

**Today's Jam is based on a structure created by Nancy Stark Smith called
the "Underscore".**

The Underscore is an activity in which everyone can participate at their own level of knowledge – even those who have never heard of it before!

The most important thing about the Underscore is the state of mind of the participants:

- Everyone involved is committed to seeing what all that is going on in the space as part of one dance.
- Each of us contributes to how this dance evolves by tuning in to what is going on within us and around us.
- You can observe and remain connected to the dance, just as a character in a play can be on still on stage and watch others.
- You can even go to the bathroom without removing yourself from the dance – just as a character can go to a part of the stage where no one else is and do something that the others do not observe.
- Talking can diffuse the ability to stay focused on the dancing – please talk only when it is necessary.

Together we cultivate a state of heightened perception which we maintain until the formal ending of the Underscore. (if you need to leave the jam early, you can maintain your “Underscore” mind-set until the scheduled end time if you like).

If you do not have experience in Contact Improvisation and you have arrived after 12:15, please observe today.

Other jams will be much easier to join late, and people will be more available to give you guidance.

The best way to begin your jam experience is to attend the class which is offered at the beginning of each jam session (11:45 to 1pm).

The following are excerpts from the Underscore chapter in "Caught Falling: The Confluence of Contact Improvisation, Nancy Stark Smith, and Other Moving Ideas" by David Koteen and Nancy Stark Smith. It's a great book, with wonderful insights into practicing and performing CI and improvisation in general.

(You can buy it through Contact Editions, <http://www.contactquarterly.com/contact-editions/index.php>).

One important thing not on these excerpts are the glyphs [graphic symbols] Nancy created "to capture the spirit or energy of the phase without words". Many people find them useful – I'm just not technically able at this moment to add them to this document!

THE UNDERSCORE

"The Underscore is a framework for practicing and researching dance improvisation that I've been developing since the early 1990's. It is a score that guides dancers through a series of changing states, from solo deepening/releasing and sensitizing to gravity and support; through group circulation and interaction, Contact Improvisation (CI) engagements, opening out to full group improvisation with compositional awareness, and back to rest and reflection.

The Underscore can be seen as a vehicle for incorporating Contact Improvisation into a broader arena of improvisational practice; for developing greater ease dancing in spherical space - alone and with others; and for integrating kinesthetic and compositional concerns while improvising. The Underscore is also being used in the CI community worldwide as a way to focus and concentrate Contact jams."

Arriving Energetically

Bringing your attention, your presence, your will, into the room.... Arriving into the present moment.

Arriving Physically

Arriving into sensation...arriving into "body time" - where there's enough time to register your sensations and absorb their information and nutritional value into your system...

Pow-wow

...check in...plant seeds into our practice for the day...

Preambulation

Circulating through the dance space by walking, running and other simple variations....arriving into your movement, the space, and the community of people you're practicing with.

Skinesphere

Turning on, and becoming aware of, the movement inside the mass - all the wriggling, weight pouring, shifting, lengthening, contracting, falling, torquing, flowing, compressing, elating, sequencing, settling, exploding/imploding movement activity that happens inside your body but that doesn't move you through space very much....two main aspects are:

Bonding with the Earth

Releasing your weight to the ground and feeling support come up into your body from the ground. This sensation of release and support can be felt in many positions, including standing upright, feeling the "small dance of standing"...

Mobilizing/Agitating the Mass

Gently shaking and loosening the mass...mobilizing different mass areas...soothing and stimulating the body through motion, energizing and separating the particles of mass for greater articulation and readiness later on...

Kinesphere

Extending your movement, energy, attention, awareness, curiosity, desire into the space around the body by increasing tone, stretching, reaching, condensing, pushing... in the Underscore, the kinesphere is divided into "low" and "high"...

Low kinesphere

Opening up movement pathways through your kinesphere when your center is either on or close to the floor - rolling, crawling, scooting, sliding...this zone would include all manner of movement that prepares you to fall and recover and safely pass through the space from the floor up to about waist height...

High kinesphere

Extending your movement and energy/attention through mid-heights to standing level and even off your feet... Integrating high and low kinesphere, working to transition comfortably between them

Expanding/Traveling Kinesphere

Extending your attention and mobility through more space, either by expanding the size of your sphere of movement and awareness, or by traveling that sphere through the space...

Overlapping Kinespheres

... the kinespheres of the dancers - the space through which their energy, movement and attention are circulating - will overlap with each other. This sensation of moving past and through someone's "space" (and of being passed) "stirs the pot"... primes the dancers for further connections... In overlapping kinespheres, you're moving through the landscape of different movement qualities and characteristics without interpreting the information yet; taking the ride like a hawk over a summer hillside.

Grazing

Warming up to interaction with others and the environment through a series of short connections - perceptual connections (e.g. you see a coincidence) and physical connections (your path of movement comes together with another mover's in a confluence and a touch). Noticing connections that you are a part of and those that occur between others. Allowing your solo dance to pass into, through, and between any of these connections, in any order. This is grazing.

Connections:

Touch

Attraction

Repulsion

Coincidence

Intersection

Confluence

Divergence

Contrast

Influence

Empathy/Resonance

Collision

Tangent

More: "It is fun to make up new ones as we go along. Noticing what occurs."

Engagement

After a while of grazing through short touches and other connections, one allows oneself to stay or be drawn further into a touch connection and to fully "engage". You are no longer on your way to somewhere, tasting short connections along the way. ... We often use the first long engagement of the score as an opportunity to focus on the development of a Contact Improvisation dance - a CI warm-up dance.

Development

As soon as one engages, the dance naturally develops - deepens, unfolds, one thing leading to the next...

Resolution/End/Disengagement

Ending the engagement can be sensed or chosen...it can be resolved mutually, be interrupted, be ended by one person. ...

Recirculation Thru Score

Now, after the end of the first engagement, you are free to move anywhere in the score...

Open Score (with Observing and Reentering)

Now we are jamming - physically, energetically, compositionally, experientially. ...

At some point during the open score, dancers can individually step out of the frame of activity and observe, and several minutes later reenter, finding their way back into the improvisation. This is an important function of the score and is done with the intention of supporting, studying, and enjoying. There are many possible filters for looking at the activity. Some possible filters/lenses for observing:

as phenomena...,

through the lens of the Underscore...,

as a composition...,

as physical dancing...,

as a jam...,

as a "village"...,

any way YOU SEE IT

Final Resolution Of The Room

At some point it is announced "five minutes to final resolution"... each individual (and the group) arrives at a common stable end point and holds it until everyone has arrived at the resolution...

Disengagement From The Whole Pattern

After the final resolution has occurred, each individual takes him or herself out of the final arrangement on his or her own timing. ...

Reflection/Harvest

Taking time on one's own to rest, warm down, review, and reflect...

Sharing/Thanksgiving

This is a time to come together (often in a circle or group) to offer reflections, some "fruits" of the harvest. Usually short remarks with little or no cross-talk discussion...

The End

Ending the sharing/thanksgiving time and closing the Underscore can be done formally or informally - with silence, a bell, sharing of food, a simple thanks and good-bye.

Nonsequential Anytime All-The-Time Aspects

Streaming: Streaming is a sense of the ongoing flow of your energy and life force...

Gap: Moments in the improvisation where you experience a temporary absence of reference, a feeling of being between two forms and not sure what's happening or what to do.

Telescoping Awareness: Adjusting the scale and focus of one's awareness... zoom in...telescoping out...

Idiot Button: Press it whenever things have gotten too complex. It simplifies and reduces everything to the basics - presence, breath, sensation...and now what. The idiot button is a handy alternative to completely shutting down.

Listening: Keeping your ears and other senses open. Noticing the sound and its connection and coexistence with what you're doing and what's happening in the room.

Practice Note: All "in" all the time

From the moment you enter the room until we finish the sharing, you're in the score no matter what you do. You're never "out". Everything is part of the composition of the score until we close – even going to the toilet (expanding/traveling kinesphere!)

A SPECIAL THANKS to Nancy for letting us post these excerpts on the Chicago jam webpage in preparation for our monthly Underscore!