



**Posting on Facebook by Robert Anderson before ECITE12 (lead to forum 1 at ECITE)
June 19th 2012**

what is contact improvisation?

There have been quite a lot of films and images appearing on FB recently showing the happy smiling joyful practice of contact improvisation. They paint a colourful picture of the contact improvisation community. But what does this picture seem to say about CI? And what does it omit? So with ecite2012 around the corner here are a few provocative questions I'd like to pose as food for thought...

- Is CI a form just for the young, fit and attractive?
- Is CI a form just for white (possibly sun-tanned) people?
- Is CI a form just for able-bodied people?
- Is CI just for heterosexual people?
- Is CI a social club for people with enough money to travel to and pay for festivals?
- Is CI for those who share a specific dance-hippy fashion sense?
- Is CI an international swingers club or a dating agency?
- Is CI just a good excuse for a beach party?
- Is CI a form for finding sensual gratification?
- Is CI a new age cult?
- Is CI a good marketing tool for eco tourism?

Comments on this posting

[Benno Voorham](#) Am planning to set up a series of workshops with the title: 'Reclaiming Contact Improvisation'. Where is the dance?

[Richard Sarco-Thomas](#) Hi Robert, It's sad but for the most part it seems likt the answer to all of these questions you pose is yes.
But that's your point right? are you a Chichester this weekend?
R ;)

[Colleen Bartley](#) it omits the movement research which is core principle of the work and is endlessly interesting to practice

[Jenny Döll](#) may i share these questions for discussion in the freiburg ci group?

[Jo Blowers](#) Part of my motivation to work with Nancy in London next week and to attend ECITE again this year is to explore the answers to these and many other questions. As a follow up I am also planning to organise a 2 day conference in Liverpool early next year in conjunction with my LIC colleagues. The theme (which is of course evolving) will deal with questions like 'Is CI a rigorous practice with a distinguishable pedagogy and if so, is its identity in jeopardy if it is not clearly defined within these terms?'

[Claudia Roemmel](#) Looking forward to share this and more questions at ECITE in Bern ! :-)

[Jun Akiyama](#) - Good questions, [Robert](#)! Wish I were able to be there at ECITE with all of you this summer to delve into them. Hope you're all doing well! :)

[Guy Aloni](#) Robert, thanks for this reflection. Sharp, clear and touch directly the question "where CI goes to", and maybe more important - why do I do Contact Improvisation? . . .

[Judit Keri](#) Robert! Cool!

[Aharona Israel](#) good questions my friend, i won't be there in ECITE this summer but may i add another question: is CI a muscular, 'yang' and acrobatic style of dance? what is the feminine expression of CI?

[Gesine Daniels](#) thank you Robert, you make me happy with publishing these questions! I also have the impression that for many people the answer is "yes" or "I don't care", but also "yes, and also ...". I want to leave the vacation- and dating-CI to those who are fond of it. For me it is interesting to look for this "and also..."in the CI community. what else is CI, what could it be what was it and for whom and why ... is there an ethics of CI? what is the politics inherent in CI? where is the movement research, the artistic vision, ... I think it is still there and developing, but we are not as present and shiny with our announcements - maybe the research and the art happen without making money with it and so there is no obvious reason to announce it everywhere on facebook?! I hope I can make it to ecite this year!

[Karl Frost](#) I think that many of the moments of discomfort around these kinds of questions and others comes from the desire to see contact improvisation as a specific something. That, it is not. It is not a noun in the normal sense of the word, referring to something that has a more or less clear referent. It's explicit verbal definition was initiated blurry, leading eventually to the blur in the range of practices that people engage in under the term. As i understand Steve, he initiated an experiment of openness exploring the hypothesis that leaving the definition open combined with the interesting starting places that they had would lead somehow to a more highly developed technical practice than if the development were contained within a hierarchical ownership structure. This experiment obtained a negative result. Instead, I believe, the mean level of technical understanding of bodies in motion peaked in the early 90s and has since been in a decline as people took the open invitation in many different directions that did not include critical process. This is nothing wrong on their part, but the result of the initial experiment. I have suggested this before that I think that the world of contact improvisation would get more interesting if people let go of there being a central thing that people are supposed to do and instead made clear events or practice spaces with more precise foci and rules that made explicit different invitations. I think that this is what Nancy has been trying to do with her Underscore, and I think that is great. I would like to encourage more people to do the same... make clear invitations to more specific practices that serve the interests of specific circles of people.

[Julija Melnik](#) One thing I value in CI is that a person is constantly giving his own sense/meaning to the practice. And it's probably constantly changing depending on experience and reflection and so on... so as a practitioner or a teacher you "attract" people around yourself who resonate with your vision/meanings/values, etc. in CI. Thus the most important, if so, is the question directed inwards - what is CI for me? What do I practice? What am I doing? Am I doing what I think I am doing? I guess that most of the "conflicts" arise because of the ignorance.

[Robert Anderson](#) looking forward to dancing, debating & discussing with some of you at ecite2012 and with Nancy at Chichester, Roehampton, Moving East.

[Caroline Waters](#) It's also true that all of us who teach CI in Uni's don't advertise on facebook either, so there is a whole aspect of this work that is unseen and not part of the beautiful people community that has evolved..

[Heike Kuhlmann](#) exactly now we need to discuss those questions and more in times of RIO+20, times of economic crisis, crisis of capitalism: Can CI be more than what Robert had posed: Can it be something to raise consciousness, to become aware of gender roles, hierarchies, heteronormativity, powerstructures,

[Caroline Waters](#) It used to be.. exactly that Heike, which what inspired me in the first place especially around issues of disability, inclusivity and gender roles, but we don't live in the 80's anymore and it seems, (as is normal) the new generation do not seem to be aware of such a rich past.. we have had over 20 years of ECITE within which these issues have been debated, danced, documented.. but somehow it gets lost....:)

[Julija Melnik](#) Be the change :)

[Tom Goldhand](#) This list reminds me of another list of questions posted in CQ a very long time ago by Daniel Lepkoff - under the title "questions not to be answered" (which of course they were addressed and answered after that).

That list was about the physicality, visibility and performativity qualities of C.I.

I remember 2 of these questions - why is the shoulder lift a mark for an advanced contact dancers? why is it sometimes so beautiful to look at beginners and so boring to watch advanced contact dancers?

Open questions to encourage self observation and checking up on what they were doing, questions which are still relevant today, I guess in those times your questions ([Robert](#)) were not relevant, (don't know as I was not there), but they are now.

Your questions might have risen due to our format of teaching/engaging in the dance and to the format of passing on the knowledge of C.I., and to the developing branches of C.I.

I guess not have a strict structure and definition to what we are doing enables it to grow, and sometimes grow wild. The big upside is that it encompasses every part of the lives of people who practice C.I. and its definition stays alive with the people who do it.

The downside is that sometimes it seems as if the stem of it is forgotten, C.I. is not "just" a fun dance to do with a partner, a meeting point of two bodies creating together a dance. It seems that the strong enquiry about the awareness to the physical forces and pathways inside the body and outside of it is sometimes left behind.

I would really love to see more "strong" workshops, meetings, labs with the community/teachers/practitioners for doing exactly that.

and to the old question - is ECITE still needed.... for me it is exactly for that reason that we should continue to ask, debate and bring these topics again and again.

Thanks for raising and bringing it out here.

[Jenny Döll](#) I recently read an article on the opening of the "documenta" (an exhibition of contemporary art) in a newspaper. It put the question of from where art derives its right to exist. The author juxtaposed both art, that wants to serve a political purpose and art which merely serves aesthetic pleasure. Saying that (put in simple terms), one without the other becomes flat and that both are complementary. I like that. C.I. has been named art-sport, hasn't it?...

[Claudia Roemmel](#) Robert, do you feel like moderating a "Forum" with this theme on ECITE2012? We want to schedule some time periods on ECITE this year, in which various topics are discussed. Your questions could be the content for one of these Forums. The organisation-team would be happy about your input! :-)

[Robert Anderson](#) I'd be happy to be involved with this kind of forum.

[Anna Hellsten](#) In October there will be a second meeting in Gothenburg addressing these very issues: Radical C.I. There will be work on heteronormativity, hierarchies and other political aspects of C.I. It can get quite uncomfortable mixing C.I. with politics, since there is so much we choose not to talk about in the dance communities, but it can also be very fruitful and eye-opening. So if you are interested: come!

[Anna Hellsten](#) The meeting will be Thursday to Sunday, Focus on dance and politics, and I do not remember the dates right now...

[Jennifer Moy](#) I guess it's all of those things - but is it more? Look forward to good conversations in Bern XX-J

[Barbara Stahlberger](#) Wow I was just discussing about this theme and great, that we will be at ECITE and share about. Thanks Robert to make this starting point! At the same time I'm questioning myself how much I would like to spend time on that or rather would practise/explore C.I.!? Where is my focus and where do I want to put energy in?

[Heike Kuhlmann](#) it is very interesting to see that these question do interest a lot of Contacters. Gesine and me were talking about CI and its political signification the whole spring and now people preparing Radical CI and Robert posing those question, for me it seems like it is really the time for that!!!!:-) Unfortunately I will not be at ECITE this year as at last minute I will teach at Transcontact, but I really hope you find a way like now and other ways to transmit the discussions, streams, dances to all of us interested in this!

[Thomas Kampe](#) Great stuff Robert.

[Otto Akkanen](#) unfortenutaly I will not be in ECITE, will be in Altay with beautiful tanned people. To me one thing that rises from Robert's questions is actually the about the video. You know, all of you who are making different CI, old, non-tanned, ugly people inside of horrible gym halls, where are the videos? Why no one makes them? what it tells our visual culture, and why the video makers want to go along of the mainstream visual culture?

I have a memory that long time ago Peter Aerni was doing and asking for new vidoes of CI, since everyone have seen that "bloody newton thing" hundreds times already. So now, we are getting videos, but it doesn't really show the whole CI (if it shows CI at all, and yes, what is CI? I've been arguing about this with petri about 10 years now and we disagree and yet we both are right because no one really labelled it well enough) I think Mr. Frost said it nicely (or I understood it) that there actually is no CI. It does not have consistent definition.

Is CI radical? depends concerning what? touch is still radical in most of our society. Otherwise, not much, it is mainly white, upper middleclass , hierarchical thingy. I can't say anything about.

[Colleen Bartley](#) how do people feel if we print this ongoing discussion to share at ecite ?

[Caroline Waters](#) good :)

[Colleen Bartley](#) maybe just press like to my comment if its ok with you so see if we have a sense of who's happy with that, cool?

[Barbara Stahlberger](#) Am 24.07.12 09:25, schrieb Colleen Bartley:

[Colleen Bartley](#) how bout this

one?<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81EVZd5LADU&feature=youtu.be>

[The wind is calling](#)

www.youtube.com

Dance film made in the Cap de Creus Todela national park of Cadaques/Spain. music gemafree (creative commons) Idea/Choreografy: Markus Hoft and dancers

[Irene Sposetti](#) And what about Yes we have bodies, and what about that all are very beautiful specially when they are exposed to elements and nature, not matter age or shape or gender, what about some of us love nature based life style, what about there is other possibilities of exploring the dance out of gym halls and cities and when you see dance in nature, in pictures or videos, yes it looks actually incredibly beautiful.I am one of those that propose events in sunshine, near the water eventually far away from the common centers of Ci in the main european cities..does this feels like an attack?..or a subliminal ecoturism business strategy :D just because the dance it is not happening in the usual places we are use to?!..and yes when there is water and it is hot I do take off my cloths without thinking what my body looks like!..and dance with it and play, affirming the simplicity of it and not caring about the twisted look of a society that manipolates all images... and yes the practice gives thank's god ,a lot of Joy and this makes people smile. Smiling in dance videos , does this sounds odd?..What hippy does mean in those questions?..choosing different clothing than usual gym suits ?!..I feel a bit sad reading all those questions based mainly on the appearance of pictures and videos, and also I feel quite a lot of judgment in them... for all those that put blood and soul to make dance happen in new places, faraway from the usual centers...yes this include travelling and I can clarify that most of the people doing that live in a very low budget,

myself included. I am one of the teachers and organizers of such "Holiday events" and I feel a lot of authenticity, honesty, beauty, sacrifices, passion and good will in myself and in all my friends and colleagues in creating spaces of practice in new places. I wish that even if it looks different from what we are used to, we could offer the chance to see it beyond the veils of the mind. And recognize what unite rather than what separates all of us. Thank you for reading and sharing *

[Anir Leben](#) in appreciation for all these words, questions, discussion-threads that are posted here I would like to add that I do love beauty! I do love when people go in their own beauty and are ready to show and share it - if that means, going fully into the technical approach and old-stevo-pexton-initiative-work - great! if it is to include people with disabilities, different ages, different backgrounds, gender-orientations - super nice! if it is to go out and explore dance in sunshine and near the water with your bathers or nothing on - olè to you, too! I think one of the greatest treasures that CI has to offer, as we all know in all our differences, is that it is a practice of rich possibilities to include and bring forward your own passion, interest, what drives you in it. The inspiration that stays with me therefore in all of this for now are the questions that are worth asking on a regular basis: what's my interest in CI? and how do I want to bring it into the world?

[Gesine Daniels](#) @Irene: yes, there is judgement ... and it is there for a good reason: "age, body shape and gender" do matter to you guys when you promote your events and choose the pictures. If you and other people; who advertise "these events", really believe that all bodies are beautiful, why then do you prefer to use images of young smiling and suntanned people? Isn't it, because people in their 40's or 50's or 60's, focusing on what they do with a facial expression that shows concentration don't sell so well? or why don't they appear on the flyers? don't they exist? why?

[Gesine Daniels](#) ... and flying to India Thailand Goa etc. is NOT part of a "nature based lifestyle" how I understand it. I think it is part of letting other people pay the price for our happy smiles! exploring the dance outside of gym halls ... great! ... If this is your agenda, why don't you go to a public place in a town/village that you can reach by bicycle or train, explore it there, have local people see it and participate in it. if you want nature: why don't make sure that the nature close to you is protected and go there ... what do you give back to the people who live in the places where you do festivals at the beach and "in nature"; to those, who provide the beautiful scenario for festivals in exotic places? if you live there ... do you pay taxes there? help to build and finance a social system? where does the money go that festival participants pay? You claim to make dance "happen in unusual places" ... yes you do ..., but not for unusual people. so I don't see the value in it and I think your "blood and soul" would be serving a better and more honest purpose if you would do CI with the local people there instead of encouraging us white middle class well off dance- and eco-tourists to fly to these places. maybe you are doing a lot of great and unusual work that I don't know about ...; but what I see advertised is just using CI to sell something like an alternative dance safari to mostly young European and US-American contact tourists. And they don't even need to be especially wealthy, as flights are so cheap; and you probably have to pay almost nothing compared to European prices for accommodation food and studios, because manpower is so ridiculously cheap there...

[Ulla Riikka Mäkinen](#) Gesine, there is a big difference for me traveling as a teacher to a CI festival where it is locally organized, initiated etc, and where they got me and few other teachers to support from abroad to bring the knowledge of CI to the locals (e.g. Kuala

Lumpur last year). Then it is still on my conscience to take a long flight overseas but with my European friends, I wish to dance in Europe, if I go further, I'll go there to make new friends and to bring CI to places where it wouldn't otherwise get to. The same is that lot of the CI that is happening is not seen in flyers or facebook, but is taking place in schools, dance schools and educations that are not necessarily advertising it that much. So how do we build up our image of the CI world? In this time of image overdose, I think it is very relevant question what kind of images, videos, pics we are sharing of CI. Thanks for the input, discussions, viewpoints, disagreements!

[Irene Sposetti](#) Dear Gesine, I wish that we can keep softer tones and avoid to enter a too critical attitude towards each other, also I would avoid to personalize too much themes that regard everyone. This is my need to continue a dialog and exchange of thoughts and impressions.

I would love that you could apply and expose such a detailed social and ecological analysis to the majority of activities and events of CI organized in urban spaces in Europe and elsewhere. Specially referring to their social engagement; their esthetics of promotional materials; their eco sustainable choices in the organization of small and big events; their promotion of eco travelling etc.

I don't know where this strong wave of critics is coming from and towards what it is aiming really?..One video, few pictures, from where, what?!

When we connect with places of the third world, so called, many are the questions that raise up in me and in all those that are traveling and working there. Most of them are not answered and are present on our tables, when making choices, discussing and organizing. There is a big wish in me of contributing with my actions, at all levels, building a better world, now based unfortunately on inequality and discrimination of all sort.

I can share, if you really wish to know about me and my life. I have been living for about 4 years in an international eco sustainable community ([auroville.org](#)) in south India, teaching constantly and promoting Ci with people of All age, culture, color, gender and shape for almost No money.

I have been promoting and I do Ci in Indian cities, addressing to Indian dancers communities, working for ridicoulus salaries and investing a lot of time and passion in it. Since two years I do live part of the year with Johan Nilsson, in Sweden in Ytterjärna, biggest eco sustainable antroposific community of nordic countries. Here we live and promote CI organizing events in and out of town, addressing to the local communities and promoting the connection within dance and nature .In our daily life we partly move by boat and walking, reducing the use of car, we have dry toilets, we stay in a wagon living with intentional low consumption of electricity and water. Johan, my partner of life and work, is specialized in biodynamic farming, working in it since 15 years.

This year in India we will create in Goa, where we teach CI, systems of recycling and activities to raise awareness about it, within the community of travelers and tourists. We will also offer there labs-lecture focusing on environment, nature and human, working with gardening and plants, in a vegetarian cultural center, parallel to our Ci activities.

I am actually very happily traveling to Feiburg festival by train from Stockholm!..I found a decent ticket with [bahn.de](#). I invite everyone to check it out!

My best wishes to you Gesine and to all for happy, fruitful, conscious dances all over the world ♥

[Anir Leben](#) questions and inner reactions to the initiative and succeeding posts in this discussion:

why not do what you and i feel like it's missing
instead of diminishing in worth what's already there?

why arguing on a worldwide level instead of on a personal (first)?
is it YOU / ME that feels not belonging /represented in this that is being advertised?
why not say it?

maybe i'm not superknowledgeed in political issues. maybe i know not enough about it
all.

still what stirrs me most is to get to know what stirrs the people that are close and to
connect with this instead of having to deal with the whole world immediatly.

ok.

it's certainly something to have an ecological conscience about what you do.

i agree.

i've never been to thailand nor india yet, but i know that they also live from the tourist-
economy. that of course, doesn't justify going to "nature-resorts", putting up huge
festivals and destroying the surroundings in any form.

but we're talking about dancing contact there with a maximum 300 (if!) people, who
mostly are "hippy" enough to have an awareness of where they are and what they do.
we are not talking about a huge music-festival with a lot of drunk people that leave their
litter everywhere.

so what's the point?

advertising?

is it really so disturbing?

i think what we're talking here is more a generation thing between everybody that
teaches contact and this, for me at least, is worthwhile looking at and feeling through
together.

it needs appreciation from both sides. the younger ci-teacher-generation to realize how
beautiful a path all the "older" teachers have created and what they left us to go on from,
including themselves... and the older generation looking at the maybe
crazy new ideas and movements that come up from the younger ones and riding the
inspirational waves with us (counting myself to the younger generation).

i'm happy to participate in this discussion, also because it raises my awareness.

what i don't want to see happening is a competition downwards.

so who has the ugliest output/advertising, because it implies that you're serving
humanity. yes, that's really something. i grew up like this. and maybe not only me. it's
very christian to me, to think that i can serve the world by putting my light underneath
somebody elses so that they won't feel small. it's a nice idea, however, to fotograf older
people and people of different shapes and sizes in their beauty dancing contact! i'd take
part in a project like that!

gesine, i'm not only referring this to you and anyway i really acknowledge your output,
it's something, that needed to be said otherwise it wouldn't have occurred as well as all
the other outputs.

let's go on with understanding each other!

thank you.

[Andrew Wass](#) The improvisation of contact. Pretty clear, no?

[Irene Sposetti](#) Good Gesine, I am happy that something is also resonating in the same tune :-) I have overall the wish for the possibility of communicating, expressing our impressions and offering each other feedback without stepping in a field of judging and accusing, specially when there is not depth in knowing the others realities because we haven't been very close to them and experienced them. I wish for including the others in our reasoning and not separate and point finger against, This as a base for a healthy and constructive exchange between friends and colleagues as we all are. By the way I recommend you could visit India and experience the beautiful enthusiasm that is springing within indian dance communities that have been touched by the beauties of CI. We are very happy that Jam started in Bombay and Chennai this year! Thank's to all those that have been teaching there since years(me included) and a big thank you to the Goa festival... I want to inform you that anyway I am not even an organizer of the festival nor a producer or a film maker...but I had the urge to answer to all those words because I am in India since many years and I can't relate really to all the projections that have been done on it. To be more direct and precise in addressing the questions would be more correct probably. Was it A video, Few pictures?! Please talk to those who made it and express your feedback, it could help them to improve their relation with image and their way of contributing to diffuse CIBut any way Let's meet, talk and dance it all :-)