

STILL MOVING



Susan Kelly & David Appel in Appel's "Slow Roller," 1984.

THE LEGACY OF EXPLORATION

by Tina Mantel

Zurich, January 24, 1987:

*In the last two weeks I had to write a lot about my dancing and teaching both in preparation of my workshops and the writing of grants. Some of it was of course on Contact Improvisation, and after I completed a "historical overview" with the help of Sally Banes' chapter in her book, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, I was inspired to continue and look at how I, as a probably "3rd generation" Contact dancer (my first teacher was Randy Warshaw) experience the form in the present.*

I was moved by your appeal for material to be included in the "Still Moving" section, and as I always thoroughly enjoy all articles printed in CQ, I hope to be able to contribute with these thoughts. [T.M.]

Looking at video tapes of the early Contact Performances 15 years ago, and comparing them with today's dancing in concerts, jams and classes, I detect a certain tendency. The movement material and the attitude of the dancers has become more refined, delicate, favoring soft and fluid movement exchanges. One could say that as some of the Contact vocabulary found its way into more traditional dance languages, its look became more dance-like and less of an "art-sport" as Simone Forti once called it. But that evolution was just one direction the form could grow in. Other pathways are continuously being explored, because the group of people who initially discovered, created or invented Contact Improvisation, succeeded in keeping it from being institutionalized like so many other new dance forms, thereby assuring that the core of the work which is *exploration*

STILL MOVING addresses the current thinking, perception and practice of Contact Improvisation—i.e., Contact sbop talk. Please participate by sending your writings as well as your responses to what you read here, to us at C.Q., P.O. Box 603, Northampton, MA 01061.

stays alive.

I am very grateful to these people (thank you Steve, Lisa, Nancy, Danny. . .) for their generosity—not formalizing and restricting the process of discovery, but leaving us its legacy. This way I, as everybody involved in Contact Improvisation, have to and am able to make my own discoveries. It is a continuing challenge to me both in dancing and in teaching, because familiar things have to be rediscovered and new things remain to be discovered.

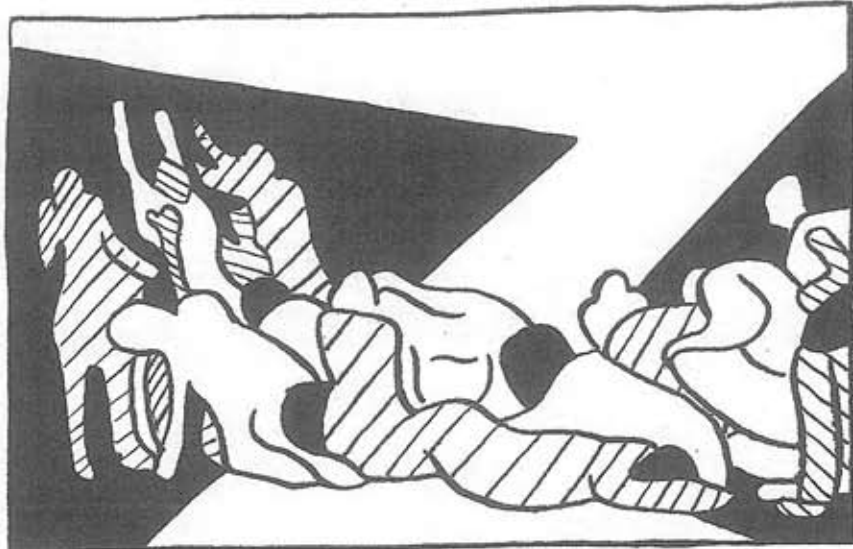
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My partner, Brad Stoller, and I discovered something very new when improvising together in preparation for a performance. We decided to take a look at the moment just before we actually move into physical contact. We tried to extend this moment of waiting for the opening of the movement flow between us. Brad called it "offering"—offering a part of his body and energy, me responding either by using his gesture to begin physical contact, or by reacting to his energy only, not letting contact happen yet. My response was, in turn, an offering of movement and energy to him. After a while we discovered that we both became psychologically much more involved: an outstretched arm was not anymore "merely" a lever I could use in the numerous ways I had used it or would use it in a duet, but it became an arm with a hand that belonged to a man, whose name was Brad, who was extending it towards me. Our dancing changed completely, with tension-filled moments of waiting, expecting, hesitating and then explosively reacting, to easy-flowing and extremely connected passages when we both surrendered to momentum.

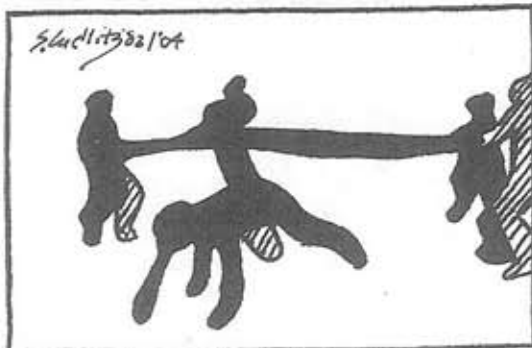
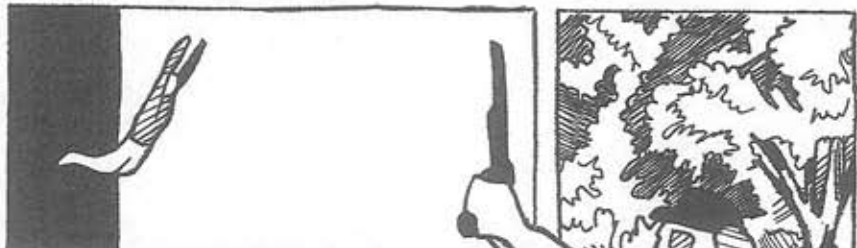
A few rehearsals later, we found ourselves spontaneously talking while dancing. Not to each other, but each telling his/her own story, memory, thoughts, in a free-associative flow of words and sentences. The verbal and the physical dances were in contact with each other, and at rare, wonderful moments, all four met and time seemed suspended.

How to let emotions and feelings that arise during a duet float to the surface of the dance, letting them be as clear and visible as the exchange of energies through the body still intrigues and puzzles me. Contact Improvisation is a means of discovery for me, and I am looking forward to a never-ending process of exploration within its framework. Steve Paxton once put it very simply and beautifully in a workshop:

"If you want to get to a new place, you can't know where you are going." ☆



CONTACT QUARTERLY -- The Early Years
Celebrating CQ's 30th anniversary, 1975-2005



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