

UNCOVERING FLOW:  
CHOREOGRAPHIC STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT FLOW  
CHARACTERISTICS IN DANCE PERFORMANCE

by

JESSICA NICHOLE ZOLLER

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Dance  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

June 2015

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Jessica Nichole Zoller

Title: Uncovering Flow: Choreographic Structures That Support Flow  
Characteristics in Dance Performance

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the Master of Fine Arts degree in the Department of Dance by:

Shannon Mockli	Chairperson
Steven Chatfield	Member
Theresa May	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
----------------	-----------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2015

© 2015 Jessica Nichole Zoller

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Jessica Nichole Zoller

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Dance

June 2015

Title: Uncovering Flow: Choreographic Structures That Support Flow Characteristics in Dance Performance

This choreographic research identifies and examines triggers that can induce flow, as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, through a creative process and performance, illuminating a type of experience that supports awareness of flow characteristics in a dance environment. The methodology documents qualitative phases of self-reflection, interviews with current performing artists, and discussions with dancers that assisted in identifying key flow triggers, informing movement explorations that culminated in a new dance piece and performance. Flow triggers identified through this process were imagery, environment, awareness of audience, and touch, which were explored with the aid of aerial hammocks to create a tactile experience for the dancers in the work. By exploring flow triggers within the creative process the performers experienced and reflected upon flow characteristics, often applying personal triggers to find deeper focus within the dance. This study may inform artists and educators interested in a flow experience in their creative process.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Jessica Nichole Zoller

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Fine Arts, Dance, 2015, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Dance (minor in Sociology), 2007, Western Washington  
University

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Aerial Dance and Circus Arts

Positive Psychology

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2012-2015

Freelance Dance Artist, 2007-Present

### GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Georgianne Teller Singer Award, University of Oregon, 2014

Monica Gutchow Dance Scholarship, Western Washington University, 2006

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express gratitude to the chair of my thesis committee, Shannon Mockli, who supported me throughout my investigations, performance, reflections, and writing. Additionally, I would like to thank my committee members, Steven Chatfield and Theresa May, for their invaluable feedback and encouragement.

Special thanks to the dancers who participated in the creation and performance of *GRIP*, Bryn Hlava and Ferena Kagata, for their input and artistic honesty throughout the creative process. I would also like to acknowledge the performing artists that agreed to be interviewed for this research: Sam Hobbs, M'Liss Stephenson Quinly, Ty Vennewitz, Susan Murphy, and Noel Plemmons.

Thank you to Devin Zoller for standing by me in triumphs and struggles over the past three years and being a source of positivity and unconditional love. Special thanks to my parents, Craig and Kelly Hoover, for encouraging me to follow my artistic ambitions. Lastly, I sincerely thank my graduate cohort, Faith Morrison and Katie Scherman, for their laughter, inspiration, and genuine friendship.

Dedicated to the positive psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	6
Assumptions.....	7
Biases.....	7
Delimitations.....	7
Definitions.....	8
Significance of Study.....	9
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	10
Conditions and Characteristics of Flow.....	10
Flow and the Performer.....	12
Flow as a Viewer.....	18
III. METHODS.....	23
Phase I: Collecting Performance Reflections.....	24
Flow in Performance Self-Reflection.....	24
Artist Interviews.....	26
GRIP Dancer Interviews.....	38
Phase II: The Creative Process: Collaboration and Showings.....	41
Rehearsals in Gerlinger Annex.....	44
Rehearsals at Bounce Gymnastics.....	52
First Showing.....	56
Second Showing.....	59



Chapter	Page
Third Showing.....	62
Phase III: The Culminating Performance.....	65
IV. EVALUATION.....	73
Flow Triggers as a Choreographic Process.....	73
<i>GRIP</i> Performance Self-Evaluation.....	76
Audience Question and Answer Session.....	78
Post-Performance Interviews.....	80
Evaluation of Initial Research Questions.....	84
V. CONCLUSION.....	89
APPENDICES.....	92
A. <i>GRIP</i> PERFORMANCE PHOTOS.....	92
B. BUDGET.....	96
C. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	97
D. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	98
REFERENCES CITED.....	101

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Happiness is absorption.” -T.E. Lawrence

The stage can be a potent space for transformation, growth, excitement, nerves and disaster. As a performer, there is no experience that replicates my psychological and physical state of being that exists and merges while dancing. There are times when I am so immersed in the moment that I trust my every move and decision. Transformative experiences in performance have lead me to the stage time and time again. Similar to a surfer searching for the next wave or a baseball player hitting a home run, I perform to experience complete immersion in the moment of my actions that include suspending, falling, balance, gesture, and interaction.

I have related the unique dance performance moments of body and mind immersion and synchronicity to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow (1990). According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow is a positive mental state with six characteristics, “Intense and focused concentration in the present moment, merging of action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness, a sense of personal control, a distortion of temporal experience, and the experience of the activity is intrinsically rewarding” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 90). Along with identifying the characteristics of flow, Csikszentmihalyi has specified the conditions for flow to be achieved: 1) set an overall goal, 2) determine ways to measure progress of that goal, 3) deepen the focus and concentration within the activity, 4) develop skills necessary to interact with available opportunities, 5) evolve the activity to avoid boredom (1990, 90).

Csikszentmihalyi discovered the mental state of flow by researching sources of human happiness. He began his research by studying those who did activities for the enjoyment rather than the guarantee of money, rewards, or fame. Csikszentmihalyi discovered people were motivated by the positive experience they had while they were engaged in a specific action or activity (1990, 2). Flow can exist in many activities such as work, gaming, sports, sexual activities, play, and in the performing arts.

The mental state during flow most accurately describes my ideal and sought after experiences as a dancer in performance. Csikszentmihalyi defines flow as, “The mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity” (1990, 4). This is the definition that guided this research process and my reflection of the movement research. Accordingly, I am compelled to qualify my experiences of flow achieved while performing as the result of a rewarding or positive participation, rather than performing a piece about positivity or portraying happiness.

Performing artists may refer to experiences of flow by many different names and descriptions. Artistic Director and founder of STREB, Elizabeth Streb, describes her movement experience,

Engaged in moving I was not conscious in the same way I am when fewer forces are corralling me...This feeling is highly addictive. I saw movement as a way to be in the world, and to understand as fully as possible the most important and non-trivial aspects of the earthly experience...Time slowed way down, space passes as if it had no choice, and its vapor like quality became structured into shapes that guided my flight and my traveling by force and necessity. (2010, 33).

Though Streb does not use the word flow to describe her experience, she does describe multiple flow characteristics as defined by Csikszentmihalyi. Streb describes temporal distortion, the satisfaction the experience brings, loss of self consciousness, and full

engagement in her movements.

Over the past sixteen years my performance experience has included modern dance, circus arts, aerial dance, and theatre. This research focuses on two idioms, modern and aerial dance. I have been training in modern dance since 2002 and in the aerial dance since 2008. Within this research I integrated dance and aerial because both idioms have multiple goals and conditions to overcome to achieve flow. By examining the triggers that have the possibility to induce flow in the creative process I choreographed *GRIP*, an aerial and dance trio with eight aerial hammocks, that took place on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at Bounce Gymnastics in Eugene, OR. The purpose of my research was to illuminate a type of process and performance experience that supported an awareness of flow for myself and the dancers.

Within my literature review I discuss multiple artists and scholars that influenced my creative process and sensitivity to flow triggers. Among the dance researchers is Kate Lawrence's vertical dance "Descent of the Angel" (2010). Outfitted in a climbing harness suspended by rope she danced along the side wall of the Guildford Cathedral in the UK, where she had to explore issues with safety, changes in environment, as well as added tactile stimuli from the aerial apparati. Inspired by Lawrence's work, I employ aerial dance techniques and apparati to overcome challenges that aerial dance possesses while being absorbed in the moment of performance. The transformation of space, time, and energy used in aerial dance can potentially expand and challenge the performer's experience, as well as the experience had by the audience. "Aerial bodies are received bodily and viscerally. A spectator will 'catch' the aerial body with his or her senses...within a mesh of reversible-body-to-body (or -bodies) phenomenology. In this

visceral catching, motion and emotion converge.” (Tait 2005, 141), offering further exploration of how flow may be experienced by an audience member and performer.

The similarities between aerial dance and contact improvisation I have discovered allowed me to approach the aerial apparatus used in *GRIP* similar to a dance partner. I prompted myself and the dancers to appreciate and notice the movements that were disorienting or challenging in the explorations with the aerial hammocks. I also asked them to let the hammocks take their weight like partner would in contact improvisation and in return the dancers could support the hammock's structure. Approaching the hammocks as if they were another human, allowed me to appreciate the touch of the fabric and the unpredictability of how the hammock moved and reacted to my weight.

Along with experiencing flow as a performer I have also experienced flow as an audience member while viewing, contemporary modern dance company, tEEth's *Homemade* (2010) and Ricochet's *Smoke and Mirrors* (2011). During each performance I lost track of time, experienced a loss of self awareness, held intense concentration, and the action of observing the performances was extremely rewarding. Commonalities in each concert were the use of self touch, contact with other dancers and apparatus, dedication, focus, and the execution of movement that created imagery and meaning. My perception of the performer's involvement contributed to my experience of flow as the viewer. It is my assumption that because their performance intention was clear it had a transcendent impact on me.

Inspired by these experiences, I engaged a modern sensibility in approaching the choreography for *GRIP*. Questions that influenced this research including my interviews, creative process, performance and reflection were as follows: What aspects of flow are

present in performance, what choreographic structures induce flow for artist in performance, what disrupts or affects flow in performance, and does an artist in flow have a unique aesthetic impact?

I explored triggers, stimuli that can induce a sense of flow, for myself as performer. I interviewed five professional performing artists about their performance experiences: The selected artists include: Sam Hobbs, Noel Plemmons, M'Liss Stephenson Quinnly, Ty Vennewitz, and Susan Murphy. The performing artists' expertise lies in modern dance, circus arts, aerial dance, and physical theatre. Many of the artists I interviewed are skilled in multiple performance idioms such as physical theatre and dance or circus and aerial dance. I also interviewed two University of Oregon dance students, Ferena Kagata and Bryn Hlava, who participated in the process and performance. With the information I collected and my own experience of flow in performance, I reflected and wrote in a journal after all seven interviews about what stood out, confused, or contradicted my personal experience with flow.

I then choreographed *GRIP*, an integrated aerial and dance piece inspired by common triggers I began to see emerge from all of my interview journal reflections: touch, action, contact, ability to see the audience, and personal investment in the movement material. *GRIP* investigated ways to enhance experiences of these triggers in collaboration with my dancers and the performance environment.

The dancers and I then participated in post-performance interviews to gain insight to changes in opinions, feelings, and questions that occurred throughout the process as well as the culminating performance.

### ***Purpose Statement***

This research identifies triggers that can induce flow in the creative process and performance for the purpose of illuminating a type of performance experience that supports an awareness of flow for dancers.

As a result of my purposed investigation I choreographed a culminating dance and aerial piece, *GRIP* that included myself and two University of Oregon female students. The piece combined elements of dance, aerial, and use of environment. Movement explorations and structures were generated from my interpretation of selected artists' flow triggers, thus striving for the goal of optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) while performing in front of an audience.

The integration of dance and aerial was crucial to this research and culminating performance because I could offer my own history and expertise as a performer which was important in the process and reflection of this research. I integrated aerial and dance to create opportunities to obtain flow through aerial where the conditions and triggers are unique from dance. By combining dance and aerial in the rehearsal and performance more possibilities for movement exploration and collaboration increased. While creative possibilities expanded, the fusion of aerial and modern dance also presented restrictions that uniquely impacted this process such as in consideration for safety and rigging logistics.

### ***Assumptions***

My assumption is that I have experienced flow based on Csikszentmihalyi's definition and my own reflections of past performances. It is also my assumption that I have observed performers in flow as an audience member. My assumption is that the information gleaned from the interviewed artists was an accurate description of their individual experience.

### ***Biases***

Flow is my preferable experience as a performer or viewer compared to not being in flow; inability to stay in the present moment, presence of anxiety or boredom.

### ***Delimitations***

The five professional artists I interviewed are people I have seen perform and know professionally. The two University of Oregon dance students were selected to be a part of my movement project due to their availability, interest, and observation of their maturity as performing dance artists that thoughtfully invest and reflect on their flow.

The information concerning the performing artists' triggers were collected through my journaling and reflection of each artist's reflectivity of flow characteristics while in performance. This research received University of Oregon's Expedited IRB Human Subjects Approval.



## ***Definitions***

### **Aerial Dancer**

A performer who is most typically rigged and suspended from a ceiling, building, or free standing structure. The aerial dancer combines the use of musicality, shift of weight, and flexibility all seen in dance technique. The aerial dancer also utilized elements from circus technique such as strength training and progression of established tricks in each apparatus.

### **Apparatus/ Apparati**

Equipment hung from the ceiling or standing rig with which the performer dances with. For the purpose of this study, the aerial hammock is the apparatus. It is a large piece of fabric hung from two separate points suspended three feet from the floor.

### **Contact Improvisation**

“Contact improvisations are spontaneous physical dialogues that range from stillness to highly energetic exchanges. Alertness is developed in order to work in an energetic state of physical disorientation, trusting in one's basic survival instincts. It is a free play with balance, self-correcting the wrong moves and reinforcing the right ones, bringing forth a physical/emotional truth about a shared moment of movement that leaves the participants informed, centered, and enlivened.” (Paxton 1979)

### **Flow**

“The mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 4).

## **Performer's State**

The artist's physical, psychological and environmental experience while performing for an audience that can lead to a change in their senses and consciousness. The performer's state could be positive in flow or negative in anxiety. The performer's state is something to recall on post performance.

## **Trigger**

The performer's triggers are stimuli that initiate a process or reaction that results in flow. Trigger examples could be touch, imagery, environment, improvisation, or the use of breath, experiences that allow dancers to sense flow characteristics.

## ***Significance of Study***

This research applies Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow states to dance performance experiences. It is significant to the exploration of the performer's positive psychological state of mind as a choreographic process. Investigations on flow and choreography may also inform performance strategies for dancers, creative possibilities for choreographers, as well pedagogical methods for dance educators and movement therapists.

A majority of the flow investigations I've encountered involve athletes in competitive environments or for employment purposes. Fewer studies have been conducted concerning the dancer and flow as well as how flow is affected by the added pressure and adrenaline of an audience. I have contributed to the research by exploring triggers that induce flow, for me and others, applying Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow directly to the performing dance artist.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To gain insight into experiences of flow through the lens of performer and audience I called upon my own phenomenological reflections of past performances I sensed flow. Beyond my own scope of flow, I sourced information from dance scholars and psychologist who influenced this research. Throughout this review of literature I will refer to research that addresses triggers that have the possibility to induce flow characteristics for the performer and audience such as: challenge of tasks, self touch and contact with other dancers, imagery, collaboration, and interaction with environment.

#### ***Conditions and Characteristics of Flow***

Research in flow and optimal experience stems from Csikszentmihalyi's contribution to positive psychology and the pursuit of human happiness. Csikszentmihalyi found that, "Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for" (1990, 2), and isn't necessarily achieved by money or leisure but, "The best moments usually occur when the body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to complete something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something we *make* happen." (1990, 3).

Csikszentmihalyi's research reinforces the notion that the act of refining one's skills in accomplishing a difficult task provides a rewarding psychological experience. For example, dancers may suffer from body and psychological injuries, low income, and extremely busy schedules to balance their lives, and yet, despite these challenges dancers continue their pursuits. Even amongst the negative aspects one might face in the

performing arts, the artist also learns how to cultivate their rewarding experiences. The rewarding experiences the artists have often correlates to their personal happiness in and out of their field.

To achieve an optimal state one must also understand the conditions and characteristics of flow. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi defines flow as, “The state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (1990, 4). Csikszentmihalyi suggests five flow conditions: 1) setting an overall goal, 2) determining ways to measure progress of that goal, 3) deepening the focus and concentration within the activity, 4) developing skills necessary to interact with available opportunities, and 5) evolving the activity to avoid boredom (1990, 97). The flow conditions are not the same as the flow characteristics. The conditions need to be met in order for flow characteristics to be present. The skill level and challenge both must be high in order for the participant to achieve flow in the performing of their task, otherwise boredom or anxiety may occur instead. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Once the conditions have been attended to and met, the performer can enter a mental state of flow with the following characteristics, “Intense and focused concentration in the present moment, merging of action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness, a sense of personal control, a distortion of temporal experience, and the experience of the activity is intrinsically rewarding” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 90).

Though much of flow research is conducted on athletes and in office environments, the flow conditions and characteristics can all be applied to the dancer learning, preparing, and performing choreography. In my research I used the flow

characteristics as a guide for interview questions, discussions with the dancers in the creative process as well as a in my evaluation of the entire movement project.

### ***Flow and the Performer***

Performing has often been the most rewarding, challenging, and addicting experience in my movement practices and research. Each time I perform, whether it is in the dance, aerial, circus, or theatre idioms, I crave the intangible state of being that happens in front of an audience. This research focuses on performance that includes witnesses because the stage environment can be, “attention, perception, and thought set in motion in such a way as to kindle, or ignite, the space for change” (Kozel 2007, 71). An audience can add excitement, nervousness, and adrenaline to a performer that would otherwise not experience a change in their mental state without observers. An audience adds a layer of challenge to the experience for the performer. I am interested in how performers experience flow while sharing their dance with an audience. When I am fully present in the moment of performing, and an audience is my witness, I lose track of time and self consciousness. I relate my heightened focus and consumption in the moment to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow (1990).

Researching triggers, stimuli that initiate a process or reaction, widens choreographic possibilities for movement and environments that create flow. I'm examining triggers that induce flow in my performance such as imagery, touch, challenge in tasks, and interaction with the performance space.

Research concerning technique and alignment for dancers often are addressing flow characteristics and conditions even if Csikszentmihalyi's flow definition is not

mentioned. For example, Harlene Goldschmidt's *Dancing With Your Head On: Mental Imagery Techniques For Dancers* describes the benefits a dancer could receive by practicing their skills in reflection and mental imagery through the Brave method (2002). The Brave method (2002), "Breathing, Relaxing (or Releasing), Aligning, Visualizing, and Energizing." (17) shares many condition qualities of flow such as practicing to be engaged in the action of performance. To assist the dancers in the application and meditation of the Brave Method (2002) Goldschmidt met twice a week with dance majors over 15 week semester. Two guided imagery sessions lasting up to 15 minutes were practiced during the class, "Sometimes alignment and technique would be the focus, other times creative qualities of movement." (2002, 16). Following guided imagery sessions the class would discuss a range of topics including, "goal setting, motivation, managing emotions, and self-confidence." (2002, 16). By using mental imagery, self reflection, and focusing on the five elements of the "Brave Method" dance majors facilitated and commented on their learning progress, dance creations, and dance performance. Goldschmidt concluded, "Emotionally derived, felt imagery adds focus and personal motivation to dance movements." (2002, 16) allowing the dancers to be personally invested and responsible for their growth as performers. The Brave Method (2002) could be another avenue for the inducement of flow by allowing the students to have a sense of control over the movement they express. The performing artist takes ownership of the tasks they execute because they add another layer to their movement: the layer of imagery, visualization and breath, allowing each performer to be personally invested and responsible for their performance experience. Responsibility over one's performance speaks to the characteristics of flow that is a sense of personal control

(Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 90). Goldschmidt's Brave Method (2002) influenced my own creative process as I explored guided imagery sessions and set up an environment for open discussion with my dancers during each rehearsal.

Along with imagery as a potential flow trigger I have experienced the use of touch in performance that resulted in flow characteristics. When I use touch in a dance piece that has a sensitive approach and often involves another human being or apparatus I focus less on myself and more on the sensations around me as my focus expands. According to Eric Franklin's *Dance Imagery for Technique and Performance* (1996) moments of touch are significant as a performer because, "Touch can greatly enhance the effect of an image or even constitute an image themselves...Touch can be used to increase the sensory awareness in an area of the body" (232). With the awareness I receive from touching my own skin, partnering with other dancers, or the tactile sensation received from the coarse grip of a trapeze bar my state of performance becomes more about the task I've created and less about my personal self outside of performance.

Franklin's "Imaging Touch" includes releasing, tapping, dissolving, creating a current, and musical improvisation (1996, 233) can be applied in movement generation and collaboration with aerial apparatus. Franklin refers to touch as a way to release tension that might be held in the body while rehearsing and performing, as well as to further an image or feeling for a dance. For example, using the body's surface like a drum invites the fingers to tap all over the body while keeping the wrist as loose as possible. When practicing a dissolving touch, dancers can image something melting into or away from their body. In regard to touch that is imagined like a current of energy, the impulse for a point of contact can travel to a different part of the body as if filled with electricity. By

allowing the music to influence the dancers impulses and timing for touch dancers can tune into multiple senses outside of themselves while still participating and listening to the self or collaborative connections they are making. My own experiences of tactile connections in dance allow me to fall deeper into an absorbed performative state in which I am able to be present forgetting what I'll be doing later that day or what others are thinking of me while I'm moving. Touch with self, others, or apparati enforces my place on stage as exactly where I need to be. While in the creation of *GRIP* the dancers and I explored multiple applications of touch. We interacted with the aerial hammocks, used self touch in dance gestures, felt the fuzzy texture of the gymnastics floor with different body parts, and contacted with each other during the dance.

Intense focus can support loss of self consciousness by requiring the dancer to stay focused on the task at hand. In extreme physical movements it becomes even more crucial to be focused on the task at hand and not on one's personal sense of self. In Elizabeth Streb's company STREB, the dancers are tasked with executing highly dangerous and skilled movements such as ducking from a large swinging bricks or falling on to a mat from 20 feet in the air. Streb describes the actions as, “real movements” (2010, 21), that are about setting a goal and achieving that goal through authenticity, “It is not about anything, separate from itself.” (2010, 26). The dancers of STREB must be focused on the action and not about their personal self or what the implications of their movements might mean to an audience. “In STREB work, second-guessing oneself is anathema to survival” (2010, 39).

Along with generating imagery, touch, and actions that require focus, interaction with the performance space may also trigger flow. Dancers and aerial artists can perform



in many different environments including traditional proscenium stages, concert halls, amphitheaters and non-traditional outdoor spaces in water, sand, warehouses and tree filled parks. The presence of an audience can also shape the environment for the dancers in performance in many ways. The proximity between the audience and dancers during a performance may create a level of physical comfort or discomfort. Some dancers and audience members may enjoy the close proximity to one another because it offers a sense of communication and shared energy. Other dancers and audience members may be uncomfortable being so close to each other due to lack of space to execute their movements or the audience's fear of choreographed or spontaneous participation in the performance itself. The performer's environment may also challenge their sense of gravity and movement interpretation as they relate to flow. An aerial dancer's sense of gravity differs from the grounded dancer. A performer that fuses both the aerial and modern dance idioms has to develop separate skills to achieve flow in performance such as an ability to change their sense of verticality in relationship with the floor. Developing skills to safely perform aerial dances many feet from the floor is critical to an aerial performer to experience flow characteristics.

Kate Lawrence had to acquire a new set of skills, outside of her modern dance training, to perform her vertical dance “Descent of the Angel” (2010) where she hung parallel to the wall of the Guildford Cathedral in Guildford, UK. Lawrence defines vertical dance as, “Dance that takes place off the ground, against a vertical surface (commonly a wall) and that becomes the dancer's floor.” (2010, 49). In Lawrence's vertical dance movement research, she realizes the dancer can move beyond the binary restrictions aerial dancers often face with emphasis on personal safety and fulfillment of

performance, “Binary is disrupted by notions of horizontality as well as by the dancer's sense of...inside and outside spaces.” (2010, 58). Lawrence needed to interact with her environment to make sense of her “floor” and how to execute movement to accommodate that floor. The possibility for her to experience flow could be achieved because the task was no longer too difficult and she, “developed skills necessary to interact with available opportunities” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 97).

Similarly to Lawrence collaborating with a wall and researching ways to interact with a vertical surface, contact improvisation asks the dancers to create new definitions of dance through shared weight, inversion, and attending to needs outside their own much like many aerialists do with their apparatus. In my personal practice with contact improvisation I've often experienced flow characteristics such as loss of time and sense of action and awareness moving together without a conscious decision to make things happen, instead contact improvisation helps me to allow the movement to spill out. In Cynthia Novak's *Sharing the Dance* (1990), she refers to ways that contact improvisation can be confusing and even frustrating in the beginning until new skills and awareness are developed,

A student of contact improvisation must accept disorientation and learn to be turned upside down or sideways, moving through space in a spiraling or curving motions...At first, the sense of spatial disorientation cultivated in the form sometimes frightens people...Students thus have needed to learn techniques for falling so that they can they can respond quickly and appropriately to surprising events and avoid injury. The edge of physical danger in contact improvisation has always been appealing and exciting to some people. Like many athletic activities, contact improvisation can offer the exhilaration of safely accomplishing dangerous feats. (151)

The beginners experience in contact improvisation also speaks to the novice in aerial dance and possibly Elizabeth Streb's work as well. Performing dance idioms that

challenge the dancers' sense of safety, control, awareness, and orientation in space may also yield high flow potential because, “the body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to complete something difficult and worthwhile” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 3). Understanding the similarities between aerial dance and contact improvisation as utilizing conditions that could encourage flow, myself and the dancers were sensitive and listened to the aerial yoga hammock during the creation of and performance of *GRIP*. We not only had to acquire the skills necessary to interact with the hammocks but also to adjust, improvise, and appreciate the hammocks inherent quality just like a human partner.

The challenge and reward of work like STREB, circus, aerial dance, and contact improvisation is collaboration; the dancer cannot be concerned with themselves and their experience alone in performance. These practices require research and exploration on the part of the performer to overcome issues with safety, gravity, and partnerships within movement and environment that may affect their ability to be in flow. The possibility of flow is still obtainable, as long as the performer's skills are developed in order to be efficient in obstacles that arise and responsive to the performance environment. The work of STREB, Kate Lawrence and the principles of contact improvisation influenced my decision to work with dancers that did not have previous aerial experience, to observe how they adapted and acquired different skills sets to accomplish the tasks I created for them.

### ***Flow as a Viewer***

Though I am concerned with the conditions and flow experience of the performer,

it is critical for me to acknowledge the elements that have high flow potential for me as audience member. In my examples from tEEth's *Homemade* (2010) and Ricochet's *Smoke and Mirrors* (2011) I was drawn in to the performance of the dancers in such a way that I experienced flow characteristics such as loss of time, total absorption, and loss of self awareness.

Angelle Herbet, choreographer and Phillip Kraft, composer, are the co-artistic directors of tEEth. I saw *Homemade* on November 5, 2010 at The mOuth Theatre in Portland, OR. *Homemade* is an evening-length dance performed by Noel Plemmons and Keely McIntrye who danced half of the piece while completely nude. The dancers performed solos as well as duets that included physical partnering sections. Within sections of the dance, the performers work with a microphone that has an extremely long cord that they wrapped themselves or their partner with, which I interpreted as a gentle gesture of covering each other's naked bodies. In other times the coiling of the microphone wire made me feel as if they were trying to silence one another like boa constricting its prey. I was curious what the microphone wire would feel like on my bare skin and how I would feel if I was on stage naked as they were.

On many occasions the dancers performed self touch by putting their fingers in their mouths, pressing their palms into their faces, or wrapping themselves in a large white cloth and pressing it against their skin. When the dancers were enclosed in the fabric I could still observe the contours of the dancers' faces and body shapes. Curiously, the white cloth covered their nude bodies but did not take away their psychical human qualities. The white cloth engaged my senses as I again empathized with what the cloth might feel like on my skin. I began wondering if the cloth was sticking to their sweaty

bodies, if it was hot and hard to breathe underneath, and if the blanketed moment felt like they had a reprieve from the audience or the act of performance.

As much as the dancers performed self touch they also engaged in contacting each other. The dancers' connection was intimate and tested the boundaries of beautiful, grotesque, comfortable, and awkward. For example, the dancers put their hands in another dancer's mouth and lead them around by pressing their finger tips towards the roof of the jaw. As an audience member, I was drawn to all forms of the performer's touch because the dancers seemed to demonstrate a loss of self consciousness in complete focus and dedication to their actions. Also, the dancers touch triggered my experience of flow as the observer because I could sense the vulnerability of the touch, provoking me to recall experiences of touch experiences from my own performative and everyday life.

A moment that stands out in the performance that evoked my own sense of control and loss of self-consciousness was when both dancers faced the audience completely nude and fully lit from the overhead stage lights. As the dancers faced the audience they went through a series of gestures that twisted and contorted their bodies, allowing the audience to see every inch of their flesh in multiple shapes, while putting their hands all over themselves. The dancers did not hesitate in any of their movements, interactions with each other, or the presence of an audience which contributed to my sense of full absorption in their indulging actions.

The ability to induce flow with self touch or touching others enlivens my own reflection as I imagine what the touch of the microphone or cloth would feel like or how my body would respond to being completely nude in front of an audience. Would I be warm or flushed from head to toe? This dance would not have induced flow me as the

viewer if the performers seemed uncomfortable on stage, lacked motivation, lost focus, appeared uninterested with the dance and each other, did not use intentional touch of their own bodies on their faces and inside their mouth, or contacted with each other's body.

Another piece I became fully immersed in due to full commitment, focus, touch, and imagery from the performers is during performance is the Ricochet Projects' *Smoke and Mirror*, on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2011. I saw *Smoke and Mirrors* at the Alberta Rose Theatre in Portland, OR. Laura Stokes and Codhi Harrell, co- choreograph, direct, and perform in The Ricochet Project. The piece includes a trapeze solo and duet, aerial fabric solo and duet, rope solos, contortion, acrobatics, dance, and collaboration with props such as chairs, swinging light fixtures, suitcases, and chalk. The performers are able to use Eric Franklin's Imaging Endowment (1996) as a way of transforming the multiple props and apparati into a, "Special property in your mind's eye" (216). When Harrell walks across the base of the metal trapeze like a tight rope, Stokes contorts her body to fit inside a stack of chairs, and when both performers dangle from the ceiling holding on to hanging light fixtures it creates a dichotomy of whimsical images paired with ordinary movements and props. I was captivated by how both of the dancers were integrated with their environment.

Though the performers using the props and apparati appear well rehearsed and display an immense amount of strength and flexibility, *Smoke and Mirrors*, moves beyond demonstrations of tricks. *Smoke and Mirrors* allowed me to experience flow as an audience member because it transported me to another world that is radically different than my everyday life, yet it has elements with which I can identify. My kinesthetic and emotional empathy arose from the swinging of the trapeze, the spinning of the rope, and

how they dropped and caught each other in their moments of physical contact.

I was invested in the performances of the artists on stage as I lost sense of my own self consciousness, and experience of time in the action of viewing *Smoke and Mirrors*. Harrel and Stokes interacted with the environment, affected the environment, and let the environment affect them. *Smoke and Mirrors* exemplifies the fusion of aerial and dance in way that I explored in my research to transform the environment, interact with objects and people through touch as focus on the action necessary to fulfill the movement. The integration of aerial and dance holds the highest flow potential for myself as the performer and audience, which was the reason my creative process and performance of *GRIP* incorporated dancing with the floor, apparati, and the air.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

My methodology for the creative process and culminating performance occurred in phases. Each phase built and contributed to the next, leading to the creation and performance of *GRIP*. After 10 weeks of the creative process, *GRIP* premiered on December 6, 2014 in Bounce Gymnastics' Circus Room. The piece was created by identifying and exploring flow triggers in an environment that incorporated dance and aerial. Throughout the entire process I used a journal to record my initial thoughts, feelings, and self-reflections.

I will articulate the reflective methods I used to collect information concerning the nature of performance. I began with my own consideration of flow in performance and then conducted a series of interviews with current performing artists and the dancers involved in the creation and performance of *GRIP*, which provided insight concerning how others reflect upon their performances.

In order to obtain information from human subjects I received expedited approval from the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board. I created a recruitment letter and consent form that all seven of my participants received and signed. After each interview I wrote in my journal allowing each experience I obtained to influence my writing about performative moments in front of an audience. Once all the interviews were completed, I revisited all of my journal entries to seek meaning and find themes in my own writing relating to triggers that may induce flow in dance performance. I created a list of triggers that became the starting point for my creative process. The final performance, *GRIP*, reflected a creative process that explored flow inducing triggers with



emphasis on aerial apparatus and environment.

### ***Phase I: Collecting Performance Reflections***

#### **Flow in Performance Self-Reflection**

As I embarked on this creative process I reflected on my own positive experiences while in performance. I recalled a performance that took place in West Linn, OR during AWOL Dance Collective's *Art in the Dark* (2011) production at Mary S. Young Park. The performance of the piece was very satisfying because it was dynamic in movement accents, physically challenging, and included many opportunities for touch. I gleaned key ways into a flow experience by discovering how the tactility of the apparatus, confidence in achieving difficult movement tasks, and the outdoor environment of the show were the triggers that heightened my performative state.

The untitled aerial teardrop piece was co-choreographed and performed by: myself, Jessica Baker, Kelsey Humfeld, and Emily Krause. The teardrop apparatus consists of two fabric loops connected and rigged from a single point at the top. The teardrop was raised to approximately ten feet off the floor. I performed the teardrop piece four nights in a row in front of an audience that were seated in the round.

An enjoyable element to the piece was how well I knew the choreography. I had been rehearsing the dance for over four months and felt very comfortable with all of the movements, transitions, and direction of focus within it. That being said, there were two large drop sequences at the end of the piece that always caused my heart to race. Even in my confident ability to perform the drops correctly I had to be perfectly aware of each step I was performing to execute the movement safely and in an aesthetically pleasing

manner. My attention was immersed on that task and I experienced intense focus followed immediate relief and satisfaction once I was dropping in the teardrop.

The tactile stimuli of the teardrop was both pleasing and demanding as the multiple loops in the fabric could take on many different forms and textures. It took time in the creative process for me to navigate my balance of weight and manipulation of the fabric by playing close attention to my relationship to the apparatus and how it felt on my body. I was able to divide my weight between the fabrics due to the two loops and I would drop from one loop to be caught on other side. At times the fabric would be loose creating a soft sensation and others times the fabric would be very taught due to my weight inside of it. When the fabric was tight it created a painful touch as it gripped my skin or caused a burn from sliding too quickly. Painful or not, touch informed the entire piece and I made choreographic decisions based on how the teardrop could support me or how I could manipulated the fabric in different textural states.

A challenging element to the piece that induced a hyper-awareness and focus was that the dance was an ensemble piece. The piece included three other performers on stage with individual teardrops. At times we were all performing different choreography and in other moments unison. This required me to split my attention between my own task and experience and maintain a connection with the group in energy, focus, and dynamics of the movement.

The environment in which the performance took place was also a unique experience and something I can recall much clearer than the actual movements I danced. The aerial apparatus was rigged from wires connected from tree to tree in the Mary S. Young Park. It was the beginning of September around 8pm; the air was sticky and

warm. A soft breeze would float through the trees and sway the wires from where the teardrop was rigged. The audience was seated in the round with no light except shone on those suspended from the trees. Even though I knew there was an audience witnessing my performance, the lighting made me feel as if I and the dancers were alone in the woods hanging from the limbs of the trees.

Reflecting on my own experience of flow characteristics while performing the teardrop piece with AWOL Dance Collective, I lost track of time, did not feel self-conscious, sensed personal control in my movements and was completely absorbed in my focus and actions. I contribute my deep focus and enjoyment with this performance through the challenge in movement material, tactile stimuli the aerial fabric provided, and the outdoor environment of performing in a park. This self-reflection contributed to my research, creative process, and performance of *GRIP* by inspiring the use of aerial hammocks.

### **Artist Interviews**

The essence of Csikszentimihalyi's flow is something I believe each performing artist experiences, though each performer may describe it by another name or reflect on the experience differently. To receive qualitative information regarding selected performing artist's reflection of past performances I was interested in understanding how each artist might describe their experience of flow characteristics in performance in their own words. With the “exchange (of) information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (Janesick 1998, 30), I interpreted information from each interview through my own understanding of flow in performance. I selected to interview Noel

Plemmons, Sam Hobbs, Susan Murphy, M'liss Stephenson Quinnly, and Ty Vennewitz due to their range of performance experiences and idioms. I was also interested in speaking with these artists due to the fact that I have witnessed their performances that impacted and left strong impressions on me as audience member. All of the interviews were conducted and recorded in person with the exclusion of Susan Murphy and Ty Vennewitz, who were interviewed and recorded over the phone.

Noel Plemmons, Sam Hobbs, and M'liss Stephenson Quinnly are three professional dancers and choreographers based out of the Pacific Northwest. Susan Murphy and Ty Vennewitz are professionals in the realm of circus, aerial dance, and physical theatre. Having seen each performing artist as an audience member, I'm making the assumption that they have each experienced flow characteristics in the past.

Each participant was asked a series of background information questions regarding how many years they have danced and worked professionally as well as a brief history of the environments they have performed in.

I then asked a series of questions that addressed experiences based on the presence of Csikszentmihalyi's flow characteristics. In order to do this I asked the artist to recall a specific work in which they had a positive performative experience. Then I asked the artist to recall the performance space, date, if an audience was present, and how many dancers (if any) were in the work with them. The questions relating to specific work they had a positive experience with were:

1. Did they experience intense and focused concentration in that performance?
2. Did they sense a merging of action and awareness in that performance?
3. Did they experience a loss of reflective self-consciousness?

4. Was there a sense of personal control or agency over the situation or activity?
5. Was there a distortion of temporal experience?
6. Was the act of performing intrinsically rewarding and why or why not?

Using the same questions as above, I then asked the performing artists to recall a negative experience while performing in attempt to understand what may take someone out of flow.

Finally, I asked the artists to discuss their performance experience as it relates to environment and choreography.

1. What takes you out of the moment while performing?
2. How does the ability to see the audience affect your performance?
3. How does the environment you are in affect your performance, do you have a preference?
4. How does the safety of yourself and others while performing affect your experience?
5. How has your performance experience changed over time?
6. How would you describe your experience before you are about to perform, including emotional state and routine/ rituals?
7. How would you describe your experience after you perform, including emotional state and routine/ rituals?
8. Please describe the feeling, color, and temperature of your performance experience.

Inspired by a phenomenological approach, I wrote in a journal after each

interview. I reflected on the elements of the conversations that stood out to me and also on ideas that aligned or contrasted with my own performance experiences. Influenced by the research and methods of Sondra Fraleigh's *A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance Through Phenomenology* (1991) and *Consciousness Matters* (2000) I recorded immediate responses to the interviews and then revisited my writings, “to extract the meaningful essentials, to communicate to the reader well founded points of reference.” (1991, 13). The reflective journaling ultimately helped me to understand how I could structure an environment that allows for the performer to engage in flow.

#### *Artist Interview #1- Noel Plemmons*

Noel Plemmons (Portland, OR) is the artistic director, choreographer, and dancer for POV Dance. He has also performed as a modern dancer for tEEth (Portland, OR). I was interested in speaking with him about his performance experience while in tEEth's *Homemade* (2010).

From my journal reflections and notes, I gathered that Noel enjoys being in close proximity to an audience in performance. The closer the audience is to him, the more comfortable he feels. Noel prefers to be able to see the audience or feel close enough to them in space to sense their energy. His whole body is more awake, aware, and in control when he is performing for an audience at whom he can look in their eyes. For example, in his performance of a solo in tEEth's *Homemade*, Noel said he could read the mood of the audience, informing him of how his movements and expression made the audience feel. He knew the exact moment he had the entire audience captivated, as he performed gestural phrase that included self touch because he could see and sense the audience engaged in every move he made. I find it compelling how much Noel could feel and see

that in the audience, yet remain focused on what he was doing, not becoming overly conscious of himself. What I gathered from the interview is that in performance Noel experiences a calm energy and is highly aware of the audience.

I ascertained that being in flow for Noel allows him to transcend from his everyday person to become someone so acutely aware of every move, sound, and breath he takes as it is communicated to an audience. I gathered that two elements of performance that seem to support flow characteristics for Noel are his close proximity to an audience and ability to transcend from his everyday persona.

Noel also shared an experience with me where he discussed an experience that left him feeling uncomfortable on stage. Working with tEEth, Noel was often asked to use his voice in performance. Noel had experiences singing, screaming, and trying to talk with a microphone head lodged in his mouth. In a particular unsatisfying performance, he was working with a different Portland dance company. Noel recalled feeling so awkward when the choreographer asked him to sing a song, without providing him any instruction on how to sing it or why he was singing in the context of the piece. Noel believed he never figured out how to sing the song in a way that he felt satisfied with. The song seemed so out of place to him leading to him questioning the entire message of the work.

Reflecting on Noel's account, I sympathize with his self-consciousness in performance as stemming from questions he had regarding the choreographer's artistic intent. In my understanding it seemed that Noel never “stood” behind the song he was supposed to sing, and thus, was challenged with experiencing any of the flow characteristics. After our interview I realized that a key factor to a flow experience in performance may be that dancers need to be personally invested emotionally, physically,

or artistically in order to feel confident about what they are sharing in front of an audience.

Noel's reflections on performance impacted my creation of *GRIP* by influencing my decision to have the audience in close proximity to the stage space. Influenced by the concept of being observed and how observation might change our experience as dancers within the creative process of this research, I decided that we would perform movement explorations for each other to reflect on changes of experience when being watched versus not.

#### *Artist Interview #2- Sam Hobbs*

Sam Hobbs (Portland, OR) has worked with Bodyvox, Minh Tran, and Rainbow Dance Theatre. Sam also produces his own choreographic work. I was interested in interviewing Sam because he has expressed to me having extreme stage fright before performing. His performance anxiety actually resulted in him taking time away from and his dance career. I was curious about how Sam might articulate his performance experience and the strategies he employed to cope with his stage fright.

Through my reflection and interpretation of the interview with Sam I understood his satisfying performance experiences to be similar to the feeling of jumping into cold water. This sensation happened to him for the first time in a duet he performed as an undergraduate student. at Western Oregon University.

Much of the duet consisted of partner work between Sam and another female dancer. He said that during all of the moments of contact he had with the other dancer, he felt like he was swimming with no effort as every transition glided into the next. He thinks this duet felt so easy and clear due to the personal relationship he had with the



female dancer. The piece required him to tell a love story with his movement, and he spent a large amount of time rehearsing the piece before the performance.

From my understanding of our conversation I noted that Sam prefers to be alone before a performance. Often he seeks a quiet space to be by himself before a performance, especially when he was experiencing anxiety about being on stage. Sam would conjure images of who he is going to be once he is on stage. Though he doesn't always perform roles that are character based, he believed he had to become something other than himself while dancing this particular duet. Conjuring images of the movements he was about to perform as well as the moments he would make contact with another dancer helped him to realize the tasks he needed to accomplish on stage. I interpreted Sam's developing awareness of connection with others as a critical element to not feeling isolated on stage and his transition to the character he felt compelled to depict. In his quiet moments of reflection and imagery, before the performance began, Sam could focus and relieve some of his pre-show anxiety allowing him to be able to perform and experience flow characteristics.

The information I gleaned from Sam's reflection and applied to my own process was the importance of connection between me and the dancers. I made sure the dancers felt they could communicate openly with me in the process. I also constructed sections of the dance where the dancers and I would make eye contact with each other, physically connect, and take movement cues from vocal initiations requiring us to be aware of each other throughout the piece.

*Artist Interview #3- M'Liss Stephenson Quinnly*

M'Liss Stephenson Quinnly (Portland, OR) is a founding member of Polaris

Dance Theatre. She is a dancer, choreographer, and rehearsal director for Polaris. M'Liss is a fierce performer and technician. Her movements are clear and precise and when she is on stage it is hard to watch anyone else.

My reflection and interpretation of the interview with M'Liss revealed to me that focusing on the accomplishments or actions of each movement is extremely important to her, especially in physically demanding and exhausting dances. During the creation and dress rehearsals of an extremely physically difficult and long piece she danced with Polaris Dance Theatre she planned “exit strategies” once large movement sections were completed. M'Liss felt a sense of relief and accomplishment if she had identified moments to exit the stage, in case she for some reason couldn't physically go on to the next section of the dance. I asked her if she ever had to use one of her planned exits during an actual performance and she never did. M'Liss also informed me that she was not thinking about her ways to escape off stage while she was performing, yet the identified exits were planned before she began dancing in front of an audience. I ascertained that the “exit strategies” provided her with landmarks within the piece, breaking the lengthy dance into smaller manageable tasks. It seemed to me that this strategy provided a sense of calm for M'Liss to not worry about passing out or collapsing on stage in utter exhaustion, leaving her dancers to improvise without her. She planned her moments of exit so precisely that she was conscious of how they would affect others during the performance and if they would disrupt the choreography. It was my understanding that M'Liss utilized her back up plan so she could focus on the action of each movement she was doing, instead of thinking about how long, exhausting, and difficult the entire piece was going to be each time she performed it.

Listening to M'Liss speak of her planned exits and tactics for performance, I understood this as a way of coping with the added pressure and stress that performance can bring opposed to rehearsal. My interview with M'Liss influenced my creative process by consciously deciding to have myself and the dancers stay in the stage space for the entire piece, with no exits and entrances. I wanted myself and the dancers to go on the entire 15 minute journey together, not having the chance to leave the performance once it had begun. *GRIP* had multiple sections to the dance that were threaded together with connection through eye contact and physical touch between the dancers and I. The multiple points of eye contact within *GRIP* served as a strategy to allow myself and the dancers to remain focused and connected throughout each section of the work.

*Artist Interview #4- Susan Murphy*

Susan Murphy (Darien, GA) is a certified Laban Analyst, trapeze performer since 1978, and conducts *Authentic Aerial* workshops from her studio in Georgia. I was introduced to Susan in 2010 when she taught a weekend workshop at AWOL Dance Collective in Portland, OR. I witnessed Susan perform a solo at the Aerial Dance Festival in Boulder, CO in 2012. Susan blends dance and aerial effortlessly on stage. With over 36 years of performing experience, I was eager to interview Susan to learn more about her state of being in front of an audience over the years.

Susan Murphy has worked with her single-point dance trapeze for decades. Through my interpretation of our interview I understood Susan's relationship with her trapeze to be very familiar and intimate much like knowing a family member or close friend, making me think that working with an apparatus can be more like working with another dancer. She knows how the trapeze would react to her movements and more

importantly how to get back on track if something goes wrong. Listening to Susan talk about a duet conjured memories of working with my own aerial silks and getting my foot and ankle completely entangled in a fashion that was not planned. In those unplanned moments there are usually two choices to be made. The first choice is to freak out, tangle myself more, and lose all energy making it impossible to fix the situation. The second option is to improvise in a calm fashion, usually working my previous movements in reverse to free the foot from the fabric maze. Csikszentimihalyi expressed that action and awareness need to meet each other in order for flow to occur (1998). An experienced and well trained aerialist like Susan has the strength and stamina to remove herself from an unplanned movement situation in a mindful way. Susan is so connected to her trapeze dance partner that her actions and awareness become one as she performs, adjusting and improvising as needed.

In my conversation with Susan I gathered that the possibility for flow for is more likely for her when she has a personal investment in the material she is performing. Susan referenced one of her solo pieces that was a particularly potent performance for her. Susan's process included recording memories of her grandmother and aunt in her journal, she then created movements she could perform with her trapeze that embodied the words and at times verbalizing of the words she had written. I ascertained that Susan was able to dive deeper into her performance because the movement material was personal and unique to her experiences with the women of her family.

Inspired by Susan's use of personal story and memories to invest in her performance experience, I invited the dancers and myself to write about our own experiences of performance and why we enjoy it. The dancers and I then created

movement based on our own words so each of us were responsible for movement that arose from a personal narrative and creation, allowing us to invest in the crafting and performance of our individual phrases.

*Artist Interview #5- Ty Vennewitz*

Ty Vennewitz (Seattle, WA) attended the National Cirque school in Montreal for clowning and juggling. Though he specializes in clowning he also has professional performing experience in aerial dance, modern dance, and music. Currently he is a company member with Terry Crane's Acrobatic Conundrum. Ty's ability to perform in a comical manner with clowning and circus is highly interesting to me. Often his work involves a large amount of improvisation as well as interaction with the audience. Ty has a unique ability to transform into whatever character he is playing and appearing to stay in the moment, even under moments of chaos.

In our conversation I gathered that the ability to interact with an audience is very important for Ty's performance. He often performs roles that are comedic and require him to use his voice. For instance, while performing with The Acrobatic Conundrum he has engaged with the audience by proposing questions all while sucking the air out of a helium balloon. As his voice got higher and higher, I gathered that Ty tried to remain as serious as possible with the audience, in the hope that the irony of the situation would heighten the absurdity. As I relate to Ty's situation, I conclude that if an audience does not return the energy I am giving them, I would be very aware of not receiving my desired effect on stage and self-conscious thoughts would likely arise.

Another moment I gathered that Ty found to be a highlight of his flow experiences was when he performed for an outside circus and he had to make his way

from the audience to the stage while hula hooping. Though he knew he had to make his way up to the stage eventually, he did not have set choreography for how to get there, leaving enough space and freedom for him to improvise and interact with the audience as he impulsively felt inclined. Ty started hula hooping and then made the decision to run down the middle of the audience. The audience made space for him as he traveled like a wave parting perfectly down the middle. The audience and Ty seemed to have a shared experience of hyper focus, with his path and intentions made clear, to complete his trajectory in space. Ty expressed that the moment felt electric, like something outside himself was making that moment happen so seamlessly and audience provided him with so much energy, that the rest of that particular performance felt like he was floating.

Ty also spoke of having to move a microphone and accompanying stand around the stage during a performance with The Acrobatic Conundrum. On one occasion he forgot to move the microphone and after his solo performance he found himself, on stage, realizing he did not perform his task correctly. He was worried that the other performers would be disrupted by the fact that they then had to grab the microphone, which would have been something new they would have to do in the moment. I thought it was interesting to consider that Ty's experience of flow was influenced by his thoughts and actions for the others on stage, relatable to the degree of interactivity and foresight one must have even as Ty may be focused on his own performance.

Ty's interview influenced my creative process by allowing space for improvisation during rehearsals as well as in the culminating performance. I wanted to make sure the dancers felt comfortable improvising with the aerial hammocks in order to make safe and artistic choices in the event that they became tangled, fell out of the

hammock, or their timing of movements did not match up with the rest of the group.

### ***GRIP Dancer Interviews***

Bryn and Ferena, two University of Oregon dance students, collaborated with me in rehearsal and performance. I choose the female dancers to be in my MFA movement project because they are both equally dynamic and engaging movers with captivating presences on stage. The two University of Oregon dance students were selected to be a part of my research due to their availability, interest, and observation of their maturity as performing dance artists that thoughtfully invest and reflect on their flow. After the dancers agreed to be a part of this research and dance creation I interviewed them individually before embarking on the creative process.

I asked the dancers to recall both rewarding and unsatisfying performances as they answered the questions that I listed earlier in this chapter. Though Bryn and Ferena are students, I maintained the same approach as the five professional artists.

#### *GRIP Dancer Interview #1- Bryn Hlava*

Bryn Hlava is a junior at The University of Oregon and is a strong and technical mover who has been studying dance she was young girl. During high school Bryn trained and performed with the Jefferson Dancers, a pre-professional dance company associated with Jefferson High School in Portland, OR. Bryn's dance training includes a large range from ballet, hip hop, jazz, modern, and African dance. While at University of Oregon Bryn has performed in multiple undergraduate, graduate, and faculty works.

Bryn and I discussed a disappointing experience she had while performing that interested me because of the actions she took to remain present within the piece. Right before the lights came up at the beginning of the piece, Bryn realized the dance floor was

wet, causing her initial sensations of fear of falling on stage. In talking with Bryn, I understood that she felt anxiety between all of the dancers as they consciously tried not to slip and fall in the water. Bryn seemed to become extremely aware of every move she made on stage. I gleaned that Bryn was experiencing many oppositional characteristics of flow, she was self-consciousness and aware of the potential danger the environment presented her. Bryn said she became even more physically unstable as the piece progressed and she slipped and fell twice. In an effort to stay calm and try to remain focused within the piece Bryn spoke to how important physical and eye contact with the other dancers became for her. Bryn needed the other dancers support to prevent from slipping again and to also calm her nerves. Anytime she was able to touch another dancer, she felt more stable and grounded than when she was alone. Bryn reflected on the performance as a learning experience and example of the unpredictable nature of the stage. I understand Bryn's search for connection and contact with other dancers as an attempt to trigger a deeper level of focus and enjoyment in a piece where she felt out of control.

#### *GRIP Dancer Interview #2- Ferena Kagata*

Ferena Kagata, senior at The University of Oregon, is an impressive dancer with virtuosic and athletic qualities. While studying at UO Ferena has performed in multiple undergraduate, graduate, and faculty works. Ferena has also participated in Shen Wei's dance intensive and the American Dance Festival's winter session.

Through my discussion with Ferena, I learned she experiences deep focus, loss of time, and enjoyment in the activity when she performs in the dance studio as opposed to dancing on stage in front of an audience. Through my reflection I understood that she



enjoys the immediate feedback Ferena's body provides her when she dances in the studio and tries something new each time she performs a phrase in class. Experimentation and the lack of pressure to execute the movement perfectly seem to influence Ferena's ability to experience flow characteristics.

Ferena described a performance in front of an audience that was a rewarding experience due to her accomplishing a challenging dance phrase, as well as receiving positive feedback from an audience member. During this particular piece Ferena had to balance on one leg with her other leg in a lifted attitude position. While in the balance, Ferena shifted the weight in her standing leg to slowly promenade in a circle. Ferena said she had really struggled with the phrase because it challenged her dance technique, strength, musical timing, and overall coordination. In her last performance of the piece with the challenging promenade, she remembers trying not fret about the move before she began her balance. Ferena said she let her mind go blank and exhaled loudly. As she was moving in her small circle, she began to notice how smooth the motions felt and that she didn't need to use much effort to complete her rotating attitude balance. Once the phrase completed she looked out to the audience and saw a faculty member nod in approval. She recalls that moment to be very special since Ferena rarely notices anyone in the audience. I gathered from our interview that receiving immediate feedback from an audience member, who also is a figure of inspiration and mentorship for Ferena, reinforced that she accomplished something challenging, but worth the time and effort it took to accomplish and dance that phrase. After speaking with Ferena and reflecting on the experience in my journal I related experiences of approval as another validating experience in the role of flow characteristics. The audience validates the performer by witnessing the challenge,

vulnerability, control or lack of, and witnesses the performer's surrender into the full absorption of the moment. Speaking with Ferena reinforced my desire to create a dance piece that would include an audience in close proximity to possibly make our flow experiences visible to others.

### ***Phase II: The Creative Process: Collaboration and Showings***

Once I had reflected on my own experiences with flow in performance and spoke with the seven selected performing artist, I revisited each post-interview journal entry. I began looking for the common themes I wrote about. The triggers that I took away from the reflections and applied in my creative process were: tactile interaction with apparatus, physical contact between dancers, use of eye contact within the dance, proximity to an audience, completion of action tasks, and personal investment in the movement that comes from the dancers creating and exploring choreography. Inspired by these triggers, I proceeded to the phase of my research that involved creating a unique dance piece.

At the beginning of fall term, September 2014, the dancers and I rehearsed four hours a week for approximately 11 weeks. The final performance, GRIP, was presented on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The first three sessions of our rehearsals were conducted in University of Oregon's Gerlinger Annex dance studios. The remaining rehearsals and final performance took place in Bounce Gymnastics' Circus Room. The dancers and I explored creative tasks and improvisation to generate movement that was based on specific flow triggers that will be discussed in detail in this section. The rehearsals did not take on an environmental and tactile theme until we were in our performance space at Bounce.

I chose to include myself in the work to have my own performance experience to better assist in the final evaluation. It was important to know how I felt from on the inside of the piece during the creation and final performance. It gave me the opportunity to generate and execute movement from the point of view of an internal state of being while in performance as opposed to being motivated by what the dance would look like for an observer.

As I embarked on the rehearsal process I knew that Bryn and Ferena did not have aerial dance experience before we began rehearsals. I was curious about how the lack of the dancers' aerial experience, might assist me in discovering new approaches to aerial work.

My goal was to let the flow triggers shape the choreography and not to go into my comfortable and known way of creating movement. I expected this unknown way of working to be interesting and exciting, as well as challenging throughout the process.

In certain conditions, the creative process begins with the goal of solving a problem...For artists the goal of the activity is not so easily found. In fact, the more creative a problem the less clear it is what needs to be done. Discovered problems, the ones that generate the greatest changes in the domain, are also the most difficult to enjoy working on because of their elusiveness. In such cases, the creative person somehow must develop an unconscious mechanism that tells him or her what to do. (Csikszentimihalyi 1996, 114)

Going into the rehearsal process I wanted to research flow triggers within a choreographic structure. I also knew that I needed to listen to my artist intuition that I had been developing for the past decade as a creator and performer. It is often hard to articulate why I make certain choices within a dance or on stage. It often feels like the motivation and drive for artistic decision making stems from my gut the, “unconscious mechanism” (Csikszentimihalyi 1996, 114). Sometimes following my impulse leads to

development other times my impulses are merely one time experiments.

Csikszentmihalyi's quote serves as a reminder that even though I created a dance in the role of a researcher, I tried not to disregard my past experiences and gut instincts felt while creating a new dance.

As a group we delved into movement explorations, journaled, and then discussed how movements felt after we performed them. Though I never collected the dancers' journals, I would often ask them specific questions relating to flow concerning what they were thinking of when they performed certain sections, if they noticed the sounds coming from the other room at Bounce, and what changed when they knew someone was watching them. This inquiry amongst the group as well as my own phenomenological journaling supported the development of the piece.

I also wanted to pay close attention to Csikszentmihalyi five flow conditions (1990, 97). By setting an overall goal I was able to remain focused on the purpose of my research and how the piece was progressing. My overall goal was to use flow triggers to support a choreographic process. I also wanted to create an open and ongoing dialogue with myself and the dancers in regards to how we were experiencing movement in rehearsal. Determining ways to measure progress of my goals became based on my reflective journaling after each rehearsal and post committee member showing feedback sessions.

To deepen the focus and concentration within the activity for myself and the dancers, I allowed the dancers to generate and improvise with the aerial hammocks. Giving the dancers time to explore and be responsible for their own movements served as a way for them to deepen their focus and take ownership of their individual experience.

To develop skills necessary to interact with available opportunities the choreography progressed along the way. It was important that the dancers developed the strength required for lifting themselves in and out of the hammocks. Equally important was making sure the dancers were comfortable with improvising with the hammocks in the event that a series of movements did not go as planned. The dancers' strength and familiarity with the aerial hammocks became apparent with repetition of movements and creating space for the dancers to perform individually as well as in group unison work.

Evolving the activity to avoid boredom also happened throughout the process of creating *GRIP*. The dance evolved even on the day of the show as I made small changes to choreography. For example, I asked the dancers to hold poses longer in the beginning section of the dance. In contrast I also asked the dancers to follow my lead in a section that needed to happen quicker and with a stronger sense of urgency.

The progression of the final piece was also influenced by the three thesis committee showings held at Bounce Gymnastics. The first two showings shared insights to initial reactions, themes, and overall mood that the piece created. The showings provided opportunities where the thesis committee could ask me questions, and in return, I could gain an audiences' perspective on how the piece appeared to be shaping. The final showing took place the week of the performance and provided information regarding small details such as our use of focus and intention within the work.

### **Rehearsal in Gerlinger Annex**

I began our first rehearsal by teaching Bryn and Ferena a dance phrase that I had created a week prior to our rehearsal. The phrase had many shifts in tempo as well as many movements that went in and out of the floor. It was my intention to give the

dancers material that might be physically difficult and required some problem solving. The phrase ended abruptly with the dancers balancing on one leg in an abstracted passé with their eyes closed. The phrase ended with the balance provided an internal experience that challenged their proprioception skills. Once the dancers felt they knew the material well enough to replicate it without me, I worked with them to insert two moments of pause and also one moment to change their direction in space, to experiment between continuous action and decisive pausing. We worked on completing the new phrase multiple times in a row, trying to eliminate moments where they could start thinking about other things or make judgments on the artistic choices they previously made. Once they had completed the movements three times, I then stepped out of the exercise and watched them perform the material two more times.

I asked the dancers how they felt and what they were thinking about. Both Ferena and Bryn said they were focused on the action of the movements, the task at hand. I agree that my mind, while performing the phrase, was focused on the movement and what was supposed to happen next. We were all immersed in the movement and remained focused throughout the short phrase, which I thought was a positive shared experience for the group that provided flow.

The dancers did express how difficult it was to have their eyes closed in the last balance moment. It was challenging and scary and also made us feel out of control. We began to explore the sightless balance in greater detail. We balanced with our eyes closed coming from a lot of momentum, no momentum, and we also experimented with closing the eyes very slowly. The idea came to me from attending multiple yoga classes where I would stand in one legged balance, tree pose or dancer pose; the instructor would ask the

class to close their eyelids in a sustained manner. The darkness became gradual and often the one legged balance became easier and peaceful with the slower closing of the eyes. With each iteration of our sightless balance, I asked the dancers to state preference. Collectively we thought each eyes closed balance offered a different experience for us as movers. Closing our eyes quickly provided us with greater challenge and was much harder to sustain the balance. The gradual closing of the eyes balance left us feeling more in control of that moment and we could also sustain the balance for longer without falling out of it. It also provided use with a challenge that we set a goal to accomplish and then had to work on establishing the skills necessary to achieve the goal (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 97).

It occurred to me that if we only performed movements that resulted in the experience of being in control, though it may encourage flow, it may also be easier to become bored because it would eventually be too easy. After rehearsal had concluded for the day I wrote in my journal, “how do we find a sense of control in movement or moments where we feel completely unstable? Can flow happen equally in the moments of certainty and ambiguity?” Before the next rehearsal I made a note in my journal to revisit the, out of control, sightless balance and explore phrases with self touch and contact amongst myself and the dancers.

We began our second rehearsal by reviewing the original phrase from our last session together. Once the dancers arrived at the abrupt balance moment I gave them more options to try. I asked them to stay in the moment as long as they could which allowed for wiggling, use of the arms for balance, and ability to change direction and occupancy of space while staying on one leg. The dancers and I experimented with this

movement multiple times. When we would open our eyes we ended up all facing different directions and we all tended to move a short distance from our original spot. Similar to our last rehearsal I participated in the exercise with the dancers and then also watched the dancers perform the task a few times. From the inside it was a strange experience to really struggle and then also starts to become more conscious that the other dancers may have already opened their eyes and could see me struggling. I recall not enjoying the pressure I added to my task by considering possible judgment I would receive from Bryn and Ferena witnessing my struggle. Because the rehearsal environment was extremely safe and welcoming, I realized my fear of judgment was not directed by the dancers but from my own self consciousness. Each time I performed the material I made it my goal to think less and less about the other dancers and to focus on my experience alone. The deliberate choice to focus on my own movement experience, not how it looked to Bryn and Ferena, shifted the phrase into an experiment with my sense of time. How long have I had my eyes close, how long until I gain a steadiness in my balance, and how long will the others keep their eyes closed?

The dancers both spoke of enjoying this new balance where it was fast and dynamic going into it but they could take as long as they wanted to find balance, struggle, or inhabit new space. When I stepped away from the movement and watched the dancers they both experimented with different ways to live in the sightless moment. For example, Bryn ended hopping forward on her working leg; always maintain a deep bend in the knee. Ferena would often promenade in a half circle and hold her arms out to the side or above her head. Bryn and Ferena had different approaches for dealing with the sightless balance yet both were able to accomplish the task.



Individually, we created our own gestural phrases that included four moments of self touch. I guided the exploration and suggested we stay in one spot in the room and try to explore self touch that wasn't always initiated by their hands. After they had set their material we added moments that could travel with touch and played varied the qualities and dynamics of each touch. I even asked them to take one of their touches and create distance between their body and the point of contact; it became a hovering touch gesture instead. In this exploration I noticed the dancers tuning into their own space, feelings, and timing. The room became very quiet and both dancers were immersed in their own creations, not asking questions, or observing what was happening with the rest of the group. The dancers and I kept exploring our individual touches until I requested we share our small movement explorations for each other.

As we each took a turn performing for each other I noticed they both had moments with closed eyes within which their facial demeanor became softer. I felt a strong sense of kinesthetic empathy as I watched them. I could feel the slight tickle of a hand passing underneath my chin as I watched Bryn's move the top part of her wrist underneath her jaw. Their dance of touches brought me to a state as viewer that caused me to lean in closer as I watched them. Time slowed down and the small intimate gestures of touch transported me to an engaged state just as it can when I am the mover.

While in Gerlinger Annex we began exploring if it was possible to start a dance phrase without preparing ourselves to perform. I was curious how much we needed to be still, warm up, or take deep breathes in order to present for each other. Could we just go directly from walking to dancing without the typical, "relax, center myself, ready, go!" kind of thinking? It was a challenging task because we consciously had to surprise

ourselves with the beginning of a phrase. I did think it helped to be walking around the space just talking with each other and then start moving in an improvised way.

Ultimately, I realized that our bodies in motion kept our minds clear in a different way than if we were sitting still and not doing anything. After rehearsal I wrote, “Is it better to start a piece with lots of movement, giving the dancer no time to think about the performance they are about to do?” which I can see having its benefits for getting to state of flow sooner. I also reflected that no matter if the piece starts with movement there is always that time just before the curtain opens where the dancer can experience positive or negative thoughts before the performance. The dancer then has the opportunity to direct their thoughts in a way that will best support their upcoming performance. Thinking about how the pre-performance state of the dancer may affect the performative state I wrote, “What do we tell ourselves before we perform?”

Reflecting on what Susan Murphy had said in regards to internalizing a role and having a personal investment in the dance, I decided as a group we would create movement based on our own written words. The dancers and I took time at the beginning of rehearsal to write freely about the ways dance had provided us with positive or satisfying experiences. I asked: How does dance bring you pleasure, how does it feel to perform for others, and why do you keep dancing? After the group had time to write we underlined five words or phrases from our journals. Once our five words were selected out we then created movement for each word with additional challenges. One word had to involve a self touch, another word had to involve a touch of the environment, another word had to conjure a source of imagery, another word involved the use of the voice, and lastly one of the words had to include movement that went from the floor into the air or

vice versa. The dancers and I spent most of the rehearsal coming up with our movements for each word matched with a direction. We layered the material together in ways we found to be the most fluid and organic for ourselves. Slimy, sloppy, electric, vast, and talks to me were the words I selected to create movement for. With all my movements combined, the dance ended up traveling in a straight line. I had moments of small gesture, my chin jutting away from my body and then burrowing into my neck, as well as a large jump turning over my shoulder that landed with my head on the floor looking through the space I created in my legs. Not knowing what words Bryn and Ferena chose for their movement study, I did witness similarities between all of our movement. We each had a move that inverted us, with our heads on the floor and our hips above us. We each traveled in our dances as well as explored soft delicate gestures with large dynamic jumps or bound efforts into the space. The experience of creating the movement was a satisfying experience because we each were given the opportunity to generate movement that was influenced from our own writing and reflections about performance. Each word we selected also had a corresponding movement direction we assigned, allowing the exploration to have something to push against. The direction and also limitation of the assignment asked the dancers and I to engage in creative decision making. The dances Bryn, Ferena, and myself created also became the source of movement development that was explored in the hammocks once we began rehearsals at Bounce.

We took time to create and explore our word based dances, and then we performed them for each other three times. The three showings included having the viewers sit close to the performer, far away from the performer, and also with their backs to the performer. We individually decided which type of performance we wanted to begin

and end with. Once we had all showed our creations to each other we journaled to reflect on how each performance felt, and if they differed, how so? I wrote, “I enjoyed the energy when Bryn and Ferena were facing away from me and I began my performance with my back to them as well.” I appreciated that particular version of performance because it felt internal, similar to dancing with eyes closed, and I had to tune in to my own senses and surrounding before I experienced the energy from the viewer.

In discussion about the different types of performance, I noted that Bryn and Ferena had stronger moments of being invested in the moment when the viewers were close, no matter if they were actually watching or not. Beyond our preferences and observations for how we performed for each other we also discussed how using our voices felt. The dancers and I shared our discomfort with using our voices while we performed our solos. I used my voice by saying the word no, Ferena said hello, and Bryn sighed deeply in a tired and relieved manner. Ferena had stated that the sound her voice made seemed like it did not come from her own body. I realized that the dancers and I, thus far in the creative process, had been working internally by exploring movement with our eyes closed and reflecting on our individually experiences. I believe, the use of our voices in the movement exploration felt unnatural and made us uncomfortable during performance because it contradicted our internal experiences, the voice sounded and felt completely external.

The first few rehearsals were a wonderful time for us as a group to begin our methods of movement exploration, performance, journaling and communicating about our experiences without the added stimuli of the aerial apparatus. Our methodology continued as we transitioned into our performance space in Bounce Gymnastics's Circus

Room.

### **Rehearsals at Bounce Gymnastics**

Bryn and Ferena did not have previous aerial dance experience prior to this creative process. I kept the aerial rigging of the hammocks low, focusing on the integration of aerial and modern dance as the dancers were new to working with an aerial apparatus. However, due to the Bryn and Ferena's performance experience, I was confident in both dancers' ability to improvise with the hammocks if something went awry in the performance.

The beginning rehearsals at Bounce were a time for acclimation to our new environment. The Circus Room at Bounce Gymnastics is where all of the aerial and partner acrobatics classes are held. The floor is covered in blue felt carpet which lies on top of a thick layer of foam padding. Hanging in the air are all the apparatuses such as silks, trapeze, hoop, rope, and the aerial yoga hammocks. The room is a blast of color with yellow walls, blue floors, and hanging fabric from every color of the rainbow. The Circus Room is separated from the main gymnastics room that was often filled with children for classes and birthday parties causing many of the sounds that travel into the next room. The circus room was a place of many distractions and stimuli overload. Initially, I was concerned that the dancers and myself would have a hard time focusing during our rehearsals due to noise, activity, and all the equipment taking up room in the space. The busy nature of the circus room was distracting at first, but after time we all became acclimated to the gymnasium environment, allowing us to delve deeply into the movement explorations and development of choreography.

I recall our first rehearsal at Bounce as very exciting because we were all eager to

work and play with the aerial hammocks. We took our socks off and felt the furry floor underneath our feet and we jumped around to see how much the foam absorbed our landings. I also guided an exploration that prompted us to touch the aerial hammocks like we would touch a human partner. With curiosity and sensitivity we approached each hammock much like a dancer would approach a partner in a contact improvisation jam. I wanted the dancers and I to feel like the hammocks were more than an apparatus for us to control and manipulate. The contact improvisation approach with the hammocks allowed Ferena, Bryn, and I to make movement choices based on the tactile stimuli and balance of weight we experienced.

I then demonstrated different ways the hammock could support weight, such as: hanging over the hammock on our hips, knees, and even the back of our necks. Once the dancers and I had time to explore and manipulate the hammocks, I led them through a meditation while they were lying inside the aerial hammocks, similar an aerial yoga class, in which the student will end the class in Savasana, corpse pose. The aerial yoga student will expand the aerial hammock and lie in Savasana horizontally enclosing their entire body with the fabric. It feels as if one is in a cocoon because it forces one's external limbs to be folded in close to the body's center and it dulls the sights and sounds of the environment outside of the hammock.

Inspired by the seven main chakras and the corresponding chakra colors (Lane 2104, 13) as well as Harlene Goldschmidt's Brave method (2002), "Breathing, Relaxing (or Releasing), Aligning, Visualizing, and Energizing." (17) I led the dancers through a guided meditation as a way to produce imagery from their own bodies while connecting to the apparatus. I had the dancers lay in the hammocks with their eyes closed and the

lights turned off. After they relaxed into their hammocks I guided them through a color meditation. I asked the dancers to pay close attention to the top of their head, if they were holding tension, or how it felt against the fabric of the hammock. After they directed their mental focus to the top of their head I asked them to imagine the color violet. After spending a few minutes with each chakra that went in succession to the root, lower half, of their body. I then asked the dancers to focus on one of the seven colors we imagined: violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. Once the dancers had time to imagine a color of their choice I gently swung each hammock to let them experience a moving sensation with their imagined color.

It was my intention to have Bryn and Ferena experience the hammock as another environment they inhabit. I wanted the dancers to feel the sensation of the hammock to completely enclose and support their body weight. They expressed their sense of sight, sound, and orientation in space became dull from being wrapped so tightly in the hammocks. Exposing the dancers to multiple experiences with the hammocks was important to me. Not only could they dance, execute tricks, and improvise with the hammocks they could also feel new qualitative environment from inside the hammocks that carried their body. As a group, I wanted us to explore as many possible options for movement experimentation with the hammocks as dancers.

After the meditation, I asked the dancers to write in their journals about what it felt like to be lay in the hammocks, what colors were really bright or dim, and what was the sensation like to swing in the hammock. The dancers then took time to create small solos with the hammocks based off their meditation experience. I decided not to give them any other direction to see where they would go with their dances and also how they

would dance with the hammocks for the first time. Both Ferena and Bryn created short solo phrases that included beautiful moments where individual parts of their body slid down the length of the fabric like drops of water falling to the floor. Ferena also danced a moment where she went underneath the hammock and then slowly raised her body so her curved back met the bottom curve of the hammock. The image of the two curves meeting, that of the hammock and Ferena's spine, stuck with me throughout the process and also made an appearance in the finished piece. It seemed as if Ferena and the hammock were magnets pulled toward each other, appearing organic, as if they were destined to connect. The action was strange because the hammock lost its U shape once it met Ferena's head and billowed around both sides of her face, melting into her.

Within our first rehearsal at Bounce I also taught the dancers two short movement phrases that I knew might be challenging at first since they were figuring out the coordination and strength needed to dance with the hammocks. Both phrases required their arms to pull themselves up into the hammocks and also stay above the ground suspended in the hammocks for a small period of time. The phrases had quick actions, slow and suspended movements, and also changing directions and verticality. I knew Ferena and Bryn would be able to pick up the movement quick, but I also was aware that the first few times they executed the phrases they might experience confusion, awkwardness, or physical discomfort. For example they grunted and exclaimed, “Ouch, the fabric is pinching my thigh”. However by the end of rehearsal, they were able to complete both phrases. I used the two aerial dancing phrases as markers to see how much stronger and more capable they might become with the actions in the hammocks as the weeks passed, to explore and note their, “development of skills necessary to interact with



available opportunities” (Csikszentimihalyi 1990, 97).

### **First Showing**

In the upcoming weeks at Bounce the dancers and I continued our research with the aerial phrases, improvisations with the hammocks, as well sitting in the apparatus and swinging to experience a wider range of motions supported by the hammocks. The first thesis committee showing was October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014. All three committee members were present. At that point in the process I had yet to forge a specific structure for the piece, nor did I know what music would accompany us. Once the committee members had arrived I asked them to take observe the movement and comment on the images and sensations the movement evoked. The biggest comment that came out of the first showing was the use of the swing in the hammock, from side to side and also front and back. The committee spoke of the kinesthetic empathy they had for the swinging motion and also the child-like implication it holds for play and wonder. The committee also proposed questions regarding what the hammocks represented. Theresa May made the comment that when the fabrics were swinging on their own they took on life without the dancers making contact with them. Since the dancers and myself were creating movements based on immersion and action, I had not considered how the work could produce narrative imagery or how certain movements could “move” the audience such as the swings. Something to also note is that all three committee members wanted to touch and interact with the hammocks. I took it as an encouraging sign to see each committee member explore the apparatus because it meant they had a tactile curiosity about them and also wanted to experience what it would be like to be held by them. If the committee members had a desire to touch and experiment with the hammocks then many audience

members would potentially have the same fascination.

After the showing I had a clear idea of where I wanted to develop the piece. It was always my intention to have the audience close. My uncertainty in how many hammocks to have in the space and if the audience should be on two separate sides of the space became clear after the showing. Thinking about each hammock as its own entity, I was drawn to the idea of having as many down as possible leaving a small area for an audience on one side of the space. I also developed a new section of the dance where we all swung in the hammocks, requiring us to use more space. Limiting the audience to one side of the space allowed for more room to execute the swing movement we developed.

As the work began to grow I also realized that I was interested in collaborating with a musician on a score. I feared that if I selected pre-recorded music I might easily shape the piece around it, instead of focusing on our flow triggers as explorations. Collaborating with Christian Cherry added to the rich process and performance experience because he tailored each section of the music to compliment the dance's energy and mood. In the beginning stages I recorded sections and phrases of the work we were rehearsing and sent them to him. It was not until the later stages that he saw the skeleton of the piece in terms of format as well as the approximate length of the dance. Christian provided many drafts of each section of the score throughout the process which we would rehearse. For a majority of the process I preferred the music to be at a low volume or turned off completely so we could dialogue as a group and focus on our environment. Christian and I began to notice a dynamic shift in the piece about halfway through where we needed the energy to pick up and be as driving as the movement had developed. I shared with Christian my desire for elements of the music to sound as if we

were under water, inspired by my interview with Sam Hobbs and his experience of flow feeling similar to jumping into a cold body of water. I also wanted the music to provide another layer of environment that aided in the uniqueness of the small performance space filled with floating hammocks. With the imagery ideas I expressed to Christian, he provided an environmental sound to the music that reminded me of someone deep sea diving, breathing with the assistance of a scuba mask. As for the rest of the score, I asked Christian to allow the movement from our rehearsals be his guide. The music did not play a large part in our rehearsal process until the two weeks before the culminating performance, when Christian had completed the final score.

Before the second showing of the work I asked the dancers to bring back their five word movement solos they created in Gerlinger Annex. After reviewing the material Bryn and Ferena then sat in the hammock with their backs against the fabric, hips at the base of the hammock, and their feet slightly raised on the fabric directly in front of them. They then worked on adapting their solos to fit the dimensions, restrictions, and unique possibilities in the apparatus. I then provided an extra challenge and sensation by spinning the hammocks. The hammock would wind up clockwise and then when it couldn't twist anymore, the apparatus would spin counterclockwise. The new solos were visually striking because the hammocks abstracted the dancers bodies only allowing the viewer to see sections of their solos. Bryn translated a movement in which she normally would stretch and lay on the floor, now pushing and stretching the fabric so the length of her body became parallel to the floor, extended five feet in the air. The image was similar to someone lying in a levitating bed. A dynamic moment emerged when Bryn released the tension she created in the stretch of the fabric and folded in at her hips to drop

suddenly into the original sitting position she started in.

Another movement motif that developed before the second showing was the tactile connection to floor and hammocks. As we explored how touch affected our movement and mental state, we began improvising with the idea that we could interact with the unique floor at Bounce and the hammock at the same time. The dancers and I wrapped our wrist with the hammock and gripped the top part of the fabric turning it into a hand loop. All of us were able to sit on the ground with our hands connected to the hammock. The sensation of being so grounded on the floor simultaneously feeling capable to pull myself off the floor with the help of the apparatus was an interesting duality for movement potential. We explored the limitations of our new movement and how far we could challenge the boundaries. The motif developed into a series of rolls on to our stomachs and backs while keeping our hand in the loop. When we couldn't physically roll anymore we would release and slide back to our original spots. Repeating this action continually we discussed how the action, at first, was a task to complete. In the multiple repetitions of the rolling movement, the dancers and I transcended away from the task as we experienced the full sensation of the floor, tension created from our connection to hammock, and our timing with each other in the group. Many of the tasks involved with the hammocks triggered flow for the dancers and myself due to our immersion in completing the actions with the hammocks and our physical interaction with our environment; there wasn't room to think of anything else.

### **Second Showing**

The second thesis committee showing was on November 10, 2014. My thesis chair, Shannon Mockli, was in attendance. I had three sections to show and did not have a

full music score from Christian yet. Though the piece was still in development I did know that the dancers and I would remain in the “stage” space the entire time and the piece would be approximately 15 minutes. I asked Shannon to look at the development of phrases and provide insight to moments she was invested as an audience member and other times when her attention would drift away from the dance. What I gathered from Shannon's feedback was a majority of the material was in unison, there wasn't much physical contact between dancers, the repetitive nature of the hand lock rolling motif drew her in at first, then went on too long without added dimension to the repetition, and that the big swinging section had moments of risk and excitement that could develop and be extended in length. I also received the sense from Shannon that the tactility the dancers were experiencing was engaging to her as an audience member. I realized it was so important to be processing, rehearsing, and performing at Bounce for the amount of touch we were able to uncover. Touching the aerial hammocks, the ruffled texture of the sprung gymnastics floor, and partnering with each other all enhanced the relationship between dancer, audience, and environment.

In the final weeks of rehearsal I decided that it would be important to start making an order for the dance so myself and the other performers could dive into the work and experience the piece in its actual timing and development. I also took into account Shannon's feedback and decided to make a duet for Bryn and Ferena instead of having them both do their new hammock word dances simultaneously. Bryn remained in the hammock and Ferena danced with her outside of the hammock. Ferena moved with Bryn in her spinning motion, momentarily interrupted her spin, and also held herself up by the hammock as her legs rested on Bryn enclosed body. The duet was a way to combine

multiple images and tactile moments we had explored individually yet, in this way Bryn, Ferena, and the hammock were all relating to each other. Bryn's dynamic lift to be parallel with the floor and then drop in her hammock was still a part of her movement. In the duet version, Ferena was underneath Bryn, initiating her accent with the top of her head. Ferena's head met the fabric that was on Bryn's back. As Ferena connected her head to the hammock she supported some of Bryn's weight until Bryn actively pushed into the hammock with her arms and legs to stretch and lift her body in a horizontal position hovering over Ferena's body. When Bryn dropped, released her stretched out tension, Ferena was laying on the floor looking up at her. Both dancers commented on having to be more conscious of their timing to make that movement happen safely.

In many sections I took away moments that once were in unison and asked the dancers to embody their own timing. We then found certain landmarks where we all caught up together to proceed to the next section. I wanted the dancers to have the experience of being completely involved in their own movement and timing, contrasted by moments where we visually connected with each other to move forward in the dance forward as a unit. The individual embodiment and group awareness that arose both had potential in supporting opportunities for flow.

Developing the swinging section that took place in the second half of the full piece was really exciting and fun to rehearse. Swinging brought about nostalgic feelings for us because we were rocked as babies and swung on the playground as children. It wasn't until I started aerial dance training in 2008 that I reunited with the experience of swing, spin, and flight. As a group we looked at how the swings could be soft, gentle and flowing. We also looked at how the swings could be risky and involve a specific delivery

in timing. I asked the dancers to hold onto one side of the hammock about at their chest height. After the dancers had pulled the hammock as far as they could away from the hanging point, I would yell “up!” and the dancers would lift their legs engulfed by the swing while quickly throwing their legs over and through the opening of the hammock. The fast swing was intoxicating because of the rush through the air and the risk involved to make the moment happen. Many times our legs didn't make it in time on the hammock or we became tangled in the fabric. At times I was aware of the awkwardness of the swinging move and doubts began to arise that the move would not be doable by every dancer. I started thinking of ways to change how we maneuvered in and out of the swing and had to remind myself that the challenging aspect was a positive thing and collectively we needed to bring awareness to the task at hand. The dancers and I needed to spend more time in the awkwardness of the swing to develop our own methods that resulted in a strong, fluid, and energized entry and exit of the swing.

### **Third Showing**

For the final thesis committee showing Christian Cherry was also in attendance to set up the audio equipment his original composition. Two speakers were set up in the back corners of the circus room facing the audience which created an encompassing sound for both the performers as well as the viewers.

I need to create a shift in attention and focus during the week leading up to the performance. I wanted the dancers and myself to transition our collaborative creative modes to become aware of our performance roles. In an effort to become focused on our performative experiences, we recorded a specific goal(s) in our individual journals before the thesis committee showing. The dancers and I also participated in this task before

dress rehearsal and culminating performance. My goal was to focus on what was happening in the piece in order to lose myself within it, in contrast to thinking of all the things I needed to organize and accomplish to make the show happen later in the week.

Shannon Mockli and Steven Chatfield were present at the showing to provide feedback on the experience the piece provided, how it related to my research inquiries, and the overall aesthetic of the work. The feedback was positive and they expressed how the piece created an experience that kept them involved in our explorations. The swinging section remained a highlight moment for both Shannon and Steven. The feedback that most informed myself and the dancers for the last few rehearsals was paying closer attention to where our visual focus was and how we use our eyes to connect with the hammocks and with each other. Though I had felt very connected with the dancers in the piece from physical touch or even in our domino effect in timing, our eye contact was not as prominent as I had originally wanted. I started to recall the reflections from many of the performing artists I spoke with who stressed the importance of eye contact to assist in their concentration and focus while performing.

As a result of this feedback I added connection with eye focus after Bryn, Ferena and I had been moving independently without own hammocks and we all end up sitting in our hammocks like swings. To initiate the next move, which was one of the aerial phrases we learned earlier in the process, I asked the dancers to remain still until they saw someone else in the group moving. It became sort of a game, where we all checked in with each other and gave specific eye contact until the movement swelled and we rode the momentum. It forced us to make a deliberate connection with each other and rely on the timing of the collective group. This section was at the half way point in the piece and



served us well to check in with each other, become aware of where we were in the music, and breath.

Another focus change that came about after the thesis committee showing was the closing image of the dance. The dancers and myself had our backs to the audience as we pulled hammocks as close to the audience as we could. Grounding our feet into the floor and slightly lifting our body weight with our arms, The dancers and I slid underneath the hanging point of the hammock. The sliding movement was repeated three times with Ferena remaining very close to the audience, Bryn traveling to the center of the stage space, and I traveled to the farthest hammock from the audience. In the last slide, we originally ended hanging, keeping our faces turned away from the audience. I suggested that we keep sliding down the hammock low enough that we could touch our heads to the floor, arch our backs, and have our eye focus direct to the audience. From the performer perspective it was really powerful to take feel the audience's energy in the last moments of the dance. From a choreographic perspective I found it satisfying to see the faces of the dancers and see them staring back at me. It was one of the only times the audience could look at our faces in stillness, yet it was reflective of the entire piece since the image of us was suspended and inverted.

The last two weeks of rehearsal was a time for the dancers and I to rehearse with Christian's completed score. Christian provided musical landmarks for the dance that provided us with a sense of time and when the energy of the piece was about to shift. In the last swinging section the music sounds as if it is unraveling and that became the cue for Bryn, Ferena, and me to jump out of the hammocks and prepare for the last image of the dance. We had become very comfortable rehearsing the dance without sound that it

required adjustment in our timing to have the dance and the music end together. Some rehearsals we would finish the dance five minutes earlier than the score. Other times the dancers and I would realize the music was concluding while we were still moving in and out of our swinging hammocks. Eventually Bryn, Ferena, and I became familiar with the score and identified the sound landmarks with sections of the piece. For example, if Bryn and Ferena started their duet before the steady pulse began, they could take more time dancing and connecting with each other. In summary, the music provided the dancers and I another layer of environment as well as sense of time throughout the piece. The score aided in the transition of movement explorations to a realized dance piece, just as the lights helped to transform the Circus Room into a intimate performance space. With final adjustments to the dance and a shift in attention to fulfilling my role as performer, I was anxious and excited to share the piece the dancers and I had been collaborating on for the past months.

### ***Phase III: The Culminating Performance***

*GRIP* took place on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in the Circus Room at Bounce Gymnastics in Eugene, OR. My thesis committee and other University of Oregon faculty members were in attendance along with students, family, and friends. 55 audience members filled the small performance space.

Many of the production elements were kept to a minimum, due to budget, time, and the availability of human resources. The performance space ended up feeling intimate due to the size and lighting of the space. The dancers and I wore three different black leotards with mesh sections to expose a layer of skin on the back, shoulder, or neck.

Simple opaque black leggings accompanied the leotards. I choose tight fitting clothes so that the costumes would not get tangled in the hammock or cover our faces and bodies when we were inverted in the air. The simple black clothing also provided myself and the a unifying look amongst the dancers and myself in contrast to the brightly colored aerial hammocks.

Devin Zoller designed the lighting for the show with two Source Four instruments that were placed in the upstage left and right corners. The entire piece had three looks which were: fade in, dim lighting throughout the majority of the piece, and a fade out for the conclusion. The lighting created many shadows in the performance space and also blocked out all of the extra rigging, signs, and the bright yellow walls of the jammed packed room. The lighting aided in transforming the space at Bounce from a busy recreation room to an intimate and dark stage space.

During the day of the culminating performance, I was busy setting up chairs in the Circus Room at Bounce, covering sections of the walls, replacing hammocks in the space so there would be a theme in colors, folding programs, setting up the video camera and making sure I had all necessary items at Bounce for the performance. Setting the space up early provided the dancers and I time to run the dance three times before the audience arrived. This time was crucial for my much needed redirection of focus from organizer to performer.

To assist transitioning from the role of the choreographer to the performer I tried to approach the performance with an open mind and let the experience be another part of the research concerning the performer's mental state. In Andrea Olsen's *The Place of Dance* (2014) Bebe Miller discusses how performances can yield unexpected results in

Andrea Olsen's *The Place of Dance* (2014):

Be ready for surprises. You never know what will happen in performance. Let the dancing teach you: if you are responsive, you are responsible. The invitation is to inhabit the choreography or improvisational structure freshly each time performing not pre-forming. This involves spontaneity and awareness, staying open to transformative states. Allow yourself to be touched by your work. (183)

The culminating performance was magnetic and energized in a way unlike any other time we had run the piece due to the energy of a visible audience, the intimacy the lighting created, and also my own awareness that it was the last time I would perform in *GRIP*. I wanted to honor my final performance of *GRIP* by being present in the stage space.

*GRIP* was just under 16 minutes long and began with Shannon Mockli introducing the work to the audience, with a brief explanation to my research on flow triggers as a choreographic process. The dancers and I entered the performance space and took our beginning places in the dark. The piece opened with Bryn, Ferena and I sitting on the floor holding the hammocks in a wrist lock, facing away from the audience. As the lights slowly faded up we gently began to lean away from the hanging points of our hammocks so we could touch our backs to the floor, returning languidly to our piked seated position. I wanted Bryn, Ferena and myself to have enough time at the opening of our dance to become comfortable in the space without having to see the audience. The audience had time to visually absorb the dancers and the performance environment before we saw them. I could hear my breath and the breath of the dancers around me as we lowered our backs in and out of the floor.

Connected to the hammock, I lowered and lifted my upper body, providing me with strong imagery of a life-line or umbilical cord that allowing me to feel safe and in

control. After the opening image of the piece unfolded and Bryn broke from the group into a small solo where she remains connected to the fabric, she returned with her back to audience and quietly said, “go”. This was our cue to move on to the next section and also provided my first opportunity to face the audience. I started lowering my upper body towards the audience like I had done before, but this time I kept lowering as my back arched the top of my head rested on the floor. Though my face was inverted to the audience, I could see them in the darkly lit room. Many audience members were sitting on the floor on the same level of my head and other audiences members filled the space seated in chairs and even standing on the stair case at the back of the room. As I gazed at the upside down audience, I remember the physical warmth and energy that ran through my body and I became comfortable being on stage. I felt supported by the floor and by the hammock. I could also feel a connection with Bryn and Ferena by hearing their movements on the floor as well as their breath. Because the movements were so slow and small at the beginning of the piece it allowed me to calm my nerves and pay close attention to Bryn and Ferena's movement timing.

After my arch back to the floor, seeing the audience, I then went into the next movement phrase that consisted of straddling my legs and reaching my left hand across my body towards the floor. Quickly after the reaching gesture, I grab the hammock above my wrapped right wrist and tuck into a ball pulling my body weight up by arms. I reached for the fabric with my left hand and I didn't get a good grip, so my hand fumbled and slide down the fabric slightly. The slip of my hand startled me and I became nervous that I missed my timing with Bryn for the next straddle, reach, and pull movement. I arched back to the audience so I could see them again and that is when I also noticed Bryn. Bryn

and I sat up and moved on to the next section of the choreography. Staying focused on Bryn I could see she was reaching her hand out on the floor, so I matched her movement and continued on in the piece. My nerves were calmed by connecting with Bryn and also once my hand felt the furry texture of the performance floor.

I recall the moment I finally stood up from the floor, spinning on my knee and stepping forward, traveling to a hammock closest to the audience. My legs felt uneasy underneath me as it was the first time I was completely vertical in the dance and not in contact with the fabric. I closed my eyes and traveled towards the hammock, landing underneath it. As I opened my eyes, I realized the bottom of the hammock was underneath me and I let it spill over my head. The fabric felt cool in temperature and soft on my face.

When the music shifted from atmospheric sound to a steady pulse, Bryn and Ferena began their duet as I improvised with the remaining six hammocks. I pulled and tugged on each fabric, letting them lift my weight or drag me in different directions. As I let each hammock go, I directed my focus to the duet. In rehearsal, I enjoyed watching Bryn and Ferena dance together. It was one of the only moments in the piece I became the observer within the piece. I suspected that I would be nervous in the duet section during the performance of *GRIP* because I stood still facing the audience. Bryn and Ferena's dance continued to captivate me on the night of the performance because the lighting highlighted their movements and I could not see the audience at all. I watched their interaction with each other, becoming lost in their use of time and space that suddenly I became aware that I need to redirect my focus on my own task within the piece.

After the duet, the dancers and I made our way to individual hammocks closest to the audience. The next section of the dance consisted of the phrase work I taught Bryn and Ferena during our first rehearsals at Bounce. The dancers and I went through the aerial dance phrase with our hammocks with our own timing; Ferena went slightly slower, Bryn was at a medium pace, and I went the fastest through the phrase at times repeating movements. I structured three moments of pause where the dancers and I would check in with each other before going on to the next phrase. During the performance I remember the last pause provided the most energizing experience as we sat in the hammock, letting our legs dangle. I looked at Bryn first and then over my right shoulder to make eye contact with Ferena. As we slowly reached for the fabric with both of our hands, the dancers and I tried to flock together, matching our slow movements in effort and care. In the performance it felt like we sat in our places forever, breathing together, and moving as one unit.

The dance shifted in mood and dynamic after our flocking section. The score became louder, beat driven, and layered. The shift in the music matched the energy of the swinging section that was comprised of multiple patterns in space as well as timing of our swings. When I was swinging during the performance I noticed all of the shadows we cast on the walls and how it looked as if there were 10 other dancers in the room swinging with Bryn, Ferena, and I. With each upswing the air pushed my hair back from my face and I closed my eyes, indulging in the moment like a dog with its head out a car window. During the swinging section, I have no memory of being scared that I would run into another dancer, the audience, or fall out of the hammock. Instead, I felt each swing become bigger than the last and I enjoyed how satisfying the action felt as I danced

alongside the shadows Ferena, Bryn, and I created.

The piece ended with myself and the other dancers taking one last slide on the hammocks away from the fading lights and audience. The dancers and I arched our backs to rest our heads on the floor. Our feet remained connected to the floor and our hands gripped the hammock, as we once again felt the pull between the apparatus and the floor. The piece ended in stillness, allowing the dancers and myself to see the audience for the last time from an inverted position as the lights faded to black.

Once the performance portion of the evening had concluded I invited the audience to stay for a question and answer session. I shared my movement research process with the audience as well prepared a few questions to ask about their overall experience. The audience feedback session lasted approximately 40 minutes.

At the end of the evening, I was exhausted but genuinely happy. The performance was over and nothing went horribly awry, I also attended to the goals I set. In the minutes before the performance I wrote, “my goal is to be in the space with a present mind, to stay connected with my dancers, and to not worry about being judged”. In the week before the performance self doubt had begun to emerge for myself. I became concerned with what others would think of the piece. Did I do enough with the aerial hammocks? Will people be bored? Is *GRIP* representative of dance research on flow? I made a conscious choice to push my negative and overly self-conscious thoughts about the piece aside. I instead focused on the movement, the connections I had worked to realize with my dancers, and the unique experience of performance. I fear that if I kept being concerned with other's judgment I would not have been open to the flow experiences explored within the piece. There was so much work in the creative process of making



*GRIP* as well as the logistics and time spent making Bounce's circus room a performance space. All of the time and energy was well worth it for the fifteen minutes of sharing the dance with an audience. I gained a deeper sense of attention and awareness in my performance of *GRIP* that would not have happened if this research consisted of a creative process alone.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVALUATION

This chapter discusses the self-evaluation of the movement research process and culminating performance, *GRIP*. The audience question and answer session and post-performance performer interviews are phases of the process that offer outside evaluation that I also consider in my own reflection of the research and the nature of flow characteristics felt present. Keeping a journal was essential to my reflection and evaluation of this process. I was able to formulate written expression concerning a physical experience I had. Though I never collected Bryn or Ferena's personal journals they served as another method of evaluation and expression for the entire group. Moving and writing supported our discussions about what was keeping us in flow and what was distracting us. Our rehearsal process was richer with the aid of phenomenological journaling, discussion, and watching each other move.

I will be evaluating the movement research in terms of what I accomplished based on what I intended to do, acknowledging any limitations or changes that occurred along the way. I took into considerations the thesis questions I answered and also which questions have yet to be addressed.

#### ***Flow Triggers as a Choreographic Process***

The purpose of my MFA Movement Thesis Project was to examine triggers that induce flow in a performance setting, specifically in front of an audience. I accomplished what I purposed to do with the information I collected and explored by choreographing an integrated dance and aerial piece for myself and two University of Oregon dance

students. I remained loyal to the process and construction of *GRIP* by developing choreographic structures from flow triggers, listening to the flow experiences of the dancers, and feedback from the thesis committee showings. The flow triggers that most influenced the choreographic process, inspired by the artist interviews, were: tactile interaction with the hammocks, physical contact between dancers, use of eye contact within the dance, proximity to an audience, completion of action tasks, and personal investment in the movement that comes from the dancers creating and exploring choreography.

I created movement material in the hammock that was physically difficult or awkward for Ferena and Bryn to perform. I was interested in observing how the dancers navigated the material and developed ways to accomplish movement phrases with greater ease. Another condition was to continuously share material we created in rehearsal for immediate feedback. As the piece developed I relied on the feedback of my thesis committee and video recordings of our rehearsals. Feedback allowed us to apply corrections or changes directly to our roles in the piece. Feedback kept us from boredom or monotony in the movement as we created new challenges to match our growing ability within the dance. Setting clear personal goals before the last thesis committee showing, dress rehearsal, and final performance offering was important to redirect my focus of creator and researcher to performer.

Limitations that arose throughout the process were time conflicts and the use the space at Bounce Gymnastics. Though I had designed the movement project to run for 11 weeks, there were a few times our rehearsals had to end earlier due to someone renting the Circus Room at Bounce. Another challenge and limitation with rehearsing at Bounce

was the overall noise level, distractions, and times I had to share the Circus Room with other groups. The dancers and I made the best out of the situation since it was the only place we could rehearse for free with seven rigged aerial hammocks. The sounds coming from the main gymnastic room into the circus room included the trampoline, screaming kids, and loud pop. At first, I sensed the distraction and over stimulation of the environment in myself, as well as the dancers. Many times we would be sharing the rehearsal space with other people working on different apparatus or stretching on the floor. Bounce always had competing sounds when we were there such as music playing and kids playing. The more immersed we were in the work we created with the hammocks; the more the outside noises were muffled. Watching videos from rehearsals I usually noticed how loud it was in the room on the video, realizing I had not noticed the sounds while we were working.

Changes that occurred throughout the process were aesthetic in nature. I purposed to have all directorial decisions be based on the research of triggers that induce flow and not to let aesthetic choices lead the movement away from the research inquiry. I do not believe any of the aesthetic considerations made in the final stages of the creation of *GRIP* lead the movement away from my research inquiry of using flow triggers as a choreographic process. Listening to feedback from my thesis committee was really important for me to decide which aesthetic choices aligned with the research and what aesthetic choices did not. I wanted myself and the dancers in the piece to undergo an experience in the doing, but was also concerned with the audience engagement. This is why the swinging section became such a large development in the piece due to its ability to provide sensation to the performer, kinesthetic empathy to my committee and

audience, as well being visually appealing. Overall, I do not believe that any of the aesthetic choices I implemented, from showings feedback or rehearsal video, drastically changed the flow triggers that were already embedded choreographically. The correlation between audience feedback and my own experience was extremely helpful because it opened up various choreographic possibilities that I would not have been aware of from the inside of the piece.

### ***GRIP Performance Self-Evaluation***

The day after the performance I revisited the interview questions I had asked the five current performing artists as well as Bryn and Ferena. Each question was directly related to my performance of *GRIP*. I started by recalling the times I experienced any of the six flow characteristics, “Intense and focused concentration in the present moment, merging of action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness, a sense of personal control, a distortion of temporal experience, and the experience of the activity is intrinsically rewarding” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 90).

In my journal I wrote, “I did not anticipate how powerful my first view of the audience would be”. Seeing the audience for the first time was so beautiful and I was surprised that it did not make me nervous. Seeing the audience sent warmth through my entire body and calmed my nerves. I was so excited that people were in the space to observe my performance and contribute to the shared energy and communication in the room. Though seeing the audience from an inverted perspective was surreal it was also such a soft, controlled, and welcoming introduction. I lost a sense of myself and became so transfixed by the sight of the audience though I was still emerged in the piece and kept

my timing with Bryn and Ferena. When I reflect about the piece in general, the first image that appears for me is when I saw the audience from my inverted position on the floor. The image became a unique experience in which my awareness and experience of flow was heightened because the audience became integrated into the environment.

Ironically my strongest moment of flow was also followed by an experience that took me out of the moment when my hand slipped on the fabric. Though I was able to continue on with the choreographed material, the slip of my hand startled me. My mind immediately started to race with thoughts of panic such as, things are going wrong and it is only the beginning of the piece. I was so aware of my own judgments and sudden nervous energy. It wasn't until I rolled my body down for the final time and arched, I was again reassured by seeing the audience I focused on Bryn. Seeing that Bryn and I were doing the same gesture at the same time calmed me. I suddenly had time to breath and connect my movements with Bryn. Seeing Bryn's head on the floor also reminded me to recognize the feeling of the floor on my own head. The sensation of my head on the floor, seeing Bryn, and the warm presence of the audience allowed me to dive back into the piece once again.

Another moment in the piece where I experienced personal control and merging of my actions with awareness (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 90) was during the first moment the dancers and I began to move independently from the hammocks as we made our way up from the floor. Bryn and Ferena transitioned into their duet where Bryn covered herself inside the hammock. As this transition unfolded we danced a phrase that also involved our own improvisational choices that took us to different hammocks. In my improvisation I travelled upstage and I remember having my eyes closed for a portion,

which was different from how I had ever rehearsed this. As I opened my eyes and raised my body, I realized I was directly underneath a hammock; the feel of the hammock draped over my head was intoxicating as I interacted with the hammock to traverse closer to Bryn. In my journal reflection of that moment, I said, “that never happened before, performance is so mysterious and unpredictable. In the case of aligning perfectly with the hammock it seemed as if the stars were aligning just for me”. Lining up perfectly with the hammock was surprising and satisfying because I remember how unstable my legs were when I rose from the floor. It was the first time I was standing in front of the audience, not connected to a hammock. I was anxious to make contact with the fabric of the apparatus and moving towards it with my eyes closed; I imagined how it felt on my skin and a sense of calm it would provide me in support and orientation of the space. In my performative state I closed my eyes and accepted my out of control feeling in my legs and my body took over, leading me to exactly where the hammock was. I gave into the uncertainty of the moment and eventually regained control and alignment of my actions and awareness by relying on my tactile senses.

### *Audience Question and Answer Session*

My reflection of the audience's response to the culminating performance was valuable in regard to understanding the images, emotions, and overall experiences viewing the work. Once *GRIP* concluded I shared my research inquiries with the audience and provided information regarding the process that led to the performance they just witnessed.

I asked two questions of the audience: first, What was your experience like as the

viewer? And second, what images or feelings did the piece conjure for you? From the audience's response to the first question, I gathered many were involved in the dancers' exploration with the hammocks. Some audience members were aware of the progression in height throughout the piece that included dancers on the floor, standing on their feet, and then being elevated high above the ground by the hammocks. Audience members noted that the levels in space throughout the piece were made possible by Bounce's specific environment. Many expressed how they observed our appetite for the hammocks growing as if we kept testing the hammocks in different ways, until we were satisfied with the ending experience of the swing. In response to my second question, I sensed a strong audience reaction to the swing motion.

Several audience members spoke to the nostalgic nature of the swinging action. Many expressed their desire for wanting to experience the hammocks by touching the fabric and wrapping their bodies in the apparatus. A few audience members expressed appreciation in hearing the sounds of children playing mixed with our swinging and sense of curiosity with the hammocks, guided by their own nostalgic experiences from growing up.

The audience members also asked questions of myself and the dancers that related to our flow experience in the piece. Many audience members were curious if we ever became distracted and, if so, how we redirected our focus back to the dance. Ferena, Bryn, and myself all experienced moments within *GRIP* that took us out of the piece. I experienced distraction when my hand slipped on the hammock. Ferena became conscious of herself when she noticed how close she was to an audience member's boot. Bryn became nervous when she saw and recognized audience members for the first time.



We all spoke to how eye contact or physical connection with each other helped us to we to re-engage within our performance. I discuss Bryn and Ferena's performance experience in further detail in the post-interview performance section.

Once the question and answer session concluded I greeted family, friends, and my thesis committee. As I walked around and discussed the performance with multiple audience members I noticed many people touching the hammocks, feeling the texture of the floor with their fingers, and even a brave few began experimenting by letting the hammock take their weight or allowing their body to be inverted in space. It was a beautiful sight to see the audience members becoming a part of the stage environment. Their impulse to touch and experience what the performers had experienced was so strong it led them to the stage.

### ***Post-Performance Interviews***

Two days after the culminating performance I met with Bryn and Ferena and conducted post-performance interviews. Each interview lasted approximately an hour. In relation to their experience performing in *GRIP* on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014 I asked the same questions from their interview that took place before rehearsals began. Although, the purpose of the movement research was to use flow triggers as a choreographic process and not to ensure flow for the performer. I was still curious about the dancers experience in and out of flow throughout their performance to understand what allowed them into the work, what pushed them out of a flow experience and what possible conscious strategies they implemented to return.

I noted that Bryn and Ferena had immersed moments of focus and concentration

in the very beginning of the piece, though their experiences were very different. The following descriptions are an account of Bryn and Ferena's performance narratives through my interpretation. Bryn appreciated that the opening of the piece took its time, and she in return had time to listen to her breath and relax her muscles into the floor. Bryn's back was closet to the audience so she said she could watch Ferena and I start moving which also relieved any pre-performance anxiety she may have had. As Ferena and I lower and raise our upper bodies in the opening of the piece, Bryn started her solo about one or two minutes after the piece began. Bryn's movement shifted her body clockwise as she remained low to the ground with her right hand wrapped in the hammock. Once most of her body shifted to face the audience her gaze remained low to the floor directed at her left hand that stretched across her body. The moment of turning towards the audience was so powerful for Bryn because she saw how the lighting was cast over her skin, could feel the energy of the audience with the front of her body, and could also feel the warmth of the room. In that moment she was not thinking about what came next in the dance or what she would be doing after the performance. She was so taken with the simplistic beauty of her arm in the light.

Ferena's heightened immersion in the piece was similar to my moment of flow when we arched our backs and saw the audience for the first time from an inverted perspective. The difference in Ferena's experience was not affected by seeing the audience positively or negatively. She explained to me that the intense focus and temporal distortion was from the physicality of a particular movement. As Ferena's head rested on the floor and she arched her back, she could feel the pull of the hammock from her hand to her sternum. The physicality of the movement was intense, but pleasurable

for her and she said it felt like she was in that stretch for a very long time.

Looking at the audience for the first time, Bryn became distracted and self-conscious, the same moment I was deeply immersed in the piece. Bryn was the closest dancer to the audience, especially close to those who were sitting on the floor. Bryn arched her back and looked at the audience, surprised to be able to identify her roommates, boyfriend, and father. All of sudden she realized she was being watched, not only by her peers, but her loved ones and that momentarily removed her from the immersion in the piece. Bryn was able to get back into the focus of the piece once she pulled her body up and was facing the back wall. She took many breaths and focused on Ferena and myself, trying to regain the energy and connection she felt with us at the beginning of the dance.

Ferena was taken out of the piece towards the end when she was really close to the audience. She was on her feet pulling the center downstage hammock closer to the audience as her body twisted and turned. Out of the blue, Ferena said she looked down and saw one of the audience member's boots, and then became aware of how close she was to the woman in relation to her movements. As Ferena fixated on the boots for a brief second she then looked over to me as I was performing similar movements. She noticed I looked as if I was indulging in my timing and wanted to join me in the experience of that specific physical movement. It is interesting that Ferena, Bryn and I all had moments we became distracted or lost focus in the piece. Similarly, we were able to dive back in by looking at each other or searching for connection.

A shared flow experience between Ferena, Bryn, and myself was during a duet in which Bryn was enclosed by the hammock. Ferena had to focus on the timing of her

movements with Bryn so she was immersed in the duet and didn't have time to think about anything else. To accomplish the movement tasks the duet required Bryn had a similar experience to Ferena as she had to interact with the spinning motion of the hammock and the distortion of time while focusing on making herself available to Ferena by exposing a leg, arm, or waiting to drop from her lifted horizontal stretch so Ferena had enough time to get from underneath her. The duet was a powerful performance experience for me as well, not due to my movements but as an onstage witness. I was intensely focused on their interaction and heightened sensitivity to each other. For example, I saw Ferena rise up from underneath Bryn and help lift her into the air. Ferena's eyes were closed and she used her whole back to push Bryn up causing the action to that seem more delicate and tactile than it had been in rehearsal. The nature of these movements was heightened by performance. I watched with such interest and immersion that I almost forgot what I was doing on stage completely.

I noticed a common experience between Ferena and Bryn during the post-interviews that was the existence of internal dialogue during the performance. Internal dialogue seemed to run the gamut between positive and negative thoughts. After Bryn had been distracted by seeing people she knew in the audience she expressed how active her thoughts became and the feeling like she couldn't put her mind to rest. She said that once the voices in her head became too loud she would say to herself, "I'm Okay" over and over again. "I'm Okay" became a mantra for Bryn that emerged within the piece. By iterating this thought she was able to shift her focus back to the piece and away from distracting self-conscious thoughts. I interpreted Ferena's experience with internal dialogue as driven by action related tasks. During dress rehearsal, Ferena performed a

move in the hammock differently than she had ever before and it resulted in the hammock slipping off her arm as she fell out. Ferena said she was thinking of that movement in hammock as it grew nearer in the piece and all of a sudden she started internally reciting the steps she needed to do to accomplish the task, swing left arm, push hips back, hook left foot. During the performance Ferena accomplished the movement in the hammock just as she described it in her head. Ferena's internal dialogue kept her focused on the task at hand and she remained invested in piece.

### ***Evaluation of Initial Research Questions***

In regard to this specific movement research, I will address my initial research questions as a final evaluation of this project. I will also provide new inquiries that could be explored in further studies on flow characteristics supported by dance choreography and performance.

What aspects of flow were present in *GRIP*? All of the flow characteristics were present at some point for myself and the dancers during our performance of *GRIP*. The characteristics included: distortion of time, clear intention and focus, moments of pleasure and enjoyment, loss of our reflective self, and moments of personal control in a activity. Though each of us felt flow characteristics we were not encountering all of them at the same time nor were we all in flow at the same time. I am not surprised that the sense of flow experienced throughout the piece was an individual understanding. Though Bryn, Ferena and I were on stage dancing as a group we still were sensitive to our individual participation throughout the piece and were not always doing the same movements at the same time. I have come to realize that flow is not a constant state for

myself on stage. Rather, flow comes and goes organically and is a unique individual experience.

What choreographic structures induced flow for Bryn, Ferena, and myself in the performance? In regards to the culminating performance, there were three choreographic structures that dealt with time and sensation that produced the most common flow experiences for me and the dancers. The opening phrase in the piece due to the dancers not facing the audience, having a tactile stimuli in the form of support from the hammock and the stage floor, as well the slow movements that allowed us to acclimate to our audience and environment instead of rushing off to the next section of the piece.

The duet between Bryn and Ferena also provided a shared flow experience for the group, due to our ability to see each other. Bryn and Ferena negotiated space and time with the hammock and their movement interactions while I traveled closer to them, losing any sense of self as I watched their relationship unfold in and out of physical contact.

The final choreographic structure that allowed the dancers and myself to dive deeper into the piece was the challenge and risk we experienced from the large swinging section. The swings provided a dual experience of completing a task in a timely manner to avoid collisions and the experience of pleasure swinging through the air at a fast speed.

What disrupted or affected flow in *GRIP*? Though Ferena, Bryn, and I all shared moments of flow we each experienced different times of distraction, self-consciousness, and loss of focus within the piece. In this project, it did seem that the audience had a very different effect on each of us. The first time I saw the audience, I experienced many flow characteristics. When Bryn saw the audience for the first time it distracted her because she could recognize specific people. Ferena did not really see the audience until the end

of the piece when she almost touched a woman's boot. Ferena was distracted, but not jarred from the experience as Bryn was. In continuing research it would be revealing to see if the audience had such a strong positive or negative reaction on the dancers once the piece had been performed multiple times with different audience members. Perhaps the audience affected Bryn, Ferena and my own sense of focus or caused distraction because *GRIP* was only performed once in front of a larger audience. Most dancers and performing artists would have to negotiate the felt adrenaline and pressure that an audience in close proximity provides such as we did in *GRIP*. Multiple performances might have yielded differences in flow experiences and distractions yet the most important information gleaned from each showing would be how Bryn, Ferena, and I are able to return our focus within the dance.

Did Bryn, Ferena, and myself have a unique aesthetic impact while in flow? In regards to flow and aesthetic for this research, I believe the amount of touch and exploration with the environment created an indulgent and sensory involvement. Though there were times toward the end of the piece when the movements became fast with sharp dynamics, I framed the work to develop slowly and “dig” into each section before moving on. All of the research was interpreted and explored phenomenologically by the dancers and myself, which may make the aesthetic of flow highly subjective and individual to each process and personal preference. Throughout the piece I was aware of where Bryn and Ferena were physically in space and experienced moments where we contacted with touch or connected with our eyes. During the piece I did not know if Bryn and Ferena were experiencing flow, mostly because I was concentrating on my experience and tasks throughout the dance. I felt connected to the dancers during the

performance and could feel us working together; interwoven by the movements we had invested and created in the past weeks. I assumed they were invested in the moment along with me, yet I could not physically read the times they were experiencing flow characteristics.

After the process and performance of *GRIP* I compiled a list of questions that arose that could be investigated in future research. After my own self reflection and journaling as well as discussing the piece with the dancers in the post interview I realized both Bryn and Ferena had moments on stage where their individual strategy helped them to stay focused. Bryn incorporated a mantra of, “I’m okay” within *GRIP* to keep her calm and focused. Ferena used internal dialogue directed at the specifics of accomplishing a sequence of movements that was physically challenging for her, walking herself through the steps. Bryn and Ferena's internal dialogue had a positive effect on their performance. When my hand slipped on the fabric I immediately became worried and my head began to race with defeatist thoughts such as, “you are screwing up early in the piece” and “the audience saw me make a mistake”. I was not able to stop my negative internal dialogue until I connected with Bryn and became mindful of the tactile stimuli from the floor.

Can the internal dialogue during a performance be a positive experience? For Bryn and Ferena the use of their internal voice assisted them in moments of stress, nervousness, and also helping them to remember what to do physically in completing movements with the aerial hammocks. Would creating a mantra, a statement that could be repeated by the performer, encourage greater moments of flow characteristics in conjunction to the triggers that were utilized in this choreographic process? Or does a person's performative mantra arise not from the creative process, but later as a



mechanism for running the piece in performance successfully? These questions arose as the research shifted from performance to reflection and evaluation.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore flow triggers as a choreographic process documenting mine and the dancer's experiences of flow characteristics, through interview and self-reflections, within the process and culminating performance. This research examined how flow triggers can be used as a unique approach to movement generation, artistic direction, as well as personal performative strategies. My experience with triggers has informed other choreographic works in which I have recently performed. I am able to call upon the triggers that I have discovered work for me through this research. One of my personal flow triggers I have implemented since the culminating performance of *GRIP* is noticing moments within a dance where I can focus on tactility with the dancers and the performance environment. Another trigger is opening my awareness to the audience and the shared energy created in times of physical exhaustion. I have also gleaned from this research that understanding more about my performance preferences, by identifying and implementing the triggers that help me to experience flow characteristics, is just as important as dance technique. Striving for flow experiences is something I will continue to practice in and out of dance performance.

Looking at flow triggers as a way of working choreographically was a challenging experience because I did not want to rely on the overall aesthetics of the piece as a primary motivator or use choreographic structures with which I was comfortable such as letting the musical score of the piece dictate the dynamics or climaxes in the work. Accessing and discussing performative states holds another challenge as well because it is individual, mysterious and difficult to describe. I was conscious of the fact that if my

goal fixated on achieving flow in the culminating performance I would not listen to what the performance would say on its own. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi discusses the type of person who embarks on a creative process, interested in experiencing a new truth even if the truth had been originally discovered by someone else:

Without a good dose of curiosity, wonder, and interest in what things are like and how they work, it is difficult to recognize an interesting problem. Openness to experience, a fluid attention that constantly processes events in the environment, is a great advantage for recognizing potential novelty. (1996, 53)

I involved myself as a participant and creator in the process and performance of *GRIP* to find my own truth about adopting triggers as a choreographic process. I know more about who I am as a dancer in front of an audience, which will inform my movement practice and creative process for the rest of my artistic career.

Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow is not a concept that I introduced to the world, yet my curiosity about the performer and how to facilitate sustained moments of intense concentration during choreography and performance is something I discovered on a personal level for myself with Bryn Hlava, and Ferena Kagata.

My experiential and reflective research on flow and the performer did not end after the culminating performance and will continue long after my graduate school career has come to a close. As long as I am sharing movement in front of an audience, I will be researching my experience in flow. As long as I am curious and mindful of how my body feels and reacts in space with others and apparatus, I will be researching my experience in flow. Cultivating opportunities to experience full absorption in dance creation and performance is more than research, but a way I choose to be in the world that provides meaning and wonder through an embodied self.

Though this research was choreographically based dance educators could implement the application of flow triggers in a pedagogical setting. I worked with skilled dancers who I knew were reflective and adaptable. What would this research yield with younger dancers or less experienced performers in an educational atmosphere? How would the students articulate their experiences with flow? How might the instructor build dance exercises that support the students' full absorption in their movement explorations, technique, and in performance? Investigating personal strategies that help induce flow characteristics have the potential to benefit individuals in performance, education, dance therapy, as well as anyone who is interested in cultivating rewarding life experiences.

APPENDIX A

*GRIP* PERFORMANCE PHOTOS

Performance photos by: Mark McCambridge











## APPENDIX B

### BUDGET

Project Budget

Poster: \$60

Programs: \$50

Photography: \$50

Costuming: \$90

Lighting: \$100

Bounce Gymnastics Circus Room Rental for rehearsal and performance: \$500

Total budget: \$850

## APPENDIX C

### PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

#### **Recruitment Letter**

Dear Participant,

My name is Jessica Zoller and I am a Graduate Student from the Department of Dance at the University of Oregon. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the experience of the performer in front of an audience. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a performing artist. I obtained your contact information from your website.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by me about your performance experiences. I would like to record your interview and then I will use the information to inform my choreographic process about the triggers that induce a state of flow for the performer.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at [jhoage@uoregon.edu](mailto:jhoage@uoregon.edu).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jessica Zoller

## APPENDIX D

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

**University of Oregon:** Department of Dance

**Informed Consent for Participation as a Subject in:** The Performer in Flow:  
Examining Triggers that Induce Flow as a Choreographic Process

**Investigator:** Jessica Zoller

**Type of consent:** Adult Consent Form

#### **Introduction**

- You are being asked to be in a research study that examines the experience of performing had by performing artists in front of an audience.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are a performing artist that I have seen perform.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

#### **Purpose of Study:**

- The purpose of this study is to examine the triggers that induce flow in a performance setting. I will choreograph an integrated, dance and aerial, piece that is constructed from the research concerning artists' triggers and reflection of flow while in performance.
- The number of subjects is expected to be six professional performing artists and two University of Oregon Dance Students. Eight total participants will be included in the study.

#### **Description of the Study Procedures:**

- If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: The five professional performing artists will be interviewed about their experience being a performer in front of an audience. The interviews will be recorded. The interviews will last no more than two hours and will only consist of one interview per participant.
- The two University of Oregon dance students will be interviewed twice, once at the beginning of the study and lastly interviewed after the dance performance in December 2014. The interviews will be recorded and will last no more than two hours at a time. The two University of Oregon students will also rehearse twice a week for a total of four hours a week on an integrated aerial and dance piece that will be performed in December 2014. The two University of Oregon dance students will also be asked to keep a journal and record their experiences in rehearsal once a week. The journals will be kept privately and will not be read by

myself, other participants, or the thesis committee members.

**Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:**

- The study has the following risk: The study for the two UO dance students will involve modern and aerial dance. With physical activity there is risk of physical injuries but safety precautions such as warm up and the use of padded mats on the floor will decrease risk.
- There are no foreseen risks for the participants who will be interviewed.
- This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

**Benefits of Being in the Study:**

- The purpose of the study is to examine the triggers that induce flow in a performance setting. I will choreograph an integrated, dance and aerial, piece that is constructed from the research concerning artists' triggers and reflection of flow while in performance.
- The benefits of participation are contributing knowledge and experience to the field of dance and the greater understanding of the experience of performing in front of an audience.

**Payments:**

- There will be no payments made to participants

**Costs:**

- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

**Confidentiality:**

- The participants name will not be coded and included in the research material.
- The interview recordings of this study will be kept private. The recordings of the interviews will be kept by the principal investigator, Jessica Zoller, and stored electronically.
- All electronic information will be secured using a password protected file. The video recordings of the interviews will only be accessible to the principal investigator, Jessica Zoller, and her thesis chair, Shannon Mockli. The recordings will be erased from my personal computer files once the thesis project is approved in June 2015.

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:**

- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation. The subject does not jeopardize grades nor risk loss of present or future University relationships.

- You will be provided with any significant new findings that develop during the course of the research that may make you decide that you want to stop participating.

**\*Dismissal From the Study:**

- The investigator may withdraw you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) withdrawal is in your best interests (e.g. side effects or distress have resulted), (2) you have failed to comply with the study requirements.

**Contacts and Questions:**

- The researcher conducting this study is Jessica Zoller. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at 360-624-8006.
- If you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, contact Jessica Zoller at 360-624-8006, who will give you further instructions.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon at (541) 346-2510 or ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu

**Copy of Consent Form:**

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

**Statement of Consent:**

- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

**Signatures/Dates**

---

**Study Participant (Print Name)**

---

**Participant Signature**

---

**Date**

## REFERENCES CITED

- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1996. *Creativity: The Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1998. *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Fraleigh, Sondra 2000. "Consciousness Matters." *Dance Research Journal* 32, no. 1: 54-62.
- Fraleigh, Sondra. 1991. "A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance Through Phenomenology." *Dance Research Journal* 23, no. 1: 11-16.
- Franklin, Eric. 1996. *Dance Imagery for Technique and Performance*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Goldschmidt, Harlene. 2002. "Dancing With Your Head On: Mental Imagery Techniques for Dancers." *Journal of Dance Education* 2, no. 1: 15-22.
- Hebert, Angelle and Kraft, Phillip. 2010. "Home Made." tEEth. Accessed April 21, 2013. [http://www.teethperformance.com/z-home\\_made/media-videos.php](http://www.teethperformance.com/z-home_made/media-videos.php).
- Homemade*, tEEth, choreographed by Angelle Hebert, music by Phillip Kraft, The mOuth Theatre, Portland, OR, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010.
- Kozel, Susan. 2007. "Performance." In *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology*, 66-71. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Lane, Victoria. 2014. *Chakras for Beginners: How to Balance Chakras, Strengthen Aura, and Radiate Energy*. San Bernardino: Relentless Progress Publishing.
- Laura, Stoke and Harrell Cohdi, performers, *Smoke and Mirrors*, The Ricochet Project, The Alberta Rose Theatre, Portland, OR, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011.
- Laura, Stokes, and Harrell Cohdi. 2011. "SMOKE and MIRRORS." Youtube, October 19. Accessed April 14, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM-BbI3igaA>.
- Lawrence, Kate. 2010. "Hanging from Knowledge: Vertical Dance as Spatial Fieldwork." *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 15, no. 4: 49-58.

- Nakamura, Jeanne and Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 2002. "The Concept of Flow." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by Snyder, C.R. and Lopez, Shane J., 89-105. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Novak, Cynthia. 1990. *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Olsen, Andrea. 2014. *The Place of Dance: A Somatic Guide to Dancing and Dance Making*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Paxton, Steve. 1979. "About Contact Improvisation (CI)." *Contact Quarterly*. Accessed January 10, 2015. <http://www.contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/>.
- Streb, Elizabeth. 2010. *Streb: How to Become an Extreme Action Hero*. New York, NY: The Feminist Press.
- Tait, Peta. 2005. *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. New York, NY: Routledge.