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DAN 420.01: Contact Improvisation

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DAN 420 - Special Topics: Contact Improvisation
Tuesday/Thursday 9:10am – 10:30am PARTV 005

Autumn 2007
University of Montana
Department of Drama/Dance
Office Hours: Call/email for appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contact Improvisation, introduced in 1972 under the guidance of American dancer, choreographer and improviser Steve Paxton, is the art of moving with one or more partners while maintaining a shifting point of contact and supporting each other's weight. Unlike wrestling, in which participants use strength to achieve control over one another, contact improvisers use momentum, gravity and friction to move in concert with each other – rolling, suspending, falling and recovering together. Contact improvisers often yield their weight into each other – rather than resist – and use body parts to guide, assist and support each other rather than manipulate. As we practice this form, we will focus on the physical sensations of touching, trusting, giving and receiving weight, supporting, counterbalancing, falling and yielding to a disoriented state to carry out physical dialogues and to prepare the meeting ground for engaged dancing. Class will commence with a warm up, followed by a skill session and will conclude with a round robin contact jam to practice what we have learned.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

- Participation and Attendance: Contact Improvisation is a form that requires that its participants are awake and fully present in mind and body. There is a golden rule in CI, and “that one rule is – take responsibility for yourself.” Your partner is not in your body, the facilitator is not in your body, so it's very important that *you* be in your body. This idea of keeping yourself awake and present allows for greater communication to transpire in the studio. By remaining engaged, you will be able to communicate what you need and/or desire or are ready to do in your dance. Because the material will be delivered as building blocks, only 1 unexcused absence is permitted. Your presence is important to maintain open and clear communication among the whole class. Each additional absence results in the lowering of your grade a half-letter point. (40%)
- Maintenance of a weekly journal that will serve as an account of your thoughts and responses to Contact Improvisation. It is recommended that the journal also serve as a record of what you learned (methods of warming-up, contact tools and improvisational scores). By writing down your kinesthetic experience, it is as if you have the opportunity to live it again, it can become an even richer experience. Decide upon a writing format that serves you best. Be honest. Have fun with it. The journal will be submitted mid-semester and at the end of the course. (25%)
- Completion of assigned reading and writing assignments as well as a culminating self-assessment. (10%)

- Participation in four “jams” throughout the semester. Please make advanced plans to book these required jams into your schedule: Mondays 8:00pm-10:00pm, between September 3rd and December 3rd, in PARTV 005. (25%)

ATTIRE

It is expected that all students come to class dressed in clothing that will allow you to experience the movement in a full, free and uninhibited manner. Students may protect their knees by wearing kneepads, of your choice, for each class. If you do not own kneepads, you may purchase special ones designed for CI on-line at www.contactquarterly.com. All students must dance barefoot, unless otherwise directed by the instructor. Contact etiquette asks that you keep your toenails short so you don't cut yourself or your partners and that you do not wear jewelry as it may get caught while dancing with another.

TARDINESS

Class begins promptly at 9:10 am. Students arriving 10 minutes late will not be permitted to participate in class for safety purposes. Instead, you will be asked to take notes recording your observation of what your peers are learning and exhibiting in the class. This observation should be maintained in your journal to be reviewed when the journal is submitted throughout the semester. Two observations equal an absence.

INJURY

Please notify the instructor of any injury (past or present) that may affect your ability to be fully present, focused and participatory in class.

FINAL NOTE: According to contact improvisation pioneer Steve Paxton, "Both partners are surviving a dance moment and they have to be pretty open for almost anything to happen. They can't preplan, they can't hold on to what they've just done, or consider it," he says. "They can't be too much in control, because the minute you start to try to control what you and someone else are doing, you've taken away from them their ability to interact with you."

Academic Misconduct and the Student Code

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/Index.cfm/page/1321>.

Drama/Dance Policy

All Drama/Dance students must have an in-depth knowledge of the practices and procedures outlined in the Department of Drama/Dance Handbook. The Handbook is available online at <http://www.sfa.umt.edu/drama/index.html>.