **movement** (more conscious body's motion, behavioral).

Neuromuscular control is the efferent (signal from the central nervous system to the body) response to an afferent (sensory) input, which is the functional component to movement and athletic activities that is referred to as dynamic stability. Sensory input comes as (different types of⁷) **mechanoreceptors** located in muscles, capsules and ligaments, allowing us awareness of joint position, movement, and acceleration.

All that information (vestibular, proprioception, kinesthesia) including the visual input is sent to the brain, processed, integrated to allow us to create an overall representation of body position, movement and acceleration.

Space Harmony

This movement theory, and practice, also called *Choreutics* was developed by the Austrian-Hungarian dancer/choreographer Rudolf Laban, to study the natural sequences of movements we follow in daily life, studying “the art of movement” to recognize spatial patterns.

When dancing, the term **kinesphere** is being used to refer to the space immediately reachable by our limbs without changing our place; we can use up a lot of that space within this sphere (Far Reach Kinesphere), just a bit (Near Reach Kinesphere) or something in-between (Mid Reach Kinesphere).

Furthermore, Mister Laban believed that there are three types of movers which prefer different **levels**: Those who enjoy leaping and springing off the

⁷The four mechanoreceptors are: Meissner corpuscle for heavy pressure, Pacinian corpuscle for vibration, Merkel disks for light touch and Ruffini endings for skin stretch

ground move in *High Level*; those with more sensuous movement enjoy the *Central (Middle) Level*; and those who prefer more earth-bound movements who stay in the *Deep (Low) Level*.

Within the kinesphere we can move from one point to another through different approaches, so-called **pathways**: When movement is initiated from (or passes through) the body's center we take the *Central Pathway*; along the outer limits of the Kinesphere it takes a *Peripheral Pathway*; and when the movement passes between center and periphery it takes a *Transverse Pathway*.

There is of course much more to say about this, including the Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) which is a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting, and documenting human movement; but this would go beyond the purpose of this booklet.

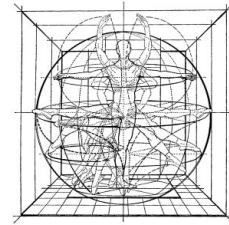


Figure 2: The kinesphere is the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs.

Resources

This book might not have been enough for your mental thirst for information, and in that case the following will guide you to many other sources where you hopefully find satisfaction.

Practice

In case you are looking to practice (classes, workshops, festivals) anywhere in the world, check out the CI global calendar, and if you need something more local (in the Netherlands) lookup the community calendar amsterdamjam.nl or go directly to Tom Goldhand's website.

Books

There are about 10 good books written which are specifically about CI.

- “Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture” by Cynthia J. Novack (A good book about the history of the form, origins and stories)
- “Caught Falling: The Confluence of Contact Improvisation” by Nancy Stark Smith
- “Contact Improvisation: An Introduction to a Vitalizing Dance Form” by Cheryl Pallant
- “Contact Improvisation: Moving, Dancing, Interaction” by Thomas Kaltenbrunner
- “Contact Improvisation and Body-Mind Centering: A Manual for Teaching and Learning Movement” by Annie Brook
- “Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader” by Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere
- “Dancing Deeper Still: The Practice of Contact Improvisation” by Martin Keogh
- “Gravity” by Steve Paxton

Videos

It's good practice to watch “the classics” (everything between 1972 and 1980) once in a while.

- “The invention of CI” - The very early beginnings, 1972
- “Magnesium” - The actual piece from that research is called magnesium, 1972
- “Chute” - A few years later, 1979
- “Fall After Newton” - Many things have changed here, 1987, originally 22 minutes long
- contactquarterly channel - A YouTube channel containing some videos of the early beginnings (e.g. Chute, Magnesium, Peripheral Vision, Soft Pallet)

- “Life Lessons Learned Through Contact Improvisation” - An interesting TEDx video-clip to see the connection of CI to general life
- “Gogolfest 2016 Contact Improvisation” - Simply inspiring to watch
- A couple of basic exercises - Something to practice by yourself as a beginner
- Steve Paxton Talking Dance - The creator of CI giving an almost 2 hours talk about dancing, 2015

Websites

- <https://contactquarterly.com> (CQ Unbound Journal, the main platform and official channel for the global CI community)
- <https://www.materialforthespine.com/> - Steve Paxton’s work and research after he passed on CI and researched walking and material for the spine
- <https://nancystarksmith.com/underscore/> - A long-form dance improvisation structure/notation using graphical symbols.
- <http://ecite.org> (European Contact Improvisation Teachers Exchange)
- <https://contactimprov.com>
- <https://contactimprovblogger.com>
- <https://bodyresearch.org/contact-improvisation>
- <https://www.dancemagazine.com/rules-of-contact-improv-class/>
- <https://joerghassmann.com/other-themes/what-is-contact-improvisation/>
- <https://dancespirit.com/contact-improv/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contact_improvisation

Glossary

big space A.k.a. “big body”; A bit of a metaphysical word to reference the heightened awareness of all the people within a room. The emergent entity created by a group which comes together.. 14

center of gravity Literally the physical center of mass, somewhere in your lower belly area. Useful when trying to stay grounded and basing your partner during a lift to make yourself stable.. 21, 25

center of gravity An idea of becoming light, pulling from your sternum. Useful when being lifted in order to make yourself light.. 25

guardian angel a third person for safety reasons to safeguard that there will be no injuries. 9, 28

inertia the “lazyness” of an object, as defined by Newton’s first law. 39

kinesphere the personal space around us within reaching possibilities of our limbs without changing position. 26, 32, 42, 44

kinesthesia awareness of position and movement. 44

momentum when a physical object is moving with a certain speed. 40

negative space the empty space which is not occupied by matter which can be “danced in”. 26

proprioception the ability to sense one’s own body position. 44

skinesphere the space beneath the skin, as opposed to the kinesphere, referring to the inward focus involved in somatic preparations. 10

small dance tiny, unconscious body reactions/movements to maintain balance/stand upright. 15, 16, 20, 32

the box Basically the torso, the whole upper body, with which most of the contact/sharing weight is engaged, excluding the limbs and head.. 21

vector a force with strength and direction, usually visualized as an arrow with a certain length. 40