# Contact Improvisation: Cultivating Instinct

Abstract- Drawing from first, second, and third erson sources, I aim to provide both historical and embodied accounts of Contact Improvisation (CI), to se its most basic physical essence as a metaphor for s function as a social movement. The collation of nformation here- ranging from immediate to reflective- allows me to paint a picture at once more specific and more holistic than a research paper.



Participatroy and Observational- Attended classes and jams hosted by Contact Improv Toronto Interview and Video Review- Personal interview with Joseph Sengo, CI teacher; viewed past and current video artefacts

Literature Review- Studied multiple written sources for background, including anthropological texts, magazine articles.

For detailed list of sources, see handout.

onnectivity Patterns- how is the whole body organized? ead-Tail- spinal articulation, preparing for level change ross-Lateral- activating spiral lines across body. equencing- how does movement spread through the

onstant transmission of force, spread sequentially or

### Shape

### Basic Forms

**Space Effort- the way** 

attention is given.

crew (twisted, spiral) forms fit partners together like

Nodes of Change- how is shape change motivated? otivation comes from the environment- the floor an artner(s). Thus, mode of change is directional ridging to the environment), or carving (adapting with the environment).

Image: "Joseph Dumit Contact Improvisation". February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

Hannah Schallert FA/DANC 1340

## Laban Movement Analysis

# Effort

Vhat is the dynamic vality of the movement? Strong, allows direct tactile indefinitely. ow Effort- continuity. communication with ree, allows for soft and partner.

muli and internal

ciprocal exchange.

of form

gave up system of

manager, registered

trademark in favor of

magazine which facilitated

sharing information and

fostering community

parallel

development

of Somatics

sponsive bodies, external **Time Effort- inner attitude** Indirect, flexible attention and fluidity of motivation. towards time.

self and intention of

moving.

ensations operate in Immediacy makes for sustained yet sudden Veight Effort- sensation of effort. Urgency of the now

responded to with patient movement that unfolds

inesphere- what volume of space is taken up?

nesphere shared by both bodies, and a common centre of gravit ifts constantly.

patial Pulls- where is the movement going in space?

any different pulls can be active at once, organized around an osahedron (figure with twelve sides). Pathways outlined in space oiral through three dimensions.

# 1960's/Pre

### 1972-Magnesium

John Weber Gallery & Early Years

Paxton invited to

### 1975- *Contact* Quarterly

# Pluralization

some beg

to make

### Post Development

communal living,

disintegrated

original companies

• new centres

companies

formed, but

more localize

social/rock and roll dance counter culture experimental theatre

post modern dance interest in sensuality, individuality

non-authoritaria

creation methods

Steve Paxton's interest in structured improvisatio

improvisatory solo taught to class at Oberlin College

> wild, crashi movement style nonsequential

Paxton recieves grant to create

teach, perform at colleges and dance for galler galleries invites dancers to brings Weber live and work in dancers, Chinatown loft videographer

dancers study videos, clearer aesthetic

emerges first solo dancing

# '73-'75- Expansion

new students teach friends in order to have dance partners

ad-hoc, social performar es in roun audience performers

mingle

mobility

geogra

audience begins growing to organize

rapid learning curve draws dancers and non-dancers

### shared worry over dangerous consciousness teaching, fragmentation

grows as connections go beyond local to

29 "Contacts" (actively teaching performing etc.) as of 1976, each indicative of local complexes Pluralization of styles, meanings

way to keep track of methods, share

Paxton wanted to stay away from metaphysical, thus tension grew between need to define and desire to remain

# Conferences and

conferences

represented

peak of

national

organizatio

high level of skill make hierarchy of pros and living off CI amateurs generations

improvisers discussion turned to what had been left

performand

es not only

"pure" Cl

difficult movement look easy seldom dangerous or unpredictable

improvisers in the 80's didn't seize opportunity for collective endeavor, had begun developing individual careers

Cl's aesthetic permeated modern and postmodern dance- for example Trisha Brown, Twyl Tharp, and later Kaeja d'Dance

### "Some jams can end up being all 'moves'."- Joseph Sengo

t is the implementation of Cl's guiding principles- their embodiment and eaching-that forms a technique, which necessarily requires a pre-conceived approach to moving. The more it is recreated, the less it is discovered.

"The underlying technique needed to prepare for and survive the surprises of a Contact Improvisation duet is to pose and maintain a question ('where is my partner? where is down?') What happens when, after a few years of practice, what was once an unpredictable emergency situation becomes familiar? The never-before-imagined relationships with another person ... can be taken as a definition of the work, rather than the physical questioning that is the ground from which this bounty of innovative material springs." - Daniel Lepkoff, "A Question"

Contextualizing Findings-lived experience in relation to theory and history

"Thinking with my nerve-endings.. not actively doing. Turnaround of moments somewhere before brain." –Field notes, November 29<sup>th</sup>

CI manifests through sharing weight and following a rolling point of contact. Thus, it follows that its novement is neither choreographed- one cannot predict which action will be necessary as each moment unfolds as a result of the one before- nor is it entirely free form improvisation- partners are Iways seeking and informed by another body or the floor.

"The sense of touch and physical reflex actions assume more importance for the dancer than the sense of vision and consciously chosen actions." –Cynthia Novack, Sharing the Dance

### "It seemed to me like social forms very much determined the look of dances, or were a strong factor in the way they looked." Paxton, in Sharing the Dance

Hoping to move away from 'dictatorship'-like models, Paxton sought to develop nowledge collectively, in deference to innate reservoirs of individual impulse over ny one teacher or choreographer- the form itself functions as teacher, master, nd choreographer. My learning was similar in the first jam I attended, the bulk of which occurred 'on my feet'- through kinesthetic empathy as I watched, and proprioceptive experience as I embodied responses to my partner.

## Conclusions

What happens when a system of movement tries to rogress and thrive while still eschewing definition? Is this ot in an idyllic conception of an entirely free movement orm rooted in the physical, but in the way its proposition egs questioning the self, authority, consciousness and ontrol, natural-ness, and embodied behavior.

CI in its initial phase was predicated on adherence to ecessity, to the natural-both in its physicality and its organization. However, being situated in the 'natural' t was open to imposed meanings and connotations emotional, meta-physical, theatrical). Further, its ocus of knowledge and power in communities (local, magined) surely contrasted more commodifiable, nierarchical techniques, but was impractical as the form gained national and international popularity. hus what made CI so powerful is also what made it cruly of its time, functioning in this way more like a social movement than a technique- unpredictable, temporal, shifting in response to environment.