



# Navigating the unexpected

*«My body is not in movement when I can predict my next steps»<sup>1</sup>*

To be in motion is to navigate between taking bearings and losing them. Losing balance and regaining it, becoming disorientated and then reorientated, oscillating between vertigo and anchoring. This list could go on indefinitely if we were to add to the physical and physiological spaces, the emotional, philosophical, sociological and all the other strata of experience.

And what if contact improvisation, with its falling and shifting supports, were pretexts for learning, for setting ourselves in motion?

To walk, dance and move, the body relies on sensorimotor patterns, structures of action and perception acquired through experience. In this case, we say that the body assimilates what is happening: it interprets what it already knows. The improvised movement then takes on a familiar form. Internal models are enough to make the sensory world coherent. The dance then more or less follows an implicit script.

But sometimes, support slips, an unexpected gesture thwarts our bearings. It's in these moments, when our ability to predict the world is exceeded, that something essential comes into play: accommodation. To continue to find meaning and the ability to act in the midst of this disorientation, our schemas must adjust to the world in real time. New responses are invented in the face of what is still unknown. Unsuspected resources open up to us- new gestures we never imagined ourselves capable of.

The fall is a case in point. A central figure in contact improvisation, it invites us to leave the reassuring shores of stability, to allow ourselves to be moved by forces beyond our control. If we accept it, it allows us to experience that new balances can be formed within us in real time, to apprehend what's happening to us. We then learn, without having organized it.

But any fall, any improvised sharing of support, is not necessarily a fertile ground for this openness and learning. Sometimes stress takes over. The body can't adjust, stiffens. Attention lapses. We can't really assimilate or accommodate. A threshold appears- a moment of rupture when the old is no longer enough, and the new is not yet here.

What if improvisation consisted in listening to these thresholds, to hold on to the place where a form of dynamic balancing is still possible- where the back-and-forth between what we already know and what we discover by moving is still fluid and fruitful? What if dancing allowed us to practice inhabiting instability and taming uncertainty in a fruitful way?



Astrid, Catherine & Stéphanie

---

<sup>1</sup> heard during a workshop by Susanne Martin  
<https://www.susannemartin.de/>