

**Leaning into Life: A Motion-Sensing Inquiry into Becoming
Inter-Active for Life through Partnered Practices**

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Inter-Active for Life

24 **Leaning into Life: A Motion-Sensing Inquiry into Becoming Inter-Active for Life through**
25 **Partnered Practices**

28 **Leaning into Life**

29 What comes to mind when you think of leaning in? Better still, stand up, lift your torso,
30 and shift your weight from your heels to the balls of your feet. Feel yourself tilting forward. Feel
31 the inclination to keep going forward until a step must be taken before falling. Now think about
32 how common this comportment is to so many physical practices. There is the poised and ready
33 position of the tennis player waiting to receive a serve, the momentary stance of the defending
34 soccer midfielder or basketball guard on her toes anticipating an opponent's attacking move, and
35 the wrestlers' sure-footed, crouched lunges as they take hold of one another to begin a bout.
36 Whereas leaning may lead to a fall if done just by oneself, it is more evidently about leaning into
37 the life of a game, sport or disciplinary practice if done with an opponent or a partner. Here, in
38 these interactions, we can see and feel our inclination to be enlivened.

39 'Leaning in' is an expression that motivational speaker and business woman, Sheryl
40 Sandberg, used as the title of her book (Sandberg & Scovell, 2013). This expression is one of
41 confidence and power, or what Sandberg described as "being ambitious in any pursuit" (p.19).
42 Just imagine the position of a sprinter at the beginning of a race, propped on starting blocks and
43 ready to lurch forward down the track. This image accords with Sandberg's business advice to
44 women. But while there may be real advantage to such assertive angling of intention to excel, we
45 might also bring up considerations of sustainability and responsiveness if the habitual posture is
46 always that of thrusting ourselves forward. Might there not be some merit to softening one's lean
47 without necessarily implying "the ways I might hold myself back" (p. 17)? Might we also
48 connect to the sense of life that may be experienced if 'leaning in' and 'holding back' were not

Inter-Active for Life

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3 49 so much understood as opposing expressions but rather two poles on a continuum of responsive
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5 50 postural alignments with respect to the particular situations in which we actually find ourselves?
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8 51 This oscillating sense of life within a lean is the motivational impetus for our motion-
9
10 52 sensing inquiry. This impetus is consistent with an “Active for Life” orientation that has become
11
12 53 the main aspiration of many national and international physical education and sport associations,
13
14 54 such as the International Physical Literacy Association, Sport for Life, and Physical and Health
15
16 55 Education Canada, as well as Physical Education curricula, yet at the same time, it remains
17
18 56 arguably underdeveloped in terms of its lived and living meanings (Author 1, 2016; Author 2 &
19
20 57 Author 1, 2019). Within curricular conceptions, for instance, this slogan for Physical Education
21
22 58 infers that students acquire the individualistic knowledge, skills, and attitude to engage in
23
24 59 physical activity across the life course, which is a goal that has yet to be materialized (Kirk,
25
26 60 1992, 2010, 2013). This failure has much to do with the disconnected paradigm in which we are
27
28 61 situated where movement is often taught in isolation of its relational context, and in what Kirk
29
30 62 (2010) has coined the “physical-education-as-sport-technique paradigm.” The fundamental
31
32 63 movement skills of throwing a ball, for example, are broken down and taught in isolation from
33
34 64 what it means to catch or receive, and hence from gestures of giving and receiving, which are
35
36 65 reciprocating gestures that orient us to the primary movement pairings that constitute life, such
37
38 66 as the inhalation and exhalation of breath (Author 2 & Author 1, 2006). Rather than attune to
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40 67 such vital oscillations, being “active for life” means orienting primarily to a destination and
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42 68 attaining a “durability” for getting there (cf. Sport for Life, 2016).
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49 69 The relational, contextualized focus of the present inquiry into partnered practices asks
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51 70 what possibilities unfold if we explore what it means to become not only *active* but also *inter-*
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53 71 *active for life*? Motional attunement to others may well maximize sensations of vitality in the
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3 72 present moment (Author 1, 2016; Author 2, 2007; Author 2 & Author 1, 2006; Author 2, 2017)
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5 73 and feelings of vital contact (Author 2, 2014; 2018). To be “inter-active” implies a feeling of
6
7 74 interconnection between oneself, the movement, others, and the environment in which the
8
9 75 activity takes place. Such connectedness is the basis of communication in any partnered sport.
10
11 76 The particular *angle* of our inquiry is the nuanced degrees of learning that participants in
12
13 77 partnered sports demonstrate. By describing the contextualized variants of leaning in, we aim to
14
15 78 show the degrees of relational sensitivity that these physical disciplines cultivate. We thus delve
16
17 79 into a “physical literacy” (cf. Author 1, 2011; Author 1, 2016; Author 1 & Author 2, 2014) of
18
19 80 partnered interactivity. Our hope is that the relational awareness that emerges from studying
20
21 81 these partnered practices will not only assist those wishing to advance in these partnered
22
23 82 practices but also promote relational sensitivity when teaching and coaching a wider range of
24
25 83 inter-activities, including establishing relational connections in team games and sports. This
26
27 84 research thus offers a practical pathway for teaching what is so often thought of as ineffable yet
28
29 85 is characterized by what we have described elsewhere as the very satisfying experience of
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31 86 “interactive flow” (Author 1 & Author 2, 2006a, 2006b, 2015).

87 **A Function2Flow Motion-Sensing Inquiry**

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40 88 When we lean into life as a primary motivation for increasing physical activity participation,
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42 89 the way we experience our bodies and our movements enables us to shift from something to
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44 90 objectively quantify, such as how many breaths we take in a VO2 max assessment for example,
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46 91 to that which enlivens us, so much so that it takes our breath away. The Function2Flow (F2F)
47
48 92 conceptual model (Author 1, 2015a, 2016) was created with this interdisciplinary intertwining in
49
50 93 mind (Author 1, 2011; Author 1 & Author 2, 2009; Author 2 & Author 1, 2006, 2007). The F2F
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52 94 model thus facilitates an interdisciplinary understanding of how any movement, from a walk
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Inter-Active for Life

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3 95 down the street to a complicated series of steps in a more formalized game, can be analyzed in
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5 96 relation to the experiential dimensions of movement *function*, *form*, *feeling*, and *flow*. Flow is
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7
8 97 posited as the desired outcome as it connotes intrinsically enjoyable physical activity which
9
10 98 engenders feelings of being ‘at one’ with others and ‘in sync’ with the milieu of action
11
12 99 (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; 1997; 2000; 2008).

14
15 100 Research questions that orient us to what it means to become *inter-active for life* within a
16
17 101 partnered practice were developed in keeping with the F2F framework (Author 1 2011, 2015a,
18
19 102 2016). These questions provide opportunity to explore a *functional*, *form-bound*, *feeling-induced*,
20
21 103 and *flow-enhancing* pathway toward inter-activity. The constitutive F2F dimensions thus inspire
22
23 104 the following questions: What *functional* fitness attributes having to do with cardiovascular
24
25 105 capacity, muscular strength and endurance, agility, and flexibility provide a foundation and
26
27 106 physical capacity to engage in partnered practices? Is there a visibly identifiable “correct” *form*
28
29 107 in partnered practices? How does this form vary from one partnership to another? How does it
30
31 108 help one connect to a partner? What *feelings*, from inner sensations of breath and balance to
32
33 109 muscular tension, extension and alignment manifest in partnered practices? How does this
34
35 110 internal awareness affect these practices? And is the feeling of *flow* something that is simply
36
37 111 there or not there or does it build and fade with various intensities, energies, rhythms or
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39 112 frequencies in partnered practices?
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113 **Motion-Sensing Inquiry**

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45 114 The foci of our motion-sensing inquiries (Author 1 & Author 2, 2006a; 2015; Author 2 &
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47 115 Author 1, 2019; Author 1 & Author 2, *submitted*) into the practices of leaning into life were the
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49 116 movement disciplines of AcroYoga, Push Hands Taijiquan, Salsa Dance, and Equestrian Arts.
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51 117 The particular ways we leaned into these inquiries included: a) observing expert teachers and
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3 118 coaches of each partnered activity in action; b) interviewing each expert on a minimum of two
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5 119 occasions; c) acquiring firsthand experience with each partnered activity through introductory
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7 120 workshops and, in some cases, by ongoing participation on our respective parts in the activity up
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9 121 to competition and performance levels which have provided opportunities to test out what was
10
11 122 texted in the transcribed interviews, i.e., we were able to enact what we saw, heard, and felt; and
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13 123 d) working with a professional videographer to film each disciplinary expert, as they engaged in
14
15 124 their partnered practice and taught it to others, for the purpose of exemplifying the most salient
16
17 125 qualities of inter-active awareness (*N.B., see www._____.ca for each video documentary*).
18
19 126 Such a motion-sensing inquiry enabled us to kinetically, aesthetically, kinesthetically, and
20
21 127 energetically incorporate the study data in a way that not only exemplifies the life experienced
22
23 128 by our experts engaged in their partnered activities but also afforded opportunity for us to
24
25 129 become enlivened through the research process.

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31 130 We turned to Daniel Stern's (1993, 2004, 2010) notion of "vitality affects" and "vitality
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33 131 forms" to assist us with our motional sense-making. Stern drew attention to the various temporal
34
35 132 contours of everyday movements i.e., their beginning, middle and end phases, and how they may
36
37 133 manifest in a variety of building, cresting, and fading intensities, energies, rhythms and
38
39 134 frequencies. A smile might burst across someone's face, for example, or slowly take shape
40
41 135 depending on the intensity of emotion both felt and expressed. Such motional sensitivity to
42
43 136 emotional expression challenges conceptions of emotions is seemingly unitary and categorical in
44
45 137 the Darwinian sense of states of happiness, interest, surprise, anger, and so on (Stern 1993; 2002;
46
47 138 2004). We also make reference to the corpus of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone work on the "primacy
48
49 139 of movement" and the "kinetic-kinesthetic-affective dynamics" of movement (Sheets-Johnstone,
50
51 140 1999, 2011, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2020). The combination of Stern's and Sheets-Johnstone's
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3 141 analyses of motional sensitivity provide a theoretical basis for appreciating the interactive
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5 142 manner in which these disciplinary practices are experienced by those who do them to the
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8 143 highest levels.

10 144 **Participants**

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12 145 Five expert level participants were invited to help us better understand the qualitative
13
14 146 dynamics of becoming *Inter-Active for Life*. Inclusion criteria for these participants were:
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17 147 individuals who engage in an inter-activity on a regular basis (3-7 times per week); have accrued
18
19 148 a minimum of 10 years of experience; have shared their knowledge about this inter-activity with
20
21 149 others; and are recognized globally as expert practitioners. The particular individuals we
22
23 150 observed, interviewed, and filmed included the founders of AcroYoga, Eugene Poku and Jessica
24
25 151 Goldberg, Taijiquan master Sam Masich, two-time world Salsa champion, international judge
26
27 152 and coach, Anya Katsveman, and Equestrian artist and master horse trainer, Paul Dufresne (as
28
29 153 featured on the _____ .ca website).
30
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33 154 **Biographies**

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35 155 *Eugene Poku and Jessica Goldberg* are the founders of AcroYoga and directors of
36
37 156 AcroYogaMontréal. They met in 1982 at a dance school called “5678” in Montreal, the city in
38
39 157 which they currently reside, and have performed together ever since. The unique fusion of dance,
40
41 158 acrobatics, martial arts, contortion, mask work, object manipulation and audience participation
42
43 159 featured in their performances and workshops and provided a basis for turning to Ashtanga Yoga
44
45 160 in 2004 and the subsequent development of AcroYoga which they now teach all over the world.
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49 161 *Master Sam Masich*, distinguished as one of the “100 Extraordinary Chinese Martial Arts
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51 162 Practitioners” in the world by the International Wushu Sanshoudao Association, is a certified
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53 163 eighth degree master and full-time instructor of the Yang-Style Taijiquan. Sam Masich has
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3 164 earned many gold medals in national and international level competitions. He is also a certified
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5 165 competition judge and has officiated in North America and China.

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7 166 *Anya Katsevman*, two-time world salsa champion and recipient of over twenty international
8
9 167 and world titles in ballroom, is also a coach and choreographer for eight world salsa champions.
10
11 168 She judges international competitions, designs costumes, and has performed in touring shows such
12
13 169 as “Burn the Floor” on Broadway and ABC’s “Dancing with the Stars.”

14
15 170 *Paul Dufresne*, clinician and horse trainer, winner of numerous National Equestrian
16
17 171 championships over the past 20 years, is a featured performer at Horse Shows and Equestrian
18
19 172 Expositions across Canada. He calls his disciplines Circensic Dressage (a combination of
20
21 173 Classical Dressage and Trick Training), Reining which involves Vaquera and Western styles,
22
23 174 and Liberty Training horses to perform in large spectator arenas.

175 **The Lively Lean**

24
25 176 While one could explore an extensive Function-Form-Feeling-Flow inquiry into each of
26
27 177 the partnered practices, we approach the F2F dimensions of a lean with an exemplar from each
28
29 178 inter-activity. We begin with leans that are most obvious in the partner-supported, outstretched
30
31 179 positions of AcroYoga and emphasize the *functional* body awareness upon which they are based.
32
33 180 We then, through the example of Taijiquan Push Hands, delve into the experience of wave-like,
34
35 181 back-and-forth rotational and reciprocal bodily leans with attention to bodily *form*. The *feelings*,
36
37 182 from various degrees of pain to pleasure, that come with subtle variations of reciprocated leans
38
39 183 are articulated through the partnered practice of salsa dance. And finally, the interactive *flows*,
40
41 184 the building up of positive energy through nuanced variations of bodily leanings communicated
42
43 185 are exemplified in equestrian arts where bursts and moments that brim with life are magnified in
44
45 186 the ways a horse responds motionally to the most subtle of cues.

Inter-Active for Life

187 ***The Functional Lean in AcroYoga***

188 Normally when we think of yoga we imagine a person going through a series of lying,
189 sitting and standing positions on a mat. Even within the context of a group class, the focus is
190 turned inward to one's breath and the various inner sensations of each stretch or extended pose.
191 AcroYoga, by contrast, is a relational practice where one person becomes the "base", or what we
192 might think of as the "living mat", upon which the other person, the "flyer", can lean upon and
193 into. The "flyer" and the "base" connect through eye contact and synchronous inhalation before
194 the "flyer" presses into the "base's" feet, knees, shoulders, and/or hands in order to move in and
195 out of what seems an endless combination of supine, prone, side-lying and inverted poses. The
196 success of this dynamically partnered balance is premised is the reciprocation from one moment
197 to the next. Compared to standing on a mat or walking on the floor, where it is only gravity that
198 ultimately holds sway, Eugene, the expert flyer we interviewed, describes the life and energy he
199 senses as his base, Jessie, presses into him.

200 When I'm with Jessie, it's like I'm on the ground, which is what you want as a base... she
201 is soft, she is a cushion.. [like a] sidewalk which has a little give. So that's the first thing.
202 The second thing is how I react to the ground... What are the things I do in my body...to
203 be able to receive the energy that's been given to me and also give energy back? That's
204 the reciprocity, in every way. (E. Poku, pers. comm., December 2019).

205
206 What may be considered to be merely functional in terms of the support a "base" provides,
207 similar to the way one rock may be stacked on top of another to create a beautiful and aesthetic
208 structure by a river's edge, there is instead a softening that occurs in the way each partner leans
209 upon and into the other. Such a connection does not happen overnight as Jessie explains. It
210 comes through a prolonged commitment to one's partnered practice.

211 We didn't even begin to understand about softening into reciprocity until like 15-20 years
212 of working together...understanding that the basis of that... how do I move from here to
213 that supportive, place...the same feeling of security ... we are not fighting each other....

Inter-Active for Life

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3 214 That takes a while and when it comes it sure is blissful. (J. Goldberg, pers. comm.,
4 215 December 2019).

5 216
6 217 Softening into reciprocity in a balance requires an oscillating sway. Eugene explains,
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8
9 218 “there is always movement but it's minimized” (E. Poku, pers. comm., December 2019). More
10
11 219 pronounced movement occurs in the acroyogis transition from one balanced position to the next,
12
13 220 yet the attention to micro movements, and to subtle motile responsiveness, is key to experiencing
14
15 221 success. Jessie describes the journey of what it is like to be a supportive base as the flyer moves
16
17 222 from one angled lean to the next.

18
19
20 223 For me it's all about reciprocity so I wait. I feel. I wait. I breathe. I look. I feel where the
21 224 weight is and I go into the opposite direction. If Eugene is coming in to do a twist to the
22 225 right side, I know that I have to overcompensate to the left because he's going to be
23 226 dragging that way. If I want to stay in a stack, then we take that breath, we take that eye
24 227 contact, and Eugene can start to twist and I start to modify my position to reciprocate his
25 228 position. He senses me doing that through his body awareness. (J. Goldberg, pers. comm.,
26 229 January 2020).

27
28 230
29 231 The function of balance in AcroYoga is thus a counter-lean. Jessie summarizes the way she
30
31 232 subtly supports the various shapes that the flyer moves in and out of: “Basically, I'm trying not to
32
33 233 shove my partner over. So, whatever Eugene does I'm going to lean back in this way [she
34
35 234 gestures a counter-balanced position] to make sure that we keep breathing together” (J.
36
37 235 Goldberg, pers. comm., January 2020). When asked to describe the experience of a counter-lean
38
39 236 that is going well, she said that extraneous tension melts away and the breath becomes smoother
40
41 237 and slower.

42
43
44 238 Eugene and Jessie lead us through several warm-up activities in their three-hour
45
46 239 introduction to AcroYoga workshop to orient us to the functional way balance may be
47
48 240 experienced relationally. One such inter-activity is called, “Ninja tag”, a game where players
49
50 241 walk around in a stealthy fashion and in a relatively small area. On command, when given the
51
52 242 “stop” cue, we all assume a stationary stance and are invited to reach out and destabilize the
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Inter-Active for Life

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3 243 person closest to us. At first many of us step out of our stationary positions as we react to the
4
5 244 gentle pushes and prods. The more we play the game, however, the more we realize that the
6
7 245 secret to sustaining a balance is to engage the core, not to the point of becoming completely stiff,
8
9 246 because stiff positions topple more easily, but in a way that helps us lean back in to the other
10
11 247 person. Such warm-ups awaken a sense of countered action and reaction in the various ways one
12
13 248 may sway in response to the other. Jessie explains the relative importance of such a warm-up
14
15 249 activity: “I need to make sure that you can lean in... before you think about taking anybody up in
16
17 250 the air” (J. Goldberg, pers. comm., December 2019).

18
19 251 Once a functional sense of counter-leaning is established, no matter what the position,
20
21 252 from a plank to an outstretched star, the flyer is not only sustained by partner responsive and
22
23 253 reciprocal core engagement, but an awareness that also stretches out to the extremities. Eugene,
24
25 254 explains that “the more the flyers can integrate the core, the lighter they are, and the easier it is
26
27 255 for them to manipulate their bodies with the bases, or the bases to manipulate their bodies” (E.
28
29 256 Poku, pers. comm., January 2020), yet he also attends to his outer extremities, namely, his feet.
30
31 257 “Even though it is a simple thing but for me as a flyer, the engagement of my feet and my legs
32
33 258 matter.” (E. Poku, pers. comm., December 2019).

34
35 259 AcroYoga teaches us that we may sustain a balance in any position with a motile counter-
36
37 260 balance. If we were to stand on one leg, for example, and experiment with leaning out to the side,
38
39 261 we should feel the counter-balance that prevents us from falling over. We might ask: What part
40
41 262 of us leans away and what leans back into the point of departure? What role does core
42
43 263 engagement play as well as attention to the extremities of our head, hands and feet? And in the
44
45 264 quest for stillness, how might we welcome moments of oscillation where we do not hold

Inter-Active for Life

265 extraneous tension? How might this sense of leaning into a balance enliven us to what is possible
266 in any posture or position?

267 *The Form of the Lean in Push Hands Taijiquan*

268 Taijiquan is generally imagined to be a solo soft and meditative practice comprised of a
269 flowing sequence of choreographed forms. Master Sam Masich describes how this solo practice of
270 Taijiquan relates to the Push Hands practice as a relational activity in which the two participants
271 move with one another in oscillating and, to some extent, reciprocating interactions.

272 We are usually familiar with Tai Chi as a kind of solo movement the groups of people
273 practicing in the parks in Shanghai, and this is a big part of the training, at the same time
274 it is designed to work with partner practice. What solo movement allows me to do is start
275 to learn how the waist and hips work so when I set into my stance, I'm standing in such a
276 way that I'm not going to lose my balance. I'm not twisted. I'm not out of structure.
277 When I perform the written or improvised gestures, I'm always doing it from the base,
278 from the legs and the waist. (S. Masich, pers. comm., October 2018).

279
280 Similar to the core awareness and engagement that is required to engage in AcroYoga, practice
281 in Tai Chi as a solo art is required as foundational to the ways of moving through the partnered
282 form. Sam contrasts the internal body awareness, of "bodyfulness" (Caldwell, 2018) needed for a
283 range of meditative and martial arts, to the externalized movement orientation of other physical
284 activities.

285 We live in a society that values physical activity and sport mostly in terms of getting the
286 ball in the hoop or getting the puck in the net. The idea of studying physical activity just
287 to understand the core realities of something like movement is foreign to us. Tai chi at
288 least at one level requires that we just look at how the shoulder works as a ball and socket
289 joint, how that is like the hip in its ball and socket joint behavior, how the elbows as well
290 as the knees are hinge joints and the relationship between the wrist and the ankle. These
291 fundamental realities that both put constraints on movement but also give us all of the
292 possibilities of movement are things that we really explore in a detailed way in Tai Chi
293 practice, [which is] something we wouldn't [necessarily attend to] when we're playing
294 basketball. (S. Masich, pers. comm., October 2018).

295
296 Such structural awareness is essential in attuning to the ways one leans in and responds to
297 a partner in Push Hands Tai Chi. The Yang style of Taijiquan has a basic stance of one leg

Inter-Active for Life

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3 298 placed in front of the other and the weight balance evenly over both. The torso is perpendicular
4
5 299 and different energies come into play. A forward pressing motion is met with a rolling back
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7 300 motion. Each partner leans into and away from one another as the points of contact of the arms
8
9 301 and hands are maintained from moment to moment. As this back and forth sway is taking place,
10
11 302 the intention is to “hold a structure” in which no matter the direction of bodily movement, the
12
13 303 body as a whole remains centered and grounded.
14

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16
17 304 But can such relational, bodily attention have relevance for the way we move in response
18
19 305 to each other in, say, basketball? Might there be applicability to the various ways we move to
20
21 306 receive or block a ball? At any given moment, if someone said “stop” in a basketball game and
22
23 307 the players were able to freeze, what bodily forms would be visible, and in terms of engagement,
24
25 308 what degrees of bodily lean would be apparent? If one one were to say “stop” in the midst of the
26
27 309 Push Hands interactions, each partner, if well practiced, should be in a recognizable form that
28
29 310 exemplifies the core realities of Tai Chi which Sam Masich put into four categories: actions that
30
31 311 a) ward off (peng), b) roll back (lu), c) press (ji), and d) push (an). When experienced in Push
32
33 312 Hands, each of these actions are given and received such that the internal forces pressing
34
35 313 outward from one person are received by the other in such a way that they are neutralized in a
36
37 314 dynamically balanced, or yin and yang, fashion.
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42 315 To orient to this reciprocated interaction, imagine you are in an introductory workshop
43
44 316 Sam is leading. It is common for him to call upon participants to physically demonstrate the
45
46 317 desired Push Hands forms. On this particular occasion he invites one of his student-instructors to
47
48 318 assist him in a demonstration. Mathew accepts Sam’s invitation with a bow. He faces Sam,
49
50 319 assumes an evenly-weighted, slightly bent-legged stance with one foot forward and the other
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52 320 angled backwards. This stance is mirrored by Sam. Each of them gently lift their hands upwards
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Inter-Active for Life

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3 321 and forwards to establish a connection. Wrists roll over wrists, forearms circle both outward and
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5 322 inward, and their hips rotate as their lunge-supported torsos lean toward and away from each
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8 323 other. Occasionally one of them takes a step forward or backward while the other person
9
10 324 maintains the distance with matching motions.

11
12 325 Sam begins talking to the workshop participants while demonstrating these moves with
13
14 326 Matthew. He says: “I receive the point of contact. Right here. I do not resist the pressure
15
16
17 327 Matthew is offering. I say ‘yes’ to this contact and get underneath it and support it” (Master Sam
18
19 328 Masich, pers. comm., October 2018). Sam rotates his wrist as he says this. He bends his knees a
20
21 329 little more and sinks his weight into his rear hip. In saying “yes” Sam ensures that his connection
22
23
24 330 to the ground such that his alignment and balance remain undisturbed. Sam holds himself within
25
26 331 the classically defined postures of Tai Chi. He continues to shift his position in relation to
27
28 332 Matthew’s presses and releases, all the while holding a confident bearing.

29
30
31 333 Sam teaches Push Hands as a practice premised on maintaining optimal form in one’s
32
33 334 actions of leaning in. There are progressively degrees of “intrapersonal attunement” (Siegel,
34
35 335 2007) attained through this inwardly-focused attitude to one’s body and connection to another’s
36
37
38 336 body. To simplify how we might orient to this intrapersonal attunement, Sam describes the
39
40 337 bodily responses to incoming unexpected force through a yes/no binary. The YES response is
41
42 338 one that is more cultivated and practiced. It isn’t knee-jerk, where we say NO to it by trying to
43
44
45 339 avoid or fight it.

46
47 340 If Matthew is pushing towards me, my tendency is to shirk away from it. If he pushes and
48 341 I resist, I’m saying NO. If I try to get away from it, I’m saying no. Tai Chi is
49 342 fundamentally a YES art. When Matt pushes me, I want to say YES to the point of
50 343 connection first, and that’s where we really have a connection. I want to feel the point of
51 344 connection, how I support it and, in supporting it, how I can support it with my own
52 345 structure...I actually have more power if his force is coming and I’ve learned to accept
53 346 force in this way. So if he’s pushing along my arm and I say NO, he can come and take
54 347 advantage of my resistance. But if I say YES, it’s like somebody gives you a gift, hands

Inter-Active for Life

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3 348 you an object. I say, that's fine, I support that, but I'm going to put it over there on the
4 349 shelf. If I say no to it and force it around, it gives him fuel for his fire. But if I say YES, I
5 350 accept your force and now that I've accepted it, this force is mine to do with it as I want
6 351 and some of the things I want to do may be quite nasty. (S. Masich, pers. comm., October
7 352 2018).

8 353
9 354
10 355 This last comment gives pause for thought. It was exemplified in our Push Hands
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12
13 356 workshop when a 70 year old woman destabilized a man in his 40s. She had a twinkle in her eye
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15
16 357 when she shared her words of wisdom: "The harder they try to push you over, the harder they
17
18 358 fall." Such is the seemingly miraculous feat of a Tai Chi master who, by maintaining form, can
19
20 359 redirect energy. Beyond asserting one's advantage in a combative or competitive context,
21
22
23 360 however, Push Hands presents a relational way for leaning into the difficult moments in life with
24
25 361 more composure.

26
27 362 When I'm practicing Push Hands with a partner, I'm not only trying to learn how to
28 363 attack and defend or deal with force and stress, I am also trying to refine my energy. I am
29 364 also trying to help the partner to refine their energy. We can see with the example of the
30 365 partner being very aggressive that if I act aggressively, my energy is not becoming more
31 366 refined, it is actually becoming crass. I'm training myself in the instinct of animalistic
32 367 responses, whereas what I want to achieve through Push Hands is that when force comes
33 368 my way I learn to accept it. I learn to support it. What I'm learning to do is, through my
34 369 connection with the other person, work from my natural instincts toward my more
35 370 cultivated responses. When I interact with a partner, what I'm trying to do is take those
36 371 first layer instincts that cause me to make the errors and escalate everything out of
37 372 proportion, and convert this layer into a kind of practice so that my connection with a
38 373 partner takes me to a place where I am responding better. I am responding within my
39 374 structure, with connection. I am responding by saying YES rather than by saying NO, all
40 375 the time not in a fear-based response but a connection-based response. This is true self-
41 376 cultivation. It is not easy to get there in anything we do in life. Push Hands practices and
42 377 the rules that support Push Hands practice are designed to take us in this direction and
43 378 ultimately make us better people. (S. Masich, pers. comm., October 2018).

44 379
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49 380 The Tai Chi YES may come across initially as a bit more manipulative than receiving and
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51 381 supporting weight in, say, contact improvisation (Author 2, 2014). Yet when Sam Masich says
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54 382 that "I am trying to refine my energy so that when force comes my way I can accept it and trust
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Inter-Active for Life

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3 383 it," there is a sense of some vital power that transcends any individual motivations to over-power
4
5 384 one another. George Leonard (1999) has written, in this regard, of his practice of Aikido in terms
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7
8 385 of also saying YES to life. He asks: "Do you really *want* to say yes to life, not merely for the
9
10 386 extrinsic rewards it might bring but basically for its own sake?" (p. 158). This YES response is
11
12 387 about living fully in the NOW.

388 ***The Feeling of the Lean in Salsa Dance***

16
17 389 The forward leaning posture one assumes in Salsa affords a sense of connection and
18
19 390 communication with one's partner. While it might not be as obvious as the slightly A-framed,
20
21 391 chest-to-chest connection in Tango, the forward lean is always there to some extent. Anya
22
23 392 Katsevman describes the salsa posture as a neutral anatomical stacking of joints with the caveat
24
25 393 that the hips are more forward in that they are placed over the front part of the foot instead of the
26
27 394 midline. This alignment affords a forward lead in one's walk as well as a sense of compression
28
29 395 between the interconnected palms and arms. If a follower leans too far back in her stance to her
30
31 396 heels, she will feel heavy and hesitant to the lead. Anya explains in more detail:

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33 397 Because we are communicating with each other it is important to give each other weight.
34
35 398 Connection happens through body weight, therefore as part of our normal posture we
36
37 399 have to take the entire bone structure of the body and put it towards the balls of the feet
38
39 400 as opposed to the middle or the back so that my weight could be closer to my partner.
40
41 401 And when both of us maintain that we can always feel connected without creating any
42
43 402 extra force or pressure. (A. Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

44 403 What is important to communicate to salsa dancers who are in the midst of refining their practice
45
46 404 is that the forward lean is neither constant nor fixed. Yet, an awareness of one's sense of motile
47
48 405 agency (Sheets-Johnstone, 2017a) within the Salsa lean takes time to develop. _____, the first
49
50 406 author of this inquiry, reflects back on the lean she used to adopt each time she danced (Author 1
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52 407 2015b):

Inter-Active for Life

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3 408 When I walk with the intention of falling into the present moment, I open myself up to
4 409 my partner so that I am both grounded and light at the same time. The momentum
5 410 generated from my feet ripples up into our connected palms. If my postural frame is
6 411 supported yet soft, without excessive tension, he can guide me. A turn or a shift in
7 412 direction, a step into the unknown, can blossom into fullness when I abandon myself to
8 413 the moment with *complete trust, when I give my arms to my partner to move*, as if I
9 414 were that leaf in the wind. (Author 1 2015b, 130, *italics added*).
10 415
11 416

12 416 The longer one dances and commits to progressing, the more one becomes aware that not
13
14 417 every partner on the social dance floor is worthy of *complete trust*. If a follower leans fully into
15 418 the dance and receives a cue from a leader with excess unanticipated force, pain in the neck and
16 419 shoulder region may result, which may turn into a chronic condition if not addressed. With a
17 420 desire to reduce such pain, _____ asked Anya to describe how she would respond to such
18 421 moments of interaction. She said, “if someone is pushing too hard, I have two options. I can
19 422 accept that and push back or completely loosen up so they feel their own pushing” (A.
20 423 Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019). She elaborated further when she was asked what that felt
21 424 like for the lead. She said, “It feels weird for them. I become a noodle”. Anya purposely pulls
22 425 back and softens so that “He feels himself and hopefully relaxes” (A. Katsevman, pers. comm.,
23 426 March 2019).

24 427 Imagine that you are doing a back-to-back partner squat from a seated to standing
25 428 position so as to orient to this sensation. Success is based on both partners pushing into each
26 429 other equally. If one person pushes into the other with excessive force and the other relaxes and
27 430 chooses not to reciprocate, the result of the excessive pushing becomes palpably obvious to the
28 431 person who is pressing more than the other one. Within the context of a salsa dance, Anya
29 432 describes what it feels like to soften and become a noodle.

30 433 I relax my arms physically to such an extent that I give nothing and take nothing. I use
31 434 my legs to get the job done because there is still a significant amount of lead I feel
32 435 because we are holding hands but I don't give my body to that person so that the direct

Inter-Active for Life

436 point of contact isn't hurt. If they are rough it doesn't affect the rest of me and all that
437 person is feeling is themselves. (A. Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019)

438
439 With a desire to sense what Anya described, that very same evening ____ accepted a
440 dance from someone she usually avoids because he tends to be too forceful in his cues. The
441 following vignette describes the manner in which a motion-sensing interaction took place.

442 Amir (pseudonym), a man who is slightly shorter than me with a somewhat athletic build,
443 walks toward me with a smile of recognition. Instead of averting my eyes, I look into his.
444 He offers me an open hand. I accept by placing mine in his as we walk to the middle of
445 the dance floor. He begins to lead me into a few warm up patterns that are easy to follow
446 (i.e., right-turn, cross-body lead, etc.). And then it happens. He sharpens his gestures and
447 begins to cue directional changes when I am half way into a turn. More torque is
448 generated from this windup action. I follow the unanticipated change of direction. He
449 smiles. The dance continues. Yet, I am determined not to give of myself as I usually do,
450 to this dance, to the likelihood of pain that may emerge from each twist and torque as I
451 have done in the past. I hear Anya's words in my mind, "*I remove myself from the*
452 *situation. I noodle. I relax my arms physically to such an extent that I give nothing and*
453 *take nothing*". I begin to soften my arms more than I have ever done before. The torque
454 immediately diminishes. The edge is taken off. I begin to feel better. I feel light. I feel
455 free. I continue to walk in the directions he cues yet, I lean less. I give less. His smile
456 fades... Slowly my lips begin to curl upward. (Author 1, March 2019, motion-sensing
457 inquiry journal).

458
459 Author 1 was not previously aware that she could lean into a dance with variable degrees.
460 Such motion-sensing awareness prepared her to not only avoid moments of unanticipated pain by
461 pulling back, but also intuit when it was time to give more. When Anya described giving her
462 body to the person, she is referring to the degree she gives of herself to the dance, not just
463 physically but also emotionally and energetically. As one can imagine in other contexts such as
464 the forward angling pressure in an offensive basketball dribble, "your posture projects a certain
465 type of energy" (A. Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2016). While the ideal scenario is that both
466 partners give of themselves in the same amount to the dance, such an exchange is rarely
467 experienced, even within award winning dances. Anya recalls her interactions with the person

Inter-Active for Life

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3 468 with whom she won two world titles, and moments when she would lean in more than her
4
5 469 partner.

6
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8 470 I remember crossing his boundaries of comfort. I remember always being in his personal
9 471 space because I had to create intimate moments. I remember creating explosive moments
10 472 of stillness. I remember giving those things to him in the dance. I remember him
11 473 executing the work but I never felt this exchange of powers. Even at the end of our
12 474 partnership we never got to a place where it was a mutual exchange, or at least I never felt
13 475 it. (A. Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2016)

14 476
15
16 477 Anya was asked if she experienced moments when she received more than what she gave with
17
18 478 other dance partners. She replied,

19
20 479 [it is] unusual because I'm usually the person filling it up. [...But if it happens] that's nice
21 480 because then I get to experience instead of create. It is more exciting for me to react than
22 481 it is to create so if I set the mood it's fine but if he sets the mood then it excites me more
23 482 and I'll probably even end up giving more. (A. Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2016)

24 483
25
26 484 Attuning to such acts of giving oneself to a dance, to a moment, through becoming aware of
27
28 485 one's motile agency in the way one leans into a dance, affords positive feelings and refined
29
30 486 awareness of when it is time to give more or hold back a little and give less. When we feel the
31
32 487 dynamic qualities of a lean we are developing the affective repertoire that is otherwise cast more
33
34 488 general as "thinking in movement" (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, 2011, 2017a, 2017b).

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36
37 489 What might these leaning feelings teach us in terms of our supposed natural tendencies,
38
39 490 inclinations and disposition to move through life? Do we tend to lean more, give more? Do we
40
41 491 sense when it is time to noddle or soften? Before this motion-sensing inquiry began, Rebeca not
42
43 492 only had a tendency to lean into her salsa dances with too much abandonment at times that led to
44
45 493 a shoulder injury, she also became aware of her tendency to lean in a little too much or push
46
47 494 herself too hard no matter what the context. While grimaces of exertion might be acceptable in
48
49 495 other sports, the spiraling and swiveling lean in salsa is performed best when unnecessary
50
51 496 tensions fade away. What might inspire us from feeling our way into a salsa lean is that we can

Inter-Active for Life

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3 497 ripple and soften our bodily comportment just enough to respond to the other but not overstay,
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5 498 overextend or over-lean into the moment.
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499 ***The Flow of the Lean in Equestrian Arts***

9
10 500 The motions of leaning in, away from, and with a partner in AcroYoga, Push Hands Tai
11
12 501 Chi and Salsa Dance take on particular significance in Equestrian Arts. The effects of postural
13
14 502 and positional changes can be quite dramatic in the discipline of Liberty Training where the
15
16 503 trainer and the horse interact on the ground and where forms and patterns, gait transitions, and
17
18 504 modulations of energy expenditure, are cued through bodily postures, positions, and gestures.
19
20 505 Paul Dufresne discusses how he cultivates this relational connection through an energetic
21
22 506 connection across space. He leans toward the horse that is circling around him. He turns his
23
24 507 shoulders almost square to the line of the horse's travel and with particular focus on the horse's
25
26 508 "drive-line" which is the muscular coupling of the horse's back and hindquarters from whence
27
28 509 the motional power derives. Leaning in, Paul drives the horse forward in a continuous arc around
29
30 510 him. Were the focus of his attention a little further forward on the shoulders he might well turn
31
32 511 the horse to the outside and away from him. But by leaning into the drive line, he holds the horse
33
34 512 in a dynamic tension of what another horse trainer called "drive and draw" (Field, 2014).
35
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40 513 Paul says to us while working with a young mare at Liberty: "What I am asking myself is
41
42 514 that, when I get the horse to move, can I put pressure on her ribcage to have her soften and bend
43
44 515 around me? But first, my focus, my core, will be aiming behind that at her hindquarters. If I need
45
46 516 forward motion, my pressure will be there. "And when I pressure there, see how she bends
47
48 517 around me? I'm riding her right now from the ground" (P. Dufresne, pers. comm., August,
49
50 518 2018). Paul explains the training process as being very much about using pressure to create bend.
51
52 519 He says, in relation to working with the mare:
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Inter-Active for Life

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3 520 You can see now that when I create pressure she is bending from the poll to the tail to get
4 521 around. The reason why I do that is because I don't want horse to counter-flex and lean
5 522 in. She is not to invert. That pressure, when I ask this horse to bend there, is going to
6 523 cause a physical response in this horse to actually start to release endorphins in her body,
7 524 and then she can't help it, she just starts to relax. (P. Dufresne, pers. comm., August,
8 525 2018).

9 526
10 527 Later on, Paul brings two more horses into the round pen. These geldings circle in
11
12
13 528 tandem around him, seeming more interested in one another initially than in Paul. In response he
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15
16 529 leans in, pressing similarly his attention into the hindquarters of the horse on the inside of the
17
18 530 circle. Both horses almost instantaneously transition from a trot to a canter. Paul holds this lean
19
20 531 and taps the ground with the cue stick he holds. An even greater energy of motion is evident as
21
22 532 the horses stretch into a gallop. Paul then draws back, standing straighter, while the horses slow
23
24 533 the tempo and settle into a rhythmic and synchronously cadenced trot. Paul softens his shoulders,
25
26 534 lowering his arms to his sides, and dropping his own energetic force into his pelvis. He focuses
27
28 535 now on the horses' flanks as if his gaze can feel right where a rider would place her inside leg to
29
30 536 have her horse bend softly around this cueing contact. The horses continue to circle around him,
31
32 537 coming closer and closer to the centre of the round pen where he stands.

33
34
35 538 Paul leans slightly back as if opening up an invitational space for the horses. He hollows
36
37 539 his chest a little, drawing back the energy from his core that had been pressing the horses into
38
39 540 propulsive motion. The horses turn more evidently toward him. Instead of just the inside eyes,
40
41 541 both their eyes are on him. Their bodies soften even more. They transition to a collected trot. The
42
43 542 circle becomes smaller and smaller until the inside horse almost brushes past Paul. He takes a
44
45 543 step or two back and the horses slow to a walk and come to stand with him, side-by-side,
46
47 544 shoulder-to-shoulder.

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52 545 The quality of the lean in Liberty Training is reflected in the responsiveness of the horses.
53
54 546 When the interaction is flowing there is a sense of "bringing up life" in the horses (Author 2,

Inter-Active for Life

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3 547 2018). Yet here, in watching Paul lean into, with and back from their motions, we gain more
4
5 548 specific understanding of just how this upsurge of life feeling is created kinetically,
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8 549 kinesthetically, aesthetically and synergistically. Paul says we need to keep asking ourselves:
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10 550 “How little energy do we need, or, how little pressure do we need to get it done? If there is just
11
12 551 the touch of the rein when riding, the horse should be moving over.” Impart just “a little bit of
13
14
15 552 energy and then give the horse a chance to pick it up” (P. Dufresne, pers. comm., August, 2018).

16
17 553 The signs of relational flow are that the horse is going to be much more responsive, much
18 554 softer. The horse is going to allow you to make changes to how she moves, or where she
19 555 goes, with no apprehension. She is going to think “Oh, this way over here.” And you are
20 556 going to use a minimum of energy to create it. All the cues become softer and softer. It
21 557 becomes just like a dance. (P. Dufresne, pers. comm., August, 2018).

22 558
23
24 559 To make his point, Paul refers to the rhythmicity of the interaction. We feel for this rhythmicity
25
26 560 just by watching how horses move. They walk, trot and canter from four-beat, to two-beat, to
27
28 561 three-beat rhythms. They transition upwards and downwards through these gaits with fluidity in
29
30 562 a consistently-held rhythm. The trainer attunes to the horse’s motions, cues them, and modulates
31
32 563 them by taking up this rhythmicity. Or as Paul says, “any time you lead with rhythm you are
33
34 564 going to be much easier for your horse to understand. It means that you are going to have flow.
35
36 565 And when you have flow, you are not imposing. There is life in it” (P. Dufresne, pers. comm.,
37
38 566 August, 2018).

567 Conclusion

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44 568 From AcroYoga, Push Hands Taijiquan, and Salsa Dance to Equestrian Arts, what this
45
46 569 inquiry indicates is that a lean situated within any context, such as a game or a sport, is never
47
48 570 stiff, still or static. There is a functional, formal, felt and flowing dynamism to leaning-in. The
49
50 571 significance of attuning to the contextualized, discipline-specific nuances of leaning-in is that we
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54 572 can better sense the life that can be brought up and that can be so interactively enhanced. We

Inter-Active for Life

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3 573 can come to appreciate the different functions that a lean serves, the multitude of forms in which
4
5 574 it becomes efficacious, the repertoire of feelings that it evokes, and the omnipresent possibility of
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8 575 flow within actions and responses of leaning in, with, and away from a partner.
9

10 576 This motion-sensing inquiry into the various ways a simple posture maybe experienced
11
12 577 inspires us to pay more attention to where we are carrying our weight and what capabilities such
13
14 578 awareness affords. Are we able to relax into a playful sway if we are experiencing a moment of
15
16 579 challenge, or when we feel that we are becoming unbalanced, both literally and metaphorically?
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19 580 Are we aware of the forms we assume when we are engaged not only in a physical pursuit but
20
21 581 also in the subtleties of leaning in to create connection with another person in conversation? Are
22
23 582 we aware of the feelings that modulate in intensity with the variable angles of a lean and the
24
25 583 pleasures and pains that may ensue when sustaining a lean for an extended period of time? Are
26
27 584 we opening ourselves up to leaning into moments that are greater than ourselves, where we may
28
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31 585 receive as much as, or more than we give?
32

33 586 We conclude this article with a catch phrase, “What’s your angle? What’s your lean?”.
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35 587 Once we become aware of our tendencies, our inclinations, to live life slightly pulled back or
36
37 588 perhaps too far forward, we can learn new ways of leaning into life through partnered
38
39 589 disciplinary practices. If possible, we encourage you to give our featured partnered practices a
40
41 590 try. If that is not an option for you, we invite you to return to your usual sport or movement
42
43 591 discipline and experiment with the different ways a bodily lean may be effected in terms of
44
45 592 where your weight is distributed and to what degree it is fixed and static versus dynamic and
46
47 593 responsive. Such an inquiry may sound practically simple, but the effects and affects have the
48
49 594 potential to be profound. You might begin by exploring the practical ways your relational
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53 595 postural awareness serves a functional purpose in terms of the various forms that take shape, but
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Inter-Active for Life

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3 596 as you continue to lean into your inquiry, you may discover more nuanced feelings and flows not
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5 597 only within your practice, but in the very manner in which you can lean more actively and
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7 598 interactively into life. To lean into life, with motion-sensing awareness, is thus a viable means to
8
9
10 599 become inter-active for life.

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