

# The framework of connection

A model for strong, whole, healthy individuals, partnerships, and communities

by Mitra Martin

## Introduction

We live in a disconnected and disconnecting world. We all are yearning to connect. But when we try to, we are stuck and stalled by the limitations of our understanding of what connection is. Argentine tango, the dance of connectedness, provides a metaphor and model for a better way.

Today, our culture holds and reinforces many half-truths about connection. Connection isn't a switch you can just turn on or off. It's not as simple as getting online, or going out regularly with friends, or showing up at a coworking space or for your weekly yoga class, or even being happily married. We can do all these things but still feel unconnected on a deeper level.

The framework of connection provides a complete, deep, and liberating model for understanding what connection is, and how we can cultivate it in our lives. This model comes directly from the embodied wisdom of Argentine Tango, a hundred-year-old improvised, social, folk dance and music tradition and growing community movement, part of humanity's intangible cultural heritage according to UNESCO.

In this paper, I attempt to articulate the gift that tango offers to humanity in a detailed framework that brings to life four realms of connectedness tango calls on its practitioners to develop. What does it really take to tango? Whole healthy individuals, embracing each other in creative partnerships, cultivating an inspired and dedicated practice community, making space to deepen their connection to spirit.

One exciting dimension of this work is its clear articulation of Tango's intricate and nuanced model of partnering, specifically, the relationship between "leader" and "follower." In the dance, these roles are surprisingly interrelated, each requiring both

initiative and receptivity, yin and yang. The model that emerges can change the way anyone thinks about leadership and followership in their life and work.

## **We, the improvisers**

We begin in the middle of the last century. Humanity was going through a rough patch; it was sick, almost suicidal. Rapt on mutilating parts of its own human self with tragic contraptions like atomic explosions and chambers of gas and automatic weaponry.

And in that moment of lostness there was one little organ of this vast body of seven billion people that was finally getting organized. One part - I like to imagine a heart - that managed to rise above and below and around the myth of sadness and loneliness, to rearrange reality and show us how the next thousands of years could be.

That heart is anything that steps outside of the world of if-this-then-that-tit-for-tat. It is whatever starts to find the rat-a-tat right there *in* that tit-for-tat. It is that commitment to being in tune on many levels, to keep choosing to know that every bit, every sweet bit of life can be a dance and actually is just like this one right now.

That heart is all the lonely people who didn't give up or go mad but decided to not be lonely. That heart is the musicians who broke free of "it has to be like this" and created jazz. That heart is the slaves and immigrants who chose to find a tango inside of their yearning. That heart is the kids who girded up for rap battles instead of knife fights. That heart is us - we, the improvisers.

We, the improvisers. What if the only thing holding humanity back is thinking that there's any activity that's **not** improvising? Improvising is a heroic act. Improvising is what skillful parents, effective salespeople, transformative entrepreneurs, noble statesmen do. Improvising means we pay total attention and create something for all of us we couldn't have ever imagined in advance.

## **Improvising means feeling**

To be an improviser in this game of life we need to re-learn how to feel. We need to be able to feel, deeply, on many levels:

- To be able to feel your whole self, all the parts of your own body, to re-include in perception parts of yourself that you haven't been used to paying attention to;

- Then, to be able to expand and feel another person's body - to experience their experience as if it is literally your own - your own moods, thoughts, emotions, movements;
- Next, to be able to expand and feel the collective body - tune into the mood of the superorganism we form part of and feel it in all its parts, its joys, its sadnesses, its power;
- Finally, to be able to expand yourself to feel yourself in your completeness, a participating autonomous center in a spirited world that you co-create

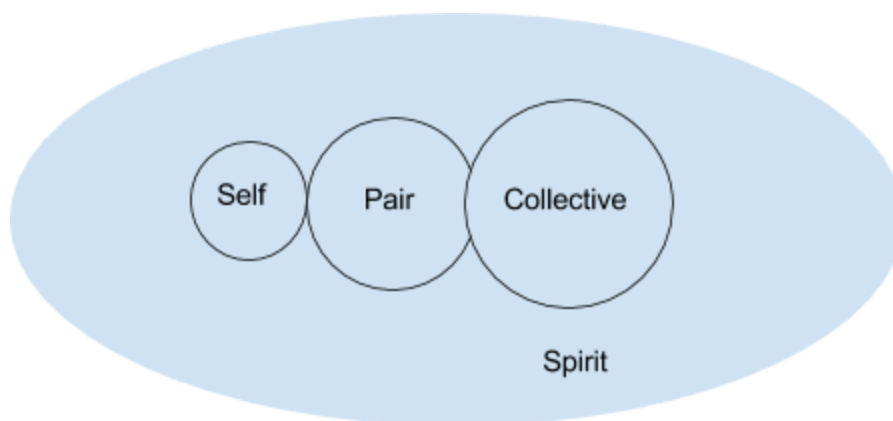
Improvisers feel. They can tune in to whichever of these levels serves the needs of the moment, serves the needs of emergent creation. They learn to do this by practicing at each of these levels. They develop themselves, they collaborate in partnerships, they participate in ensembles, and they cultivate connection with spirit.

There are so many well meaning approaches to improving the world but what many of them seem to be missing is the guidance - it must be ever so gentle - to rediscover lost forms of feeling. I don't think that even the smartest techniques, the best business master's program, or the most well-researched book on relationships will work. Unless it points us in the direction of a search for finding and anchoring an awareness of your whole self, and learning to broaden that awareness to 'selves' that include more and more of us.

We need to be able to feel, so we can improvise. And improvising is what's needed now.

### **Four centers of feeling**

There are four centers of feeling, four possible points to place focus and feel.



Each of these is a natural center, and like everything in nature, holds within it the qualities that are the underlying fabric of life: the creative and the receptive, the yang and the yin.

According to ancient Chinese models of change, yang and yin have never been separated from each other and they can't be because that's not how they roll. Each actually rolls into the other, either gradually or quantumly; each feeds on the other; each delights in the other's oppositeness to it.

Each of these centers is so complex - yin and yang interrelating, dancing, on an infinitesimally subtle level. Anywhere there is weariness, weirdness, or effortfulness it is likely that our analytical minds have tried to dissociate yin from yang, or cut away the complexity of their play. And the result is not too good.

- In the collective space, the result is a sadly yin-deficient concept of authoritative, solitary and disconnected "leaders" who have not learned how to tune into all the levels of feelings that would allow them to serve, and yang-deficient "followers" who submit. What if each of us knew how to be a leader or a follower and could put on this role whenever life's improvisation called for it?
- In the pair space, the result is that our relationships can fall apart, or simply become a context for pervasive, subtle, insidious abuse, because although we are trying to be good partners we have not learned how to feel our partners nor ourselves. What if we both could learn the yin and yang skills that would allow us to tune into and serve the needs of the creative pair?
- In the self space, the result is floating, lost individuals who even as they effort toward "self-improvement" have no solid connection to the yin of their earth nor the yang of their inspiration. What kind of education would educate souls to feel who they are?
- And when it comes to spirit, the result is continual ineffectual attempts to "really change" without the willingness or knowhow to actually, really, truly, get out of one's own mind and its patterns. How can we get out of our own minds?

### **The limits of our education system**

Growing up we don't really learn much about these things. At least I didn't - and I got what probably some people would consider the best education possible on the whole planet. My college motto was "in the nation's service and the service of all nations." But in my college,

- I never learned anything about how to go deep into myself to discover who I am and what I'm called to do, so that I could start to be of service;
- I never learned what it takes to create a harmonious relationship with another individual;
- I never learned what leadership is and how I could be helpful to either my nation or all nations;
- I never learned how to cultivate a connection with spirit.

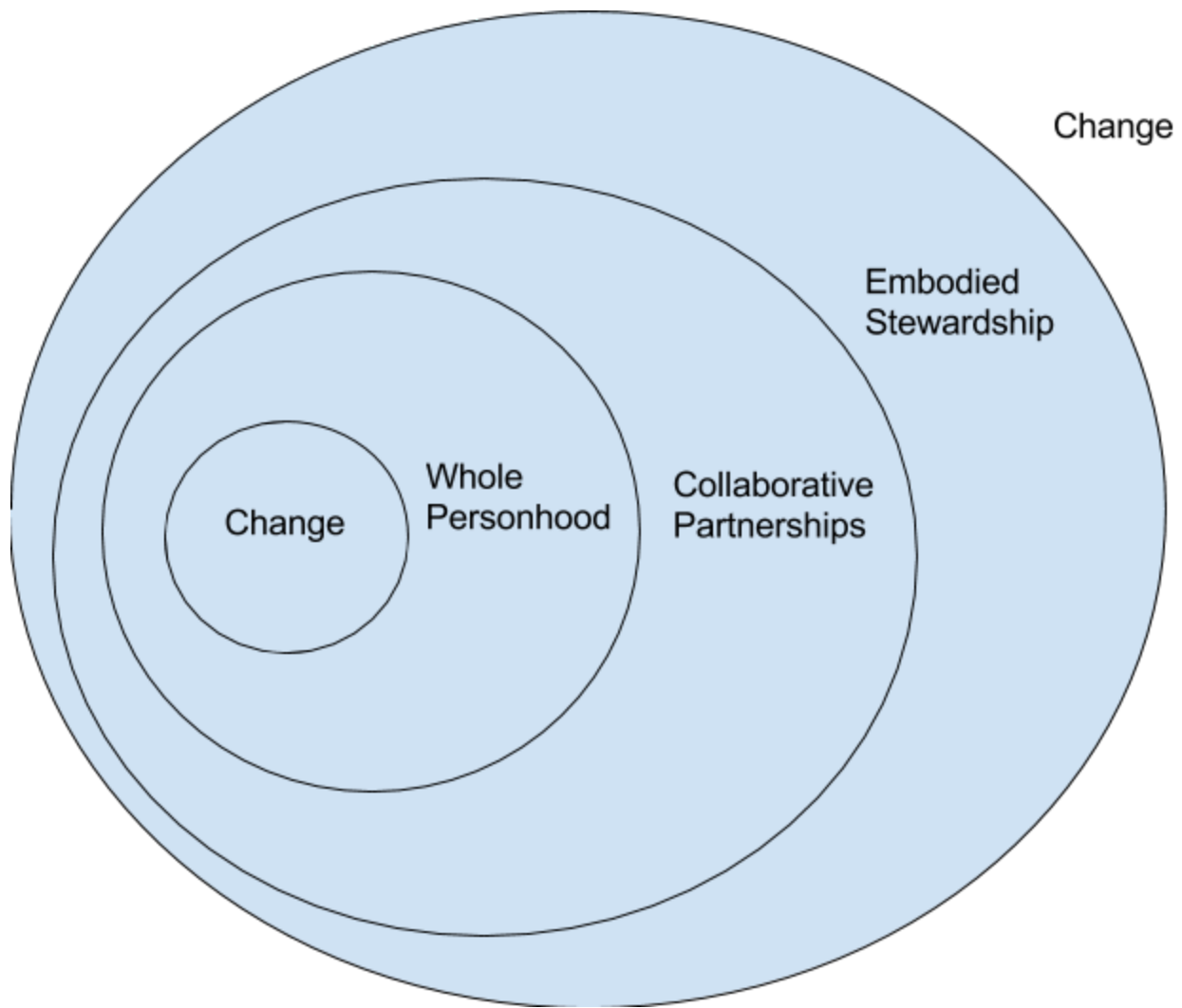
And I think that as a result of an epic vast hole in our whole education system there's a lot of mixed-up thinking about these things. Because each area of focus is complex, it's easy to surround it with half-truths that are the result of incomplete and limiting thinking. This experiment is an attempt to provide a more complete, and more nuanced framework that articulates the fullness what each is and how they interrelate.

### **A new framework for learning to feel**

It is possible for everyone to learn how to improvise. Improvisation is based on learning how to focus and feel on each of these levels. Learning to feel on these levels requires practice and there are four practice areas. Each can be encountered and developed in any order.

- Whole personhood
- Collaborative partnership
- Embodied stewardship
- Change

I will explore each of these practice areas by outlining the yin and yang qualities it is built upon; highlighting the beliefs and values that can get in the way of cultivating it.



### Whole Personhood

Discovering and re-integrating lost parts of ourselves is what makes change conceivable. Those may be parts of our bodies we have lost awareness of; buried, emotionally dense experiences; worlds of imagination that have been side-shelved.

Each of us can cultivate our wholeness through action and through receptivity. Being **receptive** as we tune into our self arena means opening up to feel more of ourselves and receiving the sensations of the world. That means (1) feeling our **foundation**, where we come from and what we are made from; (2) embracing the **cycles** of life and (3) opening to its **extremes**; and (4) allowing experience to **flow** and transform organically from the present to the emerging.

Being **active** means choosing to dedicate more of our energy to our own blossomings, and going out to create patterns in the world that activate our own individualization. That means (1) attentively **managing time and awareness resources**; (2) building boundaries and strength to defend your own **aligned integrity**; (3) practicing **extending and expanding** into new spaces sensibly; and often it means (4) going ahead and **changing course** or direction.

When we activate **and** receive with respect to our self, we find ourselves returning to us a state of being that feels...good.

### Collaborative Partnerships

Already when we are tiny, minutes old, we are involved in the joyful and intense game of pairing. Eye contact, sharing rhythms, playing with tension and expectation, suspense and fulfillment, tenderness and touch - we are wired to become entrained into such experiences as a source of health, safety, growth.

Somewhere, deeply, we remember the experience of knowing ourselves as part of unit that is bigger than us, a partnership, through which energy flows and creates and delights. Creativity -- of a complexity and richness beyond the possibility of a single individual -- is able to emerge through a well-structured partnership. When we find it again it can feel so natural, so like home.

Somehow, it has happened that the gesture of pairing has for some been disrupted, becoming confusing or even dangerous. But we hold the yearning, the hope, the belief, the knowledge that we can return to the world of happy pairing that is our inheritance. Maybe this is why the tango embrace for so many people, despite the anxieties it may provoke, can feel like such a joyful return.

And we can cultivate a richness of collaborative partnerships in our lives through yin and yang qualities, acting and receiving. Being **active** means choosing those ways that allow myself to shine and be strong as I partner: (1) choosing and adjusting my mental, emotional, or physical closeness or **distance** to best support the connection; (2) sharing of myself persistently with honesty and **directness**; and (3) choosing **power**, a wholeheartedness and enthusiasm that provides energy to carry out the partnership's work.

Being **receptive** as we open on the possibility of partnership means (1) we relearn deep noticing as we become **focused** and let in more of the detail of another's presence; (2) we practice **listening** curiously and openly to how our partner flows and offers invitations for our involvement; (3) we open up to **matching** their unique moods and qualities, to letting those moods and qualities become ours too; and (4) we create space for the richness and range of **sensual** experience that may emerge when two bodies interplay.

This dance, this tango, can feel intense, intriguing, involving. It can even become an obsession for periods of life, possibly for a *whole* life. Ultimately, however, its potential is in its power to be directed into service of the collective.

### Embodied Stewardship

Connecting to, caring for and cultivating what is **beyond** ourselves and our partnerships is something that requires a particular way of concentrating attention, energy, and power. In the past it has been helpful for those who are drawn to that broader endeavor to be very visible to others, and to have far-reaching sight - to be able to see and be seen. Maybe that is where the idea of the leader as "up above" or "higher than" came up.

Today though, there is a tone of stewardship that thrives not on highness but on feeling - feeling the collective as one's own body. And from that place of feeling, it's possible to inspire the whole collective body to organize *itself* and allow a spirited energy to move through it, which leads to all kinds of co-creativity, renewal and revitalization.

My partner Stefan actually experiences the whole of humanity (including himself) as a single body made up of seven billion people - a body whose life is mysteriously interwoven with other bodies such as the Earth.

Assuming that collective bodies will just take care of themselves responsibly is no longer viable. For well-organized, coherent, spirited expression and expansion, centers of feeling and flow within each "superorganism" need to be awakened, opened, activated, and engaged. I picture these as similar to acupuncture points. A few acupuncture points get jiggled, and as a result my whole being is enlivened and can feel and do the creative spirit's work. And once a whole body is dancing, no part of it is excluded.



Today, we the acupuncture points (there must be millions of us in a seven-billion person body) are the promise and potential of our whole system. More than leaders who lead from on-high, who may experience themselves as separate from the bodies they seek to support, we the acupuncture points are IN the human body, OF the human body, experiencing its pains and joys and squelched yearnings, and its dream of finding its paradise, its soulful collaborative partnership with Earth, again.

The metaphors of "leadership" are telling. Here are some things we are accustomed to say:

*We'll fix the company.*

*We'll run the company.*

*We'll save the world.*

*We'll make it work.*

All of these statements suggest a distancing or disembodiment: a sense of the thing that is meant to be led as an object - a machine to be run or fixed, a helpless entity that needs saving or motivation. But embodied stewardship is so much more involved and less egoic than our traditional idea of "leadership." When we become embodied stewards, we feel how we have been infected by our own beliefs about the collective, and discover that what holds us back may be the insidious ways we in fact see ourselves as helpless, unmotivated, machinelike.

Embodied stewardship is, like change on every level of life, enlivened and experienced through our yin capacities and our yang capacities, and it immediately loses power and impact when one side is overemphasized. Being **receptive** as stewards means we let in an awareness of what is real and true on a variety of levels: we notice (1) **what's real in each relationship** and acknowledge the adaptations of the other; we notice (2) **what's real in each community** - resources, sources of power, patterns of activity and thought; and we notice (3) **what's real about the our times**, tuning our sensitivity to the largest, broadest, finest, subtlest energies and data.

Being **active** means being a center of (1) **imagination**, deliberately creating mental space for a vision of a new world and persistently choosing to develop and refine this vision; embracing working actively with and through others to (2) **sculpt** responses in relation to a coherent, envisioned whole: confirming, reinforcing, amplifying, redirecting, contradicting; and finally issuing clear, doable and wholehearted (3) **invitations** for others to act, again and again, without dis-heartenment, with urgency and deadlines.

All of this is done peacefully, with conviviality and an orientation toward long term health and transformation, by the embodied steward.

## Change

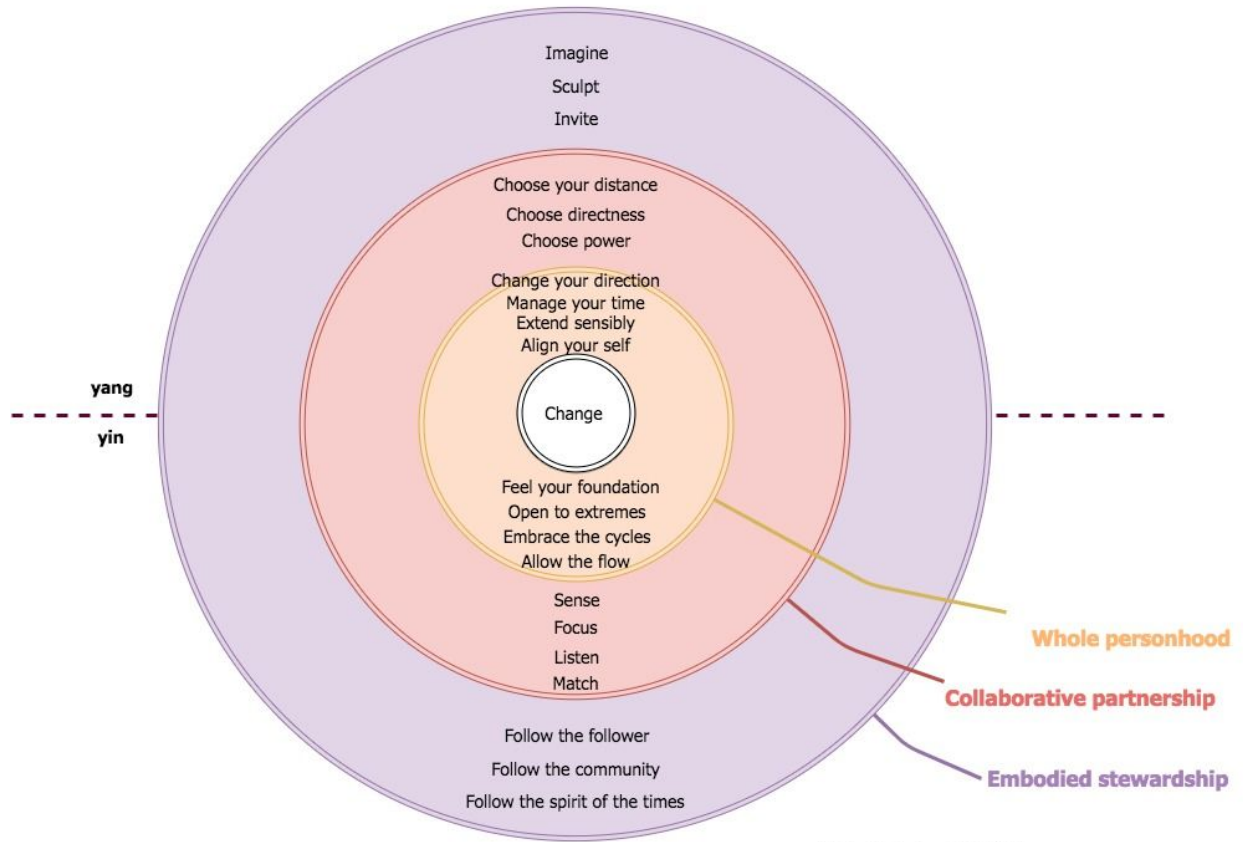
The nature of change is deep. There are two kinds of change: gradual change and quantum change. Gradual change happens through an accumulation of efforts, activities, initiatives, choices. Quantum change is when something "flips" and your whole world is now new. Both are natural.

Cultivating change is what we tend to do during times of trouble. If everything's fine, why change? When we know things not to be fine, on some internal or external level, we start making space for change. But then we often hit a wall. How can you change yourself? How can you change your mind? How do you open your own mind? I believe these are possibly the most deepest and most urgent questions out there that we need to consider. Many of the patterns that contribute to the situation we want to change are deeply embedded inside of us as heavily myelinated patterns of thought.

One major contribution of spiritual traditions is that they codify a set of practices that allow for mind-opening to take place. Sickness or disaster can also serve this function. When our minds are open, content enters our awareness from a completely different source than usual. We think things that we have never thought before. The contemplative practices that still and open the mind allows the voice of something beyond our own cognitive patterning to be present.

And when we focus on this level, on what emerges from that beyond, we connect with pure yin and pure yang, an improvisatory dance of stillness. In connection with this vast and benevolent presence, we are **receptive** - we still ourselves, we attend, we listen and serve. At the same time, we are **active** - we question, contribute, shine, and we create. And through the relationship that emerges with spirit, or spirits, we learn how to enliven and inhabit our unique individual potential, and the potentials within our partnerships and collectives, better.

# The Framework of Connection



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## A summary of skills of each area

### Whole Personhood

#### Yin Techniques

Feel your foundation	Remembering and letting in the sensation/awareness/mood of your foundation - family, ancestry, tribe, earth.
Open to extremes	Creating space for inner tensions between contrasting extremes and even apparent contradictions.
Embrace the cycles	Acknowledging, celebrating, mourning the cyclicity of life at all levels, its endings and beginnings; following the nature of things.

Allow the flow	Allowing one thing to physically transform into (emerge from) another without interfering, and cultivating acceptance of all forms.
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### Yang Techniques

Change Your Direction	Keep changing and adapting the strategies guiding your life toward your vision - with openness, flexibility, adaptive learning.
Manage Your Time	Use the precious resource of your life/attention/creativity to the fullest and managing the limited hours you have on this planet/in this body with deep respect and care. Perceive, create, meet deadlines. Evolve time management habits.
Extend Sensibly	Explore your perimeters of comfort, expand what's possible while being sensible, respectful and attuned - find, articulate, and explore new edges.
Align Your Self	Seek actively to establish and maintain connection to an inner compass that keeps you attuned and in touch with your truth/nature and with choices that hold integrity.

### Collaborative Partnership

### Yin Techniques

focus	Able to be "with" and "in" the moment - present. Noticing and absorbed in the world of a situation or person for stretches in which time dissolves. Experiencing each moment as a beginning.
listen	Being open to something that is flowing; nonjudgmentally curious about what it is and how it is changing; receptive to ways of becoming part of it (invitations).
sense	Allowing learning and exploration through the sensual experience of nature and bodies. Opening to the richness of sensation that may emerge when two bodies interplay.
match	Allowing a different mood or quality to emanate into yours by opening what's possible for your body/emotions/mind up yet another degree.

## Yang Techniques

Choose Your Distance	Choose and adjust the degree of mental, emotional, or physical closeness that matches the needs of the work.
Choose Directness	Be direct and true - non-evasive, non-oblique - in the sharing of values, feelings, needs and strategies.
Choose Power	Exuberance, enthusiastic cheerfulness: the motive force to carry out ideas - others' as well as yours - wholeheartedly. Believing in yourself/partner/community through persistent <i>choosing</i> to believe and direct energy.

## Embodied Stewardship

## Yin Techniques

follow the follower	Adapting to what's real in this relationship and acknowledging the adaptations of the other. Noticing and factoring in what the other perceives even if it doesn't match (your) reality.
follow the community	Adapting to what's real in this community - resources, source of power, patterns of activity and thought - peacefully, with conviviality and an orientation toward long term health and transformation.
follow the spirit of the times	Adapting to the spirit of the times. "Fiat mihi."

## Yang Techniques

IMAGINE!	IMAGINE - deliberately create mental space for a vision of new world and persistently choose to develop and refine this vision.
SCULPT!	Work actively with and through others to shape their responses in relation to a coherent, envisioned whole: confirming, reinforcing, amplifying, redirecting, contradicting.
INVITE!	Issue clear, doable, and wholehearted invitations for others to act, again and again, without dis-heartenment, with urgency and deadlines.

## Change

stillness	Let it be, let it go, let it come, let it be. Adapt, inspire. Exhale, inhale. Create, serve.
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## **From thinking to knowing**

It may be possible to intellectually grasp what I am talking about here, but, knowing it within and having access to it whenever needed only comes from much vivid experiencing and exploring.

To appreciate the depth and nuance of each of these areas of focus, and each of the complex skills that gives rise to integrating any of them, we need to bring together many resources that most people don't usually have access to:

- We need to be willing to use our bodies in a variety of new ways to learn about our whole self
- We need to work physically together in pairs over long periods of time to discover a feeling for partnership
- We need access to a community that congregates physically together regularly so that we can tune into the feeling of the collective

There are many dynamics in our world that get in the way of accessing these things. A culture of disposable relationships, of learning-tourism, of high mobility and travel, of overcommitment and distraction; a culture that prizes the nuclear family as the most high cultural institution (there is no commensurately respected institution that is specifically geared toward the enlivenment of the social fabric); a culture where there is still fear around bodies and touch; a culture with an impoverished understanding of what community is and a myth that what it offers can be accessed without physically being present with others; a culture where, for many, a living connection with spirit is still barely at the periphery of our attention.

Considering all of that, if we want to explore and develop skill in the full framework of connection, we need to create supportive structures that will enable us to find the energy - the time, space, resources, and motivation - to pursue this work.

## **Improvised forms provide motivating domains for exploring the framework of connection**

There are many practice domains that bring together bodies and music to explore and improvise in pairs and collectives. Improvised music-making and dance forms that are open to all kinds of all ages and experience backgrounds include capoeira, singing and drumming circles, belly dance, break dance, blues, Lindy Hop, Salsa Rueda, Argentine Tango.

To the extent that these practice communities make space for spirit - usually experienced in the form of deep respect for the paired mysteries of music and silence - they can become transformative.

As we start to work with our and others' bodies, we start to develop a deepening felt sense of respect, affection, caring for ourselves and one another. With the right guiding frameworks, and a gentle commitment to a long-term time horizon, what can emerge is a loving practice community - some might call it a "sangha" - that activates the ripening of individuality, partnership and collectivity.

There are many other physically improvisatory forms - for instance, team sports, improv theater and comedy, horseback riding - that provide socially motivating practice grounds. Since they don't hinge on a connection with music they do not fall within this context.

And there are many rich improvised forms that call forth only very specific parts of the body, usually the fingers and hands. What I'm focusing on here is those forms that require the engagement of the whole body working together with other whole bodies.

Once a connection with the form is established (which is nontrivial - the first months can feel very awkward and frustrating for most and many will drop out) the rituals, the benefits, the challenges, and the community that congregates for practice start to provide more social motivation for the practitioner to go deeper - and, as they go deeper, to explore, feel and understand in more areas of the framework.

Creating and scaling the social motivation for the forms I've just described needs to be the most urgent, highest priority of those who care about the future of education.

### **The power of metaphors**

We often draw on our bodily experiences to understand and think about more abstract experiences. Metaphors are when we take something very abstract and make it more vivid by mapping aspects of it to a felt experience that everyone's familiar with. If I try to

explain tango to you by saying, "Tango is just hugging and walking," you know what I mean because you remember how it feels to hug, and how it feels to walk. This provides you with a sense of Tango that you were not able to tap when you saw that tango performance on TV. And even though of course tango is more than "just" hugging and walking, this metaphor concisely communicates something about it that would be a lot harder to convey in any other way.

Metaphors are extremely pervasive in thought, often in ways we don't even realize. There are many subtle metaphors that continuously operate in our thinking without our explicit awareness. What they all have in common is that they come from our experiences with our bodies: their shape, size, parts, how they relate to the environment, what they need, their rhythms, etc. When we talk about the "legs of a chair," we are using a metaphor that is based knowing what human legs are and do. When we say the "this election is an epic battle" we may be thinking of or imagining what it feels like to physically fight with someone. [Lakoff]

Today we lament the quality of dialogue in our nations and communities and within and between our institutions and individuals. We may think that better dialogue will happen if everyone can go to college, or if we could find better technological solutions for engaging people. But I believe that the quality of dialogue will only change insofar as humanity develops a richer range of felt, embodied experiences to draw from to structure our thinking and thus our dialogue.

We cannot have meaningful dialogue about community if we have not had a felt experience of being in and of a community. We cannot have a meaningful dialogue about partnership - for instance "bipartisan partnership" or "organizational partnership" - if our bodies have never experienced what it actually feels like to be in partnership - what it calls on, what it calls forth, what it is about. And we cannot have meaningful dialogue about peace if we have never experienced it inside of ourselves. We cannot know and exchange about "leadership" in any meaningful ways if our bodies have never experienced what it feels like to follow a leader, to be a leader, to create gently and sensitively with and through other cherished bodies.

Urgently, we need to create cauldrons of learning, of embodied experiencing, where we can broaden the range of felt experiences that each person knows and can access. Once we know something on a feeling-level, we can then draw from it in our metaphorical thinking. And as we learn to think in new ways, ways that come out of these more rich, vivid, and nuanced experience of what it **feels** like to be connected on different levels, we will be able to access and activate a whole fresh kind of dialogue. A



kind of dialogue that is deeply, deeply needed in the coming century as we enter a deeper level of collaboration and peace-making.

## **Argentine tango as a practice ground**

As a practice ground for exploring connectedness, Argentine Tango is very rich. Tango provides a model for how we can be at each of these levels: powerful individuals, embracing one another to create whole healthy partnerships, moving through a room that is a whole healthy community catalyzed by a continuity of subtle acts improvisational leadership that power all deeper into connectedness, guided always by change.

### Using the whole body

Tango calls for us to develop an awareness of every single part of our bodies, from the tiny parts of our feet, to our often-ignored powerhouse hips, to each individual dancing vertebra of our spines, to our thrilling and expressive ribcages, to our sensitive and responsive arms and hands, to our shoulders, necks, and faces, to the matrix of receptors that is our skin, to our lungs, our hearts, our ears and musical minds, our nervous systems and the rhythmic surges and flows of neurotransmitters that evoke emotional experiences within our bodies. Tango calls on us to know and feel these, and to coordinate them intimately with every single part of another body.

### Argentine tango music

The music of tango emerged from decades of exploration and improvisation where thousands of virtuosic musicians from all over the world attempted to create the most inspiring music that would inspire the general public to embrace each other and dance in large numbers. This creative exploration went extremely deep and humanity emerged with some of the most rich, powerful, evocative music that comes from an extremely deep place of collaboration, listening, and connectedness.

### The powerful embrace

Tango emerged during a time when, because of the demographics of the immigrant community in Argentina, men hugely outnumbered women. Tango dance was one of the only socially accepted ways for men and women to meet each other and played a critical role in courtship. As such, far more important than being "right" or doing the dance "correctly" was the comfort and pleasure of your partner - this was at the forefront of the leaders' minds.

The tango embrace that has emerged from this era, infused with feminist values that call forth the same dedication from both leader and follower, is a gesture of unconditional acceptance of self and partner for a finite time period. As dancers learn to Tango it teaches us how to make that gesture and how to know and communicate when

we cannot, following the rich and playful Argentine tradition of inviting, accepting and declining via eye contact.

### Intertwined yet distinct roles

One aspect of tango that makes it terrifically rich is how intertwined the roles are. "Leading" and "following" are only poor translations from the original culture that do not capture the fullness of the partnered relationship that is proposed and required by tango.

A more complete way of thinking about the leader's role is: inviting, offering, allowing, containing, accompanying; a more complete way of thinking about the follower's role is: flowing, dancing, going along, accompanying, influencing.

A crucial dimension of leading is following the follower. And following is so active that without the follower's decisiveness and power, the dance breaks down.<sup>1</sup>

### Feeling the social body

Tango's form was forged at a time when literally hundreds of couples - strangers and friends - would be moving through room at high speeds alternating with stillness, to new and electrifying music. For this to work and for all the bodies to be actually safe requires an extremely high level of awareness of the minds and bodies of the people around you. This is why adapting to and "dancing with" the other couples in the room - allowing others couples' movement choices to constrain and inspire what each couple does - became part of the essential techniques of tango improvisation. Practicing this calls forth a kind of precise felt awareness of the collective body that is extremely rare to discover.

### A co-creative community that cultivates decentralized leadership

Because transcendent tango experiences are more accessible the more you know and the more people who know you, and because big dance parties are a highlight of the experience, there is a strong incentive to get involved co-creatively in the community and to donate creative energy and resources to making it happen. Fostering a tango community requires lots of different kinds of effort and many different people contributing their energy. This fuels the growth of leadership skills and individuation.

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<sup>1</sup> The metaphors we have today about what leading and following are suggest that these roles are separate. When people are operating from these role-cages, I notice weakish "followers" who move around timidly, doubtfully, as if they are slightly sick; I notice tense and stressed "leaders" who are rigidly terrified by their untrue belief that they are responsible for everything and need to control it all. That's not a Tango; that's a reflection of confused minds.

## The 22 techniques of tango

Becoming a mature tango dancer means you can create connectedness in a variety of contexts, working skillfully within yourself, your partnerships, and communities. Each of these zones requires the development of a variety of a yin techniques and yang techniques, and requires a cultivation of a connection with spirit through silence.

Here is an outline of the techniques of tango:

	<b>Leadership - Yang</b>	
IMAGINE!	<b>Figures</b>	Envision and create new Tango movements, movement combinations and ways of connecting.
SCULPT!	<b>Tone</b>	Use the embrace to gently form your partner's response into something that coheres with the evolving creative vision.
INVITE!	<b>Leader's Invitation</b>	Invite another body to move toward a certain place at a certain time.
	<b>Followership - Yang</b>	
Choose Your Distance	<b>Proximity</b>	Choose the distance between bodies that supports your and your partner's needs.
Choose Directness	<b>Frontality</b>	Keep your partner in front of you and yourself in front of your partner.
Choose Power	<b>Follower's Power</b>	Move with decisiveness and commitment when there is no alternative but to move.
	<b>Soloing - Yang</b>	
Change Your Direction	<b>The Pivot Before the Step</b>	Pivot to change your body's direction whenever and however much needed to support the moment.
Manage Your Time	<b>Rhythms</b>	Match musical rhythms with physical movements.
Extend Sensibly	<b>Extension</b>	Stretch your leg then commit weight.

Align Your Self	<b>Alignment</b>	Stand and move while keeping your spine comfortably organized.
<b>Spirit - Yin and Yang</b>		
-stillness-	<b>Stillness/Lovingkindness</b>	Let it be, let it go.
<b>Soloing - Yin</b>		
Feel your foundation	<b>The Whole Foot</b>	Sensing all the richness of detail between your lower body and the floor.
Open to extremes	<b>Spiral</b>	Allowing for both spines' spirals to express themselves fully.
Embrace the cycles	<b>Phrasing</b>	Noticing when and how musical thoughts end and how the body wants to inhabit that.
Allow the flow	<b>Flow</b>	Tuning into the flowing that the music kindles in you and allowing it space.
<b>Followership - Yin</b>		
focus	<b>Purity of Focus</b>	Devoting your full attention to your partner instead of glancing around or thinking about things.
listen	<b>Listening</b>	Listening to your partner's contributions and allowing them in.
sense	<b>Quality of Touch</b>	Touching your partner in a way that holds discovery, newness and care in each moment.
match	<b>Matching</b>	Matching with sincerity the mood, rhythm, and quality of movement your partner offers.
<b>Leadership - Yin</b>		
follow the follower	<b>Follow the Follower</b>	Noticing how your partner responds to your invitations and incorporating this feedback into what's next.
follow the community	<b>Follow the Ronda</b>	Noticing the other couples in the room and moving in a way that makes it easy for them to cultivate their partnership.
follow the spirit of the times	<b>Follow the Festival</b>	Taking in the mood, pace, and possibilities of the whole event and working humbly and constructively within it to create a world where all needs are met.

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Mitra Martin is dedicated to developing the resources to facilitate new learning communities where 21st century fluencies can be extended and shared. She is an improviser and Argentine Tango expert. Mitra is a graduate of Princeton University. She lives in Los Angeles.

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I'm so grateful for your being connected to this work. Each tiny gesture of love triggers untold reverberations. If you would like your friends to know about this project, please share it. ~ Mitra

*May all needs be met*

*May we each be free*

*May we all shine together*

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