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### DANC 305.01: Contact Improvisation

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## **DANC 305: 01 Contact Improvisation**

M/W/F 9:10-10 AM PARTV 005

Spring 2016  
University of Montana  
School of Theatre & Dance

**Facilitator** Nicole Bradley Browning  
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[nicole.bradleybrowning@umontana.edu](mailto:nicole.bradleybrowning@umontana.edu)

Office Hours: T 1-2:30, R 11-12:30

**Facilitator** Heidi Eggert  
Office: PARTV 186

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Office Hours: W 11:30-12:30, R 10:30-12:30

### **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 eventually conclude with a round robin or contact jam to practice what we have learned.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

- **Participation and Attendance (65%)**  
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, and you will very well help prevent injury or mishap. Because the material will be delivered as building blocks, only 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.
  - Final Contact Jam: We will meet for our final session, Wednesday May 11<sup>th</sup> 10:10-12:10 pm PARTV 005. **(5%)**
- **Journal (15%)**  
Maintenance of a weekly journal that will serve as an account of your thoughts and responses to the practice and study of Contact Improvisation. Document the work of teachers, colleagues and collaborators whose work excites, challenges, informs, and/or inspires you. Record WHAT'S HAPPENING around you in the field of dance, improvisation, and performance. Interview someone; take notes following a practicum; review a live or virtual performance; write short snapshots/portraits of people, events, situations. 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 biweekly to your CLASSMATES. This provides an opportunity for the dialogue to exist well beyond the perimeter of the room in which we practice the form. Every other Friday, you will exchange your journal with a peer journal. You will read your peer's experiences in the class, their questions, their AH HA moments, their ideas – and then – you will RESPOND in their journal. The journal will be returned to the author on the next Monday. Should you find that you have authored material in your journal you do not wish to have shared with your peers... tear the page out, cover the entry with other paper and write "private" or fold the page back and indicate private as well.

The schedule of exchange follows:

Journal due to peer on: 2/5 (returned 2/8 ), 2/19 (returned 2/22), 3/4 (returned 3/7), 3/18 (returned 3/21), 4/15 (returned 4/18). The complete journal will be submitted to the instructor on the final day of class.

- **Readings/Research: (15%)**

- Required text for this course is Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture by Cynthia Novak. Additional reading assignments will be given to read/research the journal *Contact Quarterly*, available in the Mansfield Library for checkout. Facilitators will provide additional readings throughout the course of the term. Scheduled Readings as follows:
- 1/25 Chapter 1: Contact Improvisation and Anthropological Analysis. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 2/1 Chapter 2: Contact Improvisation's Origins and Influences. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 2/8 Contact Quarterly Research: Research an article in CQ and write a summary and response to your research in your journal.
- 2/17 Internet Research: Research films of Contact Improvisation on line. Write a summary and response to your research in your journal.
- 2/22 Chapter 3: You Come. We'll show you what we do. The initial development of CI. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 2/29 Chapter 4: Dance as Art Sport: Continuing the Form. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 3/7 Contact Quarterly Research: Research an article in CQ and write a summary and response to your research in your journal.
- 3/16 Internet Research: Research films of Contact Improvisation on line. Write a summary and response to your research in your journal.
- 3/21 Chapter 5: Movement and Meaning in Contact Improvisation. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 3/28 Chapter 6: Experiencing the Body. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 4/11 Contact Quarterly Research: Research an article in CQ and write a summary and response to your research in your journal.
- 4/18 Chapter 7: Cultural Symbols and aesthetic practices. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 4/25 Chapter 8: Community, Values and Authority. Write a summary and response to the reading in your journal.
- 5/2 Internet Research: Research films of Contact Improvisation on line. Write a summary and response to your research in your journal.

**EXTRA CREDIT (YES, YOU CAN GET THAT)**

Attending the Missoula Contact Improv Jam will earn students extra credit. Simply attend the jam, write a reflection and submit to facilitator the week following the jam. Located at the Downtown Dance Collective,

121 W. Main St, the Missoula Contact Improv Jam is offered every Sunday from 3:15-5pm. Improvisers and dancers of all skills and abilities are welcome. The Missoula CI Jam provides minimal skill instruction with time for practicing and researching the contact improv form in a jam format with solos, duets and group work. Participate at your own risk. \$5/jam.

## 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 are expected to 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 (available for \$18 on line at: [www.contactquarterly.com/kp/kp.html](http://www.contactquarterly.com/kp/kp.html) )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. Contact etiquette also asks that you bathe before class and wear deodorant.

## TARDINESS

Class begins promptly at 9:10 am. **Students arriving late will not be permitted to participate in class for safety purposes.**

## ABSENCE POLICY

Each student is permitted 1 excusable absence. For each absence thereafter, 1/3 of a letter grade is docked from the student's grade. If a student sits out for an entire week of class (3 classes), an entire letter grade is docked from the student's grade.

**MAKEUP POLICY:** There are no makeup classes for Contact Improvisation.

**INJURY:** Please notify the instructor of any injury (past or present) that may affect your participation in class. Please see Injury Policy (posted on Moodle) for specifics.

**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 Conduct Code

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or 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/vpsa/policies/student\\_conduct.php](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php).

All Theatre & Dance students must have an in-depth knowledge of the practices and procedures outlined in the School of Theatre & Dance *Student Handbook*. The *Handbook* is available online at <http://www.umt.edu/umarts/theatredance/About/handbook.php>.

There is inherent risk involved in many Theatre & Dance classes as they are very physical in nature. Please proceed through class, shop time, or rehearsal with caution. Always be mindful of your personal safety and the safety of others. Students participating in class/shop/rehearsal/performance do so at their own risk.

Due to safety considerations, at **no** point during a student's time spent in class or serving on a production (in any capacity) should non-enrolled persons be guests of that student **without my consent**. Presence of such unauthorized persons in a class, shop, or any backstage/off-stage area will negatively affect a student's grade.

From the EO/AA Office:

*Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications. For more information, please consult <http://life.umt.edu/dss/>*

## **University of Montana Dance Program**

### Injury Protocol for all Dance Practicum Courses

(Dance Technique, Contact Improvisation, Improvisation, Composition, Pedagogy courses)

In effort to avoid injury, the Dance Faculty encourage all dance students to take responsibility for their bodies prior to the beginning of dance class. It is critical that the dancer be nourished and hydrated, rested and dressed appropriately for class (i.e. layers and kneepads for modern, ballet slippers and tights for ballet class). Additionally, dancers must arrive to class and begin to warm up their bodies to effectively prepare for class. Each dancer has unique needs, the time before class begins is there for each dancer to begin preparation of the mind and body for dance.

### Chronic Injury (Tendonitis, Bursitis, Fasciitis)

If a dancer experiences a chronic, ongoing injury requiring that s/he take relative rest sit out of class then it is assumed that the dancer cannot fulfill the requirements of the class. This dancer will not be able to earn an "A" in this class.

If the dancer needs to practice relative rest, it is expected that s/he do everything as normal in class. If the injury hurts, it's important to not quit class but instead learn to modify to complete the class.

Once the dancer sits out of class, s/he cannot reenter. The dancer is done for the day.

If the dancer must sit out of class, it is critical that s/he communicate with the instructor, ask permission to sit out of class. At this time it is expected that the dancer explain what is the injury is that requires observation of class.

Once a dancer experiences injury, s/he must see a doctor and receive a prognosis that explains what the injury is, what the dancer can do, what the dancer should specifically avoid and a timeline that indicates when it is safe to return to full physical activity.

The dancer must also see a physical therapist and begin a rehabilitation program. When seeing a physical therapist, it is critical for the dancer to tell the therapist exactly what her/his dancing entails, how the body is used, what parts of the body are used and taxed in dance classes. The dancer needs to ask what part of class s/he should be doing and what part of class should be avoided. The dancer needs to ask when you can return to more complete physical activity, discuss the timeline. Then, the dancer must create for her/himself a checklist of what can be done and what needs to be modified or omitted. This plan must be shared with the instructor.

When the dancer must sit out of class, it is expected that the dancer complete her/his physical therapy exercises while observing class. If the dancer is unable to complete such exercises, then s/he must discuss with the instructor.

### Observation Policy:

Should an injury or illness require that the dancer sit out and observe, her/his grade will reflect lack of participation in class.

Traumatic/Acute Injury:

If the dancer experiences a traumatic injury that requires s/he be absent and observing class, the dancer has the following choices:

1. Medically withdraw from the course
2. Drop the course and add a 1credit Independent Study
  - This option would enable the dancer to come back to full participation in the class over a longer course of time. It would be expected that the dancer observe class, complete her/his physical therapy exercises during class and communicate a plan of reentry into the class with direct doctor supervision over a specific period of time. The instructor of the class must approve this plan of action.
  - The 1 credit Independent Study would not count towards the dancer's required technique credits should s/he be pursuing a dance major or minor. If it becomes necessary for timely graduation, the student has the right to petition the course to be considered towards her/his major/minor. The faculty will then review and approve (or not) the request.

Illness :

If you are sick, please stay home.