

In Spirit  
An Archetypal Journey of the Soul

by

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## ABSTRACT

“In Spirit - An Archetypal Journey of the Soul” is a document illustrating the process of creating an evening length autobiographical aerial dance theater performance, *In Spirit*, through the investigation of theoretical, kinesthetic and choreographic research of archetypal symbolism, as well as aesthetic, choreographic and pedagogical aspects of aerial dance. The Jungian research specifically informed the identification of symbolism and the roles that archetypes play in creating a clear storyline within aerial dance theatre. In addition, research of aesthetic voice and current aerial dance practitioners became important and gave perspectives on creative pedagogical engagement in contemporary dance and aerial dance-making. For the duration of the process of creating *In Spirit* image-based creative tools, tarot symbolism, Jungian archetypes, aerial dance training and collaboration were explored with the cast of ten dancers. Through this research and embodying the spirit of collaboration, the choreographer and dancers worked diligently to train dancers with no previous experience in aerial dance to perform in aerial roles. The evening-length performance of *In Spirit* synthesized contemporary dance, aerial dance, theatre and symbolism regarding rebirth.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Michael and Irma Reed for always pushing me to heed my calling to Dance. To my siblings, Sabrina and Gabriel Reed for our illuminating conversations of dreams and reminding me of my individuality. To my Opa for saying “and...” when I got my undergraduate degree. To my Oma for always encouraging artistic expression. To my Nana for her words of encouragement when times were tough. To my Tata for teaching me about tending my mental garden.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Nature herself demands a death and a rebirth.” (Jung, 64)

Carl Jung posits that in our lifetime, we inevitably experience numerous changes. I personally have always shared the sentiment that the soul or spirit goes through insurmountable changes within one body. In the past two and a half years, my sentiments have been felt more strongly than ever, as I have experienced drastic changes in my personal and artistic life since I began my graduate school journey. *In Spirit* was an evening-length autobiographical aerial dance theatre performance based on the symbolism and archetypes of the Jungian theory of rebirth and the tarot. Before I came back to academia, I had a full performance career in contemporary dance and aerial dance theatre, had toured nationally and internationally as a performer, and lived all over the country pursuing my dreams of becoming a dance artist for life. My interests have revolved around understanding my purpose and attempting to live life fully. Through these experiences, I have undergone light and dark stages which are illustrated in my choreography and personal aesthetic within dance-making.

I come from a family of mixed heritage; I have always felt I lived in two worlds. I was constantly navigating the landscape of my family’s cultural differences throughout my childhood. Being from the border state of Arizona, the population of the people was reflected in my genetic makeup – native Mexican blended with western European in a haphazard combination that resulted in my two older siblings and myself. Throughout my formative years, I was always not enough of either side to feel included in either group—too brown to be white and too white to be brown. The question, “so what are you?” became regular conversation when meeting new people. How I answered that question changed over time, but it never felt good when someone would ask it. Why

could I not just be me? Why did I have to claim my genetics or culture? Feeling like I had no one to relate to led to a large amount of time by myself. I would spend hours dancing to the radio in my room alone. Dance is where I felt the most at home; understanding my experiences with dance helped illustrate my aesthetic.

My first experiences with dance were not in a studio class. In my desire to escape, I would go to raves and dance my heart out with other people who also felt they needed to side-step their reality. I had found my first dance home, a place where it did not matter who I was or where I came from. All that mattered was the vibrational bass-heavy music and the pleasure of dancing in a community. The form I began my journey of dance with and came naturally to my body was called *liquid dancing* at the time, more recently titled *waving*. I define *waving* as improvisation-based successional fluid movement isolations moving through the body. Actions can range as waves of engagement moving through pathways of core to distal and distal to core and incorporating reversals and retrograde. The primary focus is on isolation, timing, and directional changes of vectors. I did not know it at the time, but I was experimenting with improvisation and real time composition. This marked the beginning of my inquiry in the form of dance, and I wanted more information. This led me into a hip-hop dance class at a community college, where I had originally intended to major in biology.

My training in a collegiate setting began with the African diasporic form of hip-hop and breakdancing. Encouragement from the teacher and the pure joy I had when in class led me to modern dance as well as ballet and jazz dance. I was hungry for more styles, I enjoyed learning technique, and I was thirsty to perform. Over the years I have trained in several methods, forms, and aesthetics of modern, post-modern, contemporary, jazz, somatics, and improvisation, ranging from ultra-structured Graham technique to the

improvisation-based Gaga movement language. College dance was my second home; I loved the community it engendered. I wanted to dance for the rest of my life.

Since completing my formal dance training as an undergraduate, I have worked with a number of choreographers who inform my choreographic and movement choices. In my professional experience, I worked predominantly for Lisa Starry of Scorpius Dance Theatre (SDT). Since SDT is a dance theatre company, we produced evening-length works with acting, holding the same weight as dancing. After many years of bringing Starry's stories to life and getting praise from audience members for the depth and range of my performance ability, I realized how much I loved storytelling. I also worked with several of her dancers who became choreographers, including Nicole Olson, Liliana Gomez and Angel Castro. Each choreographer was influenced by her work but made departures and evolved from her technique, use of theme and aesthetic. Beyond that experience, I have worked with Mary Fitzgerald and Halley Willcox. It is impossible for me to give credit to one source, because my style is an amalgamation of all my past performances and the processes I have been a part of, as well as my experience improvising in an urban dance setting.

The scholarly and creative movement research for *In Spirit* became my haven of informative, innovative, therapeutic and empowering revelations. During the process of my research, I experienced the mourning of several deaths in my family, my circle of friends, a beloved dog, and an extremely painful divorce. Through these devastating losses, I made personal gains, independence and new understandings of myself. In essence, this process of reinvention became the subject matter of *In Spirit*. It became clear that my concept was the liminal experience and the Jungian theory of rebirth, more specifically, the process of individuation. M.L. von Franz explains in Jung's book *Man and His Symbols*, "The actual process of individuation—the conscious coming to terms



with one's own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self—generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it” (Von Franz, 166). There was an evolution that needed to occur in my work and within my Self; this is how *In Spirit* came into existence. This insight will feed my personal and artistic endeavors for the rest of my life.

My desire to produce an evening-length aerial dance theatre work stemmed from my experience as a professional dancer and aerialist within SDT. I had been a part of several evening-length dance theatre works that included aerial dance. These aerial dance pieces always seemed removed from the dance that occurred on the floor; there was a disconnect. For *In Spirit*, I wanted to create my own production with my own aesthetics and research topics that would inform the art maker I was becoming. My goal was to further blur the lines between aerial dance and contemporary dance in my own way. I was interested in the intersection of floor to flight. Why did the two practices need to be separate?

The understanding of my mixed descent fed into my research for *In Spirit*. I wanted to explore a cross-cultural view of symbolism and archetypes, a way to make meaning of my experiences without identifying with one culture or identity. Symbolism is found everywhere, in every religion, culture and history. For example, in the Catholic religion's famous archetypal image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, there are several symbols with specific meanings: sunrays to represent her greatness, a crescent moon to represent her perpetual virginity, and stars to represent her as a supernatural being (Our Lady of Guadalupe—Symbolism of the Image). These symbolic meanings are only a few that were portrayed. I was interested in finding the universal commonalities within archetypes and learning how I might utilize this knowledge to fuel my ability to reach more audience members with my story no matter their cultural heritage. I had been introduced to

Jung's archetypes, and I realized a visual way to explore these symbols was through the archetypes of the tarot. The impact of storytelling in aerial dance theatre was already ingrained in my aesthetic through my professional career; in addition, I was fascinated by the symbolism and mysticism of the tarot. My fascination with these ideas informed the following research questions: "In what ways can Jungian archetypes and tarot symbolism be synthesized to create movement designed for an evening length work?" and "How might I design the work to reflect multiple archetypes within the same section?" Ultimately several characters exist onstage and in life synchronously. I wanted to know what I was representing in each section, with each dancer, each movement, each breath. I knew I wanted to explore the concept of rebirth that is relevant cross-culturally. I then needed to understand where I stood on the spectrum of aesthetics of aerial dance performance.

I yearned to explore my own personal aesthetic which would further synthesize the floor-to-flight transition. Being a part of a dance company for almost a decade, I had mastered my previous artistic director's aesthetic – dark, sultry contemporary modern dance theatre. For years I spent every Halloween as a hungry flying vampire in SDT's annual productions of Lisa Starry's *A Vampire Tale*. I needed to know who was producing aerial dance theatre already and from whom I could take inspiration. I surveyed several aerial performing companies and identified strongly with three. This understanding of contemporary aerial practices helped me to define my personal aesthetic, what I wanted to see on stage, and what I wanted to further explore. The next research spiral I fell into was within my creative practice.

Throughout my time at Arizona State University creative methodologies, collaboration and constructivist education have been popular subjects of inquiry. I knew that when I was a dancer and an active participant in the creative process instead of a

mute body that work was set on, I felt more attached to the work. This led me to yet another question: what choreographic tools can I create to foster the cast to feel ownership over the work? To further synthesize my research of archetypes, symbolism and aesthetics, what were the results of utilizing the casts' archetypes for movement generation? These questions embedded themselves in my creative process, and I employed several versions of creative tools and explorations to answer them.

I had a big, fun problem. I wanted aerial dance in my thesis and I did not have aerialists; I had dancers. Starting as a dancer myself, I began aerial training for a show almost a decade ago. My personal accomplishments led me to believe I could train these dancers to fly and perform in a show within an 8-month period. This inspired the research question: how could I utilize dancers with no or limited aerial training in apparatus-based work? The idea gave me anxiety and kept me up at night. I had a vision for the production, and I needed to make it come to fruition. Being an aerial teacher is a little different from being a dance teacher. I was interested in constructivist values in pedagogy, but was it applicable to something as potentially dangerous as aerial dance? Another question emerged from this process of teaching the dancers aerial: how will the creative process intersect or align with my pedagogical values in both floor movement and aerial movement? I had taken on a huge endeavor to create an original archetypal storyline utilizing aerial dance theatre, to define my personal aesthetic, to teach my cast aerial arts, and to top it off, to include all of my fantastical ideas of production elements in the performance. This document exists purely as an inscription of the processes in which I created *In Spirit*, as well as the analysis and personal meaning-making from the research of archetypes, symbolism, aerial dance aesthetics, and creative practices.

## CHAPTER 2

### *IN SPIRIT* INSPIRATIONS

For *In Spirit*, an original aerial dance theatre production, I searched for inspiration from multiple sources. I have divided these main sources of inspiration into three sections: symbolism and archetypes, aerial dance theatre aesthetics, and refinement of creative practice, which also furthered my investigation of pedagogical methodologies. These concepts appeared throughout and contributed to the final product in several intrinsic ways. Within symbolism and archetypes, I referenced work by Carl Jung (1875-1961), a Swiss psychologist and founder of analytical psychology (Bishop). To understand the symbolism within the tarot, I found anthropologist, educator, specialist in cross-cultural symbols, myths and rituals Angeles Arrien whose work was extremely informative and helpful throughout the creative process (Arrien, 320). To enrich the storyline, I looked to anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983) and his philosophies on the concept of social dramas, more specifically, liminality (St John). I was interested in providing an embodied experience through the aerial dance education I was offering the dancers. I referenced several experienced dance and aerial educators, including Pamela Musil, Terry Sendgraff, Nancy Smith, Susan Murphy, and Jayne Bernasconi to guide me in the educational aspect of the creative process.

#### Symbolism and Archetypes

Jung's research on archetypes and his theory of collective unconscious, specifically the ideas of rebirth and the concept of the shadow self, enriched my plot-creation process and how I understood symbolism to be utilized cross-culturally. In building the concept of the piece, I was interested to find the commonalities amongst the human experience, so *In Spirit* could be relevant to as many audience members as possible. The linear storyline of *In Spirit* portrayed archetypes in the familiar plotline of

rebirth. It was Jung's theories about rebirth that I connected to most directly. Jung says, "Rebirth may be a renewal without any change of being, inasmuch as the personality which is renewed is not changed in its essential nature, but only its function, or parts of the personality, are subjected to healing, strengthening, or improvement" (II: Concerning Rebirth, 48). The idea that a character can be transformed spiritually inside a period of liminality is the basis for the storyline of *In Spirit*. I was invested in the messy deconstruction and reconstruction of self after a huge change, much like the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly.

In these liminal periods, the darker aspects of a personality become known. Jung refers to these aspects as the shadow self. Marie-Louise von Franz, the Jungian psychologist who took over the publication of *Man and His Symbols* after Jung's death explains the shadow self, "The shadow is not the whole of the unconscious personality. It represents unknown or little-known attributes and qualities of the ego – aspects that mostly belong to the personal sphere and that could just as well be conscious" (Jung, 168). The main character of *In Spirit* experienced a tragedy, goes through a liminal period where she faces her shadow, and is, in essence, reborn to become a more fully-realized personality. Jung's work ultimately led me into investigating the symbolism and art of the tarot; through Arrien's work, I furthered my understanding of the symbols of the tarot through a psychological, mythological and cross-cultural lens.

Before starting this project, I had very little knowledge of the symbolism of the tarot. I started out with the Morgan-Greer tarot deck, I picked this deck because it was highly recommended for beginners with its colorful illustrations and direct translations of symbolism in the booklet that came in its package. I started analyzing what I could with the limited resources provided with the deck. I began experimenting with more decks, going back to the oldest versions of the tarot, the Marseille deck created in 1760 and the

Oswald Wirth deck first published in 1889. The symbolism in the Marseille and the Oswald Wirth decks are not iconographic in the same way as the Morgan-Greer deck. For example, the five of cups in the Marseille and Oswald Wirth decks are simply five cups, whereas, in the Morgan-Greer deck, the five of cups' illustration is a forlorn man looking at three cups that have spilled and ignoring the two cups that are still full behind him. The card's meaning is similar in all of the decks; it represents bitterly submitting to misfortune in the realm of emotions. I worked diligently to find similarities within imagery in the descriptions and to learn the meaning behind numbers of the suits (cups, pentacles/coins, swords, and wands/batons) and the Major Arcana—the archetypes.

After some time with those decks, I found the Thoth deck. I instantly felt the connection I was looking for, but I needed more information. What I loved about this deck was its use of astrology in combination with pictorial cross-cultural symbolism. Using the same example as before, the five of cups in the Thoth deck is labeled “disappointment” at the bottom of the card, uses murky colors, represents Mars in Scorpio, and has wilting lotus blossoms in the center of the picture. All of these together denote a clear description of the card's meaning—emotional disappointment. I found a couple of books that dissected the symbolism within each card; it was a happy surprise that these publications had countless references of Jung's work in their descriptions. I utilized Arrien's publication *The Tarot Handbook: Practical Applications of Ancient Visual Symbols* often during the creative process. Arrien's work specializes in cross-cultural symbolism, myths, rituals, anthropology and education (Arrien, 320). This book offers interpretations of the symbolism of the Thoth tarot deck created by Allister Crowley and illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris. Each card's imagery references symbols from a wide range of cultures. Arrien explains in her introduction how the Thoth deck expresses archetypes and symbols of principles of life universally experienced cross-

culturally (Arrien, 20). I found Arrien's book extremely helpful in the interpretation of the symbols of the tarot. Her focus on explaining how several ancient cultures employed these archetypes and other symbols struck a chord with my desire to not stick to one culture's definitions. Arrien's understanding of symbolism and myths in Allister Crowley's Thoth tarot deck and her clear cross references of Jung's work provided guidelines for the storyline of *In Spirit*, and even my personal voyage during the creation of the work.

To further the storyline, I searched for more theories that would help the foundation of *In Spirit*. I was introduced to Victor Turner's theory of social drama right before I got hit with a major personal change. Understanding his concept of a liminal period became the theme of my life and *In Spirit*. Turner's theories branched from Arnold van Gennep's model of rites of passage that are synonymous throughout cultures all over the world. For this example, I will utilize a common rite of passage that youths of many tribes go through to become men: rites of separation (going into the wilderness alone), rites of liminality (engagement with spirit guides through methods of transcendence), and rites of reaggregation (coming out of the wilderness with new knowledge of self and life to be reintroduced into society as a man) (Garwood, 263). In short, the process of social drama flows in this direction: the breach (in this instance a departure from what was held true in a personality), the crisis (or tragedy), the redressive process (disintegration of personal truths and reformation of personal truths), and finally, the reintegration (of self into society), or for some, the recognition of irreparable schism (realizing the reformation does not work and the process of liminality must be undergone once more) (Garwood, 263).

To express the aftermath of a personal upheaval of values, I delved into Victor Turner's concept of liminality. Turner's work guided me to illustrate the process of social

drama and enriched the through line, bringing the story aspect together. Victor Turner explains this liminal period of time as “A fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a gestation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal existence” (Turner, 12). Essentially, the storyline of *In Spirit* was inspired by the understanding of disarray occurring after a tragedy; the main character was mourning over a loss which took her on a fantastical adventure through her own psyche (liminal period) and led to a new understanding of herself and the life she wanted to lead.

#### Aesthetics of Aerial Dance Theatre

When designing an original show consisting of a combination of aerial, dance and theatre, I felt it was integral to find several examples of who in the world of performance has made and is currently making aerial dance theatre productions and how it might be similar to or contrast my desired aesthetic. Several dance artists have experimented with and evolved the practice of aerial dance from its origin in circuses. Analogously, cirque has bloomed from the same root. In the search for illuminating these differences, I looked at works by several contemporary aerial practitioners. The three companies I admired the most were Aerial Dance Theater of Chicago, Paper Doll Militia, and NoFit State Circus. For the aerial choreography of *In Spirit*, I combined inspiration from these three companies with my own experience in the performing and choreographing aerial works with SDT. This list is in no way exhaustive. The field of aerial dance has grown immensely. I was drawn to situating my aerial work as a dance and using low-flying apparatus to explore the transitory state between my floor based and aerial choreography. I was interested in employing a dark and whimsical nature to my floor-



based and aerial choreography and transforming the space with the incorporation of technical theatre and rigging aspects.

In researching current practitioners, I came across several companies that use aerial-based movement as a primary form. Aerial Dance Theater of Chicago (ADTC) is going into their third decade of creating aerial dance theater work. ADTC can be described as contemporary dancers who train as aerialists. The practice of utilizing dance technique to inform aerial arts was also central to my research. In her review of ADTC's latest evenin-length work *Blackbird 2018*, Lauren Warnecke of the Chicago Tribune states, "the all-female cast is performing difficult choreography that is what Jensen calls 'human-powered,' incorporating partnering skills typically reserved for men, and lifting their bodies into the air through strength alone" ([www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com)). ADTC pushes gender norms of aerial dance; I also used an all-female cast. When I performed with SDT, the roles were extremely gendered. Even though I had thrived in a setting in which gender roles were prevalent, I could no longer abide by those conventions. I needed to fill a normally masculine role, and I needed to do it with not only strength, but with confidence. Having a company that ignored typical gender assignments to reference that ignored typical gender assignments gave me inspiration to do it myself. On the spectrum between aerial dance and circus, Aerial Dance Theater of Chicago is definitely on the aerial dance side, and it is the closest to my personal aesthetic. However, my floor movement incorporates more idiosyncratic qualities, and Aerial Dance of Chicago engages with a more classical Eurocentric aesthetic.

Los Angeles-based Paper Doll Militia is an aerial theater company that also inspired me. These aerialists are not versed in dance to the degree Aerial Dance Chicago performers are. However, they are closer to the dreamy idiosyncratic aesthetic I wanted to portray in my work. Their style is dark, whimsical and abstract. Paper Doll Militia

describes their work *Crossroads* as, “Incorporating the beauty and skill of five aerial silks artists and one stilt walker combined with innovative and theatrical storytelling, *Crossroads* is a balanced blend of mystery, grace, and emotional imagery” (Paperdollmilitia.com). This balance of curiosity, ability and kinesthetic empathy is what I strived to convey to my audiences. The choreography presented by Paper Doll Militia did have more distinctive movement but was more on the circus aerial theatre side of the spectrum. In my work, I wanted to present more floor dance within the choreography, further synthesizing the two practices of aerial arts and contemporary dance.

I had the opportunity to see NoFit State Circus’ *Bianco* in 2013 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This traveling circus company instilled memories of adventure that have the possibility to feed my creative energy for the rest of my life. This astonishing company utilized complex rigging structures that change the performance space throughout the show. Audiences are guided around by performers; massive structures are moved and reformatted, and the viewers wait for the next work in wonder and excitement. NoFit State Circus describes themselves as, “Contemporary circus combines live music, dance, stage design, text, and film with traditional circus skills” (NoFit State). Seeing *Bianco* significantly changed how I look at performance and production. Understanding the difference between aerial dance and cirque was essential to define my voice in the field. *In Spirit* had the dark and whimsical aspect of Paper Doll Militia, the technical contemporary dance training of Aerial Dance Chicago, the story-telling aspect of SDT and the fantastical visual magic of NoFit State circus. While I drew inspiration from these companies, questions on methodologies still lingered.

## Embodied Education within Creative Process

In my creative process, I worked to both educate and create with dancers who have no previous experience with aerial dance. The environment in which I created my work was in a university setting and I wanted to explore constructivist framework in the creative and educational process of my floor-based choreographies, as well as my aerial-based sections. All of the performers were extremely well-versed postmodern contemporary artists. I was interested to see how these knowledges would intersect once aerial was introduced. I needed methods to teach them in a short period of time. I found inspiration from Pamela Musil's views on the inclusivity of non-traditional dance forms within post-secondary education. I repeatedly referenced several aerial teachers' essays that were combined into a book called *Aerial Dance* by Jayne Bernasconi of Bernasconi Aerial and Nancy Smith of Frequent Flyers Productions. I was finally able to identify what methods worked with this group and how I needed to alter my original intentions for the best interest of the show.

When I originally found Pamela Musil through my pedagogy class, I was ecstatic she included aerial dance as a significant form to cover within the larger genre of post-secondary dance. Musil states, "Dance educators who advocate and even moralize the need for innovation, creativity, and forward thinking, we have the opportunity to direct our considerable skills toward a more expansive view of postsecondary dance that values multiple voices, sectors, and perspectives" (Musil, 119). Musil broadens the call for inclusion to go beyond only discussing the African Diasporic forms. I felt validated and empowered by her statement, and I carried that energy into the creative process. My primary role within this project was as a choreographer, but for my vision to come to life, I needed to educate the dancers to fly. This pushed me into an educator role, and I wanted to attempt to carry over my ethics and pedagogical methods from dance

education into aerial dance education. Since the dancers did not have aerial experience but were willing to expand their horizons, it was my responsibility as an educator to offer this opportunity for growth for both the dancers and me with an open and inclusive point of view.

I explored the work of several aerial teachers and took inspiration from their methods of aerial education. Knowing these practitioners' experiences and methods were similar to and different from my own provided a range of viewpoints for me to model my own method of aerial education within my creative practice. I found the book *Aerial Dance* by Jayne Bernasconi and Nancy Smith. This publication combines essays from several aerial practitioners and pioneers from the United States. I found that it is common for these aerial teachers to combine somatic theory with improvisation throughout their classes. Generally, training for aerial dance is similar to gymnastics or classical dance forms. The occurrence of somatic principles within the postmodern contemporary movement has integrated itself into post-secondary dance education and in the professional dance world. Since many of these aerial dance educators have dance backgrounds, I was interested to discern the ways in which the teachers were implementing somatic theories in aerial pedagogy.

Whether it is one concept of a somatic theory or a fully coalesced training system, each teacher employs different strategies to explore somatic principles. All of the following educators' methods were found in the publication *Aerial Dance*. Terry Sendegraff, aerial dance pioneer of Motivity, utilizes the ribcage breathing from the Pilates method and fuses her many years of training with the Skinner Release technique into her class format. This rib connection is extremely important in training for aerial; it is how the mover connects the shoulders to the hips and ultimately, upper body to lower body. Susan Murphy starts her sessions with Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) based

improvisation (Bernasconi & Smith, 80). Integrating LMA into a warm-up helped students tremendously with understanding connections within the body. Often new aerialists become disoriented when complex combinations are involved or inverted positions are introduced; by having a solid knowledge of the Bartenieff Fundamentals, as well as fluency within Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), the application of instructors' directions are more likely to be successful. Nancy Smith explains the importance of breath and groundedness at the beginning of every class (Bernasconi & Smith, 82). Taking a moment to align body and mind can be overlooked with traditional aerial training, but it is highly effective when preparing yourself for the spatial and effort change as well as modifying the body's use of weight. Jayne Bernasconi guides her students through a somatic visualization where the dancer imagines that the floor is now the ceiling, giving the experience of the change of spatial relationship to gravity in the idea of the inverted positioning that aerial requires (Bernasconi & Smith, 86). Maintaining control over the body as the feet leave the floor is a recurrent struggle, especially when inversion is involved, and the practice of mentally removing gravity from the equation aids in the understanding of reorienting the body in space.

In my aerial pedagogy, I have used a combination of concepts from LMA, Bartenieff Fundamentals and Alexander Technique to further the students' understanding. In having several languages to draw from, my illustrations of the actions of aerial and dance were further understood by the performers. Having such a broad understanding of somatic theories gave me several tools to utilize depending on the lesson at hand. If the dancer was nervous about inverting, I might refer to the Alexander Technique's concept of freedom in the neck which results in lessening the unnecessary tension in their body before attempting the movement. If the student is having issues understanding how a body connection is used during a maneuver, I refer to the

Bartenieff Fundamentals basic six: breath, core distal, head-tail, upper lower, body half and cross lateral. I can further explain these movements utilizing LMA language if there are questions. As I gained knowledge of how people taught aerial, I started training the dancers by combining somatic methods and previously-gained knowledge through my professional experiences. Simultaneously, I created the work they performed by utilizing a range of creative methodologies.

## CHAPTER 3

### CREATIVE METHODOLOGIES

As I explored different themes of the archetypal storyline that is known as the “fool’s journey” within the tarot, I wanted the movement in my project to occur as organically as possible and I desired to experiment with creative tools that I had not used previously. Before *In Spirit*, my creative process was very simple. First, I would process a feeling or mood I had experienced. Second, I used these feelings/moods to create phrases and listened to the momentum I had generated to follow through with more movements. Third, I would set those phrases on the dancers. Lastly, I would modify the phrase work according to what I found aesthetically pleasing on the performers, without losing the feeling of the movement. In this project I almost exclusively used Movement Metaphor, but I tailored the prompts for each specific section. Lerman describes, “Verbs are action words. Based on the concept of metaphor, they offer a solid starting point for generating new movement material” (danceexchange.org). By taking a word, then visualizing details of feeling within the words’ meaning and using it as inspiration for a movement instead of a direct translation, Movement Metaphor can be used as an abstraction tool. For example, if the word I utilized for inspiration was “sand,” I might think of the feeling of sand in between my toes or a memory where I was at a beach or in a desert and create movement from my body’s response to that memory or sensation.

I had three goals when creating the work as a whole: for the dancers to feel invested in the work; for my vision of *In Spirit* to be manifested organically; and for the audience to be kinesthetically affected and feel compassion and empathy for the story. Movement Metaphor was significant to this process because I was pulling movement from the stories of the dancers and myself. This tool gave me the freedom to expand and contract phrases inspired by the words chosen by the cast. If I was very inspired by one

word, it ended up as a longer phrase, if I was less inspired by a word it would end up being a shorter movement. This tool gave me the liberty to choose.

Another tool I used, Lerman's Equivalents, has a strict structure of breaking down a sentence into words then taking one word and assigning a movement to that word and stringing the movements together in the order of the sentence (danceexchange.org). I found the equivalents structure useful, but too rigid when I was in process. If the prompt I gave the dancers were a question or included a verbal explanation, I referred to Lerman's tool Spontaneous Gesture. To use this tool, I began with a question and while listening to the dancer's answer, I watched the gestures the dancer performed with their hands (danceexchange.org). In the next section, I discuss my variations of creative tools used for three of the floor movement sections, *Mostly They Come at Night...Mostly*, *Return of Lilith* and *Golden Space - Astral Plane* and the three aerial sections of *Sparkle & Soot*, *Shadow Self* and *Golden Space - Astral Plane* to illustrate the different methodologies and how they informed the work as a whole.

*Mostly They Come at Night...Mostly*

“Many dreams can be interpreted with the help of the dreamer, who provides both the associations to and the context of the dream image, by means of which one can look at all its aspects.” (Jung, 67)

In the fourth section of the nine sections that made up *In Spirit, Mostly They Come at Night...Mostly*, I was interested in creating a piece that portrayed the feelings associated with nightmares, and in turn, fears. In the plotline of the larger work, *Mostly They Come at Night...Mostly*, the main character had fallen into the spiral of her subconscious and each dancer represented the main character's fears, with their individual characteristics and origin stories. This piece was an even balance of improvisational scores and prescribed movement which the cast and I made



collaboratively. To create *Mostly*, I first shared with the cast a recurring nightmare I often had as a child to bond with the dancers and myself and build trust within the room. I find that sharing a secret or a little-known fact about myself results in trust and bonding with others. With self-disclosure, I facilitate intimacy and build rapport with the cast. In the nightmare, I was out in my driveway and I felt the earth rumble, the concrete split and exposed molten lava below the earth's crust, I would try to run but my feet were cemented to the driveway, I would scream but no sound came out, there was no one there to rescue me. I was alone and scared for my life, then I would awaken. Through this explanation we began experimenting with movement that corresponded to that dream. We began creating an improvisational structure to elucidate this image of chaos and fear. I gave the dancers the prompt that their feet were cemented to the floor, and they were attempting to escape the earth's grasp; eventually they would break free and fall towards another spot where they would get stuck again. This score was repeated three times, and was different every time.

I then invited each of the dancers to share a nightmare they were comfortable explaining aloud. I asked the other dancers in the room to pick out three words or phrases that stood out to them. After the words were chosen, I created solos for each dancer from their nightmare and asked them to make each solo their own. I played along the scale of literal and abstract when creating movements. Sometimes I would watch for the dancer's hands for spontaneous gestures and include their explicative movements within their phrase or I would take those actions and use another part of the body as a variation of their motion. For example, one of the dancers had a nightmare that a bus full of ninjas would steal her away in the middle of the night. Instantly a vision of a fast driving van squealing around a corner came to my mind, and I illustrated this by walking a half circle to the right following my hand with a sudden arrest, which represented this

image. With the method of interpretation open for me to work metaphorically, I had many options and used them liberally. The dancers and I created several duets by combining their individual phrases. We employed concepts of negative space and partnering combined with floor work and dynamic shifts in relation to the music. This piece had the most improvisational scores I had ever used, this kept the piece fresh and constantly evolving.

### *Return of Lilith*

“It is through your creativity and your strength that you are able to renew and regenerate yourself.” (Arrrien, 67)

In the creation of the eighth section, *Return of Lilith*, I experimented with the concept of rebirth. I was interested in what a person has to let go of in order to become who they are meant to be. There are times when I wished I had closure that I never got; there are things that were left unsaid, that haunted me and prevented me from starting new chapters or feeling a sense of rebirth. This was the first dance I choreographed after my ex-spouse and I decided to get divorced. I was at the beginning of a liminal period in my life, and all I could do was throw myself into creating a piece that empowered me and the women surrounding me.

In order to explore these ideas with the dancers, I gave the prompt: “What do you wish you could have said to someone who is no longer in your life? How would you say that in movement?” I also gave the option for the dancers to keep their stories to themselves and only show the movement, if they were uncomfortable sharing their experiences vocally. For me, it is harder to use words to express my emotions. I would rather express it through movement. The dancers knew what I was going through. They were extremely invested in the process and were incredibly supportive. This time, the movement did not go through the lens of my body. I asked the dancers to work alone,

and when they felt they were ready to show, I went to them one by one and witnessed their stories. I asked for their permission to modify and shape the facings, levels, focus and dynamics when I felt it was necessary to shift the audience's perspective.

I was very careful to make sure the dancer was comfortable with the alterations, because it was their story as well. The method of including movement that had not been filtered through or created by my body was a new way of working for me. In addition to these solo movement phrases, I created larger dance phrases of my own inspired by my desire to live life fully and push past any roadblocks with strength and grace. I wanted this section to show rigor and the abilities of my stellar cast. I intentionally made the phrases to incorporate larger travelling movements to balance with the softer moments in the gestural section. The motivation was to tear up the space with sheer feminine power, but also to show the softness and vulnerability that is associated with surrender. I formatted these phrases to intersect and overlap each other like crashing waves on a stormy beach.

We collaboratively created a section towards the end of *Lilith* that exemplified the support received from a community of women. The process for this section started by the assignment of a number to each dancer. I randomly wrote down those numbers on a pad of paper in a nonsequential order. If the prompt were "x move y," for example, then "two move five" would result in Dancer Two interacting with Dancer Five. The dancers had the freedom to choose how they would translate that prompt, resulting in a partnering section that constantly moved and shifted. After finishing that section, the dancers were prompted to take any phrase from *Lilith* and dance it as hard as they could in the direction of their choice. This led to the dancers weaving over and through each other again experimenting with design aspects of overlap and intersection. I kept pushing my

process into the unfamiliar, as I relied more and more on the cast for decisions to make the orchestration of the final piece different than I would have initially chosen.

*Golden Space - Astral Plane*

“As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason.”

(Jung, 20)

Mid-process, I had a vision of a golden space. This place was, in essence, the astral realm, where we go when we transcend our bodies. This concept was incredibly hard to explain to the dancers; they had many questions, and I did not feel like I could answer in words. It was a way of seeing the world and accepting that our lives are liminal. The phrase work I utilized in this section came from a tool which employed the tarot cards and the dancer's interpretation of the symbolism represented. I would shuffle the cards three times and cut the cards to the left. I would then fan out the cards and invite the dancer to be one with themselves first, then to hover their hand above the arc of cards and to pick the card that made their fingertips tingle. After the card was chosen, I requested the dancer to dissect the card visually and describe what they saw in the card and also what it meant to them. I then would take those words as a metaphor and listen to my body's intuition to create symbolic movement. I utilized this tool several times during the process in conjunction with one other tool and selected the phrases I felt to be the most indicative of the idea of transcendence for the development of the floor movement in the final and ninth section, *Golden Space—Astral Plane*. I set the work in a spiral and utilized a simplistic tool, the canon. I compiled phrases that were created utilizing metaphor from the tarot cards and worked with the dancers to create moments of canon

and unison. It amazed me how going back to an elementary dance composition tool like a cannon could be so beautiful and satisfying to watch.

I continued to use the cards in different ways for movement generation. I began collecting different decks to see how symbolism had been used across several renditions of the tarot. I found the “Thoth” deck that was created by Allister Crowley and a couple of books that broke down its symbolism. This is when Arrien’s book *The Tarot Handbook: Practical Applications of Ancient Visual Symbols* came into the process. This book has a chapter on finding your lifetime symbol within the Major Arcana’s archetypes of the Thoth deck through the use of numerology. I decided that I would do numerology for everyone in the cast, to first learn more about myself and the dancers in the room, but also see what else I could learn through the tarot. The way Arrien suggested this tool be used was to calculate the individual dancer’s numerology. The first step is to add the day and month of the person’s birthday, then to add the year to that sum one digit at a time. “If your final total equals a double-digit number, 21 or less, reduce to a single digit. The double digit is your personality number, the single digit is your soul number” (Arrien, 231). I utilized Movement Metaphor once more in the process. I invited the dancers to take time with their cards and identify the symbolism that was beautifully illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris. I then read the description of their individual soul card that was in Arrien’s book and we—the dancer and I together—began the meaning making process for each dancer’s soul card. I then created, yet again, solo material for each dancer in conjunction with the symbolism and the help of Arrien’s book and our own interpretations of the tarot. These solos appeared throughout the larger work of *In Spirit*, in the beginning, throughout the transitions and in the final section. At the time of

creation, I had no idea how I was going to use all of the phrases and in the end did not use all of the material we had made.

### Aerial Movement Process

Creating tools that could be useful for the aerial sections was not as straight-forward as utilizing Movement Metaphor. My objective for the group aerial work was to incorporate floor and aerial movement within the same work and to explore how I could utilize dancers with no previous aerial experience, train them and get them ready to perform within eight months. This was a big undertaking that incorporated my knowledge of aerial education as well as my creative vision. I began by training any of the dancers who were interested in learning aerial movement in January. Knowing very well that for some people aerial comes easier than others, I wanted to give the dancers plenty of time to improve before I decided casting. We started meeting once a week to train basic skills outside of rehearsal and I encouraged them, if they had the time and resources, to train at a local aerial studio as well.

Originally, I wanted to design an apparatus that would be used in the final piece. After calculating how much it would cost to bring my original apparatus to life, I scaled back my idea to common ceiling suspended aerial apparatuses. I settled on two champagne colored aerial slings (a looped piece of tricot polyester held together with a hardware close to the end of the fabric), one set of gunmetal colored grey aerial silks (one long piece of tricot polyester held together with hardware in the middle of the fabric) and an aerial lyra (and aluminum hoop with a rope bridle and spinning hardware). I knew I wanted to use the slings for the group piece, *Sparkle & Soot*, because that is the easiest apparatus to train new aerialists to use. The sling's design does a sizable amount of work

for the mover and could, in essence, be used like a swing. The gunmetal grey silk was chosen because I wanted to use a dark color that was not black but represented the shadow quality of the section *Shadow Self*. The aerial lyra was already in my possession and it was perfect for what I had imagined using in the final section, *Golden Space—Astral Plane*. The lyra, after all, is the apparatus I feel most at home on, and it has a hypnotizing effect when spinning.

### *Sparkle & Soot - Aerial Slings*

“I wanted to make people happy, if only for an hour.” - Busby Berkeley

The first section I created with aerial was a group piece that originally was called *the Party* and was later renamed *Sparkle & Soot*. My vision for this section was to incorporate two champagne colored aerial slings with rotating aerialists, and the entire cast dancing in the section that took place at a rave. The section represented the “fun” before the storyline went dark in *Mostly They Come at Night...Mostly*. My intention was inspired by Busby Berkeley’s geometric design juxtaposed with the feeling of a grimy warehouse party. Busby Berkeley was a dance director renowned for his backstage movie musicals in the 1930s (Vineberg, 23). What impressed me about his aesthetic was his ability to create kaleidoscopic choreographies utilizing patterns of dancers’ bodies in formations that would shift along with the timing of the music. I knew I wanted to see swinging actions with the slings to give a chaotic feel. We began experimenting with swinging and dismounting, utilizing known contemporary dance floor work transitions from jumps. By practicing those descents from a small swing, we became more comfortable and achieved higher swings and bigger dismounts. I pieced together aerial vocabulary which we practiced at the end of training sessions, first trying movement myself then seeing if the dancers could replicate my movements. It was difficult for me to know what they could do; more often than not, it was trial and error before we could find

what worked for them. Anything we set, I wanted to eventually spin, therefore we had to train to spin. Centripetal force adds another layer of not only difficulty but also disorientation. Much like astronauts, the aerialists needed to build up their resilience and tolerance to avoid motion sickness. I was truly training them how to fly.

#### Shadow Self - Aerial Silks

“Thus it seems as if the initial encounter with the Self casts a dark shadow ahead of time, or as if the ‘inner friend’ comes at first like a trapper to catch the helplessly struggling ego in his snare.” (von Franz, 166)

As the dancers trained in aerial, one particular dancer was taking the extra initiative, and it showed. I chose to give this dancer, Hannah Sewester, a featured role in the context of this autobiographical work. She quickly became the glue that brought the story together. The second aerial section that we created was entitled *Shadow Self*. In this work I explored the darker aspects of the Sewester’s role, which also would be my own psyche. The aerial silk duet occurred after *Mostly They Come at Night...Mostly*, I often described this duet as the main character walking into the boss’s level in a video game. I cast myself as the shadow, because I knew I could perform the level of aerial that I desired to see in this section. The dancers of *Mostly* were the living embodiments of Sewester’s fears and I was the root of her fears, the shadow aspect of her subconscious.

To create this section, I first began with what could be called an aerial solo. I began to weave shapes and skills together in ways I had not tried before. I honestly surprised myself at how easy it was for me at that point in my career to expand on already understood technical skills and innovate using aerial theories my body knew naturally after ten years of training. The aerial silk apparatus can be extremely supportive or totally unforgiving. There are defined wraps of the fabric around the body that keep the aerialist supported, the action of transitioning through these defined wraps



into other supported wraps or tricks is what we call aerial theory. The most important part of this theory is knowing when the aerialist is supported by a wrap and when the aerialist needs to provide their own support through hand grips or wrapping the silk around the legs.

The next task was incorporating the main character. My goal to integrate floor movement while being attached to the silk led us both to sliding around on the ground using tension from the silks. My visions of counterweight led me to whipping her around as she was wrapped in the tails of the fabric. We often ended up laughing hysterically on the floor because something went awry. Throughout the entire process we recorded, reviewed and repeated the movement ideas in a multitude of ways. Sometimes we would just lay on the floor looking up at the apparatus for a different point of view, imagining what could be done to attempt the daydream. Finally, we decided on an order that made sense for the section it represented and created movement transitions that gave breath when it was necessary and push when required.

*Golden Space—Astral Plane - Aerial Lyra*

“The universe is the principle of individuation, totality and wholeness.” (Arrien, 98)

The last aerial section was a lyra duet choreographed for the main character and me. Only this time, we represented the acceptance of the shadow and light aspect of the personality within the process of individuation. This duet took place in the center of the floor choreography in *Golden Space—Astral Plane*. The process of creating the lyra duet was different from and similar to the process used for *Shadow Self*. This section was meant to represent the balance of the shadow self and the animus of Sewester’s personality, for her to ultimately ascend to a higher realm of consciousness. My mind was constantly thinking of design aspects that could be featured, and I attempted to maximize the use of symbolism of the hoop, which could also be seen as the Universe

card in the Thoth tarot deck. We would play with shapes, then I would sneak a move on Sewester and ask her to make a particular shape or try a line in the moment. I have employed this sneaky tool previously in other aerial creative processes. Sometimes I get an idea in the moment and catch the other aerialist by surprise. When the aerial partner does not have time to think about how the movement is going to work, they go for it more quickly than if they sat on the floor analyzing whether they can do it or not. More often than not with aerial, the action needs to be attempted before doubts have a chance to make themselves known. I knew I wanted to have four aerialists on the lyra for the last image of the show. We again tried several iterations, and we kept the one most likely to succeed after the dancers had been performing for 40 minutes. Since my duet partner and I rehearsed alone, we would video and review phrases and talk collaboratively about what worked. Together, we meticulously generated transitions from shapes that we felt embodied the essence of duality of the spirit which this section represented.

#### Theatrical Elements

During the first production meeting it became clear that I needed to use theatrical elements. Something I have no shortage of is creative vision and resourcefulness. Knowing this was the first, and possibly last, time I would have a production team to make my dreams come true and my story come to life, I took full advantage of the resources the department offered. I had knowledge of what was available and ideas for what I wanted to see in the show. In the beginning of the work, I wanted the aerial slings to be concealed from the audience's view and then revealed. This effect could only be done with panels of fabric rigged from the ceiling to cover the dancers and aerialists waiting behind them. At the beginning of *Sparkle & Soot*, they were dropped. I desired for the show to flow seamlessly without the use of blackouts which made the use of the

rigging system in conjunction with the lighting and blocking of the movers incredibly important. I collaborated with the technical director and lighting designer to make this come to life, utilizing four separate hemp rigging systems, as well as lighting effects to make this artistic choice come to fruition. There were two times I wanted small materials falling from the ceiling. Once at the end of *Return of Lilith*, I wanted red rose petals falling upstage onto the dancers in silhouette. I made this choice to empathetically transfer the satisfaction of petals on bare skin to the audience. In *Golden Space—Astral Realm*, I wanted gold confetti to drop over the lyra at the end of the entire show to create a visually satisfying image of swirling sparkling magic. I also needed several musical transitions that were only made possible by the sound engineer's knowledge of my show. These elements were incredibly important to create the enchantment of the show, and the intensely helpful production team at the School of Film Dance and Theatre made all of these dreams and visions come to life.

## CHAPTER 4

### POST PERFORMANCE REFLECTION

#### Assessing Successes

Overall, *In Spirit* was a success. I achieved my goal of creating an evening-length aerial dance theatre work with a storyline based on the Jungian concept of rebirth and utilized my new understanding of symbolism throughout the creative process. The dancers dedicated themselves to their roles beautifully, and a few of them were able to perform aerial dance after eight months of training. The transitions were seamless, and I was able to use all the production elements I dreamed of to create a cohesive performance. Several people came to watch the show more than once to catch moments they were not able to focus on the first time. Each show was sold out. In my mind, this translates to success.

#### Presence of the Archetypes

The symbolism behind the archetypes made its presence known throughout the entire show, whether it surfaced as an entire role, a section, a movement/gesture or a pattern I created on the floor. The Jungian and tarot archetypes were both intentionally and unintentionally integrated throughout the piece. Jung's theory of the shadow self served to inform the apex of the story. Coming to terms with my own darkness is integral to the healing process. No person is all sunshine and rainbows. It is in the shadow that I hide my hurt; my shadow is my internal dialogue; and it is the ways in which I sabotage my own growth. In the aerial duet, *Shadow Self*, the main character's fears led her into the lair of her subconscious and she began to understand how out of control she was. The section concluded with the appearance that she was in a downward spiral being wrapped into the web of her own doing only to be spit out of the flurry of flight onto the floor at rock bottom.

A few of the archetypes of the tarot made their importance known to me during and after the process was completed. I knew *the Fool*, which represents the individual on life's path, would be an important archetype. In essence, the audience followed the main character, *the Fool*, throughout her journey. *The Tower* represents the destruction of old forms for the opportunity of renewal and healing. I exemplified this symbol simply by asking the main character to do a dramatic drop on the aerial sling after *Sparkle & Soot* and before *Mostly They Come at Night... Mostly*. *The Moon* card symbolizes the journey into the subconscious to encounter one's fears which leads to self-awareness and intuitive knowledge. This idea was explored throughout *Mostly* and *Shadow Self*. In *Return of Lilith*, I delved into the symbolism of the *Strength/Lustre* card which embodies passion and strength, as well as unlimited creative capabilities. It also means to trust one's ability to tame inner beasts. The final section *Golden Space— Astral Plane* delved into the symbolism of the *Universe* card in the Thoth deck, which represents the last card of the Major Arcana and the completion of the Fool's journey. The *Universe* card stands for the union of the Self and all of its aspects, positive and negative.

#### Challenging Understandings of Aerial Process

Creating aerial choreography for beginning aerialists is very different from creating floor choreography with seasoned dancers. There are a few factors that came into play: safety, reality and aesthetics. Number one and the most important was safety. Even though I encouraged exploration of the apparatus, the dancers wanted rules and I needed them injury free. Aerial choreography came after strength and skill training and instead of asking the dancers to experiment with the apparatus, the dancers wanted specific phrases and less personal exploration so they could work on making it look "good." There are "safe" and "unsafe" ways of aligning anatomically within aerial dance technique just as in floor dance forms. Instead of creating the same way as I did on the

floor, I had to be extremely direct about the dancers' movement, primarily to keep them safe and also to build their confidence.

Secondly, reality made itself known when I realized I had almost a decade of aerial experience and I had high expectations of the dancers' performance after a brief period of training. This is when I understood that I was going to have to perform if I wanted advanced level aerial movements in *In Spirit*. I learned to be realistic with what I was asking the dancers to do; they continued performing after the aerial section and I wanted them to be confident in their ability to execute the aerial choreography. It was imperative for the success of the show that I depend on the corps dancers to do less aerial work than I originally intended. I found I had to switch to more of an authoritative role as an aerial choreographer than I did as a dance choreographer because of our time constraint. I felt defeated by the need for an authoritative tone approach, since my whole idea of integrating constructivist pedagogy was at the forefront of my research. In the end, I had to shift my view of authoritarianism to direct instruction. This did not align with my desire to approach the choreography as an open exploration.

Third came aesthetics. There is a colloquialism in aerial training: first you get the move; then you make it pretty. Pretty—what did that even mean? I had to decide how I wanted the aerial choreography to look, and since I am a fan of line and clear intention, I was leaning towards a classical aerial aesthetic. I then had to question my values within my preferences. Even though my initial idea was to blur the line between classical aerial dance and contemporary aerial dance aesthetics, I still like what I like, and I had to accept that. The true choreographic innovation resided in the flight to floor transitions. The dancers and I experimented with different dismounts in conjunction with the utilization of contemporary rolls to the floor and redirection of momentum.

## Ethics and Aerial

I had questions on ethics and what I was presenting in *Sparkle & Soot*. The question of ethics in aerial range from appropriation of movements to eroticism and objectification. Did I utilize aerial movements that have been used by other aerialists? Yes. To claim any specific aerial maneuvers is as pointless as claiming a single person owns the action of a jump. As aerialists, we all learn from each other, and as long as there is variation in the order in which the maneuvers are presented, I do not see an issue with choreographing moves that other aerialists have used in other performances. Were the dancers comfortable with being a spectacle? Yes, as far as I was aware, the dancers had fun in this section. Was I taking advantage of these young performers by highlighting their flexible forms? No, the dancers were excited to display the flexibility they work so hard for. I made sure the dancer's costuming was safe and appropriate for aerial dance in a university setting. How was the audience going to respond to what I was presenting? The audience seemed to love it. Would it be seen as erotic? Possibly, although it was not my intention. It is out of my control how any audience member is going to perceive my work. After I diligently analyzed the ethics, I was told by several people in the cast and outside of the project to stop worrying about it.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

*In Spirit* gained its name through the concept that humans are a spirit inside a body. This spirit goes through complex life experiences and through numerous processes of liminal periods, which evolve and change a spirit over a lifetime. It is in the darkest moments of a soul that a person realizes what they are made of, both dark and light. Through these processes a person can be granted a second chance, a rebirth in essence, to begin again on another level. It is by honoring one's dark aspects or shadow self that one realizes how one can walk in the light and continue their soul's purpose in this realm of existence.

Through my research of archetypes and symbolism, I was able to understand myself and my work on a level beyond my original scope of comprehension. My life and work feed each other symbiotically. The archetypes and storylines of my life make themselves known within my work, with and without my intention, only to be made clear after further reflection. When I employ archetypes and symbolism as a catalyst for movement generation in conjunction with creative tools, I designed an entire production of dance that would not flow through my body without their inspiration.

Via my investigation of aerial aesthetics, I understand where my personal voice lies in the range of cirque-circus-aerial dance genres. My aesthetic can be defined as dark and whimsical narrative-driven aerial dance theatre. I explore the transitional nature between the floor and flight through a balance of rigorous contemporary dance and subtle gestural symbolism. Knowing my aesthetic will help me to advertise my brand of aerial dance theatre to the public and will help to inform what kind of venues and performers I will pursue to continue my artistic inquiry.



In my exploration of different creative processes to provide an embodied experience for the dancers and the audience, I learned a few important lessons about who I am as a performer, educator, choreographer and artist. The balance of my roles shifted and evolved throughout the project. In the creative processes of *Mostly They Come at Night...Mostly*, *Return of Lilith* and *Golden Space—Astral Realm*, I facilitated an experience for the dancers to express themselves and to unite with each other through their stories, points of view and experiences. This method of constructivist collaboration enriched not only the rehearsal landscape but also resulted in the performer's investment in the final product.

I hope to continue iterations of *In Spirit* in the future and to create other evening-length aerial dance theatre productions. My experiments with aerial dance pedagogy informed me I have much farther to go to integrate the use of constructivist theories within my practice as an educator and artist. For me, it is not enough to simply employ somatic theory within the training aspect or aerial dance; I am interested to further research how I can utilize these skills within the creative practice. This idea is not a means to an end, rather a spark of curious inquiry that will manifest within my aerial endeavors. It is like a fern that will constantly unfurl over the landscape of my career. After creating an evening-length performance synthesizing all of the above research, I have been granted a renewed sense of self as a performer, artist and educator. This does not feel like a period, rather an ellipsis—"to-be-continued" rather than "the end."

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APPENDIX A  
PERFORMANCE IMAGES





















