

Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy  
Dancer BA

# **Communication through Touch**

**Cooperation through the point of touch in dancing together**

## **Thesis**

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## Introduction

Throughout my thesis I introduce communication -and arising from that cooperation- through touch from various angles in order to raise awareness of its usage in dance. I am aspiring to give credit to touch as one of the means of communication, through which one's way of perception and expression transforms. I mainly relied on my experience in choosing my main themes to unfold my research topic and alongside this I completed my chain of thoughts with other author's ideas too.

I am going to start by sharing my personal experiences about touch. Here my main focus is to share where my inspiration toward my topic comes from and what were the movement practices, dance techniques that helped me to realize my interest toward communicating through touch. In this chapter, in addition to writing about my inspiration, I am also going to share the essential ideas about how communicating through touch changes the conditions of communication. As my second step, I am going to clarify the key notions that appear the most frequently in my text and are also present in my title. I found it important to define what I mean under the following three words: touch, communication and cooperation.

I am going to start the core of the text by introducing the physical aspects of touch. My goal here is to bring awareness to the physical aspects that are the most important for being able to create cooperation through touch. I see the physical aspects of touch more as the consequences of the ways I am present in touch, which is the theme of the next bigger chapter. In my structure I am going from the physical to the subtler aspects, driven by the idea that whatever occurs in the physical, must have had occurred in the mind first. Thus, these physical aspects can be extra focuses above the basic mental presences I am introducing, where these presences are the fundamentals. I will introduce four ways of being present in touch in order to create cooperation. These are the following: sensing, action, receiving and giving. I intend to explain what I understand by each of them and I also provide a list of tasks with detailed instructions with which I could experience each of the presences. These four presences split into two bigger groups. Sensing and action is the first one and receiving and giving is the second one. The reason why I organize them into groups is to show, that while I am involved in touch through one of the presences of the first group, I am usually involved through one of the presences of the second group as well. For example, I can be in the state of action while receiving. After writing in detail

about all the four of them I am going to conclude this bigger chapter by writing about the process of choosing between these four focuses moment to moment due to what is the most beneficial for being able to continue cooperation through touch. In this part I also acknowledge that these four presences are always present simultaneously, but are active in a different proportion. Treating them as separate entities helped me to experience each of them deeper, so I can use them decisively, as tools to create cooperation and be involved with my attention in touch.

Subsequently I am going to write about Contact Improvisation as the dance practice where communication and cooperation through touch can be experienced and witnessed. Through writing about the history of this practice and its initial research questions, as well as looking on touch as the main principle of organizing movement, I aim to show a possibility of how the ideas I write about can manifest in practice.

Following this I arrive to write about the state of cooperation, which is the central theme of my thesis. Here I am also going to introduce the term “third mind”, which I consider a stage of cooperation. By explaining this state my intention is to reveal the reason why I find it powerful to engage with this communicational domain, showing how touch can change fundamentally my presence in dancing and further on in daily life too. Then I introduce a categorization of the possible ways of cooperation which I name “trigger words”. These categories are summarizing my experiences of cooperation. In order to fill the trigger words with content I give a short definition and I write one task for each of them, so one can get his or her own experience of what I refer to.

These are the themes in headlines I intend to discuss through my topic. All of them are pointed to give tools to the reader, through my experiences, to be involved in communication through touch with awareness and through this create the possibility of cooperation.

## Definitions of key notions

### **Touch:**

I refer to touch in my thesis as the meeting of the skin layers of two or more bodies through any body parts.

**Communication:** Communication in my thesis refers to one's expression of his or her experience with one or more persons perceived as other entities by the perceiver. The expression must find its means (language, movement, touch...) that is perceivable and applicable for all of the communicational partners involved.

**Cooperation:** By cooperation I mean the intention of relating my actions to my partner's action in my perception, I consider him or her as someone I want actively relate to. When we both have this intention, common action appears.

## Personal interest in touch

Touch is the action that helps me the most to connect to my environment. It allows me to live my experiences through getting involved in the sensations each touch evoked in me. We can hear, smell, see, think about things, but once I get in touch with it, it becomes the part of my personal experience.<sup>1</sup> Once I experienced the physical effect of something, I am affected emotionally as well and can establish my personal relation to the thing according to my affection<sup>2</sup>.

Touch helps me to communicate what I am experiencing at the moment in its fullness as I am living it in the moment, without restricting the information into the frame of language and thoughts. This ability to communicate with others without thinking inspires me the most to dive into communication through touch. The wish to connect to my environment through touch inspired me to create situations where I can live this way of communication more and more. I wanted to emerge into this world where I felt I can reconnect to my environment as I would experience it at the first time, without the wish to name what I came in contact with, I only enjoy the sensations touch creates and how it inspires my body to move. I simply reach out toward the experiences that attract me, as my physicality allows, as an infant does naturally while discovering the world around. He gets overwhelmed by each impulse received, fully present in its sensation.

My first experience of recognizing touch as a communicational tool consciously came by starting to do judo at the age of seven. Fights in judo do not happen, beside the frame of the beginning and the end, by a set sequence, there is a lot of space for free movement. The movements are functional, they are pointed to win by the rules of judo. Here I had a lot of time to enjoy how I turn each sensation into action, responding with my body through the points of touch immediately. It taught me how to create a body awareness where I am alert to every little movement of my partner, always trying to predict their next movement and taking action before them. It was a game of listening carefully and taking action explosively.

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<sup>1</sup> Olsen, A., Mchese, C., (1991), *Bodystories: A guide to experiential anatomy*, Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press pp.79-80

<sup>2</sup> Gregg, M., & Seigworth, G. J. (2010). *The affect theory reader*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press pp. 29-50

Later when I started dancing, the awareness of adjusting, moving my body by being attentive to the sensations present accompanied me. Here I started to recognize the possibility of being involved, being in communication with the world through movement and touch. As I learnt contact improvisation, improvisation and contemporary technique I started to use and understand movement and touch differently. These tools were no longer simply functional, pointed toward a goal defined by the rules of a sport, or social interaction (e.g. shaking hands), I opened the capacity to be present in them, for the enjoyment of moving and touching. They became my instrument for expressing my state of mind, my tool for communication. Moreover, I was impressed how more intensively I was affected in the communication through the body once touch was hand in hand with movement. Physical closeness brought me to apperceive every impulse more detailed. It reminded me of the experience of putting my ear to a closed door in order to hear the inner happenings cleaner and more amplified.

Touch gave me the possibility to perceive the ordinary as extraordinary. I felt that through touch I can enter and unite with anything around, as my environment can enter into my body space at the same time. It made me to reorganize with what I identify with. I softened the boundaries I separated myself from the “otherness”, from the world around. The outside started to be relative, it could be involved in my inner space of identification through touch. As I could communicate the wholeness of my present experience, the same way I felt possible to connect to someone else’s expression too. I developed the ability to recognize any other being in relation to me or as part of me without perceiving them through the categories I constructed through my past experiences.

Being present in the sensations of touch and in the emotions<sup>3</sup> evoked gives me the possibility to base communication on what is present. Rather than responding to the personal interpretation of an action, organized by my past experiences. For instance, when I am pushed away from another body with the two hands of my partner touching my shoulders, I might think that he or she no longer would like to continue the dance with me, instead of acknowledging the space created in between, feeling the touch on the shoulders, noticing the proportion of time the action happened, in comparison to our previous ones. This is why I think raising awareness about touch in dance is extremely

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<sup>3</sup> Emotions are different from feelings, emotions are based upon bodily sensation given to an external or internal experience, while feelings are mental constructions, we organize bodily sensations under. For example: fear, happiness, anger. – Hampton, D., (2015), *The Best Brain Possible*, Available at: <https://www.thebestbrainpossible.com/whats-the-difference-between-feelings-and-emotions/>, (accessed: 09/04/19)

important in order to be able to live the communication through the body with full involvement, where movement and touch together are my tools.

## **Physical aspects of cooperating through touch**

*Hereby I am going to introduce the physical aspects of moving together in touch which are important in order to be able to cooperate. All of these categories I am listing expose fragments of the cooperation process separately, whereas in dancing these are present simultaneously. By listing these I aim to highlight the complexity of the information we can receive and give by becoming aware of the sensory impulses coming through the point of touch.*

### Orientation in space

Touch works as a reference point to show where my body is in relation to the space around. It gives feedback about how with my movements I take different parts of the space and where I can go next. Similarly to proprioception, touch helps to sense my position in space, however in this case I orientate through the touch of the outer objects, the touch of the floor rather than through sensing the position of my body parts in relation to each other. It puts me in relation with, in my perception, important participants of my actions and shows my effectiveness at a physical level. It helps me to distinguish between what are the things that are still belonging to me and which are the ones that are already out of the boundaries of my identity. What I identify with may transform by time as I deepen into touch (I am going to write about this phenomenon later). Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was very inspiring for me in understanding how touch constructs the inner and outer space simultaneously, according to him the world manifests through our individual bodily structure and skills, how we are able to get in touch with something or not, whether we can attain the desired proximity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice & Landes, Donald A. (2012). *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge, pp.127-128



## Proprioception

Proprioception is the sense that provides us the possibility to feel our position in space and keep our body in balance. It allows me to sense the position of any of my body part in relation to my whole body. It is a cognitive awareness, so we are not actively aware of this sense.<sup>5</sup> I would call this as the inner touch, as this sense is generated by the stretching and the contraction of the muscles. This is a sense that is necessary to do any movement and more over to be able to cooperate through touch as it gives the possibility to sense my own self as the reference point of every interaction. Through proprioception I am able to define my position in space and according to this I can place the other who I am connected with through touch into my coordinates. For example, I can feel that my partner's hand is on the top of my head, above my eyes.

## Kinesthesia

It is the sense that informs me of the motion of my body parts through the sense of proprioception. Kinesthesia is important because when I am in touch with someone I can presume the effect of my movement on my partners body, as well as I get feedback about my partner's action through sensing how my body is moved by him or her. Kinesthesia gives the possibility to predict my partner's movement, as I can compare them to my possibilities of moving. For example, I assume that my partner won't be able to bend his or her elbow over a certain angle.

## Sharing weight

While moving together in touch, sharing weight, even if its minimal, is almost unavoidable. How I deal with my own weight and how I manage my partner's, has a big impact on whether our cooperation can go easily or not. I have to become attentive to how my partner is mobilizing the weight of his or her body and how I can manage the

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<sup>5</sup> Sahyouni, R., (2014), *Khan Academy*, Available at: <https://www.khanacademy.org/science/health-and-medicine/nervous-system-and-sensory-infor/somatosensation-topic/v/proprioception-kinesthesia>, (accessed: 02/04/19)

weight shared. The way I react and reorganize my body depends on more factors. It depends on the direction and the speed of the weight I receive. The speed of weight is an important factor that changes the receiver's reaction greatly. For instance, when someone is falling on me or slowly leaning on me requires a totally different physical preparation. While cooperating through the point of touch I have to learn how to adapt to the different amount of weight shared, to recognize its direction and speed and adjust to it with organizing my body accordingly in the way that it helps to continue cooperation.

### Frequency and duration of touch

Changing the frequency and duration of touch creates different movement situations. For example, keeping one fixed point of touch during a whole dance of ten minutes creates totally different possibilities of movement from when we change the point of touch every ten seconds. Here I change the frequency of touch. It is also possible that my own and my partner's skin is connected for a long duration of time, although the body parts touching are changing constantly. Contact Improvisation refers to this way of being in touch as the "rolling point of contact".

### Pressure shared through touch

Contact Improvisation, in my experience, defines three main categories depending on the pressure shared upon the touching surfaces. These three names imply different possibilities of motion. The categories are: sliding, friction and binding. Sliding is when the pressure is so low that the surfaces can easily move upon each other in a continuous motion. Friction is when the shared pressure upon the surfaces does not let body parts touching move upon each other easily, the surfaces rub against each other, while still moving on. Binding is when the touching surfaces are no longer moving upon each other. Touch stays at one point and the body parts collide into one another. Using these ways of sharing pressure are constantly changing in a dance and create opportunities for different movements to appear. Each movement requires different amount of pressure so touch is in support of the movement. For example, at the moment I am lifting someone binding is usually the most useful way to engage with my partner.

## Surfaces and body parts touching

There is an infinite combination of how the body parts can touch each other. Each combination creates different movement possibilities, it usually suggests a spectrum that my partner and I will move in between. For example, touching my partner's face with my hands will probably require a certain softness and a limit in how much weight can be shared, as the face is a sensitive, vulnerable part of the body. The skin of the hands is full of receptors therefore it can execute micro movements, so it might invite a soft quality of touch to appear.

I can identify between which body part I am in contact with without looking at it through sensing the surface of it. I can define it through sensing the quality of the skin, how hairy the area is, what is the shape of the surface is like. As I can sense all this, I am able to make useful predictions during dance, about how I can touch one body part, how much of my weight the touched part can bear without looking at the area touched. It is often useful, for instance, if I am touched on my back or on the lower part of my body.

## Muscle work and usage of the natural structure of the body

How muscles are used in movement is also an important information we can feel through touching one another. It gives an idea about what movement, what amount of weight my partner is prepared to receive and what kind of movement he or she would like to initiate. For example, before my partner wants to lift me, I usually feel his or her muscles become tense. By changing the muscle tone in touch, I can transform the speed, the dynamics and direction of the common movement too.

Using the structure of my body aligned with the work of my muscles is also an important aspect of moving together through touch. Depending on how much weight is shared through the point of touch I can organize my body in a way that the execution of a movement requires the most efficient muscle work so I can sustain moving longer. For example, even doing a small lift can be exhausting if I am not aware of how to organize my body efficiently and adapt to the present state of my partner's body. Managing efficiently helps keep my body healthy and can bring me to my highest performance of moving in cooperation.

# The presences helping the cooperation through touch

## Sensing and Action

I call sensing and action two ways of being present in touch. The time I spend in each of them need to be in balance during dance, in order to arrive to cooperation. Without paying attention to the sensory inputs generated by touch and movement in dance, in other words without taking time with sensing, I lack the security through which the presence of action could appear. As well if I am only giving time for sensing, action will not take place.

Both of the presences have their own function in supporting cooperation, moving together. Sensing is a necessary process to collect information about my environment i.e. my partner and the space I am in, so I can relate to them with trust. Trust later allows me to arrive at an active state where I can initiate changes in the common movement more spontaneously through touch. To arrive at any presence is a common creation of all of the partners dancing together, where one's initiation will inspire the others to shift into another presence together. It is important to use sensing as a conscious tool in dance, as it can bring my mind again and again into a state of discovery where I can open my attention to the present sensory inputs and by this open the space for new movement exploration. Usually in a dance there are phases of time in which sensing is proportionally more dominant. For example, the beginning of moving together is a phase where sensing is significant. As Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen describes the progression of a contact jam in general in her article: "Certainly if you get me out there, in the beginning there is no way that I 'm just going to respond because I don't know how to respond. I'm going to go very slowly and I'm going to want to feel every little part of my body and where it is and then at some point I'll just go and roll with it."<sup>6</sup> However, in my experience, this phase tends to return time to time for various reasons. For example, when I need time to digest

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen, B. B., Nelson, L., & Smith, N. S. (1993). *Sensing, feeling and action: The experiential anatomy of body-mind centering*. Northampton, Ma: Contact Editions. pp. 65

what happened, or I want to initiate movements which I am not sure my partners can cope with or I want to be more attentive and explore how my partner moves so it can open new possibilities for me in the way I relate to my partner.

Action usually gets space after the phases of sensing, when I have enough experience with my partner to feel secure in proposing action more actively and let sensing withdraw to the background of my attention. How Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen continues her description about Contact Jams, she shares a similar experience: “You see them break out of sensing, and they simply are acting. ... You only see it with people who feel secure, who’ve sensed enough to know they can let senses go.”<sup>7</sup> By that time I already have to trust myself that through the sensory impulses I established a way of giving responses in a way that I keep my body coordinated, safe and in relation with the impulses of my partner. As time passes actions get to a different stage of physicality, movements can vary on a wider spectrum of complexity and common action becomes more and more spontaneous. The movers can dedicate themselves more and more after each phase of sensing to action without bigger preparation for the movement. Actions have their ground to grow in. As Steve Paxton says, when he talks about the improvisation of Nancy Stark Smith and Curt Siddall in the film *Fall after Newton*: “They were not so adventurous four years earlier. In this first performance of Contact Improvisation, they were getting used to moving by touch. By feeling their way, they brought back clues about the form and about themselves and their perceptions.”<sup>8</sup>

Basically, trust forming toward myself by the passing of time in dance liberates my connection with my partner, as well as my partner’s trust in him or herself does. That is the empowerment process in dancing: entering action through sensing and sensing through action.

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<sup>7</sup> Cohen, B. B., Nelson, L., & Smith, N. S. (1993). *Sensing, feeling, and action: The experiential anatomy of body-mind centering*. Northampton: Contact Editions. pp. 65

<sup>8</sup> Paxton, S., (1988), 'Fall after Newton Transcript', *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 13., (No. 3), pp.38

## Tasks for sensing

### **Observing the motion of breath**

#### Goal of the task

This task aims to sharpen the attention of sensing through bringing the attention of the expanding and withdrawing motion of breath. In my idea through observing each other's breath through touching the most extremely moving part of the body, one gets the possibility to tune on his or her own breath and through it learn to observe a motion through touch. As the movement is repetitive I can deepen into its observation better. Breath in my experience also effects the way I move, therefore by observing other's breath through touch I also tune on my partner's source of movement. I can attain the ability to observe movement through breath later in dance.

#### Instructions:

0. Do the following exercise in pairs.
1. Lie down on the floor, away from each other in a constructive rest position. - Knees pulled up, feet close to the sit bones, the area of the sacrum and the lower back is releasing into to floor, the whole upper body is lengthening along the spine. - Let the weight drop into the floor, through the surfaces that are in touch with floor.
2. Release every body part even more, by focusing your attention on each other, starting from the feet up to the head.
3. Start to observe the motion of your breath.
4. Slowly place your hands on the surface, which your breath is mobilizing the most and observe this motion through the touch.
5. After a while start changing the position of your hands.
6. Slowly take your hands back to the floor, on your side.
7. Slowly one of the partners sits on the side of the other who is still resting in the position of constructive rest.

8. The one who is sitting, place your hands on your partner's body where the motion of breath is most visible.

9. Just observe the breath of the one on the floor through the point of touch- The one on the floor, bring your attention to the points of touch and observe the motion of your breath through these points.

10. The one sitting, after you feel you spent enough time on one position with your hands, start to change the position of them.

11. The one sitting, start to change the position of your hands quicker, see which motion helps the most at the moment to observe breath. You can slide your hands, take longer or shorter breaks in moving.

12. The one on the floor, stay with your attention in the observation of your breath through the offered points of touch.

13. After experimenting slowly, the one offering touches withdraws.

14. Take a few breathes, without being in touch, observe the sensations inside your body, observe your breath.

15. Slowly change roles.

### **Observing the shift of the pelvis<sup>9</sup>**

#### Goal of the task:

In this task one can improve the ability to follow the changes of direction and dynamics of his or her partner through the point of touch: It gives the possibility to the one following to learn to organize his or her body in a way that he is capable of following and can react to the changes of movement. As the one who is proposing movement is in a movement repetition, the following has the comfort to only sense the changes of direction and dynamics. The one who is proposing movement is also challenged to experiment about how far he or she can go with initiation that the other can still follow him or her.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on the exercise of Tamás Bakó and developed further by Márton Debreczenyi, I did the original exercise in the bachelor program of dance in Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, during the workshop held on the 16th of January, 2019

### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. One of you stand behind the other, with your front facing the other's back. The one behind place your hands on the pelvis of the other.
3. The one touching just let your hands rest on the surfaces where you touch the other's body and both of you observe and breath into these surfaces.
4. The one in front start slowly shifting your weight from one leg to the other through the bending of your knees. Establish this repetitive motion, observe your pelvis moving through the touch.
5. The one touching, observe the movements you are doing in order to sustain the point of touch.
6. The one who is being touched slowly start to move more in space. Feel free to change the speed, the dynamics, the direction of your movement.
7. The one touching follow your partner's initiation by relying on the information provided through the points of touch.
8. How you move together you can also change the points you touch the other's pelvis.
9. Slowly try to get rid of the idea who is initiating or who is following just enjoy this little dance you share within the frame of this repetition.
10. Slowly find an end to your dance, take your hands away from your partner's body.
11. Switch roles and do the same sequence again.
12. As you reach to point "9" after the change, start to switch around freely who is touching and who is being touched. Continue your dance like this and then slowly find the end together.

### **Fall of the head**

### Goal of the task:



The aim of this task is to give an experience of how one can sense and through it learn to cope with his or her partner's falling weight in dance. I chose to work with the head because it is a relatively small body part compared to how much it weights and it mobilizes the whole body easily once it is falling with gravity.

Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. One of you hold your partners head between your hands and the other one, try to relax your head into your partner's hands.
3. The one touching, after some time start to let go of your partner's head for a few seconds so it can start to fall. The other one, realize the direction where your head is falling naturally and let the fall happen.
4. The one touching only let go the head for a few seconds and as it starts falling hold it again and help your partner through touch to come back to standing.
5. The one receiving touch, as you trust more in your partner that he or she will catch your head, abandon your head into the fall even more.
6. Change roles.

## Tasks for action

### **Falling and catching**

#### Goal of the task:

This task challenges to catch one of the partners falling body by the other offering a surface of his or her body. The task enhances activity, and the possibility of reacting suddenly, through reflexes to the other's action. One can learn to organise his or her body for receiving weight.

#### Instructions:

1. Find a partner for the following exercise.
2. Stand close to each other in the space without touching yet.
3. Observe each other's bodies.
4. One of you start playing with little falls to any direction and then recover from the fall on your own. The other just witness your partner's motion.
5. First, move with the direction of the fall and imagine how you could offer surfaces for receiving and gradually stopping your partner's falling weight.
6. Start offering surfaces of your body. Play with which surface you catch the fall with. After each fall return to standing together.
7. After experimenting close your eyes and see if the motion of the falls are still present as sensations in your bodies.
8. Change roles.

### **Balancing situation of leaning**

#### Goal of the task:

In this exercise due to the balancing position, the dancing partners are constantly alert to every little shift of weight in order to sustain the position. Here the active state is present

because of the need of constant adjustment to each other. Through this exercise one can learn how to actively reorganize his or her body according to the possibilities of the present situation.

Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. Stand side to side next to each other that the side of your bodies are in touch. Place your arm which is next to your partner around his or her shoulder.
3. Start lifting each other by leaning with a straight axis (take the line of the spine as axis) to the opposite direction than where your sides are meeting. Use the legs to support the lift as the elongation of the side of your torso.
4. Shift from one side to the other, once one is lifting and then the other.
5. Start to travel with this movement in space, while keeping the touch. Be attentive to how the point of touch informs you about when are you going to be lifted and how you have to adjust with your body so the lift happens.

**Surfacing the body**

Goal of the task:

In this task the evolvement of the ability of following one's improvisation, being able to recognise his or her movements through the point of touch is in focus. The point of touch is sliding on the layer of the skin, so one can discover and collect sensory information from the biggest area of the other's body and relate through this information to his or her partner. This task is connecting the presence of sensing directly to action, putting the emphasis on actively getting involved with the movement of the other's body, getting inspired to initiate action through it.

Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.

2. One of you, start improvising freely. Be conscious about the body parts which are in contact with the floor and observe how these points of touch orientate your movement in space.
3. The other one, slowly get in touch with your partner with any of your body parts. Keep your touch sliding on your partner's body surface.
4. The one who is touching, keep the sliding motion and play with the dynamics of the slide. Become aware how this helps both of you to orientate toward each other and how the connection with the floor helps the orientation in space. The one giving the monitoring, sliding touch, also become aware what kind of motion is created in your body through touching your partner.
5. Find a common end and change roles.

## Receiving and Giving

I can be present in touch through receiving or giving more dominantly according to which of these presences is more useful for the action I am involved. Both of them are simultaneously present all the time, but usually I am more actively present in one of them than the other. I feel it important to write about these two presences separately, because I had many experiences in dancing when I was stuck in one of them mainly, which limited my possibility of cooperation, of connecting to my partner in dance.

What I call receiving is when I am mostly being attentive to the movements of my partner's body through the point of touch. Whereas, when I am present through giving, I mainly pay attention to the movement of my own body. Here touch becomes a self-reference point.

In my experience in dancing I shift between these presences, depending on which supports more the process of cooperation that I am in. For example, when I give a new direction to my partner's body by pushing his shoulder with my palm, I may focus more on observing the movement of my body through touch, so I am in the presence of giving. To take another example, when I lift someone by offering the surface of my back by bending forward with my upper body, so that my partner can balance on it, after the moment of initiation, I will most likely choose the focus of receiving. I need to focus on the sensory inputs informing me about the placement, movement, direction of the weight of my partner's body in order to keep him or her balanced on my back, to be able to adjust to one another.

I find it very important to acknowledge these two presences as separate because once I am able to recognize my and my partner's moving body in touch one by one, it brings me the calmness of being able to follow the effect of my movements in the common action. By being present in the actions as in ones, coming from separate identities, will later give me the freedom to get rid of this distinction and be present in the actions without wanting to know the root of their initiation. Maria Raluca Popa and Penelope A. Best refer to their experience of being able to adjust their actions to each other through touch by the word attunement. They explain their experience in the following way: „The parts of our bodies that were touching were extremely sensitive, extremely vulnerable and extremely communicative. The attunement happened by an exchange of information at skin level. I precisely knew in which direction we are moving and what the next step always was due to this exchange at the level of the connected

skin.”<sup>10</sup> In my experience through the attunement, I attain a sense of clarity, where the movements do not appear as noises next to each other, but they are linked to one another, they truly become a common action.

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<sup>10</sup> Raluca Popa, M., & Penelope A. Best (2010): 'Making sense of touch in dance movement therapy: A trainee's perspective', *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy: An International Journal for Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 5, (No.1), pp.38

## Tasks for receiving

### **Surfing**

#### Goal of the task:

My aim is to create a situation where one has to pay attention to his or her partner's movements in order to keep up a fixed position. In this task, the active balancing and the responsiveness to one of the partner's initiations brings the participants to enter the presence of receiving. The presence of giving is also there at the moments of initiations, which helps then to enter into the presence of receiving in order to keep the balancing position.

#### Instructions:

16. Do the following exercise in pairs.
17. One of you go to an all four position, or table position. Your knees, shin bones, the top of your feet and your palms are on the floor. The line of the arms and the upper legs are perpendicular to the floor. The other slowly place yourself on top of your partner's back with your back.
18. Find the balance together. Don't use your hands for keeping your balance!
19. Sense into the points that are touching, sense which are the parts of your body sharing the most of the weight. Observe these points and breath into them.
20. Through observing these points spread your attention into your partner's body. Sense how each of his or her movements moves you as well.
21. When the balance is firm and you are able to feel into your partner's body too, initiate little movements in this balancing position. Any one of you can initiate.
22. When you initiate observe every time the waves of reactions in order to keep the balance of the one on top. It is your common goal now.
23. After going into the slow movement exploration find a common stop. Once again release into each other's body through the whole surface of your backs and change roles.

## **Sudden meetings**

### Goal of the task:

One of the partners, receives quick touches, which he or she cannot predict as he or she is with eyes closed. Through this, the one receiving is challenged to be alert to the impulses coming through the skin and receive the most information possible in a really short time through touch. The shortness of touches creates the alertness and active presence of receiving this task aims to create.

### Instructions:

2. Do the following exercise in pairs.
3. Find a spot in the room where you feel comfortable and one of you close your eyes. The other one, observe your partner's body, see all the possible surfaces that can be touched.
4. The one standing with eyes closed bring your attention to your feet and from down to up scan your whole body. Spend a few seconds at each body part and breath into them.
5. The one observing with eyes open, start to touch your partner. Each touch is no longer held than one or two seconds.
6. The one with closed eyes, sense your body parts touched and try to sense the movement of your partner.
7. After a while, the one who is with eyes closed, start to move toward the direction of the touch received. Meanwhile try to picture your partner's moving body, imagine him or her in space moving around you.
8. The one who is actively touching, play with which body part you touch and how frequent your touch.
9. After a while start to gradually decrease the frequency of the touches and stop. Both of you can stay with closed eyes for a bit. Meanwhile observe how the touches you shared are present in your bodies and then change roles.





## Tasks for giving

### **Rolling the mass**

#### Goal of the task:

The aim of this task is to put one in a more active role than the other, where he or she is actively moving his partner. The one who is more active have the possibility to focus on the attention of giving, by mostly concentrating on what he or she does, observe his capability of effecting the other. see how he can bring the other's body into motion.

#### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. One of you lie down on the floor and relax your body, let your weight flow into the floor through the surfaces you are in touch with it.
3. The other one, find a position next to your partner and observe his or her body.
4. Start rolling your partner to one direction with the help of any of your body parts, while the one on the floor relax your muscles fully.
5. The one rolling your partner, play with the strength of your push, with which of your body part you are pushing with and which body part of your partner. Keep observing your body and its activity through the point of touch. Observe how your body is getting involved in each of your action, how you use your body structure to support your movement, how much work you do with your muscles.
6. The one rolling the other, start playing with pulling or pushing while gradually moving toward one direction in the space.
7. The one on the floor, observe how through the point of touch your body is effected, observe the motion and the work of your partner's body.
8. The one on the floor, start to change in between allowing to be pushed and pulled with totally relaxed muscles or resist to the direction of the touch. Resist in a way that your partner can still move you, but your muscle tone is different.
9. Change roles.

## **Throwing the limbs**

### Goal of the task:

The aim of the task is to bring one of the participants into an active position where he or she just needs to take action while the other is there to observe how he or she is moved. The one who is in the more active role is mainly giving impulses to the others body by bring his or her limbs into motion. Limbs are also parts of the body which are easy to reach out for and mobilize as well as they are often the body parts which are the most common participants of doing something through the body. For this reason, it is beneficial to experience the focus of giving and the other receiving through the limbs, bringing awareness to the area which is naturally in a giving and receiving action a lot.

### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. Stand close to each other and take a moment to bring your attention to your limbs one by one and relax them. Take your attention to your left arm, right arm, left leg, right leg.
3. One of you, start giving impulses to your partner's limbs with your limbs and see how you can bring them into movement.
4. The one who is giving impulses observe that in order to give a certain motion to your partner's limbs your limbs are getting into motion as well. Observe your bodies moving together.
5. The one receiving the impulses, stay as relaxed as you can and sense how your limbs and through the limbs your whole body is being moved.
6. The one giving the impulses, think about that you want to throw the limbs of the other into space, away from his torso.
7. The one receiving, take each impulse you receive further, receive the impulses actively.
8. The one giving the impulses observe how your body is moving while giving the impulses, firstly sense your own body moving and notice the result of your movements on your partners body.
9. Go further together in the movement exploration in a way, that both of you can initiate and give impulses, with the idea of throwing the limbs of the other. When any of you is initiating to give an impulse observe your body while doing it.

10. Change roles.

## Choosing between the presences

The need for choosing between the presences I introduced (sensing, action, receiving, giving) arises from the intention of wanting to relate to my partner's action, to become capable of contributing to the common action through touch. Whichever presence I choose will define my possibilities in movement. Both my intention of moving and my partner's movements determine the presences, I am involved in touch through mainly, depending on which serves our cooperation.

I mainly used the material of Body-Mind Centering to understand how a sensory input is processed and how I respond to it. I would like to make a clear distinction between the terms of sensing and perception, as they refer to different stages of the cycle of receiving and responding to any sensory input. As Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen writes about those two terms in one of her articles: "Sensing is the more mechanical aspect, involving the stimulation of the sensory receptors and the sensory nerves. Perceiving is about one's relationship to the incoming information. We all have sense organs which are similar, but our perceptions are totally unique."<sup>11</sup> In order to be able to respond, I first have to receive the sensory input and then proceed to the stage of perception in which I compare the input with all my previous ones, so I can relate to the input. The stage of perception differs from making an interpretation of the sensory input received, it is more about relating to the input so I can give a bodily response to it.

Receiving and responding go in a cycle. The School of Body-Mind Centering calls it, The Perceptual Action- and Response Cycle<sup>12</sup>. In details it goes like this: "..., after the reception of the information (sensory aspect) there is the perceptual processing, which compares the new information with all the previous experiences and interprets the stimuli. Then there is a motor-planning phase, in which one organizes a motor response, and then there is the actual movement response itself. Finally, there is the sensory feedback, which provides information about what happened during the response and then our interpretation and feelings about what took place...".<sup>13</sup> When I am at the stage of

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<sup>11</sup> Cohen, B. B., Nelson, L., & Smith, N. S. (1993). *Sensing, feeling, and action: The experiential anatomy of body-mind centering*. Northampton: Contact Editions. pp. 114.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, B. B., Nelson, L., & Smith, N. S. (1993). *Sensing, feeling, and action: The experiential anatomy of body-mind centering*. Northampton: Contact Editions. pp. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, B. B., Nelson, L., & Smith, N. S. (1993). *Sensing, feeling, and action: The experiential anatomy of body-mind centering*. Northampton: Contact Editions. pp. 114.

perceptual processing and organizing my motor response, my bodily response, through the motor planning, I choose the presences that will support me the most in the cooperation. The chosen presences, however are already there at the stage of perceptual processing, are also the part of the motor response I give. They define the way how I respond and form the common action.

This cycle of processing an action and responding to it, shows one clearly the possibility to decisively relate to each action. I introduced the alternatives of presences that helped me to open new possibilities of cooperation, change my relation to my partner.

## Contact Improvisation

*I write about Contact Improvisation as it is a practice, in my opinion, where cooperating through the point of touch is one of the main principles that movement is organized around. The whole practice gives an amazing space to observe communication through touch. It is a practice where I can witness how touch unites the improvised movements of two or more people into a common dance. Defining Contact Improvisation through unwrapping its name, doesn't go far from the definition, that Contact Quarterly gives in their article, titled About Contact Improvisation: "The improvised dance form is based on the communication between two moving bodies that are in physical contact and their combined relationship to the physical laws that govern their motion—gravity, momentum, inertia."<sup>14</sup> The two fundamentals are: being in physical contact (in touch) and improvisation. Below I will write about its history briefly to introduce its basic questions which the practice is investigating. Then in the second part I will focus on how touch is present in Contact Improvisation, how it organizes the movement.*

### Brief history

Contact Improvisation is a constantly changing, evolving movement practice which journey started in 1972 based upon the research of Steve Paxton. Steve Paxton had background in various movement forms from martial arts to modern dance techniques.<sup>15</sup> He danced in the company of Merce Cunningham, who alongside with his collaborator John Cage had a big impact and was giving new perspectives constantly on the artistic

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<sup>14</sup> Koteen, D, and Smith, N. S. (2008), 'About Contact Improvisation', *Contact Quarterly*, pp.1., Available at: <https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/index.php#definitions>, (accessed: 15/02/19)

<sup>15</sup> Koteen, D, and Smith, N. S. (2008), 'About Contact Improvisation', *Contact Quarterly*, pp.1., Available at: <https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/index.php#definitions>, (accessed: 15/02/19)

thinking. Later on, Steve Paxton was part of a group known as Grand Union, which was a continuation of a project proposal of a composition class led by Robert Ellis Dunn. He proposed to the students to rethink fundamental questions like these: “What kind of movement can be in a dance? Where does a performance take place? Where does the audience watch from? What kind of lighting or sound situation is involved? He encouraged them to try new things.”<sup>16</sup> From these questions Steve Paxton also started his journey of finding new ways of moving. He was deeply influenced by eastern philosophies and practices in his research. He practiced yoga, tai chi, aikido and meditation. With all the affects he received, he started his journey to open up the term that dance referred to, such as John Cage did with music. He started researching with students of Oberlin College, where he would offer morning classes, he called the “Soft class” and afternoon classes that only men could participate. There he would try to integrate and experiment what he would learn in all the eastern practices, like aikido or meditation. He was inspired by their physical and mental training too. Through the training he aimed to open the new possibilities for sensing and being present in the body while moving and simultaneously he brought new ways of moving into the canon of dance. As Ferenc Kálmán remembers back to his conversation with Steve Paxton, during a workshop held in Budapest in 1988<sup>17</sup>: “Through Contact Improvisation Steve Paxton researched how the movements coming from the survival instinct present in aikido can be used in dance as well. How the body reacts to unpredictable situations of falling, receiving another body’s weight without preparation and so on. “. <sup>18</sup> Putting the dancers into situations where they had to react from their reflexes to the information, they gained through the touch was the base of the research. Steve first presented his ideas to the public in his piece called Magnesium with the students of Oberlin College. As Nancy Stark Smith, a later collaborator of Steve Paxton, remembers back on the performance: “ The men began by standing still and then started to fall off balance—falling through the space, spilling onto the mat, rolling, getting up, with little soft collisions, slides, falls — staggering around the space like they were drunk or something, a beautiful fountaining

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<sup>16</sup>Smith, N. S., (2006), 'One History of Contact Improvisation', *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 31., (No.2.), pp. 1-8.

<sup>17</sup> Péter, P., (2019), '1983-1992 Vendégtanárok kurzusai', Budapest Tánciskola Archivum, pp. 1, Available at: <http://archivum.tanc.org.hu/index.php/2019/02/05/vendegtanarok-kurzusai-1983-1995/>, (accessed: 28/04/19)

<sup>18</sup> Ferenc Kálmán, conversation during the consultation of the thesis, titled: Communication through Touch, Budapest, 10/03/ 19

of men, for maybe ten minutes, and then they finished with more standing.”<sup>19</sup> From that on Steve Paxton continued his research inviting different people to work with him. He would continue training through the guidelines of eastern practices and observing the results. Nancy Stark Smith remembers to the training like this: “Another thing we practiced: one person stands toward the back of the mat and everybody in turn runs and throws themselves at this person, who would try to catch them and somehow manage the weight. This usually meant going down to the floor together and rolling out of it.”<sup>20</sup> Through the research slowly some important principles emerged, which were improvising and being in contact during moving. The form of dancing duets started to be more and more important. Steve Paxton and his partners in the research, tried to explore all the movement possibilities that could be created through improvising while being in touch. They were experimenting with lifting, rolling, jumping on each other and with many other things. Through witnessing each other dancing and actively participating, they established a knowledge of how to train the body and the mind to be capable of responding to the sensory inputs of touch.<sup>21</sup> A movement practice started to appear which didn’t offer forms, but principles and skills for moving.

During the series of researches and tours in the United States for sharing the practice a regular group of people lined out, which later gathered into a company, called Reunion (Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, Curt Siddall, Nita Little). As Contact Improvisation wasn’t under the copyright of Steve Paxton, on purpose, it started to spread rapidly. “The nature of this form is that you need a partner to do it, and I think this is one of the most important reasons it has spread. ... Steve did not stop people from doing that—he didn’t say, “No, you have to get it from me.” So, many of us tried to share it, to create partners so we could continue to dance. And it started to grow.”<sup>22</sup> Many people experimented with the principles they could learn during attending one of the performances. or workshops. It started to be for different purposes: in choreographies,

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, N. S., (2006), ‘One History of Contact Improvisation’, *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 31., (No.2.), pp.1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, N. S., (2006), ‘One History of Contact Improvisation’, *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 31., (No.2.), pp. 1-8.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, N. S., (2006), ‘One History of Contact Improvisation’, *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 31., (No.2.), pp. 1-8..

<sup>22</sup> Smith, N. S., (2006), ‘One History of Contact Improvisation’, *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 31., (No.2.), pp. 1-8.



social dances, dance therapy. As it was applied by a lot of different people with different goals, Contact Improvisation integrated elements of other researches and practices. One of them which is often used and combined with Contact Improvisation is Body-Mind Centering, the somatic practice established by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen.

## Touch in Contact Improvisation

In my experience whenever I step into the space where people are practicing Contact Improvisation, I have the need to establish an attention where I am more aware of the sensory inputs coming through the skin. The skin is the surface that touch is arriving through. It is the place where I can receive all the sensory information I need, in order to navigate myself in space and in relation to my partner. It is also the surface I can express and react to the incoming inputs.

The awareness of the sensory inputs coming through touch is essential in being able to relate to my environment. As Steve Paxton writes about it:” The soft skin is alert to the points of contact, signals telling the dancers where they are, orienting them to their partner and the floor.”<sup>23</sup> While dancing Contact Improvisation, however I need to be aware of the information arriving through all my senses, the point of touch is the place through which all the motion between the movers is being exchanged. Through this point, I am able to form and contribute into the common action. It is the point which through I can effect my partner. Considering all this my movements are organized by the intention of wanting to cooperate through the point of touch, the body parts where I touch are the most active. Every movement I initiate is directed toward the points of touch.

Another important way how touch effects movement in general in Contact Improvisation is coming in consequence of the weight shared through touch. It creates a situation in dance where I constantly have to adjust my body in the way that it can treat my partner’s weight. This action of adjustment, will define the way I can move as I always have to counterbalance my partner. It brings a constant physical closeness, so I am able to handle the changes of direction and speed of my partner’s falling weight the quickest.

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<sup>23</sup> Paxton, S., (1988), 'Fall after Newton Transcript', *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 13., (No. 3), pp.38-39

The alertness of the skin layer and the skin as the primal organ that inspires my movement also defines the way I move. In my experience when I concentrate on my skin in dance my movements attain a softness as I am always careful and attentive to what I can get in touch with. I don't often do sharp, explosive movements, so in case I get in touch with someone or something I am able to receive it and not just crash against it. Ann Cooper Albright also points out the importance of moving with the alert attention to the skin layer: "Only once they sense the responsiveness of their own skin, are my students ready to work with a partner and feel their weight shifting back and forth between two people."<sup>24</sup>

Another important role of touch in Contact Improvisation is how it changes the way I relate to the sensory inputs received. As my attention is focused on the sensation of touch, I tend to leave the idea of wanting to understand my present experience through thinking but instead letting my body to react, feel the sensation evoked by each movement. Being present in the sensations, rather than thinking about what is happening is extremely important in situations when any aspect (speed, direction, dynamics) of my or my partner's movement changes. A situation like this can be falling for instance, which appears frequently as the bodies are leaning against, moving upon each other. Small dance is a practice in Contact Improvisation, which helps to silence the mind so it can be focused on the movements of the body and the sensory inputs received. Steve Paxton explains the impact of small dance in the following way: "The calmness of standing is extended into the fall. There are hazards. One of them is thinking ahead. What the body can do to survive is much faster than thought."<sup>25</sup>

Touch also works as the harmonizer of the forces and initiations which appear in a dance. The touch always gives something and also takes away from my movement initiation so it can be in harmony with my partner's. Therefore, I see the point of touch also as a space of transformation, where I alternate my movements in a way that it will join into my partner's movements rather than distract, unless it is my goal. I would like to quote Steve Paxton, how he writes about touch as the harmonizer of actions: "Human touch unites the forces which act upon the body with the sensations they provoke within

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<sup>24</sup> Brandstetter, G., Egert, G., Zubarik, S., (2013), *Touching and Being Touched: Kinesthesia and Emphaty in Dance and Movement*, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 263-275.

<sup>25</sup> Paxton, S., (1988), 'Fall after Newton Transcript', *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 13., (No. 3), pp.38-39.

the body. This interaction makes it possible to keep all the parts of both their bodies harmonizing.”<sup>26</sup>.

I see Contact Improvisation as a space of practicing this communication and cooperation through touch alongside other skills. While in daily life these situations are scattered and usually treated with less significance, there these experiences are concentratedly present. Through practicing Contact Improvisation, I can eventually gain the experiences which will support the acknowledgement of this communicational domain in more and more situations of life. Treating it as another tool to engage with what is going on inside the self and around.

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<sup>26</sup>Paxton, S., (1988), 'Fall after Newton Transcript', *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 13., (No. 3), pp.38-39.

## Cooperation through touch

### Cooperation and the “third mind

Creating cooperation through the point of touch can happen when I have the tools to use the sense of touch as a bridge between myself and my environment i.e. my partner. Touch becomes a common space where transition of information can happen and can unite each of the dancers actions into a common action. In order that the unification can happen, all of the participants have to step into the act of cooperation, which is to have the intention to relate to one another.

In my point of view one of the initial state of cooperation is when someone has something to share with the external world and he or she finds the tool of the expression that makes the information relatable for others too. The next step is when the others show interest to relate to the information shared. When the intention of putting myself in relation to someone else happens and the other one also does so, the common action will naturally appear as the fruit of relating. Often the common action is driven by rules that are either there to initiate the common action or are appearing during the process and are applied by the participants or are just framing the process of the common activity without becoming the initial principle of it.

In the cooperation process I am introducing, touch changes and frames the communicational space. Taking touch as the basic rule of my cooperation sets totally different circumstances for sharing information. As soon as I get in touch with someone, I immediately put myself into a strong bodily relation with the other. Through touch the fundamental condition of cooperation, to relate to one another is present. I cannot touch someone without the other touching me as well, whereas I can look at someone without the other noticing me. The subject who is touching is also touched by the object he or she is reaching toward.<sup>27</sup> Touch also brings the partners into a vulnerable relation, in other words, however I react to an action it is reflected in my body and my partner can sense it immediately. As Manning refers to the state of vulnerability that touch creates:” To touch

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<sup>27</sup> Raluca Popa, M., & Penelope A. Best (2010): 'Making sense of touch in dance movement therapy: A trainee's perspective', *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy: An International Journal for Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 5, (No.1), pp.31-44.

entails acknowledging the risks associated with the unknown toward whom I reach when I touch.”<sup>28</sup> It does not matter whether he or she can rationally understand what I am going through, but through touch I am immediately affecting my partner and he does also. This creates a possibility of receiving and giving information simultaneously. Seeing these two aspects, touch appears to me as an action that establishes a communicational space where the intention of cooperation is incorporated.

I can cooperate with someone in a way that I clearly make a distinction between myself and the one that I am in cooperation with: I can still perceive myself as a separate identity. Another stage of cooperation, in my experience touch can create, is when I lose the clear distinction between myself and the one I cooperate with by getting involved in our common action fully with my attention. Here our process of creating together evokes the perception that I am one with a seemingly other identity. In Contact Improvisation there is a term that refers to this experience of cooperating through touch, it’s called the “third mind”<sup>29</sup>. Within the practice of Contact Improvisation the third mind is placed in the point of touch, which is the symbolic space of common action. Due to the fact that skin is often perceived as the boundary of the self, getting information through the skin and the cooperation through touch can also liberate the tension of this territorial approach to the body. The realizing of this approach to the body is the fundament of living the experience of the “third mind”. As Ann Cooper Albright gives an exercise for this process: She guides her students attention to the pores of their skin and let them experience how through the pores, the weight shared with their partner is pouring into the other’s body. In my opinion this exercise proposes an image about how the skin can turn into the surface of relating rather than separating myself from the world. Through this somatic awareness of using skin for connecting and extending myself into the external, the external space can become internal.<sup>30</sup> Creating a common action together through touch internalizes the outer world, as the action itself, which is mostly linked to the subject doing it, no longer belongs to one identity, it is the treasure of the common space, of the third-mind. Matthew Ratcliffe also writes that touch is an interpersonal medium, which

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<sup>28</sup> Manning, E. (2007). *Politics of touch: Sense, movement, sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press pp. 135.

<sup>29</sup> Brandstetter, G., Egert, G., Zubarik, S., (2013), *Touching and Being Touched: Kinesthesia and Emphaty in Dance and Movement*, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 263-275

<sup>30</sup> Brandstetter, G., Egert, G., Zubarik, S., (2013), *Touching and Being Touched: Kinesthesia and Emphaty in Dance and Movement*, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 263-275.

makes us feel that we belong. It unites, in his words, melts together the subject with what he or she is perceiving.<sup>31</sup> The other is not an object of my perception, he or she is one with the subject of the experience I identify with.

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<sup>31</sup> Ratcliffe, M., (2012), 'What is Touch?', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.90., (No. 3), pp. 413-432.

## Trigger words of cooperation through touch

### What are these?

The trigger words name seven different ways of cooperation through touch. I have categorized experiences of mine in contact jams, while practicing couple dances or any other situation which involved touch. However, I think there are more possible ways of cooperating than I have listed, coming from everyone's personal and interpersonal experiences.

One of my goals by doing this categorization is to raise awareness about how many different ways of cooperation can take place, depending on what physical intention one enters the cooperation with. The awareness one cooperates can be created by practicing the ways of cooperation that the trigger words refer to and see how each can evolve an inner experience of cooperation. To observe which trigger word evokes something comfortable to be with and can bring us to the state of cooperation and which are the ones someone has to unwrap through a period of practice in order to have it as an inner experience. Above all, through practicing them one can become conscious also about their own patterns of entering into cooperation.

Another purpose of condensing my experiences into trigger words is to give myself tools I can rely on in a dance which through I can easily recall experiences of cooperation. In order to give these words meaning to others, too, I am going to provide a short description and a task which helps one to attain his or her own experiences of each trigger word.

### Trigger words

#### ***Following:***

*Following* is when one of the dancers moves with the direction and dynamics which their partner proposes through touch. In the point of touch there is the same amount of pressure shared which was present at the initiation of the movement.

#### ***Resistance:***

*Resistance* is when one of the dancers opposes to the direction which his or her partner moves toward and through this transforms the dynamics of the common movement. The

one *resisting* can vary his level of *resistance* on a wide scale: from trying to stop the movement of his partner to giving the minimal opposing force as possible, before the cooperation would transform into *Following*.

**Initiation:**

*Initiation* is when the dancers are in an action with a given amount of weight and direction shared through the point of touch and one of them decides to change the extent of any of these elements. Considering this I could call a moment of *Initiation* a lot of moments in a dance, which would be right in my point of view. However, in order to narrow down the experiences involved, *Initiation* is when the body parts which are in touch change.

**Conclusion:**

*Conclusion* is the process when one of the partners decides to lead the common action toward letting go the point of touch and it lasts until the moment when the skin layers are no longer touching. *Conclusion* is the way of cooperation before or after *Initiation*.

**Supporting:**

*Supporting* is when one of the dancers recognizes the direction of his partner's movement and he changes the point of touch in order to give extra force to the most actively moving body part toward the direction it is moving from the initiation of the movement.

**Scanning:**

*Scanning* is when the aim of one dancer is to recognize the space his partner's body is occupying and his direction of moving by sliding his body part touching on the surface of his partner's body with minimal pressure.

**Invitation:**

*Invitation* is when one of the partners changes the position of his or her body part in order to offer another surface to his or her partner where they can get in touch.



## Tasks for deepening the trigger words

### **Following**

#### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. Both of you open your arms to the level of your shoulders, bend your elbows and create with your arms a half circle where your partner can fit in.
3. One of you stand in front of the other facing him or her with your back and fit into the space offered by his open arms, while keeping your arms open too.
4. Feel free to relax the arms if they get tired during the following instructions and then return to the shape described before.
5. Start moving together in space, while keeping the form explained above. The back of the one in front and the front of one in the back are gently touching without sharing big amount of weight.
6. There are no roles of leader and follower, your goal is to move together.
7. Vary the speed, direction of your movements. The arms can also change position.
8. Change positions.

### **Resistance**

#### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. Both of you go on the floor in an all four position. Your knees, shin bones, the top of your feet and your palms are on the floor. The line of the arms and the upper legs are perpendicular to the floor. Your heads are facing toward each other. Place your head to the other's neck and shoulder.
3. Start moving in space while keeping this position. Concentrate on pushing the other or resisting to the other's push.
4. Play with how much resistance you give. Do you stop the movement of the other fully or you resist in a way, that the other can keep moving.

### **Initiation**

#### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.

2. Stand facing each other.
3. One of you touch one body part of your partner move while keeping this point of touch for a few seconds, then the other one of you offer a new point of touch. Keep changing like this. Always the body parts touching lead the movement.

## **Conclusion**

### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. Stand facing each other. One of you put your palms softly on your partners chest or shoulders, the other one feel into the point of touch.
3. Decide together how much weight you share through touch.
4. Start walking to the direction where the one who is being touched is facing. Walk slowly and continuously.
5. While you are walking, the one touching gradually let go of the touch by sharing less and less weight through it.
6. Go a few rounds and vary the length of letting go of the point of touch.
7. Change roles.

## **Supporting**

### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise in pairs.
2. One of you, start to run in the space and freely change speed and direction. The other one of you, run with your partner.
3. The one following, time to time with any of your body parts push or pull your partner into the direction he or she is moving to, giving extra force for his or her action.
4. The one running, run as fast as your partner can run with you and give extra force to you on top.
5. Change roles.

## **Scanning**

### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise with a partner.
2. One of you, start to turn continuously and slowly on the same spot.

3. The other one of you, use your hands to slide on your partner's body and explore as big surface of it as you can.
4. Both of you have the image in mind of the potter forming his pot on the throwing-wheel. The one turning is the pot and the other sliding hands is the potter.

### **Invitation**

#### Instructions:

1. Do the following exercise with a partner.
2. One of you take a wide second position where you are stable and offer body surfaces for your partner where he or she can lie on or hang from.
3. The other one of you discover the surfaces offered, as you do when you want to climb a tree, always checking how weight each body part can bear.
4. The one offering body parts, change the body parts offered, create new surface to your partner.
5. The one "climbing" the other, try different ways of engaging with the offered body parts: hanging on them from below, lying on them from above, leaning from the side, leaning away while holding one body part.
6. Change roles.

## Conclusion

When I started to look for my thesis topic, I asked myself the question: What do I love in dance? The simple answer came to my mind, that I love to be in touch with others. As I was recalling experiences of touch, like hug with one of my close friends, or touching during dancing, I realized that through touch I am able express myself and feel connected to anyone in a different way than usually. It crystalized that touch is another domain of communication, which I had many experiences in, but yet not a conscious understanding of it. During writing my thesis I investigated how touch changes my possibility to communicate and what are the conditions that allow me to deepen into this communication. I also recognized that communication through touch also offers a possibility to relate to each other's action and to be able to create common action together.

This recognition then became the focus of my thesis, that organized my writing. I started to understand what are the different presences that allow me to be involved in touch with my entire body, what helps me to receive and respond to the sensory inputs I gain. Afterwards I dedicated time to explore what are the physical aspects of touch that are important to be aware in order to cooperate. These physical aspects are formed through the ways I choose to be present in touch. I realized that Contact Improvisation is the movement practice that gave me most of my experience about cooperating with someone through touch. I dedicated a part of this chapter to write about where the whole research started from, what were the initial questions of it and how it resulted to be a practice where movements are organized by moving toward touch. Then I arrived to focus on cooperation, my central question, as I already introduced the ways one can establish the communicational circumstances where cooperation through touch can appear. I shared in this chapter about how cooperation can open and transform with what I identify with and can bring me the feeling of unity with my environment. I named this experience with one of the terms of Contact Improvisation, the "third mind". Then I gave examples of the ways I usually cooperate through touch. Through this awareness I opened the possibility to consciously change between these ways of cooperating in dance. I named these ways of cooperation by a trigger word, which helped me to recall each any time in dance. I wanted to give a practical side to my work, so when someone reads it, he or she can get an experience in communication and cooperation through touch through the exercises I created.

I feel my work fulfils the purpose to give the readers a possibility to get an own experience in what I write about, through integrating touch as a conscious tool in the way they can relate to their environment. The same learning process I went through during writing as I attained the awareness to use touch for relating to the world around. I feel through working on this thesis I opened many further possibilities of research, like how habitual emotional reactions can be overwritten by working through touch. This work is the initiation of future investigations and a reflection of what I observed so far. Until now I found many ways to explain what I experienced through touch and I also unfolded numerous conditions that allow me to be present in touch.

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