

# Arts

## Contactworks Review Insight News, Mpls 1980

### Contactworks improvises trust

By Byron Oler

As I watched, memories of peering through a microscope at an undulating mass of protoplasm—constantly changing, separating, becoming—replaced the cacophony of whirling movement on the stage before me.

Contactworks has been practicing its brand of protoplasmic fluidity for about four years in Minnesota and the company is presently composed of four members: founding member, Wendy Oliver, Patrick Scully, who's been involved since 1976; Jay Smiley, who came in 1978; and Teresa Krizan, a member since early 1979.

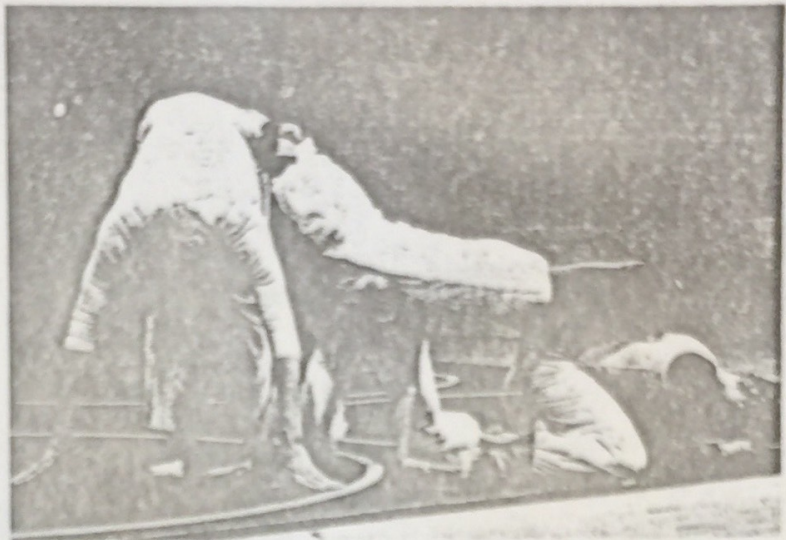
Contact is actually an improvisational relationship between participants based on trust, sensitivity and knowledge of its form. According to *Contact Quarterly: A Vehicle for Moving Ideas*, "Contact improvisation nurtures a basic physical trust between two people and among a group. The form demands a care and consideration of one's partner and towards this end, seeks to develop sensitivity and confidence. This trust and the freedom which ensues kindles a rich and fertile environment for working creatively with another person."

Contactworks *New Works* were performed Friday through Sunday at 8 p.m. in the Southern Theatre (the old Guthrie II) with a special fundraising party on Saturday.

The only structured work is as amoebic as the other two. *You Can't Eat a Yo-Yo*, for example, performed to the staccato of spliced-together radio commentary, complete with static. Images of dancers rolling head to head, another dancer slithering in from the side of the stage, men being lifted and spun by women, two men forming intertwined shapes with their bodies—impart the concept of Contact.

Contact Quarterly states that "the working relationships which develop in this form cross the boundaries created by sexual roles: men dance with men, women with women, and men with women alike. I do not know of any artistic discipline in which non-sexual, deep and honest physical contact is explored with total equality relative to sex."

There develops a great interdependence between members of the group in which dancers can anticipate moves, often sudden and unrehearsed, of other dancers. "We're dancing bodies to bodies as opposed to more traditional forms of dance which just dance with bodies and space, and not as much in physical relation with each other," explained Patrick Scully, who has taught Contact dancing to children in public schools. "A lot of people tend to



think of it as more of a layperson's dance because I think it's more easily acceptable. It doesn't set up that sort of distance that a lot of more traditional dance forms do."

"I've been teaching kids for about four years and I've found that they're almost unanimously real excited," added Scully. "It's something that kids really get into. A lot of movement that you see is what you might see two kids doing in a park—let's say wrestling—or something like that. And then we work with further developing those skills to make more complicated, more exciting, more sensual wherever those movements are possible."

Contactworks will soon be on tour in Ohio and Michigan and will round out their travels in Madison, Wis. in May. When they return, they will have been evicted from the building that housed their studio, along with several other arts groups.

"Well, we've talked to both the public officials involved and people on the city council about it and we've done a lot of work on our own and contacted realtors, but basically we're faced with the fact that for the kind of space that we have—anywhere else—well, we'll have to pay double, and it won't be quite as nice a space to work in."

Their space is located at 324 Fifth Ave. S. and falls into the "ball park" area of the domed stadium where the value of property has increased out of proportion.

"We practice physical skills to be able to survive," said Jay Smiley, whose background includes gymnastics and ballet—"self-preservation on an individual basis, and then we practice collective skills working in groups of two or more to support each other in dangerous situations. We do work to sharpen our reaction time, to sharpen our ability to deal with any given situation.

"It's reflex practice—being able to use your reflexes immediately, and you practice being able to sense with more than just your eyes," said Smiley, "your position in space, your position relative to another body. Western society is a very outgoing thing and a very visually-oriented society and you reach out with your eyes and grab things. We try and develop a sense of allowing an entire field of vision to come to your eyes so that you can re-focus and use your peripheral vision—see things coming, react to them more quickly. You develop the ability to react to something without processing it mentally first."

"Some of it comes with just working with basic skills," said Wendy Oliver, who is a dance teacher and choreographer. "Some of it comes with a lot of hard work, but there are certain things, like learning to hold each other or catch each other when we jump—so once you've learned how to do that—which isn't that long a procedure, then you're cued in for times when you'll see that it might happen. We learn how to fall, that's one of the first things we learn. We learn how to handle our weight and other people's weight. So if something's too much for you to handle, you get out of it as quickly as you can."

"With somebody who is reasonably physically fit," Teresa Krizan said, "they can expect to be improvising within six months to a year, depending on how much they worked and how far into it they were. I have students who take classes with me, a beginning session that lasts eight weeks, and its three time a week. Generally at the end of that class some of the people are pretty good dancers.

"There are degrees of fineness," Krizan added. "At the end of a few weeks you can't expect to be able to do the kinds of things we do. You can't expect to have a support with other