

Basic Training Programme in Contact Improvisation

with Daniel Werner and Joerg Hassmann

www.dancecontact.de

Berlin June 2014

This is our ongoing attempt to lay out our systematic approach to Contact Improvisation on a technical level. It is probably and hopefully a work in progress as long as we will work together. This script is mainly addressed to our students who go through the basic training programme. We want to offer some support for reflecting the exercises and experiences and to give a more clear idea how all the different things we do are connected.

For people who don't know our work many thoughts and images probably don't make too much sense but are maybe still inspiring. We are happy to receive feedback.

If you wonder why we consider this approach to be systematic, check the text 'A systematic approach to CI technique?' on our homepage.

RELEVANT BASICS OF MOVEMENT

In many years of practicing and teaching dance and Contact Improvisation a number of movement principles and ways of analyzing and explaining movement have become essential for us.

Concerning the organisation of the moving body we mainly refer to somatic concepts like Body Mind Centering (BMC)¹ and Bartenieff fundamentals² with a main focus on developmental movement patterns and specific systems of the human anatomy like bones & joints, the myo-fascia web³ and partly the organs and fluids of the body. They help us to describe, teach and experience the two main structures for our bodies to organize movement in an efficient way – the center and the spine.

Developmental movement patterns

The richest source for learning and understanding efficient and pleasurable ways to move we draw from babies – from how they learn to move before and after birth. And because we all were babies at some point we already know more or less all the most important things about movement – apart from some gaps we might have had in our own development. Most of us just disconnected from many parts of this physical knowledge in the process of growing up and socialization. We strongly believe that the human body is remarkably well designed and has the potential to work highly functional if used with curiosity and physical awareness.

As a part of our training programme we offer information and exercises to reconnect to this internal knowledge we already have. This creates a container that can easily integrate all the other detailed information that we gained from our own research in dancing and teaching dance.

The yield-push-reach sequence

In every grounded and efficient weight shifting movement – like when we make a step - the yield-push-reach sequence happens naturally. Yield, push and reach are physical activities, which create a specific modulation of the tone in the body (tension in muscles, tendons, ligaments and connective tissues). When we shift our weight, we first of all

deepen the connection to the support, we yield our weight. There is this moment of melting into the support. It is followed by pushing into the support. We use this movement into the support to extend and reach out of the support into the space. These three phases create a sequential modulation of body tone.

For example: When we want to make a step with our left leg the right leg becomes the standing leg. It goes through a moment of yielding, a minimal bending. This invites the weight shift onto this right leg. By straightening the right leg again, we move the foot deeper into the support of the floor while our pelvis moves upwards and the spine gains a little more tone as a way of extending into the space. The left leg is now free to swing forward.

The main exploration of the yield-push-reach sequence happens lying on the floor, as a newborn as well as in our teaching. But for teaching we often start with yielding the weight in standing or walking. Our nervous system is used to connect floor and yielding with falling asleep and giving away not only weight but also awareness. We found it extremely helpful for dance and especially floor work, to re-pattern oneself and to connect 'giving weight into support' with 'awareness and aliveness'.

Yield

In our context 'Yielding' is a short word for a rather complex concept. In non-BMC language it means for example 'to give way'. It contains a sense of letting go or giving in. In our context it is connected to body tone and weight. To yield your weight, means to give your weight to whatever supports you and allows your body to be carried. Easily we misinterpret yielding as collapsing. Even 'relaxing' can be misleading because it easily connects to a passive state in the body and the mind. Yielding is an active and highly alive state even though it is a lot about letting go. We are looking for a minimal tone in the body that enables us to be ready to move in every moment. If we collapse into the support we are not ready to move. We need an extra moment to activate our muscles. On the other hand we waste unnecessary energy when we hold back our weight by over-toning the body. As images or foci to find the state of yielding we use the following ideas and images:

- Sense the compression in the tissues, which touch the floor with weight.
- Sense the weight of specific body parts, especially the skin of the face, lips and cheeks, how they hang towards the floor or rest on your teeth and jaw.
- Deep exhalation helps to let go of tension and invites an activating inhalation.
- Imagine a newborn. The head is much too heavy and too big to be lifted off the floor by its own muscle power. At the same time the center follows the natural urge to move.
- Long & strong shaking on the floor. Notice the tingling sensation afterwards in the body. Imagine to be a snow dome and the snow is slowly floating down, the clear fluid stays above and some air fills the very top of the dome.
- Slowly rolling. Imagine to be filled with sand or peas, maybe like a rainmaker. Where do the peas start rolling where do they land?
- Soften the floor by softening the body. Making love with the floor (Danielo).
- Especially in standing and walking we like the following proposal: weight falls – spine rises, or more precisely: supportive structures align upwards.
- For yielding explorations on the floor it is helpful to remember that the natural state of the center is to move.

Push

To push means to actively intensify the connection to the support, which is established through the Yielding. The first direction of the push is deeper into the support, which clarifies the structure and strength of the support. From there movement out of the support happens effortlessly by itself. It makes a big difference in the quality of movement to focus

first on moving into the support instead of thinking directly upwards. The push is often misunderstood as a movement against something. This idea creates a high body tone that wastes energy and reduces the ability to adjust the push in terms of direction and intensity. 'Pushing against' reduces the ability of communication and negotiation through touch. The touch loses its openness and clarity. That's contra productive for contact improvisation, which deals so much with physical listening in leading & following and supporting weight. 'Pushing against' creates a fighting energy that usually doesn't really support a dance connection. But it can remind people with a low body tone of their potential power by switching on center and spine in a playfully rough way. It looks like most men have to go through this quality in men's duets before they can find a push that is based on the softness of yielding. (We'd be happy to help finding a shortcut.)

The push is essential to eventually change levels in space. The little finger, the ring finger and the heel of the hand (and analog for the feet) are the main parts to move into the floor. If we do so the arch or little dome in the palm of the hand (or foot) stays strong and alive and the connection through bones and joints finds a more powerful architecture.

Reach

In the moment the push is developing, a movement out of the support has begun: the body naturally reaches into space. The clearer the support from the floor, the easier the body can extend. The spine is the core structure that engages in the reach. It is closely linked to the eyes, which also reach into the space. The reach of the spine helps to organize the body especially in moments of taking weight (above floor level) and to find orientation in the space.

The most common reach in daily life – taking something with a hand, like food to put it eventually into the mouth - is less dominant in CI. The reach of an arm is usually driven by intention, which has its origin in the center "I want!". It is usually triggered through the eyes, which see something we want to have. In the context of our teaching we focus mainly on the reach of the spine.

If we reach without using the yield-push sequence as a base, we usually start holding our breath and harden our body unnecessarily.

Push and reach are very closely linked to the center and have to a certain degree a similar quality. While every efficient push is the extension of the center into the support, the reach is the extension of the center into the space.

Center and spine

For us center and spine are the two most important structures and places in the body to relate to and focus on in dancing and teaching dance. Movement is mostly bound to, traveling through, initiated from or connected through the center of the body and the spine.

Center

The center doesn't exist as a concrete physical structure like the pelvis or the spine. It is a functional area that works as a movement organizer of the body. We think and experience the center as the three-dimensional area between pelvis and rib cage with the core part around the navel. Core structures in this area are the ilio-psoas muscle-complex. It is the only muscle that connects the center directly with the legs. It attaches to the lumbar spine and the two lowest vertebrae of the thoracic spine. Here the ilio-psoas overlaps with the origin of the diaphragm (Zwerchfell), which is a core connection from our center to the upper body and the main motor for breathing.

The lumbar spine is part of the center. And last but not least many organs have their home in the center. In the BMC-world they connect to emotions and 'gut decisions'.

In that sense the center is nothing very specific and a reason why I (Joerg) didn't work with the center ... until I met Daniel. The center makes sense on an experiential level. We can sense our center as something specific – a fine and powerful organizer of whole-body movements. As mentioned above we relate it to the process of pre- and post natal babyhood, where we learned how to move, to turn, crawl and eventually walk. Before we talk about that we'll make an excursion to the fascia-web – the 'new' term for the connective tissue of the body. When we focus in our teaching on the center, we incorporate a lot of knowledge from the fascia – more and more every year.

The myo-fascia web

Through the research on 'what are the most efficient resources to find the whole body connected' we found the center and the spine as the two main anchors of our work. But still it stays a miracle what is it that makes these inside connections so tangible and clear to sense. Which inner structures and systems become activated?

The myo-fascia web - that pulls through every part of our body - is something we consider to be an answer. It influences our teaching more and more. All organs, muscles, muscle fibres, bones, veins, nerves, all physical structures are wrapped in stretchy skin bags, which are connected with each other like a web through strings and sheets. The fascia - in a healthy state - is very wet and supports sliding. Organs and other structures are hanging in our body, able to adjust to pressure and movements by sliding into new better positions. The myo-fascia web we are talking about in our training programme concerns mainly it's macro structures, knowing that this web expands also on a micro- and even intracellular level.

The skin-bags, strings and sheets are wet and stretchy. Their natural condition is to oscillate between a minimal tone, just above a 'floppy' stretch and their healthy maximum stretch, that still allows a flavour of elasticity. Maximal stretches in fixed positions, which we might use to lengthen our muscles harm the fascia. Little raptures occur in the fascia and the elasticity can become less.

In our training program we invite these fascia connections to be alive and part of our sensory awareness. The fascia is our biggest sensory organ. Billions of receptors for stretches, compression, twists etc. are in the fascia - plus many more open nerve endings that are ready to specialize according to new needs and habits. The more precisely we can sense our body in movement the more fine and distinguished our technique can become.

Efficient and enjoyable movements go along with a felt sense of physical connectedness. The fascia system is to a huge amount responsible for those functional muscle-chains. The fascia clarifies directions in all engaged joints as well as the timing of the engaged muscles. That's the reason why we often talk about the myo-fascia web ('myo' for muscles). We often talk about a *juicy center*. It combines the muscular power we have and the elastic, juicy, slidy quality of the fascia that connect the center to all other parts of the body.

Shaking, swinging, a sense of re-bounce can inform the muscles to soften and engage the fascia to take more responsibility on the 'almost floppy body tone level'. Bouncing in standing can support a healthy higher body tone, which is needed, once we leave the floor and gravity puts more force on our rising body. Body structures find stronger suspension, a slightly tighter way how they hang in the bony frame of our skeleton. Suspension, where

the breath can still flow easily, usually engages the fascia. Suspension happens also in soft maximum stretches of physical structures with still open joints (we call it reach). Suspension in falling, where we stretch time and the journey into the space is also supported by the fascia web on its higher tone end. That's why we do a lot of bouncing before we play with falling through space alone or with a partner.

(A word a bout 'tensegrity structures' has to follow here soonish.)

Navel Radiation

Let's go back to the center and its core function in the development of our movement patterns. Navel Radiation is a term from BMC and describes a very basic movement pattern that connects the center with the limbs (extremities). It begins pre-natal and is still very dominant for adults when they move on floor level. The center is the originator of the movements. From there the activity radiates out into all six limbs (arms, legs, head and tale). Random, non-intentional fold- open movements in arms and legs appear. All limbs are soft, using all joints.

Soft spine

In the center patterns the spine is still soft. In its pre-natal development it is a very flexible cartilage based structure, so called noto-spine. The embryo/ baby moves in an almost gravity free environment - the water of the womb. The spine is moved like a rod (Rute). Movements from the center travel upwards towards the head. Most easily we can experience this quality and connection in a pool, floating in the water on our back, while a partner manipulates the pelvis and center. The movements travel like waves through the spine into the head. On the floor we need to work against the force of gravity, which makes it more difficult to keep the spine soft while the center is strong and active. It helps to imagine the head to be proportionally much bigger and heavier - like in a babies body. For the first months it is impossible for the baby to lift the head. But the head is movement wise not disconnected from the center. The head can roll and slide on the floor. The sucking reflex also creates a very strong connection from the head (or more precisely the mouth) to the center. We call it mouthing.

Once the head leaves the floor we – as grown ups - can choose to keep the spine soft. The head hangs towards the floor. In CI we often benefit from a soft spine. In many moments of body surfing or upside down situations the head can hang and guide the weight of the body in a proposed direction. But even with a soft spine and hanging head the neck never collapses. That could harm the neck. The center is always on and active.

'Strong center – soft limbs' is our core phrase to describe the state of the center and the connection to the rest of the body that we want to develop in our training programme.

'Strong center – soft limbs' is the underlying organization for almost all movements we need in dance, CI and also every day life.

Exercises and images to experience the center

- Articulating the lumbar spine and lower back: The main movement of the center (in our eyes) is a specific way to lengthen the lower back, moving the lumbar arch towards the floor while lying on the back, easiest to find with the feet on the floor, knees facing towards the ceiling. At first the belly button sinks with the exhalation towards the spine and the spine sinks towards the floor. Then we start emphasizing this movement by letting the belly button sink towards the spine or even gently sucking-in the belly button. The spine moves further towards the floor while extending 'upwards' to the thoracic spine and 'downwards' towards the sacrum. (It is not so much about tilting the pelvis.) This movement engages the ilio-psoas muscle

complex but leaves the superficial muscles soft. Legs and arms find an impulse to respond through folding. It feels like a rubber connection and not like a contraction. Folding of arms and legs is easier to find lying on the side. We also explore this movement in sitting and standing.

- Sit with long legs, slightly leaning backwards. The weight of the torso is supported by the arms. By sucking in the belly button the lower back rounds. You might sense the impulse to bend the legs almost effortlessly (ilio-psoas activity). With a collapsed center the legs won't fold in.
- In whatever sitting position: Move different parts of the lowest ribs towards or away from different parts of the pelvis. As a start place one hand on the right side of your pelvis (iliac crest) and one on the right lower ribs. By moving your center you move the hands towards and away from each other. Play with moving the hands also to the pubic bone and the lower sternum or to opposite sides of pelvis and ribs.
- You can also imagine your center as a yawning and chewing mouth. Sternum can be the upper jaw, the pubic bone the lower jaw. (Same with the sides of the torso).
- Imagine to massage your organs by moving the center. Use your breath as a support.
- Imagine to have satellite centers in the palms of your hands and feet. By articulating hands and feet in dialogue with the center it is sometimes easy to experience center and limbs as connected.
- **Mouthing:** By touching the corners of the mouth we can stimulate a reaching pattern from the mouth. It reconnects to the moment when the new born tries to find the mothers nipple to breastfeed. Also the sucking activity for example by sucking on ones own arm activates the center and connects it through a soft spine to the mouth/ head.

further development (including intention and push)

- **Mama-baby technique** for deep folding and change of levels. (inspired by David Zambrano, thank you!): The breast/belly (Mama) needs to physically touch the thigh (Baby) to breastfeed. Almost touching will make the baby very unhappy! This deep folding movement is supported mainly by gravity not by muscular contraction (no forced feeding). When the breast is empty and the baby is fed both separate to explore the world or to work. Movement wise the hip-joints unfold, the body opens, thigh and belly separate being ready for the next deep folding movement. When we include the push patterns (and also the pull patterns – mainly with the heels as anchors - and we keep the hip-joints also available for rotation it becomes easier to change levels, very easy actually, delightful and juicy. With this technique - especially if we add the knowledge of pushing with the little finger, ring finger and heels of hands and feet – every movement out of the floor is a potential invitation for a lift.
- **Push and pull patterns** in order to loco-mote the center: The hands or feet find an anchor on the floor, a wall, or someone else's body. By pushing into the support or pulling towards it we move our center in space (instead of moving a limb towards the center or away from it).
- **Hugging, squeezing, pushing:** As a partner exercise hugging and squeezing combined with yielding is a great option to activate the center. Hugging and squeezing are specific pull patterns. Yielding is essential in both roles (hugging and being hugged) to find the underlying softness for a strong center and to not get stuck in a high body tone. The push can eventually help to create more space and air in this duet. We like to start with hugging in sitting position. In standing this can be a start for finding little lifts.

- Center pump: Imagine your center as a pump that pushes out the limbs and sucks them in again. Get the juices going!
- Flubber – Imagine a happy excited alien inside your belly. It has its own unpredictable will to move in all directions through space. Arms and legs make all directions available.
- King/ Queen and servants: The King or Queen wants to travel and decides in every moment where to go. The servants (arms and legs) do everything needed and possible to fulfill the - sometimes maybe weird wishes – of the King/ Queen.
- Center push: see below under 'spine in lying'

One question about the pelvis

When you think about the center, do you actually focus on or include the pelvis? What is the difference between the pelvis and the center?

Spine

The spine is the second organizing structure for our movement, which plays the major role in our vertical alignment, like in standing, walking or sitting. Its main function is to create a stable axis under the force of gravity, so that the limbs can be free to swing or to work. In CI we need this strong spine for almost all lifts and weight supporting situations. The spine - as a strong vertical axis - starts to develop in utero when the embryo becomes so big that it continuously touches the walls of the womb. It starts pushing with hands and feet but especially with the head into the softly resisting walls of the womb. We call this movement pattern '**spinal push**'. While practicing the spinal push the soft noto-spine needs to transform into a spine with bony vertebrae. The incredible power of the spinal push is needed for the baby to have a successful birth. Once it is born the spinal push pattern builds the base for a strong spine that extends into space. We call this organization and alignment of the spine '**spinal reach**'.

After birth in the sudden transition into a world of gravity the spine stays soft for quite a while. As described above the spine participates in the center patterns, where it functions like another extremity as a 'soft spine'. The spinal reach starts developing when the baby is around two month old and is lying on the belly and tries to look up, or while learning to turn from the back to the belly and later in sitting and crawling.

In our Training Programme we wish to include the powerful three dimensional movement options of the center also in situations of spinal reach or even spinal push, like in shoulder lifts.

Spine in lying

- Rolling from side to belly. Observe how the head naturally wants to move away from the floor. Where in the body do you sense this movement starting (spinal reach)? As a contrast roll from the side to the belly while keeping the head on the floor (keeping the spine soft)
- Center push: Lie on your belly. While exhaling activate your center (as described) and move it softly towards the floor. With the inhalation let go and come back to yielding. With every exhalation you can intensify the push with the center. Notice how other parts of the torso become lighter. Eventually head, legs and arms will float upwards. Neck, hip-joints and elbows are still open and happy to move. Arms and legs are free to easily extend into a soft reach. The breath can still flow. This is the main body organization for over-dancing in balancing positions. It is easy to roll from here to the side and further. If you start the extending movement from your

fingers and toes you easily get into a disconnected reach pattern with a high body tone. Then center isn't well connected and probably you tend to hold your breath.

Spine in standing/ walking

- The Small Dance. This is an almost meditative practice from the very early days of CI. Practice standing with the least muscular effort while sensing the righting and balancing reflexes of the body (see text on www.dancecontact.de). (Spinal reach)
- weight falls - aligning forces rise upwards against gravity . (Spinal reach)
- While walking or standing sense micro stretches between structures that fall and those which rise. It is nice to sense it around the neck. (Spinal reach)
- Image fountain: A partner pushes down your shoulders close to the neck, completely vertical through the bones of spine, pelvis and legs. Your shoulders drop down and rest on the ribcage while your spine grows through the weight in between the shoulders upwards – the spine 'fountains up'. (Spinal push)
- Image: An african woman carrying water on her head with a long open neck.
The experience of weight can be given by a partner with hands on the top of the head (you need to stand though) or while standing or walking by resting one's lower arms on the top of the head. The push on the top of the head provokes the spinal push. Letting go the pressure provokes the spinal reach.
- Image ice skating: Feet slide with wide steps on the floor, the spine keeps extending upwards. Drop the center a little by bending your knees a bit (pliè). You'll need to open your hip joints with a main emphasis on turn out (while still allowing the turn in movement to happen). This activates the center which also gives the base for the spine to extend upwards (spinal reach).
- Rebound. Bouncing gives another extremely helpful information to find the spinal reach. It uses the bounciness of the discs in the spine and its dynamic double S-curve and the general bouncy suspension that is created by ligaments, tendons and the myo-fascia web. Bouncing lets us find a lightness that we happily use for the over-dancer role in many lifts.

Center into Spine

The center into spine exercise is very precious to us. It builds a link from the 'central movement patterns' into the 'spinal movement patterns'. The spine practices in this exercise the transitions from 'soft spine' to 'strong spine' and vice versa. It reconnects to the activity of the spine in the preparation for birth and the birthing process itself (if it wasn't a Caesarian). We focus very much on the movement aspect of the process. But the experience touches usually also emotional layers.

It is a partner exercise. A is trying to find the spinal push. B is supporting. We name 'B's role often as the Papa-, Mama- or more neutral the supporter.-role. 'A' is in the Baby-role, which at some point very quickly develops into a child- or teenager-role. More neutral you can also call it the movement explorer.

'A' is lying on the side, activating the center patterns (strong center – soft limbs). At first 'B' supports 'A's center with a juicy touch of his hands. Later 'A' rests the head in 'B's lap. Arms and lab can create a kind of cave for the head. Also pressure on the head can invite to soften the neck and get a stronger sense of trusting and being carried. When 'A's head is touching 'B's belly, 'A' will feel at some point the urge to move the head deeper into this touch. 'B' gives the requested resistance into the top of 'A's head. The urge to push arises from the center and grows through the spine and head into the supportive resistance of 'B's body. In this state it is useful to play back and forth with minimal pushing and letting go. The base of the spinal push is very subtle. If you really find it, it is very easy to eventually push with a maximum power. When the pushing with the head becomes

stronger 'A' will move on the belly in 4-footer position. It will give more options to change from the head to pushing with a shoulder into different parts of 'B's Torso. 'B' also needs to change position to be able to give the requested resistance. It is a tricky transition to change from being caring and supporting to giving strong resistances and full weight. (Suddenly the Baby grew up and is stronger than oneself.) This activated tone in 'A's torso – the spinal push – is the base for all lifts in CI. Usually 'A' wants to lift 'B' at some point of the exercise. It is nice to also leave the partner and explore the spine in solo movements (Spinal reach) or to go back to resting the head on 'B's body (soft spine).

Other important principles for solo movement

Movements of the torso: Spiral, side bend, arch and curve

In Contact Improvisation a part of the form is to lift the weight of other people's bodies. The spinal push and spinal reach create the basic alignment for the spine especially for supporting lifts. When this focus becomes too strong a negative side effect can occur: the spine becomes a little rigid or stiff. We wish to keep the other movement options of the torso available, which have their origin in the center patterns: to bend to the sides, to arch & curve and to spiral. All of these movement options should be supported by an active strong center and by an extending spine. It might also help to imagine the *torso* as a whole – including the volumes of pelvis, ribcage and shoulder girdle – instead of thinking only about center & spine. It can help to sense far-distance-connections in the body more accurately and can give more fullness, three dimensionality and power to movements that we easily connect to the spine.

Side-bend, arch & curve and spiral – they all put energy into the torso, they charge the structure of the torso. It feels like the fascia-web, that connects everything in the torso, gets stretched and charged. The center needs to be highly engaged to support this power and to protect the lower back. The energy can be harvested as momentum when the spinal reach is maintained.

The spiral is the most powerful movement option of the torso. It might help to find more choice and precision if we are able to distinguish the 'spiral' and the 'banana-roll'. Spiral and banana-roll are whole body movement patterns. Both are two major ways to turn around the vertical axis.

In a spiral the shoulder girdle turns first until successively the pelvis has to follow (or *visa versa*). A twist in the center and the whole torso is the result, which is accompanied by certain rotations in arms and legs. The spiral is extensively used in walking, throwing, kicking, dynamic body surfing and hopefully in shoulder lifts. In the banana roll the shoulder girdle and pelvis turn simultaneously. Arms and legs always reach into one fixed direction of the space. The body is always in a shape of a banana going from side-bend to curve to side-bend to arch... The banana roll is for example useful to roll upwards from a pelvis lift onto someone's shoulder. While 'rolling on the floor' and in 'standing-leaning rolling point of contact' we usually mix both patterns.

The side bend option is very clearly using the connection of head and tail. In CI we use it a lot to keep the under-dancer moving in 4-footer level and pelvis lifts. The head guides the torso into side-bend while the tail stays behind. Eventually the tail follows and swings over to the other side creating a new side bend. The power of this movement can easily move the weight above.

Arch and curve we use a lot in the moment of pouring weight as the over-dancer on the under-dancer in 4-footer position or in leaning positions center to center.

Leg sizzors

There are many moments in CI dances where we need to roll from our belly (or back) to

the side. Especially in bodysurfing and over-dancing on higher levels. Or generally speaking in center to center duets. For that we find the 'leg scissor technique' extremely helpful. In a center to center duet there are almost always two turning directions of my torso available. One direction that rolls me away from my partners center while the opposite turning direction would move me further into my partners center. The scissor-technique makes it very easy to initiate and test these changes.

The leg scissor movement is a specific center pattern that easily brings the body into a spiral. The main pattern you find by lying on your belly. The activated center turns the pelvis to one side while both legs softly bend. Against our usual habits the lower leg is the more powerful and active one. When the lower leg begins to fold it starts actively sliding underneath the leg above. The top leg moves into the counter direction. Eventually both legs extend, so that they create a shape of the blades of a pair of scissors. If the shoulder girdle stays behind and doesn't follow the rotation of the pelvis the body ends in a beautiful spiral.

In many contemporary dance techniques the spiral is initiated from the feet as a continuous reach. The leg scissor though include the folding/ opening movement from the center patterns, which makes it more powerful, more responsive and healthier for the lower back.

Momentum

With the base of the developmental movement patterns most movements we create are in terms of dynamic rather controlled (bound flow). To add momentum can bring even more efficiency and joy into the moving body. With momentum we mean a specific rhythm or logic of acceleration (and eventually slowing down). Using momentum reduces the options to change directions because accelerating mass minimizes its desire to leave its track. The advantage is that the movement has to follow more clearly the logic of bones and joints. The dance is – in a positive sense – more predictable or easier to read. A partner can follow more easily and join in. We see three ways to create momentum. They all have a similar quality or rhythm and can be easily and efficiently mixed.

Spiral, side-bend, arch & curve we already mentioned as options to charge the body and eventually harvest the energy as momentum like we do in kicking or throwing or smaller but more complex in walking. The momentum can give its energy into the swing of arms or legs – or it can accelerate the movement of the whole body in space.

Directing falling weight. Another source for momentum is falling weight that we direct in a safe way so we don't get hurt by hitting the ground. Directing falling weight needs the ability for 'controlled letting go'. The 'control' we train in all the center and spine work. The 'letting go' needs more work in relaxation in the major joints of the body like hip-joints and shoulder girdle, which includes relaxation of many muscle groups. Shaking and swinging is the basic information for the body to understand the logic of momentum through falling weight. 'Falling through space' (see below under 'shared weight') is a rather exciting exploration on directing falling weight.

down & up is a third principle: For every jump or lift there is an underlying logic in the body of going down (plié) and pushing into the floor to get up, driven by reflexes and muscle chains. The timing of the going down synchronizes both partners for an effortless way upwards.

Work with momentum can create a sense of excitement and easily speeds up the dance too much with a loss of groundedness. The slowing down of the momentum is as important as the acceleration! We also like the option of 'slowmentum': slowed down momentum. We can keep the logic of acceleration and slowing down while reducing the speed or adding more suspension. It can help to do the same movement with the image to move in water instead of air.

Keep it simple!

'Keep it simple' is a basic idea for moving solo in a way that invites a partner to join. It naturally combines the power and flow of the center with the clarity and linearity of the skeleton. Efficiency and physical delight are the criteria for these kind of movements. That also includes

- Least necessary effort
- Open joints
- readability
- momentum
- "juicy mechanics"

COMMUNICATION THROUGH TOUCH

Friction & sliding under the skin – the base for leading and following

The clearest base for leading/ following situations we find if we use a touch with the commitment to stay where it is. The point of contact itself doesn't move, neither through rolling or sliding. Most touches don't go 100 % vertical to the touched skin. They give a direction. The tissues underneath the skin (on both sides of the touch) move to a certain degree. It is a sensation of sliding under the skin, soon there is a certain sense of stretch or pulling when we get closer to the limit of the movement ability of these tissues. The fascia transfer the pulling information to much deeper structures of our bodies than the touch itself can reach. Every leading impulse that doesn't go 100% vertical is communicated through the tissues under the skin and the connected fascia. In some situations a minimal directive pressure is enough to lead clearly – like in the finger dance or the hand on hand exercise. For the following person the moment of 'swimming under the skin' stretches the time to react and gives a choice how quickly he or she follows the proposed direction. It holds the potential to follow with a kind of honest delay (instead of predicting the direction and running ahead). The same principle also works with a lot of weight like in body surfing situations.

We can even use the friction under the skin as a soft hook like in a pelvis lift, hanging towards one side, especially once we are sweaty. We call it "hanging in someones skin".

Rolling

The rolling point of contact is one of the major principles in CI to change the place where the bodies touch each other. The point of contact successively changes through rolling. The used surfaces need to be articulated in a round shape in order not to jump from one point to the next. It can use the space for movement under the skin that is so useful for leading and following, but it never goes beyond it. Otherwise the point of contact would slide.

The rolling point of contact is a major tool to gradually pour and transfer the weight in a moving duet. Through this principle we can continuously read the responses from our partners body how it deals with our weight or support. We reduce the likeliness of unpleasant surprises like loosing each other, falling/ sliding off or dumping suddenly the weight. In a pure form it feels very limiting unless we become very precise. Then it invites an enormous amount of unpredictable movement options. But that is rather advanced.

Sliding

Sliding works best with not too much weight, like in soft leaning positions. We use it often

to adjust the pelvises before a lift. Both partners have to work in opposite directions to go beyond the friction under the skin in order to make the slide consciously possible.

The challenge is to read if the leading proposal is to follow the proposed direction or to work against it. It is one reason why pelvis lifts often don't work properly in a dance situation because the partner follows instantly downwards. The pelvis of the underdancer can't slide low enough to get under the partners pelvis.

Vacuuming

Most leading impulses use a certain amount of push to propose a direction. But there is also the option to lead by moving away from my partner. I can have the intention to 'suck' my partner with the touch to follow in my direction. The base for this kind of communication is that both partners agree on following the point of contact with shared weight. The following person needs to organize his body in a way that the pressure in the touch stays alive. It is an important tool to bring a duet into higher levels or traveling through space without grabbing the partner.

Leading and following – following and following

The common concept for improvised social dances is that one person is leading and the other is following. In CI there is also the miraculous option that both are following. It is rather easy to find in the finger dance.

A is leading B, fingertip to fingertip. Then they change rolls. Eventually both imagine the other one is leading – following every little direction they sense. It can feel like the the point of contact is leading. This works only, if both don't hesitate following, otherwise the dance might get stuck in only sensory listening, losing the output of the motor nervous system. For the mind it is helpful to remember that it is impossible to be 100% still. There is always movement.

It can be very inspiring to apply the idea of 'both are following' to CI dances with shared weight.

The usual experience in a CI duet though is that leading and following roles are constantly shifting. In our Training Programme we like to spend quite some time with clear roles. It helps to discover one's own preferences and limitations. Not to lead can be linked to the fear of taking responsibility. Not to follow can be connected to a lack of listening and the unconscious fear to give up control. Gender roles are surprisingly (?) present in CI dances. We'd like them to be options to play with and not restrictions. Having the choice is the base of improvisation (and a happy life).

MOVING WITH SHARED WEIGHT

Levels of weight

In Contact Improvisation duet dancers need a sufficient amount of shared weight to be able to feel the support of the floor through the body structures of the partner. The sensation of weight also serves as a base for the kinesthetic and non-visual communication in Contact Improvisation.

1. No shared weight

Only touch with no shared weight is used especially in standing walking level. It uses principles of regular social dance forms and can move the dance easily through space. The most clarity we get when the centers are at the core of the leading and following dialogue. They communicate through arms and hands as their extensions.

2. Leaning

Leaning mainly happens in standing level. The balance point is right between both leaning partners. Both give the same amount of weight into each other. Leaning is the permission to fall in every moment: If I loose the support of my partner I will fall (with an internal 'yes'). In the beginning it is important to physically sense the logic of the architecture of the created triangle. That includes to not push into the partner and also to not hold back the weight. The spinal reach is the main organizing principle for leaning situations, which creates a sense of leaning and falling upwards. The legs need to be willing to move and bend, for that the center has to be 'on!'. Mobile feet prefer to be rather close together!

Falling through space

Leaning starts to become really interesting if the partners continuously challenge the stable leaning position. In this way we can create the most physically and emotionally exciting dances because we dedicate the dance to the steady risk of falling.

What often happens is that only one person is truly leaning while the other one keeps a safety leg close to the partners stand, so he wouldn't fall if the partner left.

An efficient exercise for preparation is the following:

Person A stands and person B gives vertical pressure downwards, first into shoulders, the into the top of A's head. A responds with a spinal push upwards into the pressure. This activates reflexes that support posture and alignment . Then A stands alone, observing the so called small dance* of his body, meaning the little movements the body makes to balance in standing. In the next step of the exercise B puts his hands or just a finger to A's chest, and asks him to turn off the reflexes that are responsible for balancing, but to keep his posture and alignment. We use the image that B is trying to balance a stick (A) vertically. So A is falling into B's gentle support and being led back to balance without collapsing. Key points in the body for learning are the ankle joints. The muscles that are attached through tendons around the ankles should be relaxed, and the feet should be relaxed on the floor. It is helpful if somebody walks around to check this through touch and give feedback.

The starting point for the actual dance is usually leaning in a duet on shoulder level in standing position. Now both dancers, while keeping good alignment, turn off the balancing-reflexes and start to fall into each other. Without mental or physical force the direction of the research is 'how to loose the balance and stability'. Both will start to fall together into the space making quick steps to get the feet back under the centers.

The game of "falling through space" is to never give up falling into the support of the leaning partner, keeping the spinal reach, while both are falling through space. A rhythm of falling and finding new fragile balance helps. It is challenging to resist the temptation and comfort of finding stable balances. That easily happens when we use the rolling point of contact in the beginning of the fall. To loose the balance together it helps to turn the head, to bring the feet very close together or to allow a minimal yielding of the spine. Eventually it is also possible to play this game through different levels in space.

Diving Under

Another way to challenge the stability or predictability in leaning positions is for one or both partners to dive down with the head while keep on leaning. We call this option '*diving under*'. For this option we need to allow a lot of sliding and pivoting around the blind spot, the area between the shoulder blades. To make the communication more precise and the sliding and pivoting easier it helps to rounden the surfaces of the point of contact . A good

preparation is if one or both lean in the 'hanging torso position' – finding the support with the hanging upper back (blind spot). It takes time to get used to giving and receiving weight in this position. The body wouldn't do it naturally and easily reacts with fear patterns. You get closer to dancing when both partners can roll down from leaning in standing side to side finding a way to get both blind spots in touch. From there going down into squatting position is possible – leaning back to back – or continuing up to leaning in standing again. Eventually only one person can dive under in a leaning or even falling through space situation, which needs the most sliding and pivoting and the most trust. Diving under is also a great option to come up in a leaning situation from 4-footer-level.

3. Full-weight situations

Center to center

For Contact Improvisation it is necessary that the bodies learn to move 'center to center' without losing the point of contact. If we had a final examination in our training program in Berlin, there would be no way of passing it before “mastering” center to center dancing. The center is an area where the body can carry a lot of weight, and the limbs stay free to support, carry, work as landing gear - and to play around with unnecessary extras. (Here we include the pelvis and lower ribs in the concept of the 'center'.) We like it very much when Contact Improvisers are able to dance hands-free. It means that they don't need to grab and hold while under- and over-dancing, because the center to center communication is strong and precise.

In Contact Improvisation we train the center as a three dimensional structure to develop the following qualities:

- strong deep abdominal muscles for moving and carrying a lot of weight
- quick tone modulation to have a smoothly traveling point of contact
- good center limb connection, and limbs that are ready to follow and/or serve the center by carrying and supporting it.
- To work the center towards your partner, offer the center, share the center.

Over- and under-dancing

These terms we took from Martin Keogh. The over-dancer is the one who gives the weight the under-dancer takes the weight. These terms propose to keep on moving in both roles and help to avoid training static weight situations which will eventually stop the flow of the dance.

Over- and under-dancer need a different organization of their bodies to master full weight situations together. (For full weight situations on floor level – so called body surfing – the principles are pretty different, generally using a much lower tone → see below)

Under-dancer (UD)

The under-dancer has to organize the bones as the main supportive structure against gravity into the weight of the partner. Finding and using the support of the floor while moving into the weight. It is a very detailed articulation of the back that makes good under dancing. All the center work, the minimal twists and arches, which engage the fascia and move the organs prepare us to eventually move or invest precisely and alive into the point of contact. On the floor mainly the center is carrying the weight. In 4-footer level it is the lower back, in pelvis lifts it is mainly the pelvis. Simplicity and efficiency is the core of under-dancing. In standing level the feet should be rather close together and ready to move, to be able to keep the dance moving. Mainly the head-tail-connection initiates

movements that easily directs the over-dancer. Small movements of the pelvis or center can have a huge effect on the periphery of the over-dancer.

Main movement principle for the under-dancer is the push into the floor. The push needs to be based on yielding in order to lift the weight of the partner easily and with an understandable timing. Without the underlying yielding the under-dancer loses the ability to quickly adjust to new situations in weight shifts or just gets stuck in a position and the dance gets stuck, too. The spinal reach or push will join in to support weight with the torso. The center has to be very active to keep the hip-joints open so that movement under weight is still easily possible.

Over-dancer (OD)

Moving or pushing the center into the supportive surface of the partner is the core. From there the spinal reach is fed and the limbs can extend and balance the body. The underlying pattern is the yield-push-reach cycle. When being on the top the main challenge is to understand ones own fear responses which are either contraction- or collapsing-patterns and usually tend to help the center to not arrive really on the top but to keep hanging towards the feet.

Another easily forgotten part is that being on the top includes to land at some point. Also for this the limbs as the main landing gear need to extend softly and eventually reach for the floor to take ones own weight as soon as possible.

As a help we sometimes push with the hands into the supporting structure in order to lift the center and create the spinal reach. It is a good tool to overcome the hidden fear patterns of collapsing and sliding down.

Transferring weight

The transitions between carrying and being carried make the dance endurable and create easily an exciting amount of momentum. That demands a high ability to modulate the body tone. Especially the modulation from the reaching that is necessary for over-dancing into soft landing and preparing for taking weight. These transitions are mostly based on the yield-push-reach sequence which we mentioned in the previous chapter.

To change over- and under-dancer role we change from a full weight situation through a moment of no weight or leaning into a new full weight position. The main principles for getting from no weight or gentle leaning to full weight is the 'Down-tilt-push' sequence.

Down – Tilt – Push

The UD needs to lower his center under the center of the OD. Often a slide is necessary for this, which includes that the overdancer keeps moving or thinking upwards. Tilting the torso is the moment to invite the weight. It should happen when the bones are organized to take the weight so that the muscles don't have to carry. When the OD pours the weight, the UD in a feedback mechanism push into the given weight (instead of moving down with the weight). The way down should have happened before the tilt!

Shoulder-hip connection and Shoulder lifts

Another common connection to take or give the full weight is the Shoulder-hip connection that can (but doesn't have to) lead into Shoulder lifts. We use the center into spine exercise to create a rather high but flexible and responsive body tone for the spine and torso of the UD.

Down and up

In order to manage a shoulder lift a core part is the synchronized momentum upwards. The synchronization needs to start already on the way down that is necessary to move up. There is a logic for the timing that everyone's body knows from jumping, which can be modulated to a certain degree. The difficulty is to follow the proposed rhythm instead of hesitating or pushing over it.

The OD often uses a spiral to get more dynamic and to eventually land on the side of his center. Staying on the belly would give the weight to far away from the central axis of the UD.

The UD should try to lower the center by bending the knees in order to lift without straining the lower back. Once the way up is managed we suggest to keep the momentum going. Either by following the natural curve of the lifted weight downwards after the highest point was reached or by keep on turning in the given direction. Otherwise it is mainly work but not much physical pleasure even for the OD. The flying sensation is happening in the way up and down not in the strain of staying up.

Body-surfing

Body-surfing is a highly delicious but complex way to move on floor level from one full-weight situation directly into the next. One partner is like a wave, transporting the other one like a body-surfer, and they continuously change roles. Its complexity is highly underestimated. Technically it is much more difficult than shoulder lifts and it deserves more words and appreciation than the few following lines.

Body-surfing contains many important movement principles:

- Yielding the weight into the floor and partner, finding middle tone, meaning not to collapse and not to overtone. Legs need to fold and open a lot and the neck can release much more than on higher levels
- Using yield, push and reach in under-dancing and over-dancing
- Finding the modulations of body tone in the transitions between under-dancing and over-dancing.
- Changing the position of the bodies from parallel to perpendicular to each other and vice versa.
- Finding the center as a main motor for movement, and a place to carry, support and handle a lot of weight.
- The use of strong spirals create astonishing options, especially using the leg scissors options

4. The backspace

Moving into the space behind us is very scary, because it is out of our sight and control. Contact improvisation gives fantastic options to move into that fear loaded space with the support of a partner. Technically it is based on a few rather simple principles. The challenge is the fear of falling on the head and the gift is that we can notice, understand and re-pattern these fear responses. We usually work quite a lot on it in our basic training programme. More words should follow at some point.

MANIPULATION

... is 'evil' in the basic contact technique. Manipulation is a very directive way of leading that gives mainly or only one option for the partner to follow. From a communicational and improvisational point of view it is very poor and limited. But it can help us to understand the juicy mechanics of the human body. And if we surrender to it as a follower it can be heaven.

It serves us as a tool to become more clear in leading or making invitations. In a dance the base should be to read the partners movement, to follow it and then sometimes to change its direction. To have to whole variety between pure following to directive manipulation opens lots of choices in an improvisation. Hands on work or body work that leads into dance often plays in this field.

PATHWAYS

In our terminology 'pathway' means 'movement sequence'. In teaching we use pathways to learn and practice movement vocabulary that is useful for Contact Improvisation, and to exemplarily show the underlying movement principles. The same pathway can sometimes be used to focus on very different incorporated principles. It can be good to be aware which one you want to explore...

A main reason why we use pathways is the precision of a concrete movement phrase and the possibility of repetition. It can help to understand details, personal habits and preferences which we might not un-cover or challenge if we stay in our improvisation routine. Pathways can offer new options to move and through that they can widen our choices in the dance.

When we teach pathways we need to be aware of the danger (as teachers and also participants) to get into a state of right and wrong and eventually 'knowing Contact'. 'Knowing Contact' is the state just before stopping to practice CI. The desire to learn und to discover is in our eyes an integral part of the form. Looking for pathways in a dance is Contact Planing and not Contact Improvisation. It is killing the dance.

Successful repeating a pathway means that the felt journey is every time a little different depending on the partner and millions of unpredictable details.

We like to emphasize in our work with pathways, that the honest communication is the more important part of it than the fulfilling of the shape. Pathways are a great teacher if we manage not to push through it but to stay honest in the failures and to find other solutions in the moment instead - that is what we need for the dance! Continuously letting go of our little plans if they don't find the needed response.

More and more we try to start a pathway with a moment of connecting, little swinging or weight shifting movements with eyes closed for example. In the pathway itself we like to invite moments to go back and forth (as long as there is no strong momentum involved). And we like to let participants add to the end of the phrase at least one more improvised movement while staying physicly connected.

A last note

We appreciate very much that you, dear reader, took the time to get til the end of this text. We actually feel honored. Thank you! If you have thoughts, questions or comments, we are happy to hear them!

- ¹ BMC, Body Mind Centering. Developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, it is an experiential study based on the embodiment and application of anatomical, physiological, psychophysical and developmental principles, utilizing movement, touch, voice and mind. This study leads to an understanding of how the mind is expressed through the body and the body through the mind. (www.bodymindcentering.com). Linda Hartley's book "Wisdom of the body moving"* is the most systematic source of information in this field, that we know of.
- ² Bartenieff Fundamentals. A set of concepts, principles and exercises - developed by Imrgard Bartenieff - that apply Laban's movement theory to the physical / kinesiological functioning of the human body.
- ³ Myo fascia web. A certain type of connecting tissue in the body, like a web of strong and elastic skin bags, that wrap and connect all organs and muscles to hold them in place and allows them to slide against each other.