

Heike Wrede - Contact Improvisation and Authentic Movement

Personal Experience

I was introduced to Contact Improvisation (CI) in 1992 and to Authentic Movement (AM) in 1993. Both forms made me feel like coming home, falling in love with my very first experience. Since then I study, practice and teach CI and AM.

Contact Improvisation is based on physical touch and creation of pathways and movements I can not do on my own. I depend on my partner as my ground as I am responsible for my own safety. As more as I can trust my partner (and myself) as more exciting can the dance become.

Authentic Movement is a non-directive form where a mover with eyes closed explores inner impulses, sensation, images in the presence of a witness. The witness has the eyes open, remains sitting in one place and explores what images, sensations, stories etc. come up for her while she sees the mover moving. After the movement phase both mover and witness share their experience with each other.

I noticed how my contact dances changed over the years. I got often as a feedback from people who didn't know about my involvement with AM that my dancing feels very authentic. I got curious and started tracking my movement. I noticed that my impulses and response came from a deeper place, trusting that my body knows where it wants to go, staying in the moment and going in the direction that feels most truthful to me.

My knowledge of CI had also a deep influence on my experience in AM sessions. When I come in touch with another mover I feel challenged to really stay with my experience and needs in this moment. It is often very tempting to jump into a Contact dance because I know certain pathways very well or feel opportunities for my favorite lift. Staying present in the moment opened new surprising pathways for me. I had some of the most satisfying Contact dances during AM – with my eyes closed in contact with another mover who has no or very little experience with CI.

As more as I got grounded in both forms as more my desire grow to incorporate one into the other.

They have in common that they are both duo forms and the dancers/mover/witness are responsible for their own safety. In both forms I experience a deep respect for the human body, my partners and our individuality. Awareness of my limits and needs makes the dance as well as the movement safe and surprising at the same time.

In my CI classes I often start teaching a skill with inviting the students to watch their partners and feel their own body before they touch. Which place looks like it can take weight? How does this place feel in your body? How much weight do you think you can comfortably receive there?

I also invite them during a dance to shift their awareness away from their partner to themselves. Does this dance feel right? Do you get what you want? Or would you like something else? Would you like to change the dance?

I experiment with different exercises that incorporate CI into an exercise that starts out as AM with a mover moving with closed eyes and a witness at the outside. Or I start with a CI duet that leads into AM. The mover has always the option to move away from touch if it doesn't feel right to them.

The feedback I get most often for classes in which I experiment with AM, specially from beginners, is that the students feel free and liberated from questions like: Am I doing it right? What am I supposed to do now? What does my partner thinks? How does it look?

For me listening, being present in the moment and following my truth became the most important skills in CI. It made my own dancing more satisfying.

The practice of AM has deepened my practice of CI and my comfort levels with touch, inversion and disorientation has deepened my experience of AM.