



SEZIONE III: ECOLOGIE DEI PROCESSI, ETNOGRAFIE DELLE PASSIONI

Re-tracing the encounter: interkinaesthetic forms of knowledge in Contact Improvisation

Sarah Pini – Doris J.F. McIlwain – John Sutton

Introduction

Contact Improvisation (CI) is a dance technique developed in the '70s in the United States by a group of dancers led by the choreographer Steve Paxton. It became one of the most well-known expressions of postmodern dance and art movement. As expression of postmodern ideologies, CI actively contributed to the transformation of the role of the choreographer who “was no longer that individual who had ‘the vision of what needs to be said’, but a doer, a knowing accomplice, a facilitator” (Sheets-Johnstone 1978: 198). A concise and inclusive description of CI is provided by Ray Chung, one of its current renowned facilitators in *Contact Quarterly*, the journal dedicated to this dance form: “Contact Improvisation is an open-ended exploration of the kinaesthetic possibilities of bodies moving through contact. Sometimes wild and athletic, sometimes quiet and meditative, it is a form open to all bodies and enquiring minds¹”. Contact Improvisation is a duet system-based practice that can also involve solos and group improvisation. The dancers can receive inputs from the music which is often played live during the jams and which is generally improvised as well. In the last decades CI has received increased attention crossing the walls of the dance studio, becoming an object of reflection for scholars in different academic fields, ranging from anthropology of dance (Novack 1990; Engelsrud 2007; Ramaswamy & Deslauriers 2014), performance studies (Goldman 2007; Turner 2010; Edinborough 2012) and dance history (Banes 1981) to phenomenology (Behnke 2003; Albright 2011) and cognitive science (Gibbs 2003; Torrents,

¹ Retrieved from «Contact Quarterly», Ray Chung workshop announcement, London 2009, in “About Contact Improvisation (CI)”, <https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/index.php> (Accessed on 11th July 2016). Another description of CI states that “Contact Improvisation is an evolving system of movement initiated in 1972 by American choreographer Steve Paxton. 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. The body, in order to open to these sensations, learns to release excess muscular tension and abandon a certain quality of willfulness to experience the natural flow of movement. Practice includes rolling, falling, being upside down, following a physical point of contact, supporting and giving weight to a partner.” (Steve Paxton and others, in «CQ» Vol. 5:1, Fall 1979 retrieved in “About Contact Improvisation (CI)”, <https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/index.php> - Accessed on 11th July 2016).



Castañer, Dinušová, & Anguera 2010; Merritt 2015). CI has gained widespread recognition: jams² and workshops as well as conferences and symposia are organised worldwide, both in the independent scene of the performative arts and in more institutionalised and traditional dance settings.

This work emerges from a larger interdisciplinary research project that addresses questions of consciousness and intelligence in action. Core issues in philosophy of action and sport psychology like embodied thinking, cognitive control, agency and expertise have been investigated focusing on different sports and skilled movement practices such as cricket (Sutton 2007), mountain bike racing (Christensen, Bicknell, McIlwain, Sutton 2015), yoga (McIlwain and Sutton 2014) and dance (Sutton 2005). The present study, addressing the lived experience of expert and novice practitioners of Contact Improvisation, has been particularly informed by a phenomenological approach and by notions of *carnal sociology* (Wacquant 2005), *thick participation* (Samudra 2008) and *somatic attention* (Csordas 1993). We anticipate extending the scope of this study into a comparative investigation of distinct dance and movement practices. This paper is a preliminary report on our background framework, and on initial interviews with CI practitioners.

Theoretical framework: the body as a tool for research

Directly engaging with the active practice of the forms of movement addressed by the academic discourse is an essential point for a vast array of ethnographic works grounded on Phenomenology (Downey 2005; Wacquant 2006; Samudra 2006; Ravn 2009). In discussing the relevance of conducting ethnography through practical apprenticeship as useful research method for entering specific communities of practice otherwise difficult to access, the anthropologists Downey, Dalidowicz and Mason have observed that “one of the great challenges to ethnographic fieldwork is the simple problem that ‘non-participating observer’ is not an appropriate role in some social settings” (Downey, Dalidowicz and Mason 2015: 186). They emphasized that often “apprenticeship

² [¶]Contact Improvisation jams are leaderless practice environments in which dancers practice the dance form with whoever gathers—friends or strangers, old, young, experienced, novice. Some jams take place in a studio for a few hours once a week. Longer retreat jams might last several days, sometimes held in hot springs resorts or other retreat locations where dancers can practice at any hour of the day in the studio/lodge” (Definition available at the section About CI on «Contact Quarterly», <https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/index.php> - Accessed on 11th July 2016).



settings are ideal contexts in which to gain entry into a community and provide a meaningful position for the researcher and the research agenda” (Downey et al. 2015: 186). In this respect we addressed issues of embodiment and kinaesthetic awareness by privileging the first person perspective and the direct experience of the authors themselves – in this case, the first author – into the kinaesthetic practice under investigation (compare Sutton 2007; McIlwain & Sutton 2014). In this respect we embraced the concept of *carnal sociology* proposed by Loïc Wacquant (2006) in which “the mindful *body of the analyst*” is treated “as a fount of social competency and an indispensable tool for research” (Wacquant 2005: 466). The author defines *carnal sociology* as “a general approach to social life because *all agents are embodied* and *all social life rests on a bedrock of visceral know-how* (Wacquant 2005: 467). The corporeal sociology of Wacquant emphasizes the physical dimension of the rendering of kinaesthetic knowledge and advocates a *visceral* approach to the interpretation of ethnographic material since “ethnographers are no different than the people they study: they are suffering beings of flesh and blood who, whether they acknowledge it or not, understand much of their topic ‘by body’ and then work, with varying degree of reflexive awareness and analytic success, to tap and translate what they have comprehended viscerally into the conceptual language of their scholarly discipline” (Wacquant 2005: 467).

In parallel with the problem of embodied knowledge’s translation into academic discourse, similarly addressed by Jaida Kim Samudra³ in the context of her ethnographical investigation of a Chinese Indonesian martial art (Samudra 2006), we also considered that participant involvement could benefit the study of embodied skills by helping to tap and express the *tacit knowledge* that characterizes much of the texture of embodied expertise (Sutton & McIlwain 2015: 102-103). In this respect we shared Samudra’s concerns about the problem of analyzing kinesthetic practices, since often “the usual methods of collecting data through linguistic and visual media may not suffice; even participation alone is no guarantee of success, for the researcher is still left with the problem of how to analyze newly acquired physical skills as a shared social experience” (Samudra 2008: 666), considering the intersubjective nature of bodily knowledge’s transmission (Samudra 2008: 667). In order to elaborate such expertise into a theoretical discourse, Samudra’s account suggests that the

³ According to Samudra “ethnography is culture written: the memory of the collective body must somehow be translated into the inherently discursive consciousness of scholarship” (Samudra 2008: 666).



researcher should pay more attention to his own embodied skills, that incorporate the collective process of knowledge's interchange, since "the communications of the body can be verified even when not encoded into language because they work in practice" (Samudra 2008: 667). Stemming from Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description"⁴ but rather than focusing on the interpretation of the social discourse, Samudra advances the idea of *thick participation* as suitable research modality to tackle the social dimension of shared experience. In her view, "thick participation is, thus, cultural knowledge recorded first in the anthropologist's body and only later externalized as visual or textual data for purposes of analysis" (Samudra 2008: 667). Our embodied approach to ethnography and knowledge's transmission has been influenced also by Thomas Csordas' understanding of embodiment and somatic modes of attention: as phenomenologist Philipa Rothfield has emphasized, "the concept of somatic attention signals lived corporeality as the manner by which one person engages with another" (Rothfield 2005: 48). Attention should be put as well on the ways a certain culture informs the physical body, perceptions and cognitive understandings of the researcher. Proceeding from Csordas' assumption that "embodied experience is the starting point for analyzing human participation in a cultural world" (Csordas 1993: 135), and acknowledging the direct involvement of the researcher in the process of enculturation related to the physical settings and practices of his inquiry, we considered engaged ethnographic research as an essential methodological instrument to address empirical sport science (Sutton & McIlwain 2015: 103), as well as studies informed by phenomenology.

Methodology: from "hired bodies" to relational selves

For this research we adopted a mixed-method approach that included participant observation, structured and semi-structured interviews and assessment of personality differences. In this paper we propose a preliminary analysis of a section of our interview material. The study is informed by the personal experience of Contact Improvisation of one of the authors (SP), and a multi-sited

⁴ Geertz elaborated his ethnographical approach to culture borrowing the concept of thick description from Gilbert Ryle: "From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, 'thick description' (Geertz 1973: 311–312)".



fieldwork (compare Ravn & Hansen 2013) was conducted for over a year among a diverse cluster of Contact Improvisers. SP joined classes, workshop and jam sessions that took place into three different locations, in the city of Sydney in Australia and in Italy in the cities of Bologna and Ferrara. Along with the ethnographer's active participation into the practice of the dancing subjects, we also point to a different set of past experiences, comparing SP's current phenomenological account with her previous kinaesthetic knowledge. SP's encounter with CI traces back several years to the time of her professional dance training in some renowned European dance companies. SP's first experience of CI was partially shaped by a conception of the body that dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster describes as the *hired body* (Foster 1997: 253). This concept refers to the professional dance training programs aimed at "producing" highly skilled dancers, talented in many different styles, from ballet to modern dance techniques, in which Contact Improvisation is received as one of many, in order to satisfy the requests of a multitude of different choreographic strategies characterizing contemporary professional dance panorama⁵. According to Foster this dancing body is "uncommitted to any specific aesthetic vision, it is a body for hire: it trains in order to make a living at dancing" (Foster 1997: 255). The tendency to conceive the body as an instrument to serve the art of dance conserved deeply rooted origins. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, discussing the cultural and aesthetic transformations in the history of modern dance, and referring to the point of view of one of its prominent pioneers, has emphasized that "as an instrument, there was no doubt but that the body was trained to serve: 'through all times'. Martha Graham has said, 'the acquiring of technique in dance has been for one purpose-so to train the body as to make possible any demand upon it by that inner self which has the vision of what needs to be said'⁶. The specialized education of the body was a life-time commitment to 'the vision of what needs to be said'" (Sheets-Johnstone 1978: 197). This conception of the body, as evinced by Foster, may conceal a threat, since the so-called "hired body, built at a great distance from the self, reduces it to a pragmatic merchant of

⁵ It is frequent to find Contact Improvisation, or constitutive elements of this dance form, enlisted in the training programs of well-established international professional dance schools and academies worldwide. Very often skills peculiar to CI are taught and practiced in a decontextualized setting, which doesn't necessarily include the historical, political and socio-cultural background that constitute this practice. The emphasis is mainly put on CI as a specific dance technique aimed at the improvement of improvisational and acrobatic skills that can primarily serve the purpose of creating professional dancers kinetically skilled in many different styles.

⁶ Sheets-Johnstone 1978: 197 cit. Martha Graham *A Modern Dancer's Primer for Action* in Selma Jeanne Cohen *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*, Dodd, Mead, New York.



movement proffering whatever look appeals at the moment. It not only denies the existence of a true, deep self, but also proscribes a relational self whose desire to empathize predominates over its need for display” (Foster 1997: 256).

On this premise SP in conducting this ethnography re-approached CI more independently, sometimes in settings imbued with radical cultural and political connotations. This latter experience with CI was characterized by a predominance of an attention towards the dancing *relational deep self* over its performative and aesthetic aspects. The opportunity to directly engage with a different dancing context is salient in relation to Downey and colleagues’ point about apprenticeship as ideal ethnographic method. These anthropologists underline how “observing apprenticeship demonstrates that, if we are not careful, our models of a shared skill or art — or other constructs like ‘habitus’, ‘tradition’, ‘embodied knowledge’ or even ‘culture’ — might conceal from us the incessant active learning processes of re-discovery, variation, innovation, inspiration, disciplining — even failure — through which individuals gain expertise and the community of practice continues through time even though practices themselves constantly vary” (Downey et al. 2015: 185). In Sydney SP took several classes conducted by choreographer Alejandro Rolandi and focused on exploring various technical skill and playful modalities of this dance form. The course took place at the Annandale Creative Arts Centre, a place that hosts an array of artistic initiatives supported by a local evangelical Church. In Italy SP attended a few jam sessions organized by the members of the C.Bo group, an open self-established community of CI practitioners based in Bologna which met mainly at T.P.O. (Occupied Polyvalent Theater), a squatted social center set up in the ‘90s, a shared space known as a meeting point for several cultural and political initiatives linked to social resistance, antifascism and antiracism. In Ferrara SP participated in a weekend-long workshop (Ferrara Contact) led by choreographer Manfredi Perego, an independent event annually organised on the occasion of the Buskers Festival⁷. During the period of the fieldwork SP had the chance to share personal accounts and experiences with a heterogeneous group of CI practitioners, ranging from complete novices who had never practised such techniques before that encounter, to expert dancers trained in this form of movement for several years and who are currently CI facilitators

⁷ The Ferrara Buskers Festival is an international music festival dedicated to the figure of the street artist, founded in 1988 with the aim of enhancing the role of street musicians and bringing together a great number of international artists.

teaching and conducting workshops around the world.

Through a few excerpts from our interviewees' personal accounts, we can highlight a series of frequent shared features through which bodily knowledge can be articulated by the practice of this dance form. After a few Jam sessions in Bologna in 2014 and 2015, SP questioned several participants about their personal motivations towards the practice of CI and the reasons for their interest. As Behnke pointed out, "in CI, no single 'choreographer' imposes the artistic form of a 'work' on the flow of movement; not only does the dance proceed in collaboration between and among participants, but the improvisational structure allows the emerging movement itself to guide the dancers" (Behnke 2003: 51).

One of CI's key features that recurred often across our interviewees was the lack of a *judgmental attitude* among its practitioners, partly due to the improvised character of the form and the absence of a pre-set choreography.



Fig. 1. Facilitator and participants practising duet movement exploration at Ferrara Contact Improvisation Workshop, 2014. Photo: Sarah Pini.



Davide: [CI] is a dance that doesn't necessarily require the knowledge of structures and techniques before it can be practiced: it can be approached by people who are not expert dancers but have a developed attentiveness and possess the ability to manage their own movements and the relationship of movement with the others (maybe learned from other contexts). Moreover, it seems to me a "horizontal" environment, where people with any level of experience are happy to dance together, and generally it is frequented by "modest" people, whom even when they're experienced, do not stress the fact that they are expert dancers nor use it [their expertise] to draw a separation of knowledge. In the first jam I attended I danced for 45 minutes with a Sardinian CI's teacher, without knowing it [that she was a teacher]. At the end she told me "it [the dance] was beautiful because with you I felt like I returned to the true CI: you don't know anything, but you were really into the mutual dance and into the music; often the people that have learned some techniques etc. lose spontaneity because they try to do what they know, inserting the will". I like the fact that you can practice this dance since the beginning and even better using only instinctual or natural knowledge, rather than learned through techniques, steps, and classes. Obviously after this first encounter my goal was to learn more, trying to maintain the instinctual approach to inner listening. I guess I would define it a *welcoming* dance. Another aspect that I am interested in is that it seems based on a natural approach between the people, without superstructures: everything is based on the relationship, on the ability to take the weight, on the beauty of the encounter, on feeling the other and eventually also the music. It is a medium of non-verbal interpersonal communication but really deep. Lastly, it is a dance that is based on the internal feedback of the practitioners and what you can see from the exterior is not necessarily interesting: it is not built for an external gaze but only for the pleasure of the actors involved.⁸

The absence of a judgmental external gaze or a *privileged standpoint* from which CI should be experienced as our interviewees reported, is a peculiar distinctive feature of this dance form, also evinced by Elizabeth Behnke who states that "CI undermines the hegemony of the visible, it provides alternatives to an agenda of domination and control; and it opens a dynamic, aperspectival/multiperspectival world whose correlate is not a single, ideal spectator, but an

⁸ Excerpt from interview with Davide, 38, CI early novice with 6 month of practice at the time of the interview, conducted on the 26th of January 2015, Bologna. Interview materials are translated from Italian by the first author.

Intercorporeal/interkinaesthetic community, experienced in the thick presence of relational motility” (Behnke 2003: 54).



Fig. 2. Live music accompanies the dancers during a Contact Improvisation Jam in Bologna, 2015. Photo: Sarah Pini.

Gianluca: [CI] It's a dance that allows me to express my movement without filters and judgments; it's not a dance of genre, the roles of men and women do not exist, there are no predetermined steps. Like improvised music, it is essential to listen to yourself and to the other (or others). In addition, you can join and leave the dance as you wish, and you can dance alone, in duo, in group, you can change all the time, learning how to do it naturally, without judgment. "I just do what I feel like to do; you just do what you like". In CI you experience a practice of limits and possibilities, you try to live in the absolute present, in the here and now, dissolving every rational thought and suspending every judgment. It's a dance in which every time you discover something new, and it is always like the first day, the first time you tried it. For me it is, in short, a practice of knowledge and personal transformation, and it's not just a hobby or leisure. It's also a form of active meditation, where the breath has a central role.⁹

⁹ Excerpt from interview with Gianluca, 39, CI novice, conducted on the 2nd of November 2014, Bologna.

Another salient feature evidenced by many practitioners and entailed in the practice of CI is a potential personal *transformative power* and an increased attentiveness towards an *interkinaesthetic awareness* and bodily sensations. Turner refers to CI as an “experimental technique of awareness of the self in relation to others” where its extensive practice constitutes “the basis for our more expressive, improvisatory interaction” (Turner 2010: 134).



Fig. 3. Participants improvising together during a Contact Improvisation Jam in Bologna, 2015. Photo: Sarah Pini.

Many interviewees advocate a more “instinctual” or natural modality of interacting with other dancing bodies and the surrounding environment. Their experience of Contact Improvisation emphasizes an acquired attentiveness towards embodied knowledge over what they identify as “rational” thought.

Silvia: [I’m interested in CI] for many reasons, the pure experience of the dance, the surprise, the pleasure of the contact with other bodies, but also the great work on awareness, the encounter with the others, the absence of judgment. Moreover, I like the sense of community

that I find every time I join a jam or a workshop, where I find openness towards reciprocal acceptance that is rare in other circumstances. In CI I found a great opportunity for transformation, and inevitably I transferred it into other aspects of life, first of all into my relationships with people. I have the feeling that through the body you get to know and learn things in a deeper and lasting manner than through words. Also the concept of intimacy has been redefined for me: it has been enlarged and enriched with nuances. Through the dance you can have a moment of great proximity with a person and this has a value in itself - beyond what the relationship with that person is, who might even be a stranger.¹⁰



Fig. 4. Participants training interkinaesthetic awareness during a Contact Improvisation Jam's warm-up in Bologna, 2015. Photo: Sarah Pini.

Alessandra: It is difficult to answer this question [...] but I can say that what I live with CI is an ensemble of pleasure and pain. Pleasure in feeling the body free, but this doesn't always happen, and sometime this pleasure can become frustration (for example, when I cannot move upwards or when I realize that I lost the "momentum") [...] Anyway I like CI because it is a dance

¹⁰ Excerpt from the answers to a questionnaire by Silvia, 48, CI occasional practitioner, on the 16th of December 2014, Bologna.



in which all the senses are open: the skin sends back sensations that can guide me, the eyes help me to evaluate what I can do and how far I can go, ears let me hear others' breath and this also can guide my dance, smells that reach me from the other dancers, from the space in which we move, amplifying every movement... and there is also the capacity to create images, which enriches the dance and that always gives it new inspirations. This openness of all the senses, so strong, allows for the immediacy of actions-reactions to happen, the best example for me is when I decide to dance with somebody... if I hesitate, even only for a second, that person is already gone. This happens all the time and it teaches and trains me to always follow the instinct without letting the rational thought run too much between desire and action. Probably this is the best gift that CI has ever provided to me¹¹.

Engaging with local communities of Contact Improvisers allowed SP to re-trace a few of CI's shared features: the absence of a *judgmental attitude*; a potential *transformative power*; attentiveness towards *interkinaesthetic awareness*, and a lack of a *privileged standpoint*. This has been evoked also by Behnke, referring to the peculiar character of CI as a form of dance that enables the shift from an egocentric perceptive standpoint to a "multiperspectival meeting of vectors in which I directly experience not only my own mobilized momentum, but that of others with whom I am in contact" (Behnke 2003: 52). Emphasis on the *interkinaesthetic awareness* that arises through the practice of CI has been addressed also by Robert Turner referring to Steve Paxton's conception of what Western forms of movement, including both sport and dance, lack compared to Contact Improvisation. According to Paxton, in Western culture "the proper performance of a particular, choreographed, and controlled form of movement was prioritized; the sensation of movement was merely secondary. In CI, on the other hand, *behaviour evolves from sensing movement*"¹² (Turner 2010: 125). Turner evokes how in the broad perception of CI as transformative practice, a dualistic approach towards its body-mind conceptualisation has been generally characterised by the association of the terms "reflex" and "bodily" as opposed to "consciousness" and "culture" or "habit" (Turner 2010: 130). Turner criticizes the broad perception of Paxton's understanding of CI

¹¹ Excerpt from interview with Alessandra, 36, CI frequent practitioner, conducted on the 27th of January 2015, Bologna.

¹² Turner refers to Steve Paxton's paper "Drafting Interior Techniques" 1993, *Contact Quarterly* 18, 1:64–78. Emphasis added.



that appears to have gained recognition among the dance community and CI's teachers and participants. A widespread idea is that in CI "the body and its reflexes could be free, spontaneous, uninhibited, unfettered, if it were allowed to act without consciousness's interference, its cultural blocks, gaps, impositions, and habits" (Turner 2010: 130–131). According to Turner, a common misleading opinion on which many CI practitioners have depended on is "the fantasy of *unconscious* and reflexive, 'natural' human interaction and relations" (Turner 2010: 131), ignoring instead that one of Paxton's main aims in CI training was conversely the "development of *consciousness*" (Turner 2010: 131). He suggests that CI practitioners and trainers should rather focus on increased attentiveness towards bodily awareness and on the sensations that might arise from this kind of dancing in contact (Turner 2010: 134).

Conclusions

In tapping the lived experience of CI practitioners, we emphasize the diversity of the cognitive ecologies¹³ in which embodied skills are enacted and interkinaesthetic knowledge is constituted and exchanged. CI emerges as a community based practice that prioritizes the "sensitization to the corporeal" as stressed by Steve Paxton¹⁴, CI's principal initiator. This work highlighted that CI is broadly conceived as a primarily physical dance form aimed at fostering kinaesthetic awareness and challenging bodily possibilities and habits of movement. At the same time, CI practitioners seem to share a dualistic conception that tends to draw a separation between consciousness versus bodily and perceptive experience, reinforcing a contrast between culture and nature that paradoxically undermine CI political and individual potential (Turner 2010). We stressed the relevance of conducting participant and engaged ethnography and apprenticeship as a privileged methodological approach to tackle interkinaesthetic movement practices. We have sketched what CI practice

¹³ According to Edwin Hutchins "Cognitive ecology is the study of cognitive phenomena in context" (Hutchins 2010: 705), a growing field of study in the domain of Cognitive Science that understands cognition as a biological phenomenon resulting from the interaction and interconnection of perception, action, and thought in relation to a certain environment. Hutchins considers that "human cognitive activity will increasingly be seen to be profoundly situated, social, embodied, and richly multimodal" (Hutchins, 2010: 712). Evelyn Tribble and John Sutton provide another description of cognitive ecologies as "the multidimensional contexts in which we remember, feel, think, sense, communicate, imagine, and act, often collaboratively, on the fly, and in rich ongoing interaction with our environments" (Tribble and Sutton 2011: 94).

¹⁴ Turner 2010 cit. Steve Paxton 1993 *Drafting Interior Techniques* in «Contact Quarterly» n. 18 pp. 64-78.



entails as a form of movement open to different levels of kinetic skills and different degrees of experience. For many of its practitioners CI not only represents a dance practice but a reflective modality to access and foster bodily awareness and self-transformation.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank Professor Matteo Casari of the University of Bologna, and the Department of Cognitive Science at Macquarie University for ongoing support over the last two years. A sincere thanks to the many dancers involved in this research for sharing their experiences and knowledges with SP. We remember with love Professor Doris McIlwain, who supported and developed this project, her unique spark and deep insight will never cease to nourish our research.



Bibliography

ALBRIGHT, ANN COOPER

2011 *Situated Dancing: Notes from Three Decades in Contact with Phenomenology*, in «Dance Research Journal» n. 43(2), pp. 7-18.

BANES, SALLY

1981 *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theatre and Its Legacy*, in «Performing Arts Journal» n. 5(2), pp. 98-107.

BEHNKE, ELIZABETH A.

2003 *Contact Improvisation and the Lived World*, in «Studia Phaenomenologica» n. 3, pp.39-61.

2008 *Interkinaesthetic Affectivity: A Phenomenological Approach*, in «Continental Philosophy Review» n. 41(2), pp. 143-61.

CHRISTENSEN, WAYNE – BICKNELL, KATH – MCILWAIN, DORIS – SUTTON, JOHN

2015 *The Sense of Agency and Its Role in Strategic Control for Expert Mountain Bikers*, in «Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice» n. 2(3) pp.340-53.

CSORDAS, THOMAS J.

1993 *Somatic Modes of Attention*, in «Cultural Anthropology» n. 8(2) pp. 135-56.

DOWNEY, GREG

2005 *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art*. 1st ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

DOWNEY, GREG – DALIDOWICZ, MONICA – MASON, PAUL H.

2015 *Apprenticeship as Method: Embodied Learning in Ethnographic Practice*, in «Qualitative Research» n. 15(2), pp. 183-200.

EDINBOROUGH, CAMPELL

2012 *Somatic Sensibilities : Exploring the Dialectical Body in Dance*, in «Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices» n. 4(2), PP. 257-66.

ENGELSRUD, GUNN

2007 *Teaching Styles in Contact Improvisation: An Explicit Discourse with Implicit Meaning*, in «Dance Research Journal» n. 3(3), pp. 58-74.

FOSTER, SUSAN LEIGH

1997 *Dancing Bodies*, in Jane Desmond C. *Meaning in Motion*, pp. 235-57, Duke University Press, Durham, London.



GEERTZ, CLIFFORD

1973 *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays*, Basic Books, New York.

GIBBS, RAYMOND W.

2003 *Embodied Meanings: Performing, Interpreting and Talking about Dance Improvisation*, in Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere *Taken by Surprise: a dance improvisation reader*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown.

GOLDMAN, DANIELLE

2007 *Bodies on the Line: Contact Improvisation and Techniques of Nonviolent Protest*, in «Dance Research Journal» n. 39(1), pp. 60-75.

HUTCHINS, EDWIN

2010 *Cognitive Ecology*, in «Topics in Cognitive Science» n. 2(4), pp. 705-15.

MCILWAIN, DORIS J.F. – SUTTON, JOHN

2014 *Yoga From the Mat Up: How Words Alight on Bodies*, in «Educational Philosophy and Theory» n. 46(6), pp. 655-73.

MERRITT, MICHELE

2015 *Thinking-Is-Moving: Dance, Agency, and a Radically Enactive Mind*, in «Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences» n. 14(1), pp. 95-110.

NOVACK, CYNTHIA J.

1990 *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

RAMASWAMY, APARNA – DESLAURIERS, DANIEL

2014 *Dancer – Dance – Spirituality: A Phenomenological Exploration of Bharatha Natyam and Contact Improvisation*, in «Dance, Movement and Spiritualities» n. 1(1), pp. 105-122.

RAVN, SUSANNE

2009 *Sensing Movement, Living Spaces: An Investigation of Movement Based on the Lived Experience of 13 Professional Dancers*, VDM, Saarbrücken.

RAVN, SUSANNE – HANSEN, HELLE PLOUG

2013 *How to explore dancers' sense experiences? A study of how multi-sited fieldwork and phenomenology can be combined*, in «Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health» n. 5(2), pp. 196-213.

ROTHFIELD, PHILIPA

2005 *Differentiating Phenomenology and Dance*, in «Topoi» n. 24(1), pp. 43-53.



SAMUDRA, JAIDA KIM

2006 *Body and Belonging: In a Transnational Indonesian Silat Community*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, University of Hawaii, Manoa.

2008 *Memory in Our Body: Thick Participation and the Translation of Kinesthetic Experience*, in «American Ethnologist» n. 35(4), pp. 665-681.

SHEETS-JOHNSTONE, MAXINE

1978 *An Account of Recent Changes in Dance in the U.S.A.*, in «Leonardo» n. 11(3), pp. 197-201.

SUTTON, JOHN

2005 *Moving and Thinking Together in Dance*, in R. Grove, K. Stevens, and S. McKechnie *Thinking in Four Dimensions: Creativity and Cognition in Contemporary Dance*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

2007 *Batting, Habit and Memory: The Embodied Mind and the Nature of Skill*, in «Sport in Society» n. 10(5), pp. 763-786.

SUTTON, JOHN – MCILWAIN, DORIS

2015 *Breadth and Depth of Knowledge in Expert versus Novice Athletes*, in D. Farrow and J. Baker *The Routledge Handbook of Sports Expertise*, Routledge, New York.

TORRENTS, CARLOTA – CASTAÑER, MARTA – DINUŠOVÁ, MÁRIA – ANGUERA, TERESA M.

2010 *Discovering New Ways of Moving: Observational Analysis of Motor Creativity While Dancing Contact Improvisation and the Influence of the Partner*, in «The Journal of Creative Behavior» n. 44(1), pp. 53-69.

TRIBBLE, EVELYN – SUTTON, JOHN

2011 *Cognitive Ecology as a Framework for Shakespearean Studies*, in «Shakespearean Studies» n. 39(Annual), pp. 94-103.

TURNER, ROBERT

2010 *Steve Paxton's 'Interior Techniques': Contact Improvisation and Political Power*, in «The Drama Review» n. 54(3), pp. 123-135.

WACQUANT, LOÏC

2005 *Carnal Connections: On Embodiment, Apprenticeship, and Membership*, in «Qualitative Sociology» n. 28(4), pp. 445-474.

2006 *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. 1st ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford.



Abstract – IT

Adottando un approccio fenomenologico e una partecipazione diretta nella comunità della pratica di movimento studiata, abbiamo discusso alcuni approcci metodologici che sono stati presi in esame durante l'analisi dell'esperienza vissuta da un gruppo eterogeneo di danzatori di Contact Improvisation. Abbiamo descritto come questo sistema di movimento possa rappresentare un caso di studio peculiare per l'analisi delle dinamiche interpersonali che intercorrono fra praticanti con gradi diversi di esperienza, delineando alcuni percorsi comuni nell'acquisizione della conoscenza inter-cinestetica.

Abstract – EN

We adopted a phenomenological approach, directly engaging with the community of practice of the form of movement under study. We discuss some methodological approaches that we considered in investigating the lived experience of a heterogeneous group of Contact Improvisation (CI) practitioners. We delineate how such a system of movement could provide a unique example for the analysis of the interpersonal dynamics between movers with a different degree of expertise, re-tracing some common paths towards the acquisition of interkinaesthetic¹⁵ knowledge.

SARAH PINI

Attualmente sta conseguendo un dottorato di ricerca in Scienze Cognitive presso la Macquarie University a Sydney, lavorando interdisciplinariamente sulla cognizione incarnata in diverse forme di danza. Ha conseguito la laurea magistrale in Antropologia Culturale ed Etnologia presso l'università di Bologna e la laurea triennale in Arti Visive presso L'università Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne, dopo aver seguito una formazione professionale in danza classica e contemporanea in vari paesi europei, lavorando e studiando con diversi coreografi di fama internazionale.

SARAH PINI

She is currently undertaking a PhD in Cognitive Science at the Macquarie University in Sydney, working interdisciplinary on embodied cognition in diverse dance practices. She graduated MA in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Bologna and BA in Visual Arts at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, after she trained professionally in ballet and contemporary dance across Europe, working and studying with several renowned choreographers.

DORIS MCILWAIN

Professore Associato presso il Dipartimento di Psicologia della Macquarie University a Sydney. La sua ricerca verte su stili della personalità, emozioni, memoria e movimento. Ha conseguito ricerche con esperti praticanti e maestri di yoga. Assieme a John Sutton si occupa di movimento abile, regolazione delle emozioni e resilienza nello sport e in altri campi performativi.

¹⁵ We refer to the term *Interkinaesthetic* as intended by Elizabeth Behnke referring to “specifically kinaesthetic modes of interbodily relationality” (Behnke 2008: 144).



DORIS MCILWAIN

Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Macquarie University in Sydney. Her research addressed personality styles, emotion, memory and movement. She performed research with expert yoga teachers and practitioners. With John Sutton, she studied skilled movement, emotion regulation, and resilience in sport and other performance domains.

JOHN SUTTON

Professore di Scienze Cognitive alla Macquarie University a Sydney, dove ha precedentemente diretto il Dipartimento di Filosofia. La sua ricerca verte principalmente sulla teoria interdisciplinare e le scienze della memoria, in particolare la memoria autobiografica, la memoria collettiva e la memoria incorporata o procedurale.

JOHN SUTTON

Professor of Cognitive Science at Macquarie University in Sydney, where he was previously Head of the Department of Philosophy. His research mainly addresses the interdisciplinary theory and sciences of memory, especially autobiographical memory, remembering together, and embodied or procedural memory.