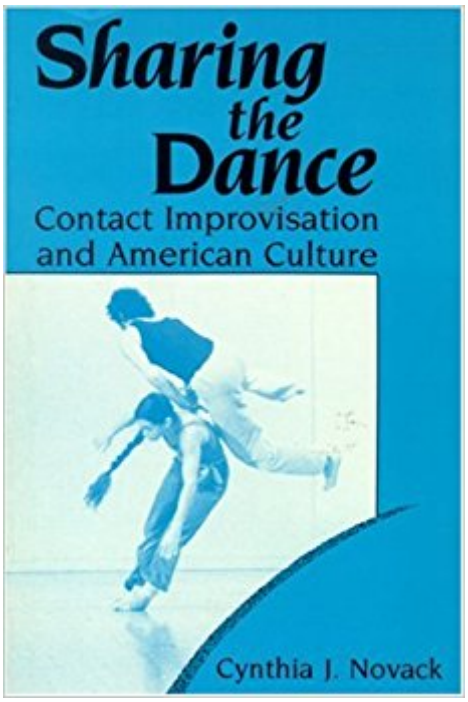
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Sharing The Dance: Contact Improvisation And American Culture (New Directions In Anthropological Writing)



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Synopsis

Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â In Sharing the Dance, Cynthia Novack considers the development of contact improvisation within its web of historical, social, and cultural contexts.Ã Â ThisÃ Â book examines the ways contact improvisers (and their surrounding communities) encode sexuality, spontaneity, and gender roles, as well as concepts of the self and society in their dancing.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â While focusing on the changing practice of contact improvisation through two decades of social transformation, NovackÃ¢â ¬â„¢s work incorporates the history of rock dancing and disco, the modern and experimental dance movements of Merce Cunningham, Anna Halprin, and Judson Church, among others, and a variety of other physical activities, such as martial arts, aerobics, and wrestling.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“In her book on contact improvisation and American culture, Novack finds a good balance between a clear analysis of the movement itself and a selected history of the cultural context of the inception of this dance form.Ã Â . . .Ã Â Novack has included a chapter based on her own experience with learning contact improvisation, which gives her historical writing a kind of self-reflexivity that is especially important within the field of dance scholarship.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •ChoiceÃ¢â ¬Å“Cynthia J. Novack is an anthropologist, dancer/choreographer, and teacher.Ã Â With striking intelligence and patience, she writes from all these perspectives in this book.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Steve Paxton, Contact QuarterlyÃ¢â ¬Å“Sharing the Dance is valuable not just for its insights into the recent history of dance but also for the

structures through which Novack analyses dance as a medium which conveys cultural meanings and values. . . . A much needed contribution to dance studies.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Burt Ramsay, Music, Theatre, DanceÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“[NovackÃ¢â ¬â„¢s] detailed descriptions of dancing, learning to dance, and watching dance provide substantive insights into processes through which the body is disciplined.Ã Â Because of its comprehensive interpretation of dance, NovackÃ¢â ¬â„¢s work should serve as an important model for future research by all those interested in the bodyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s cultural construction.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Susan L. Foster, American Ethnologist

Cynthia J. Novack is an anthropologist, dancer/choreographer, and teacher. She is assistant professor of dance at Wesleyan College and a member of the Richard Bull Dance Theatre.

I’m about to finish this book but i’ll read it again. The layers of meaning have not really settled on my mind. There are many issues being dealt with here, and they are not clearly split. Like a CI performance, it is a big jumble of meaning happening at once.There are other 2 books about CI available, and having just practiced the form for about a month i skipped them in favour of this one, because it does not seem to teach almost anything about the technique itself, instead focusing in CI as a social process.Novack states that "In the course of talking to many people, seeing performances, and participating in classes presented by dancers from all over the country, I realized that the contact improvisers constituted a clear social and artistic group, distinct from all the other improvisers at the conference. I began to perceive that contact improvisation formed a discrete, self-defined unit that could be studied by itself and that to do so would not be inventing an artificial category." And then, like your proverbial ethnographer, she goes living with the indians and comes back and tells the story. More precisely, this is a study of the people, of the dancers, and of their culture. It is not about Contact Improvisation, it is about culture.Of course, if this means there is almost no "know-how" in this book, the approach also allows her to deal with many abstract, ambiguous issues. How much culture there is in a body? What are the ideas of "Nature" and "Movement" that shape our daily lives? How do our values and pulls permeate from the very direct --- our sense of motion and weight and touch --- to the very abstract --- our organization into groups or "forms"? All of those are tangled in rich and complex patterns in the practice of CI and, i believe, beautifully represented in this book.Being an overentusiastic novice at CI, i must confess that the book also strikes me as overly shy, i keep on wishing she will be more incisive and lay out in plain terms that she thinks CI is a much more pleasant way-of-life than mainstream America, and why, sometimes she almost seems to want to say it. But this is probably a quality of the work, that it tries

to remain objective, and it’s probably the fanboy inside of me that looks for anything else.That said, the historical perspective she lays out has definitely allowed me to grasp new layers of meaning in the exercises i had been practicing, to glimpse how and why they come about, and to put words to some of the bodily percepts that the exercises awaken in me, and to put it all in perspective. It’s a very serious book about a very important matter.And, of course, there is also the unicorn. This whatever-it-is in CI that is almost impossible to talk about but also almost impossible to miss. Novack antropological approach does, i feel, bring together most of the components of the issue --- culture, meaning, leadership. Maybe there is still a unicorn to be looked after, but Novack’s book at least gives us the vocabulary to discuss it.

I would strongly recommend any one who is considering teaching contact improvisation to read this thorough account of the history and cultural influences of CI. Since this book has been written, CI has seen exponential growth through out the world. Cynthia Novak does an excellent job going into detail about the development of this revolutionary movement form and social dance.

A brilliant, honest and thorough thesis on the history and magnitude of the dance form, contact improvisation. Gorgeous photographs seem to jump off the page and document the movement explorations of the dedicated pioneers of the form.

This book brings insight to a dance form that remarkably integrates all aspects of awareness: the physical, the emotional, the social, the intellectural, the political. If we view contact improv as a form of expression, as a language then we can ’hear’ the conversations between all dancers, unedited, authentic and sometimes disturbing. The book aptly shows that the dance is a reflection of ourselves and our society.

Sharing the Dance is in part a historical perspective on the origins and development of Contact Improvisation, but also an excellent cultural approach to a dance often misunderstood by the outsider. To the uninitiated contact can often seem insular, clumsy, reeking of the ’group grope’ theatrical tradition of Schechner, and - for lack of a better term - just plain weird. Contact arouses the curiousity of many, but alienates a great percentage of the curious because of this.I used to think that ’doing’ was the only way to understand contact; while it may be the best, it certainly isn’t the only. Moreover, for aforementioned reasons, those that feel alienated by contact will certainly prefer another approach.Sharing the Dance is filled with a lyric tone that lends to the imagery of the

form it seeks to describe. Aside from being a necessity to any CI practitioner, it is also an excellent introduction to a form otherwise misunderstood. Moreover, it provides insights into perspectives of human interaction through touch that shape our everyday actions. Countless photographs throughout the book offer excellent support to the content. I reccommend it highly.

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