GRAVITY IS QUIET

An Immersive Multi-image Video Installation

by

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ABSTRACT:

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An Immersive Multi-Image Video Installation

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This paper presents research related to an immersive installation that explores the possibility of creating a portrait of a particular state of mind. This optimal state of consciousness, called *flow* and coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi reveals a subtle and hidden world of true presence and untapped potential. Entitled *Gravity is quiet*¹, this 3-channel audio visual installation examines the world of highline² as a walking meditation and mines the introspections of various *flow* practitioners through a singular, yet symphonically built voiceover. The documented individuals push the perceived boundaries of their own mental and physical capacities, illustrating their acceptance of the *culture of risk*, and the possibility of harnessing fear, discomfort, creativity and joy through the world of movement. Subjects were filmed in Canyon Sainte-Anne and Kamouraska, Quebec in the late summer of 2015. The installation is based on data collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and visual content analysis of sport-focused media.

¹ Dr. Toast, *Gravity is Quiet*, Dr. Toast. False Profit Records, 452858981, 2011.
<http://music.drtoast.com/album/gravity-is-quiet>.

² Highline refers to slacklining at a high elevation. Slacklining is the practice of balancing and walking along a dynamic nylon line, 1 to 3 inches in width and of a particular set tension between two anchor points. Highline uses a 1 inch wide line.

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INTRODUCTION:

Making the unknown—known—in terms of one’s medium is all-absorbing... Whether you succeed or not is irrelevant, there is no such thing. Making your unknown known is the important thing and keeping the unknown always beyond you — catching crystallizing your simpler clearer version of life... you must always keep working to grasp—the form must take care of its self if you can keep your vision clear.³

– excerpt from Georgia O’Keeffe’s letter to Sherwood Anderson

Beyond the description of her organic struggle between the unknown and representational form, I find O’Keeffe’s choice of language both inspiring and familiar.

working

catching

crystallizing

grasping

Her words directly address writer Sherwood Anderson and the art of personal practice; however, she also appears to speak precisely to the visceral highline experience and an athlete’s search for *flow*.

With a clear vision, one can explore a “living thing out of the adventure of his spirit into the unknown... [To] clarify something he feels but does not clearly understand – sometimes he partially knows why – sometimes he doesn’t – sometimes it is all working in the dark”.⁴ O’Keeffe’s fascination with representing the unknowable as a living form mirrors my own objectives in this MRP.

This project began with a desire to visualize human drive. If this invisible force could be made perceptible, we could then ask: where does the need to push the measurable limits of the human body come from? How is my constitution different than the athletes who achieve great feats? And

³ Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1990).

⁴ Ibid.

why is our society becoming more comfortable with the *culture of risk* and 'positive' pain? Could I capture that zenith by understanding it? These questions emerged out of my own experience and self-identity, particularly after growing up in an active household with three older brothers, playing competitive sport at a university level and now experiencing my own slump in physical activity.

A search for athletes who displayed deep focus and an acceptance of increasing physical pain was my starting point. In 2015, while filming at the Montreal Action Sports Festival, *Jackalope* I unwittingly encountered a pure state of *flow* on the highline. It was the first time I had witnessed the intense connection between fear, mindfulness, joy and unlimited potential; a completely new phenomenon for me. The talented *Montreal Slackline* highliners welcomed me into this world and I soon found myself on camping east of Quebec City in Canyon Sainte-Anne and in Kamouraska on the south shore. The highline community's strong bonds were both captivating and decidedly non-exclusive.

From the beginning of this project, I knew I wanted to create an immersive video installation that encouraged viewer participation. A nonlinear document that embraced the subject's voice and blurred the distance between athlete and spectator. The late discovery of multi-screen (with its similar qualities to *flow*); however, was an amazing gift. Multi-screen offered simultaneous and alternative perspectives of time and space, along with a framework for adhering multiple directive soundscapes. Embracing both fear and personal potential soon became a far more intriguing and empowering focal point than the phenomenon of 'positive' pain. The piece began to embrace a universal theme of untapped potential and happiness for a wider audience to ponder.

Over the course of 10 months, I made multiple trips to Quebec to shoot, interview my subjects and record their experiences of the highline then returned to Toronto to edit. During this time I struggled on two fronts: first physically in Quebec, struggling to keep up with the highliners as they scaled rock faces their anchor points and then, later as I edited nonlinearly in Toronto. I had many of my own “falls” as I grappled with conceptual and technical issues related to my final installation. Ultimately, I had to find a form for my subject to convey both the fear and exhilaration that came with experiencing *flow*. In June of 2016 the final installation was realized and presented at the Beaver Hall Gallery in Toronto as part of the *DocNow* Festival.

The primary intent of this installation was to uncover the highliners’ subtle world by tapping directly into their optimal state of consciousness. Presenting a perceptible and accessible form of consciousness is not an easy task; however, *G/Q* hopes to have unpacked the visual and audible sensations of *flow* and to have listened attentively to the subjects as they speak for themselves. “If we want to overcome the solipsism of our individual experience,” wrote filmmaker Hito Steyerl “we cannot do without witnessing... [it is] an attempt to open oneself up to the experience of others.”⁵

⁵ Hito Steyerl, “Can Witnesses Speak? On the Philosophy of the Interview,” *Eipcp.net* 05 (2008), accessed June 1, 2016, issn 1811-1696. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0408/steyerl/en>.

1. UNDERSTANDING *FLOW* :

1.1 Defining flow and the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

“I found a group of puzzled people with a tiger by the tail, interested not so much in mythology as in touching and holding an experience as ephemeral as spider silk...There is, I think now, even more to the edge than the ephemeral feeling. It has its own time its own space. The edge has its own gravity.”⁶

Most people have experienced *flow*, but they simply haven't identified it as such.

I saw pure *flow* that night. With the swirling gray clouds and a sliver of sun peeking through; a single figure danced in silhouette along a thin line in the sky. With a long piece of fabric wrapped around his head and trailing down his back, he seemed perfectly at ease and content. He could have been there or a million miles away. Happy in his playful solitude and simultaneously performing to the crowd below.

As we sat below the Montreal Olympic Stadium tower, I asked Anass Ajh of Morocco and Joseph Huard of Montreal to define *flow* in a sentence. Their definitions temporarily perplexed me but now that the project is complete, I find their descriptions aptly succinct. “*Flow* is the absence of control of our conscious mind on our behaviours” began Anass, a highline practitioner of two years. “You don't have to think, your unconscious mind will do the job for you.”⁷ “Letting your unconscious mind work on your body,” added long time member of *Montreal Slackline*, Joseph “and keeping the conscious part of your mind in the moment, in pure silence.”⁸

⁶ Michael Bane, *Over the Edge: A Regular Guy's Odyssey in Extreme Sports*, (Alabama: Wilderness Press, 1996), 232.

⁷ Anass Ajh (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

⁸ Joseph Huard (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

Highline, an active meditation which takes place hundreds of feet in the air is a perfect example of *flow*. If you cannot calm the mind, you cannot begin. It has no time restraints and involves the simplest of movements - walking. A looser or longer line increases difficulty as all movements are suddenly magnified, enabling even deeper *flow*. All highliners practice slacklining first to perfect their skills⁹ and then attempt to match their skills to the challenge.

Highline embodies the essence of *flow* as its focus is not what you experience but how you experience it. *Flow* is about controlled intensity, and highline is intense. "We're really exposed to emptiness under us. It's super high and the natural instinct is, you're just scared of being there...Your brain is like I shouldn't be here, it's too high, it's not normal...That's a panic sensation that comes up to your brain. And then you just get over that to get in the *flow*."¹⁰

If you are visualizing, you are not in the *flow* because you are imagining yourself in the moment. You are thinking. *Flow* is not a deeper level of concentration. Instead your mind must be blank, on auto-pilot and you are no longer consciously analyzing anything. "I hear everything with a lot of precision, but I don't give them any sense, any explanation" explains Anass. "I just accept to hear everything."¹¹ It's more closely understood as a state of observation, similar to an out of body experience where "[e]ssentially, you detach yourself from the outcomes. You don't have to seek to win or to be perfect. You just have to be in the moment."¹² At this point, my internal alarm for New Age talk started going off. Surely, we are all acquainted with those rare moments of perfect bliss where our skills match the present challenge and everything appears easy. But the idea of

⁹ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 35-68.
Re: 10,000 hours of well-structured practice.

¹⁰ Joseph Huard (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

¹¹ Anass Ajh (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

¹² Joseph Huard (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

consistently entering this state of mind and maintaining it for long periods of time seemed god-like.

Vipassana was one gateway to understanding *flow* according to Anass and Joseph. A 10-day intensive meditative workshop, involving 10 hours of meditation per day and the removal of all distractions. Participants aim to become *equanimists*: individuals in “a state of psychological stability and composure which is undisturbed by experience of or exposure to emotions, pain, or other phenomena that may cause others to lose the balance of their mind.”¹³ If one could control their reaction to outer stimulus, they could in theory control the state of their own mind. If pain, for example remains unclassified as said pain, then it will not multiply twofold into physical and mental pain. It will be experienced as a temporary state that will soon diminish. If you remain calm, and accept the situation then a state of *flow* will return. And this is true for *any* sensation. The idea is, not to treat everything the same but to only attach to things you want to experience.¹⁴ But what if something you did not anticipate occurs, and you need to alter your course immediately? An *equanimist* would advise you to let your subconscious decide what to do next and that will lead to the best possible outcome. They believe the unconscious mind is stronger than you are.

Anass compares his non-reaction (to sensation) to a wave that simply passes through him and diminishes. Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi recognized this phenomenon back in the 1970s when looking for the meaning of life. His 1976 Experience Sampling Method Study at

¹³ “Equanimity,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, accessed June 1, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equanimity>.

¹⁴ For two days, you focus strictly on your breathing and slowly start to experience moments of pure silence. These moments gradually become longer and longer. Then you start to focus on sensation and by day 4, you are scanning your body for sensations which can be very painful, pleasurable or indifferent. You start learning not to react to these ‘temporary’ sensations until slowly, you learn to let them be and then they diminish slowly.

the University of Chicago became the quintessential happiness study. (Ironically, I came from the opposite perspective, trying to understand society's growing acceptance of 'positive' pain.) Csikszentmihalyi was interested in the pinnacle moments of *flow* of average citizens, savants and entire civilizations,¹⁵ particularly those whose inventions surpassed the normal arc of progress. His international study observed over 100,000 subjects who wore electronic pagers, recorded what they were doing and how they were feeling at eight randomly chosen times during the workday. Constantly probing for new knowledge, the study used a phenomenological model based on information theory, which included "how sensory data are processed, stored, and used - the dynamics of attention and memory."¹⁶ Followers such as philosopher Don Ihde¹⁷ believe this is a return to 'naive' experience where analysis brackets out assumptions and an experience's true essence can be revealed.

After extensive research, Csikszentmihalyi outlined ten attributes which contribute to this alternate reality.¹⁸ (A minimum of three attributes creates *microflow* and the presence four or more attributes constitutes *macroflow*.)

1. *Clear goals* - A clear objective creates profound mental clarity.
2. *Concentration* - Nothing else matters except for the data pertaining to the moment.

¹⁵ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Flow, the secret of happiness," TedTalks video, 18:55, February 2004, https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow?language=en.

¹⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Modern Classics Ed., 2008), 26.

¹⁷ Don Ihde, "Postphenomenology: Sounds beyond Sound" (keynote presentation, Philosophy in Practice, Ryerson Graduate Philosophy Conference, Toronto, Ontario, February 28, 2015).

¹⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Flow, the secret of happiness," TedTalks video, 18:55, February 2004, https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow?language=en.

3. *Loss of feeling self-consciousness* - There is no energy left to monitor one's self and "your existence is temporarily suspended."¹⁹ In a rich environment, you merge with your surroundings.
4. *Time dilation* - Time speeds up or slows down. There is such a surplus of information available within the moment that it appears to take additional time to examine it all. For explorer Mike Horn, "The moment everything slows down, is the perfect moment of *flow*...nothing is rushed."²⁰
5. *Direct and immediate feedback*.
6. *Almost perfect balance between ability and challenge* (due to intense practice and drive).
7. *Personal Control*. The participant feels competent, reaches goal, and feels empowered.
8. *Intrinsically rewarding* (therefore the action feels effortless).
9. *Lack of bodily needs* and even emotions. Your physical needs are not considered a high priority. Psychologist Martin Seligman adds, "Consciousness and emotion are there to correct your trajectory; when what you are doing is seamlessly perfect, you don't need them."²¹
10. *Absorption*. Nothing else matters. There is no past or future to consider.

This state of mind has 3 distinct steps: struggle, release and peak *flow*. Struggle begins by engaging the challenge and overloading the brain with data as stress levels rise. Release is achieved through calm, controlled breath which triggers a release of nitroxide to decrease stress hormones and then, releasing dopamine, serotonin and anandamide to usher in peak *flow*. Once

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Flow and Ultimate Performance," Flow Genome Project video, 2:57, <http://www.flowgenomeproject.com/learn/videos/>.

²¹ Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 116.

these neurochemicals have been depleted, a return to struggle is necessary to continue the cycle. (Macroflow participants do not consciously see an end or a beginning, believing it is an overall way of being.)

1.2 Types of *flow* and strategies

While researching various sports/activities, highline again proved useful by providing distinct categories of *flow* for easy comparison. They include: the relationship between fear and *flow*, *flow* within the environment, and extreme joy through *flow*.

Fear is a natural part of pushing one's boundaries; however, highline incorporates fear of heights and fear of injury/death. These additional fears intensify the state by submerging participants in an immediate survival mode. From a young age, we are taught to pivot cautiously around fear and by adulthood, "[c]urtailing fear is no longer a conscious decision but an automatic response."²² Therefore, instead of using "[this] potentially meaningful and constructive event in [our] lives"²³, we dismiss the opportunity and believe risk-taking athletes are genetically pre-conditioned to do so. Highliners; however, do not choose the fight-or-flight response urged by increasing adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine. Alternatively, they learn to cope with apprehension through repeated practice. One "must balance the natural state of fear with knowledge based on personal capabilities and technical expertise"²⁴ writes psychologist Eric Brymer. Fear is a conscious attempt to slow time down, "relat[ing] to clarity and judgement and changes in time perception. [It is a] primal emotion...to be savoured, confronted or broken through rather than a stimulus for

²² Norbert Elias, and Eric Dunning, "Quest for excitement in leisure," In: Elias N and Dunning E (eds) *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell): 63-90.

²³ Eric Brymer and Robert Schweitzer, "Extreme sports are good for your health: A phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety in extreme sport," *Journal of Health Psychology* 18(4) (2012): 477.

²⁴ Eric Brymer, "Extreme Sports as a facilitator of ecocentricity and positive life change," *World Leisure* No.1 (2009): 52.

retreat.”²⁵ In rock climbing, for example, fear increases not necessarily because the action is more difficult, but the surrounding aspects change. A BASE jumper recounts, “The fear part of it is an awful, sickening feeling - nobody’s there for that. Some people don’t get past it, they walk away.”²⁶ What lies beyond fear is a desired goal, and it is a reasoned decision to attempt to move past it. “[T]hose who do not feel fear are a danger to themselves and others”²⁷ and by crossing fear’s threshold, you are holding yourself 100% responsible. And this responsibility comes with 100% of the reward: the euphoria of succeeding, the self-realization and “a personal sense of harmony.”²⁸ Additionally, confronting one fear diminishes the power of other fears.

A second type of *flow* depends upon a deep connection with the natural world. Participants become a component of a system, “releasing control or surrendering to something greater, and exploring parts that were previously outside of awareness.”²⁹ Nature is given inherent value, and human beings are a part of it with all other animals.³⁰ In past studies, athletes were believed to consider nature “[a] resource for athletic consumption”³¹, and “a worthy opponent ripe for battling and conquering (Celsi et al., 1993 Millman, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1999).”³² However this anthropocentric perspective, partially due to self-imposed segregation from the natural world (Stilgoe, 2001)³³ is problematic. “To fight nature is to fight oneself, to understand nature is to understand oneself, to be in the natural world in all its glory is to be in oneself in all one’s own

²⁵ Eric Brymer and Robert Schweitzer, “Extreme sports are good for your health: A phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety in extreme sport,” *Journal of Health Psychology* 18(4) (2012): 482.

²⁶ Ibid, 480.

²⁷ Ibid, 482.

²⁸ Ibid, 483.

²⁹ Eric Brymer, “Extreme Sports as a facilitator of ecocentricity and positive life change,” *World Leisure* No.1 (2009): 50.

³⁰ Eric Brymer and Tonia Gray, “Developing an intimate ‘relationship’ with nature through extreme sports participation,” *Leisure/Loisir* Vol. 34, No. 4 (November 2010): 363.

³¹ Ibid, 361.

³² Ibid, 363.

³³ Ibid, 363.

glory.”³⁴ A whitewater kayaker recalls, “You cannot conquer a river. How can you defeat something that is never the same twice, that is unaware of your presence?”³⁵ Nature is clearly in charge and participants feed off this interconnectedness by embedding themselves and reestablishing a primal connection. “Adventure sports form a modern Tao,” explains kayaker Doug Ammons, “allowing us to take part in the very forces that sculpted and shaped the world around us.”³⁶

The last type of *flow* is a playful, jovial *flow*. Once fear has been harnessed and a state of calm is achieved within the surrounding environment, enjoyment steps in. As one highliner explains, “Everything is clear. Life makes sense. Complete happiness.”³⁷ The activity becomes autotelic. There is no thought of failure and uninhibited creativity sets in. Boston Celtics player, Bill Russell describes this change in a competitive environment. “When it happened...[joy] would surround not only me and the other Celtics, but also the players on the other team...At that special level, all sorts of odd things happened in the white heat of competition, and yet somehow I wouldn’t feel competitive.”³⁸

In order to access these variants of *flow*, there are established strategies. Controlled breath and self-talk create a basis for an internal rhythm, and alleviate fear. Too much self-talk and you develop psychosis but “[g]aining psychological distance enables self-control. The language switch also minimizes rumination, a handmaiden of anxiety and depression, after we complete a

³⁴ Ibid, 363.

³⁵ Ibid, 367.

³⁶ Doug Ammons, *Whitewater Philosophy* (Montana: Water Nymph Press, 2009).

³⁷ Julien Desforges and Dhanae Audet-Beaulieu, “Highlining California”, Documentary video, 52:00, 2009, <http://highliningcalifornia.com/movie.html>.

³⁸ Susie Cranston and Scott Keller, “Increasing the ‘meaning quotient’ of work,” *McKinsey Quarterly* (January 2013), accessed June 1, 2016. <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/increasing-the-meaning-quotient-of-work>.

task...[W]e gain perspective, focus deeply, plan for the future,”³⁹ explains psychologist Ethan Kross. Pain and exhaustion are other noted entry points, popular with distance runners and adventure enthusiasts as the mind is immediately hushed. An unpredictable, rich, and isolated environment can also set the groundwork. “Big rivers accelerate you in every direction at once”, explains Ammons. “This puts the vestibular system into overdrive...[and] suddenly your entire body is paying attention. When this happens, it’s outside our conscious capabilities.”⁴⁰ The voice of intuition then ushers in fluid decision-making, “giv[ing] instructions on what to do next. Not necessarily words or rational thinking. More of a feeling,”⁴¹ explains highliner Julien Desforges.

1.3 The full potential of *flow*.

Participants in search of this optimal state of consciousness are looking for two things: greater spirituality or a higher level of performance. Highline can be viewed as a mixture of both pursuits and can experience the following consequences: further complexity of self, dangerous *flow*, an addiction to *flow*, a comfortable ‘being’ in *flow* and lastly, group *flow*.

In *The Book of Five Rings*, Miyamoto Musashi provides insight with a comparable *flow*-like state. Zen, “a method of learning, of observing, and of experiencing what you do every day...[where] you must learn to depend on yourself”⁴² creates similar deep awareness leading to a greater and content sense of self, a reduced ego, and a realization of potential. *Flow* too can develop alterations in one’s personality which are “permanent, instant and unexpected.”⁴³ A newfound

³⁹ Pamela Weintraub, “The Voice of Reason,” *Psychology Today* (June 2015): 53-4.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201505/the-voice-reason>.

⁴⁰ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 106.

⁴¹ Julien Desforges (highliner/owner of Slackline Montreal) in discussion with author, October 2015.

⁴² Miyamoto Musashi, *The Book of Five Rings*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), xx-xxi.

⁴³ Eric Brymer, “Extreme Sports as a facilitator of ecocentricity and positive life change,” *World Leisure* No.1 (2009): 49.

humility “characterised by an accurate assessment of one’s characteristics, an ability to acknowledge limitation, and a forgetting of the self”⁴⁴ is favoured in the highline community. “When you’re arrogant and egotistical,” explains writer Steven Kotler, “you’re shutting out complexity, novelty, and unpredictability to preserve a distorted self-image...Humility moves in the other direction, it opens us up and increases incoming information...more opportunity for pattern recognition, more dopamine, and less need for judgemental metacognition.”⁴⁵ You are more aware of your mortality and fragility, becoming a more sympathetic individual. “We look at things through all these filters, and we judge without even being aware of it” writes a BASE jumper. And then suddenly “[y]ou’re not bound by the constraints of a physical body anymore...[Y]ou can go places that other people can’t go.”⁴⁶ This consciousness also ushers in enhanced lateral thinking where expanding an activity is far more exciting than an adrenalin rush. Climber Jimmy Chin explains, “The greatest athletes aren’t interested in the greatest risks...physical risks are a by-product of a much deeper desire to take creative risks.”⁴⁷ “If you consistently use that state,” reports stuntman Travis Pastrana “you get confident in your ability to do the impossible. You begin to expect it.”⁴⁸

But what happens to self-control and self-preservation if you continually rely on your subconscious to decide “the best thing to do”?⁴⁹ *Flow* walks a fine line between endless potential and possible injury. “You can feel so much in the zone and so focused that nothing can really happen”, describes Joseph Huard. “But physically...mother nature can be stronger than your

⁴⁴ Ibid, 48.

⁴⁵ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 108.

⁴⁶ Eric Brymer and Tonia Gray, “Developing an intimate ‘relationship’ with nature through extreme sports participation,” *Leisure/Loisir* Vol. 34, No. 4 (November 2010): 369.

⁴⁷ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 143.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 17.

⁴⁹ Anass Ajh (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

mental state.”⁵⁰ On the highline, one can increase risk by wearing a swammie belt⁵¹ and automatically you can achieve a higher level of *flow*. Pain alerts are minimized or reprioritized, and participants learn to “use the bad to fuel the good.”⁵² Solo-ing⁵³ is the next step. Dean Potter acknowledged this choice saying, “I can sit on my ass and meditate for two hours to get a 15 second glimpse ...[o]r I can risk my life and get there instantly and it lasts for hours.”⁵⁴ “If I die, what a beautiful death” muses Philippe Petit in *Man on a Wire* (2008). It’s a dark choice to glorify death but risk is a personal choice, discloses Mike Horn. “A lot of people said...you will not survive...because it’s dark. You’ll get depressive. You’ll eventually commit suicide. But what people forget was that, that’s where I wanted to be.”⁵⁵ The addictive qualities of *flow* are particularly pronounced once the neurochemical high is over. Suddenly “[a]n enormous gap sits between the ecstasy of the zone and the all-too-familiar daily toil waiting for us on the other end”⁵⁶ reported Flow Genome Project executive director Jamie Wheal.

While hooked on the sensation of growing potential (along with the effects of dopamine and norepinephrine), *flow* demands habitual momentum: pushing ourselves a little or a lot farther each time. In 2011, ESPN recorded at least one pro-athlete death every 3 weeks,⁵⁷ and investigative

⁵⁰ Joseph Huard (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

⁵¹ A swammie belt refers to a 1.5 inch webbing tied twice around your waist with a knot, with the leash behind your back.

⁵² Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 168.

⁵³ Soloing refers to absence of safety gear during an activity, particularly rock climbing and highline.

⁵⁴ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 57.

⁵⁵ “Flow and Ultimate Performance,” Flow Genome Project video, 2:57, <http://www.flowgenomeproject.com/learn/videos/>.

⁵⁶ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 160.

⁵⁷ Devon O’Neil, “No One Is Immune to Risk,” *ESPN*, December 28, 2011, accessed June 1, 2016, http://espn.go.com/action/story/_/id/7393518/action-sports-2011-athletes-memorial.

report, *Red Bull's dark side* (2013) chronicled five extreme athlete deaths at *Red Bull* events.⁵⁸ Professor Christoph Breuer of the German Sports University in Cologne stated, "the vicious cycle of always going farther leads to a situation where risks for the subject cannot be reduced - rather, the opposite."⁵⁹

There is; however, another option: a comfortable 'being' in *flow* which requires more discipline as it does not have sudden entry points or significantly increasing levels of risk. *GIQ's* highline, for example is considered "totally safe"⁶⁰ with a harness, leash and backup line. Most participants have little to no desire to endanger their lives by soloing as they "find this state of mind everywhere".⁶¹ Potter also believed in managing risk saying, "I want to be a wizard of strategy, know myself and comfortable enough to say naah, I'm not going. I want to live."⁶²

Group *flow* is another essential offshoot. As a subjective experience, "[y]ou cannot really share this state of mind but you can influence others."⁶³ Inspired by *Super Terminal* (2005)⁶⁴, a team of freeBASE jumpers successfully accessed group *flow* by cutting out individual consciousness and learning to predict group patterns.⁶⁵ Working together, social bonding deepened *flow* further.⁶⁶ A common goal shared through a common language made the experience more tangible and

⁵⁸ Stephanie Hoppner, "Red Bull runs into criticism over extreme sports," *Deutsche Welle*, November 5, 2013, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/red-bull-runs-into-criticism-over-extreme-sports/a-16807269>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Joseph Huard (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

⁶¹ Anass Ajh (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

⁶² "Flow and Ultimate Performance," Flow Genome Project video, 2:57, <http://www.flowgenomeproject.com/learn/videos/>.

⁶³ Joseph Huard (student/highliner) in discussion with author, August 2015.

⁶⁴ "Superterminal FULL movie," YouTube video, 13:36, posted by "Gladki007," February 3, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fsAp90otdw>.

⁶⁵ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 62.

⁶⁶ "Birdmen Fly Through Chicago for 'Transformers,'" CBS News video, 5:03, June 28, 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/birdmen-fly-through-chicago-for-transformers/>.

created 'communitas': "a deep solidarity and togetherness that result[s] from shared transcendent experiences."⁶⁷ This group mentality also eliminates psychological barriers and increases shared knowledge.

1.4 Identifying motivation - The *culture of risk*

"In slightly more than 2 decades, action and adventure sports have ballooned from barely a blip on our collective radar to the most popular sports in the world save football, soccer, and autoracing."⁶⁸ "[N]ot just a 'flash in the pan' but a sign of the times."⁶⁹ We are reconfiguring our respective definitions of health and fitness by normalizing the *culture of risk* and 'positive' pain. What is behind this desire for physical extremism and where are the safeguards? Back in 1892, geologist and climber Albert Heim wrote about a climbers' high and NDEs⁷⁰ in *Remarks on Fatal Falls*, describing the wonder of extreme awareness, spatial distortion and time dilation. Philosopher and psychologist William James detailed possible alternative consciousness saying, "Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type...parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness."⁷¹ Abraham Maslow wrote about intrinsic motivation in high level achievers in the 1940s, uncovering alternate consciousnesses via 'peak *flow*' with events so 'self-validating, self-justifying...[t]hey give meaning to life itself.'⁷² Today, New York Times writer David Brooks adds, "[P]eople who live with passion start out with

⁶⁷ Richard Celsi, "Transcendent Benefits of High-Risk Sport," Association for Consumer Research, 19, (1992)1982, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/7366/volumes/v19/NA-19>.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 192.

⁶⁹ Eric Brymer and Robert Schweitzer, "Extreme sports are good for your health: A phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety in extreme sport," *Journal of Health Psychology* 18(4) (2012): 478.

⁷⁰ NDEs refers to Near Death Experiences.

⁷¹ William James and Henry James, *The Letters of William James* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), 253.

⁷² Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 164.

an especially intense desire to complete themselves. We are the only animals who are naturally unfinished. We have to bring ourselves to fulfillment, to integration and to coherence.”⁷³

This idea that human drive that has no limitations⁷⁴ explains our evolving cultural beliefs, and our often fractious relationship with the environment, technology, consumerism and self-identity. Sigmund Freud believed civilization is based upon the repression of individual desires in order to keep social order.⁷⁵ Society decides on appropriate rewards and punishments, and all other pleasures are considered fringe and unwarranted. It is true that most societal pleasures are predictable and reflex responses; however, deep *flow* practices rely on individual choice and finding joy wherever possible. Sport Sociologist Howard L. Nixon II optimistically states, “Culture is not a set of imposed ideas but a set of ideas and symbols available for use.”⁷⁶

According to Sociologist Anthony Giddens, we are now developing higher risk through an oversupply of technology, and doing little research to minimize pain. Sport Sociologist James H. Frey charges the low status of athletes with halting safety changes in sport; however, I believe, alongside Nixon that the embedded belief system within the individual is the ultimate culprit and only strict governmental laws will alter the *culture of risk*. Sociologist Francesco Duina expands pessimistically, “Winning and losing are artificial and logically flawed concepts that put us at odds with the world around us and ultimately ourselves.”⁷⁷ However, that may be the exact purpose of

⁷³ David Brooks, “Lady Gaga and the Life of Passion,” *New York Times*, October 23, 2015, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/23/opinion/lady-gaga-and-the-life-of-passion.html?_r=0.

⁷⁴ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), x.

⁷⁵ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Modern Classics Ed., 2008), 17.

⁷⁶ Howard L. Nixon II, “Accepting the Risks of Pain and Injury in Sport: Mediated Cultural Influences on Playing Hurt,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 10 (1993): 155.

⁷⁷ Francesco Duina, *Winning : The American Obsession* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013).

activities like highline: a chance to respond to the ultimate internal challenge.

2. THE SCIENCE OF *FLOW*:

The missing piece or counterbalance to the certainty of *flow* practitioners is science. Highline had drawn me in with its visual certitude, and now science was seemingly justifying their convictions with its greater knowledge of neurotransmitters and a real-time map of *flow* in the brain.

2.1 Neurochemicals

The five neurochemicals which contribute to *flow* include: dopamine, norepinephrine, endorphins, anandamide and serotonin. (Appendix 2)

2.2 Observing *flow* in the brain

A visual representation of *flow* in the brain was first documented by otologist and neurotologist Charles Limb at John Hopkins, using the high-powered imaging device, fMRI.⁷⁸ fMRI recorded neurological structure and an efficiency exchange of energy⁷⁹ in the brain to produce a footprint of *flow*. Now Dr. Arne Dietrich is studying the prefrontal cortex (PFC)⁸⁰ where one would expect hyperawareness via hyperactivity; however, the exact opposite is true. Temporary deactivation of neuronal structures called *transient hypofrontality* is redistributing energy and altering our perceptions of time and space. Basically, the body is turning off higher cognitive functions to increase the performance of attention and awareness.⁸¹ Specifically, the superior frontal gyrus which is responsible for our self-awareness along with the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex which monitors one's actions and impulse controls (by creating doubt and hesitation) are temporarily

⁷⁸ fMRI stands for functional magnetic resonance imaging.

⁷⁹ The efficiency of exchange of energy refers to the stealing of energy from one area for another.

⁸⁰ The hub for higher cognitive abilities and enhanced decision making.

⁸¹ Arne Dietrich, "Functional Neuroanatomy of Altered States of Consciousness: The Transient Hypofrontality Hypothesis," *Consciousness and Cognition* 12 (2003): 231-56, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://avierfjard.com/PDFs/Cognition/General/Functional%20neuroanatomy%20of%20altered%20states%20of%20consciousness%20The%20transient%20hypofrontality%20hypothesis%20Cons.pdf>.

deactivated. Dr. Limb writes, “The result is liberation. We act without hesitation. Creativity becomes more free-flowing, risk taking becomes less frightening...[but] the medial prefrontal cortex is activated, allowing people to still experience self-expression.”⁸² Temporal hypofrontality also alters temporal awareness as complex immediate data overwhelms the areas responsible for experiencing the passage of time. Likewise, the superior parietal lobe, including the orientation association area is partially deactivated and its function of “judg[ing] angles and distances, map[ping] course trajectories, and keep[ing] track of our body’s exact location”⁸³ are suspended, causing spatial ambiguity between self and environment. These variations could now be observed in Limb’s jazz musicians, freestyle rappers, and soccer players in real-time

If these findings are true, *flow* can increase performance indefinitely. “With our sense of self out of the way we are liberated from doubt and insecurity” states Kotler. “With time gone, there is no yesterday to regret or tomorrow to worry about. And when our sense of space disappears, so do physical consequences.”⁸⁴

⁸² Monica Lopez-Gonzales and Charles Limb, “Musical Creativity and the Brain,” *Cerebrum* v.2012, (2012), accessed June 1, 2016 (2012), <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3574774/>.

⁸³ Ibid, 56.

⁸⁴ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 57.

3. PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION:

3.1 Pre-conception stage

My initial idea⁸⁵ changed after I began my research within the weightlifting community. Few people wanted to talk about their experiences with pain thresholds, and preferred to discuss their mental approach. My fieldwork had also begun to feel more investigative than cerebral, venturing into existing power dynamics and financial compensation. Therefore I decided to take my subjects' lead with a broader approach to mental preparedness and asked: what constitutes the drive of a high performance athlete and what enables her/him to push beyond their mental and physical boundaries? The word, *flow* began popping up in conversation along with references to visualization and meditation. *Flow* described a state of mind which catapulted you into complete absorption, and a deep, almost meditative posture. Was *flow* the mystery ingredient of recent accelerated human performance?

I began my fieldwork by interviewing and filming triathletes, kayakers, yogis, aerialists and rock climbers with first hand knowledge of *flow*. Not everyone was aware or comfortable with the word but they used similar descriptors. While filming at *Jackalope* in Montreal, I happened upon a highline demonstration and immediately knew I was witnessing quintessential *flow*. Suddenly *flow* had more credence and a purity of form. Even though I had experienced my own non-intentional moments of *flow*, similar to Maslow's *peak experience*, I continued to grapple with my subjects' absolute faith in the unconscious mind. Highline presented a world where participants single-handedly confronted fear, learnt to control fear and then arrived in a place of tranquility. Both mysterious and riveting, explaining this concept to an audience seemed a daunting task as many dismissed it as empty New Age jargon or simply inaccessible. The occurrence of *flow* also

⁸⁵ Refers to examining the relationship between the growing acceptance of 'positive pain' and accelerated performance in mainstream sport.

appeared to be far more complex with its consistently dynamic nature and therefore the perfect subject matter for my first venture into moving image.

Before commencing fieldwork, my intention was always to create an installation far removed from a typical sports documentary. The subject's voice accompanied by a less familiar cinematic lens was essential. After experiencing *Leviathan* (2012) (Figure 8), I could see the Gopro's ability to access unexpected spaces and to present a strong physical presence. This seeing eye had a body and could experience physical trauma. My Hero +3 Gopro on a Feiyu-tech gimbel and attached to a monopod provided three things: an aqueous method to mirror fluid *flow*, access to hard to reach spaces (which emphasized a state of wonder), and the ability to be close to the subject one second and far away the next (simulating an out-of-body experience). *Leviathan* also inspired me to keep the audience's full attention without the use of characters, plot, dialogue, or music. These restrictions were always in the forefront of my mind during filming.

3.2 Field work

In the field, I encountered a variety of problems, particularly as I was working alone. Firstly, I couldn't always keep up physically with the athletes who often achieved *flow* far into their training session and at an accelerated speed. If I was able to keep up with them, my own laboured breathing frequently compromised sound recordings. Secondly, I may not have had the necessary technical abilities to follow their skillful moves. My past rock climbing experience, for example was insufficient to achieve the close tracking shots I desired even with additional repelling classes. My third obstacle was juggling both visuals and sound as a one person team. Initially I mounted a microphone below the Gopro on the monopod (as the internal Gopro sound was inadequate); however, the microphone could not mirror the camera's movements. As I watched my footage, I

quickly realized that to capture *flow* on screen, I needed to be completely fluid with my own movements. Constant microphone adjustments became too cumbersome and time consuming, therefore sound quickly lost its leading role.

I often questioned my decision to work alone but never regretted the choice. It allowed me to move more freely, connect easily with subjects and remain as unobtrusive as possible. I also choose not to interfere with any of the training sessions, and worked around their schedules and restrictions. In the case of kayaking, this made for many long, cold and unproductive sessions in a motor boat which was not under my control.

Finding highline was a great piece of luck as *flow* on the line was easily recognizable and could exist for unlimited amounts of time. My contiguous perspective; however, was now an impossibility due to the increased distance from the subject. At first this felt like a failure and a telephoto lens was needed; however, I began to see this limitation as an advantage. A wider view of the scene accentuated the connection between the highliner and nature, as well as an exterior state of observation. The inner thoughts of the athlete overlapping a removed viewpoint created a compelling tension.

Each activity was filmed handheld, intuitively jumping from one person to the next without any set characters. This spontaneity often lead to video clips that were too short and impatient, but also captured a few truly singular moments. I experimented with camera movement to accentuate the feeling of space within the frame, such as spins or mirroring subject movement but this worked only a small percentage of the time. Slow pans were most effective at enveloping the environment while more ambiguous shots spoke to the state of mind.

On my last day of filming highline, I was invited on to the line to experience the feeling of emptiness hundreds of feet up. Unfortunately, I opted out due to a wrist injury and missed out on the firsthand experience. Expanding my own understanding of highline would have been immensely helpful to the project and I hope to reconcile this shortly.

3.3 Finding Form

After filming highline in St. Anne's Canyon and Kamouraska, I continued to film triathlons, rock climbing, kayaking, and kundalini yoga. I hoped to create multifarious *flow* travelling through air, under water and along the ground. This larger vision of the project would represent: kundalini yoga as group *flow*, triathlons as technologically-aided *flow*, and both rock climbing and kayaking as *flow* in nature. However, *flow* was not only difficult to capture, it failed to look as distinct as I expected. It was not always fluid, its beginning and end points were blurred, and it needed a strong supplementary voice. In the end, these activities were cut from the film as additional environments, subjects and equipment raised too many questions and distracted from the overall concept.

How to use voiceover without negating the observational experience was my next hurdle. I refused to separate my subjects from their fluid movement (via formal interviews), wanting to keep *flow* accessible rather than abstract. Visiting Professor Jonathan Kahana recommended talking to video artist Sarah Friedland. Friedland's immersive 4-channel installation, *The Rink* (2012) (Figure 9) revealed a roller rink in Newark, New Jersey where viewers were submerged into the skaters' world of circular *flow*. Friedland echoed my hesitation stating, "a [s]ubject voice-over helps us understand perspective, but it takes the viewer out of a transformative visceral experience. If we

are only observing visuals and sound then we are only generating our own perspective on the characters, blink of what they may actually think of themselves.”⁸⁶ Her solution was to use sparse voiceover and long stretches of observational scenes. This became my starting point.

The voice needed to be calm with no clear distinction between insider or outsider perspectives, and to supply contrasting observations. I decided to ground the narration with on-screen text over top of an ambiguous image for the first two minutes. This subtle form of self-talk which “g[ave the state] a more tangible form”⁸⁷ was my first success. The words were both intimate and informative, set a comfortably slow pace and invited the audience to participate. I found myself drawn to the voicework in Terrence Malik’s films, and immediately saw the need for a tighter script and appropriate reader. Highliner Chantal Therrien, who had spoken so eloquently and from the heart was always the voice I intended to use and continued to hear in my head. My December screening response to voiceover was partially successful with a favourable 60/40 split, and it proved there was something to be exploited. There was room for the voice among the immersive visuals and an internal monologue was crucial for further understanding.

After researching the installation of *Sweetgrass* (2009) (Figure 10), I began to consider my own installation design. Their rear projection screen stood in the middle of the room encouraging participants to explore the space while watching on-screen movement. I could expand this treatment by including four separate voiceover zones (around the screen) and a separate area for an ambient-only experience. The installation would become an experiential, exploratory documentary.

⁸⁶ Personal e-mail between Sarah Friedland and the author.

⁸⁷ Pamela Weintraub, “The Voice of Reason,” *Psychology Today*, June 2015: 53-4.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201505/the-voice-reason>.

My next development came through Professor Pierre Tremblay's suggestion to visit the retrospective exhibit of Eija-Liisa Ahtila at the Albright-Knox Gallery. Suddenly everything changed. Multi-screen completely fed into the idea of *flow* – playing with time and space between screens, and intensifying the immersive practice. Ahtila's darkened environment with a directive soundscape was a powerful device for a layered and often jarring message. Her gallery presentation was elegant and straightforward, and I wanted to mirror this simplicity and the narrative control of the spectator. Most of Ahtila's work created disruption; however, I hoped to create the opposite effect: a seamless flow and a sense of calm. After observing various configurations, I believed a 3-channel zigzag rear projection would best serve my content and to dismiss the use of restrictive and isolating headphones.

My ensuing challenge involved lessening the viewer's fear and creating a state of calm. But how does one minimize anxiety and maintain intensity? "I'll never understand these adrenalin junkies – they are crazy!" was often overheard on the viewing platform at St. Anne's canyon and a similar reaction in the gallery was possible. Would an internal monologue have enough of a calming effect? Tremblay suggested a staging area with more familiar examples of *flow* before transitioning into highline while artist Althea Thauberger favoured immediate immersion. In the end, a transitional area was abandoned to keep focus on the main piece, minimize form and throw participants straight into *flow*. Additionally, a friend suggested requesting *observed silence* in the gallery; however, I believed the level of awareness (required in *flow*) needed to be freely given. The art must earn the participant's heightened attention.

As I began sourcing installation material, I encountered two obstacles. Beaver Hall Gallery had

weight restrictions on its ceiling support frame and a light wooden frame could possibly warp with a tensioned fabric. (An aluminum frame was considered but fabric was difficult to adhere.) Secondly, the grey screen fabric which produced the best colour results was restricted to a 120 degree viewing cone while twin white fabric offered a superior 180 degree viewing cone. This larger viewing angle was essential to afford greater audience movement and Rosco kindly donated the twin white fabric.

I hired recommended installer John Verhaeven to deal with the synchronization of projectors, and soon learnt that his preferred media player system, BrightSign was quite costly. My initial equipment choice, Ryerson's Matrox system could handle a single-super wide file to span the three screens; however, this system meant a reduction from 1920x1080 to 1360x768. This lower resolution was considered for easy syncing and financial reasons; however, I finally decided to purchase three BrightSign media players to maintain the highest possible resolution.

Editing for multi-screen came next and it did not feel intuitive. Unsure which should lead in importance, I went back and forth between visuals and script while working inefficiently with renamed digital folders. Exasperated, I took an old school approach and began arranging and rearranging diptychs and triptychs on a cork board. I soon found myself on familiar ground but how much context was necessary to enter the world of *flow*? Were non-*flow* moments necessary to identify *flow*? Should the three screens remain cohesive to one specific scene, or should they be in conversation? Ahtila's *The House* (2002) was shot with multiple cameras and a large crew, following detailed storyboards and scripts. I, on the other hand, had worked alone and without a storyboard. At times I attempted to recreate Ahtila's three screen structure, but it was by no means seamless.

I began experimenting with editing devices such as repetition, mirroring, inverting, desaturating and slow motion. However, I worried that these attention grabbing techniques could also be self-defeating as the audience needed to stay connected to the moment. Another concern was duration. Three minutes, claimed editor Ian Thompson is the attention span of your average viewer. *Flow*; however, required greater commitment and the necessary time would vary per viewer. How much time does one need to forget about time? To get lost in the moment? Andre Almeida and Heitor Alvelos ponder, "Duration is a tricky issue and the answer depends entirely on the goal of the work...maybe it's an experience that can last for several days...[and d]oes [it] require full attention throughout the whole piece?"⁸⁸ In the end, I realized the final length was somewhat arbitrary and the ending did not need to be neatly choreographed. I kept the final dialogue open ended and included breath as an invitation for the viewer to join in the practice.

My final effort at finding form involved sound. Location sound proved problematic with a thunderous waterfall in one location and strong winds in the other. Neither obstacle seemed prohibitive as I could manipulate and minimize ambient sound in my final cut; however, I did not predict these problems. My informal interview style in field also captured multiple unwanted sounds. Professor Dafydd Hughes was an excellent resource regarding soundscape treatments and proper voiceover techniques. Glenn Gould's multi-voice documentary, *The Idea of North* (1967), for example, was audibly overwhelming; however, it presented a rich wellspring of contrasting ideas and personalities. This multiplicity played into the dynamic nature of *flow*, and the voices of doubt and intuition. *G/Q* experimented with this treatment; however, test screenings

⁸⁸ Andre Almeida and Heitor Alvelos, "An Interactive Manifesto," Interactive Storytelling v.6432 (2010): 127, accessed June 1, 2016, http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-642-16638-9_16#page-1.

(of multiple narrators) proved too overwhelming for viewers. Instead complete silence represented peak *flow*, and additional foley emphasized and forged heightened awareness.

In conclusion, three separate soundscapes were created by layering ambient sound, voiceover, foley and minimal electronic music. The script brought together twelve different interviews under one voice with ambient sound mirroring the subject's current intensity and encouraging viewer cognition. Music built an immediate emotional connection while fading screens generated ample breathing space for additional auditory information and variances. According to Ihde, artists need to recapture audio information and its patterns to achieve the effect of whole body sensation.

3.4 Considering Presentation

Could *GIQ* create an embodied experience? Could a temporary pass into a secret world immerse viewers with very little formal prompting? Shows such as *Villa Villa* (1998)⁸⁹ by performers *De La Guarda* involved active participation by (literally) expanding the performance space and engulfing the audience into its energetic practice. Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim with its circular hallways also created an endless parade of art goers in a hypnotic swirl above its central hall. The viewers essentially become part of the art as they explore new and interesting spaces. Csikszentmihalyi believes that "a sense of participation in determining the content of life - comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine."⁹⁰ Psychologist Charles Walker agreed, "the more social an activity, the higher flow enjoyment."⁹¹ *GIQ* was designed with these factors in mind.

⁸⁹ Villa Villa. "Villa Villa/De La Guarda". YouTube Video, 4:18. Posted October 28, 2007. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFURao4K1hw>.

⁹⁰ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Modern Classics Ed., 2008), 4.

⁹¹ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 132.

4. DOCUMENTARY RELEVANCE

This project has and continues to be influenced by a wide variety of installations and films. Beginning with an interest in 'positive' pain, human limitations and the messiness of life, it reached a place of tranquility and potential. My influences can be divided into the following seven categories.

4.1 Sensory ethnography and the nonlinear form: *Leviathan* (2012) and *Sweetgrass* (2009).

The salvage ethnographic work of Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel in *Leviathan* was the initial inspiration for this project. Within the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL)⁹², they create immersive experiences by enforcing serious limitations. Without plot, music, main characters and a human hierarchy, the audience is fully immersed in experiential documentary. By rejecting traditional narrative framework, and authorial control *Leviathan* embraces "immediacy and corporeal subjectiveness", and "innovative combinations of aesthetics and ethnography."⁹³ Their creative use of technology and deconstructive editing create a sophisticated intimacy full of complexities left otherwise unseen. Castaing-Taylor admits to resenting the coercive nature of cinema with its distractive spectacle and scripted solutions which discourage creative and intellectual audience participation.

To be fair, SEL's objective of combining ethnography and aesthetics also pushes back on anthropological and scientific study by refusing a journalistic style and "decid[ing] not to impart information in what felt like an artificial or extraneous way."⁹⁴ SEL projects: *Sweetgrass* and

⁹² Sensory Ethnography Lab, "Sensory Ethnography Lab", accessed December 5, 2015, <https://sel.fas.harvard.edu/>.

⁹³ "Projects and Resources," Sensory Ethnography Lab, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://sel.fas.harvard.edu/>.

⁹⁴ Lucien Castaing-Taylor, "Lucien Castaing-Taylor (in his Installation Work; on 'Sensory Ethnography'); 'Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Vrena Paravel (on *Leviathan*)', in *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary & Avant-Garde Cinema*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 392.

Foreign Parts (2010) are founded on a holistic view of the world through long takes, open interpretation, contemplating representation of place, and affirming site specific art. *Leviathan* reveals both “qualities of rigorous purity ...and a casual disregard for the importance of the image.”⁹⁵

The success of sensory immersion appears to rest precariously between maximum sensory tolerance and sensory overload. Over-saturation can create “situated learning and transfer” (Clarke et al, 2007) through multiple perspectives; however, it can also provide a confusing message of estrangement and abstraction. We are simultaneously expanding and equalizing our idea of subject, redefining authorial control, and exhausting the senses. Immersion can “define the point at which language...doesn’t so much fail as reach its limit.”⁹⁶ It is a return to pre-linguistic, embodied sensory experience⁹⁷ and lies parallel to *flow* itself. Paravel admits that a clear message was never the ambition of *Leviathan* and her audience’s unease “only speaks to how infrequently life today requires us to engage this sensually.”⁹⁸ The messiness of the world is the message.

⁹⁵ William Jenkins, “Introduction to the New Topographics.” in *Readings into Photography: Selected Essays 1959-1980* (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 1980): 52.

⁹⁶ Chris Chang, “Rock in a Hard Place,” Film Comment, January/February 2013, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://filmcomment.com/article/leviathan-review-lucien-castaing-taylor-verena-paravel>.

⁹⁷ Giovanni Fazio, “In the ethnographic realm of the senses: An interview with Verena Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor,” *The Japan Times*, August 20, 2014, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/08/20/films/ethnographic-realm-senses-interview-verena-paravel-lucien-castaing-taylor/#.VS1hKBPF-ts>.

⁹⁸ Phil Coldiron, “Blood and Thunder: Enter the Leviathan” *Cinema Scope: Expanding The Frame of International Cinema*, issue 52 (2012), accessed June 1, 2016, <http://cinema-scope.com/features/blood-and-thunder-enter-the-leviathan/> (accessed April 10, 2015).

4.2 The phenomenological approach: *Leviathan*, *Sweetgrass*, and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007).

Edmund Husserl's words, "erase the world of speculation by returning the subject to his or her primordial experience of the matter"⁹⁹, is an excellent starting point for examining a stream of consciousness. How true as I careened over the edges of cliffs and tempted gravity. The cinematic approach of *Leviathan* makes you believe it is happening to you - to your eyeballs, to your ears, to your skin. You go in and out of vastly different worlds with the greatest of ease and with extreme abruptness. You feel the heaviness, "not only [of] the labour of the fishermen," explains critic Scott MacDonald "but the labour of the filmmakers themselves, from inside their experience."¹⁰⁰ Paravel leans over the side of the boat, balancing her body weight while trying to capture sensation with a camera plunged ten feet beneath the waves. Phenomenology is after all, an objective study of the subjective, and we can observe an explicit stream of consciousness that returns to both *Lebenswelt*¹⁰¹ and shared experience. By accessing, and understanding experience, you are not only validating but creating it.

In *Sweetgrass*, we watch sheep cross a stream, and start to notice personalities, wondering who is going to make it easily and who will struggle. We experience "a deeper and a different kind of spectatorial attention to the work, one less attuned to narrative chains of meaning than to sheer manifestations of being and to forms of figural expressivity that are more ambiguous and opaque."

¹⁰² We experience a disruption of the hierarchy of senses. When a bird's damaged wing brushes up against the GoPro in *Leviathan*, we feel its presence and its vulnerability. We observe touch

⁹⁹ Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Scott MacDonald, "Review: *Leviathan*" *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, (2012), <http://www.frameworknow.com/#!/review-leviathan/cr60> (accessed April 10, 2015).

¹⁰¹ Translates as the life-world.

¹⁰² Lucien Castaing-Taylor, "Lucien Castaing-Taylor (in his Installation Work; on "Sensory Ethnography"); "Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Vrna Paravel (on *Leviathan*)," in *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary & Avant-Garde Cinema*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 396.

which leads to sensation. Edits are not intended to be overly reflective, or reworked but raw. “[A] sensation that is more bodily than cerebral...a specific function of touch that is uniquely its own, distinct from its optical function.”¹⁰³ “For Deleuze, this haptic sense can only be achieved through a kind of violence, a deformation of the senses.”¹⁰⁴

In Julian Schnabel’s *The Diving Bell and The Butterfly* (2007) (Figure 12), we also gain a phenomenological-based experience of the ultimate “insider”, a stroke victim who is physically trapped within his almost completely paralyzed body. Schnabel’s movie is based on the journals of Jean-Dominique Bauby, powerful soundscape and a first person POV to share this immersive experience of locked-in syndrome.

4.3 The power of beauty and surrealism: Elaine Scarry and Richard Mosse.

“Th[e] willingness continually to revise one’s own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty is the basic impulse underlying education. One submits oneself...to increase the chance that one will be looking in the right direction when a comet makes its sweep through a certain patch of sky.”¹⁰⁵

No matter how you define beauty, theorist Elaine Scarry believes that beauty has the ability to stop you in your tracks and change your behaviour. It is arresting, magnetic, and most importantly, can lead to behavioural change.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Leo Goldsmith, “The Violence of Sensation” Reverse Shot: Museum of the Moving Image, (February 2013), <http://reverseshot.org/reviews/entry/1682/leviathan> (accessed April 10, 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

The surreal landscapes of artist Richard Mosse's *The Enclave* (2013) (Figure 11), with its rolling hills of vivid pinks and lavenders¹⁰⁷ mesmerize viewers who absorb a living hallucination. "Beauty is a main line to make people feel something. It's the sharpest tool in the box",¹⁰⁸ claims Mosse who draws attention to the war torn landscape and absent media coverage in the Democratic Republic of Congo. His moving-images are projected on six double sided screens in a darkened gallery with 12 point surround sound; showing people fleeing, a house being moved by hand, the militia preparing, and a child being buried. "It's really about using the potential of contemporary art, the faculty of the sublime"¹⁰⁹ to grab attention and challenge viewers perception of seeing. Scarry offers great legitimacy for aestheticizing the victim's situation stating, "[b]eauty makes us eligible not only to look at the things that seize our attention, but makes us eligible to go on and be caring about other objects as well."¹¹⁰ According to Plato, there is a clear connection between beauty, truth and justice with beauty being our visual call to create something better.¹¹¹

4.4 The use of multi-image: Eija-Liisa Ahtila

The work of visual artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila provides vast possibility for documentary installation. Her multi-screen configurations place the viewer in the center of the action and offer a deeply personal, immersive experience. Adjusting one's standing or seated position, the viewer controls the narrative by carefully and chaotically piecing together information to create their own stream of consciousness. An emotional osmosis rather than a didactic experience. At first, this encounter

¹⁰⁷ The vivid pinks and lavenders are created by the discontinued Kodak Aerochrome III Infrared Film 1443. An infrared-sensitive, false-colour reversal film featuring medium resolving power and fine grain, rendering chlorophyll a bright pink or lavender colour, used for vegetation surveys, camouflage detection and earth resources.

¹⁰⁸ Frieze., "Richard Mosse: The Impossible Image", Vimeo video, 7:21 min Accessed [2013] <https://vimeo.com/67115692>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ David Bowman, "Does Beauty really equal truth?" Salon Media Group, November 9, 1999, <http://www.salon.com/1999/11/09/scarry/>.

¹¹¹ Elaine Scarry, "Elaine Scarry: Beauty and Social Justice," YouTube video, 55:50, posted by "The Univeristy of Cambridge", May 21, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhIOwhlxSEw>.

may appear too unsettling for effective understanding of the heavily scripted work; however, it is both a new language to learn and Ahtila's intention. In *Where is Where?* (2008)¹¹² (Figure 13), she intentionally disrupts the viewer's sense of perception and logical narrative with four surrounding screens, making it impossible to attain all pertinent information. The messiness of the world with endless interpretations is her point.

Ahtila also plays across different time periods, interjecting a realistic human drama in present day with archival newsreels, 1956 crime scenes and surreal war reenactments. Characters freely roam in and out of each other's environments and time periods. Mixtures of fragmented 'truths' and fiction remove the role of the privileged viewer. "It denies a certain perspective" explains Ahtila. "It denies a certain order to knowledge, It denies that there is one certain truth to history and it emphasizes the fact that we really have to choose."¹¹³ Ahtila describes this approach as breaking a story across a space where time and space are significant characters. The two tenets of *flow*: time dilation, and the loss of self-consciousness in a space are therefore perfectly rooted in the multi-screen form.

Ahtila's refusal to present a privileged perspective also reflects Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* (1982). Minh-ha's film rejects the premise of *speaking about* or *for* another group and advocates for the practice of *speaking nearby*. "The best we can do is to standby," explains Ahtila "stand next to, coexist and communicate from being there with our own context, our own background, our own language, our own means of expressing...We should accept our limitations. We all live in

¹¹² Based on true events in Algeria in 1956, two Algerian boys murder their young French playmate following a French massacre of 40 Algerian men in Meftah.

¹¹³ Moderna Museet. "Eija-Liisa Ahtila- Moderna Museet 2012." Filmed [2012]. YouTube video, 14:55 min, Posted [February 2012] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bg9IEa9uNGU>.

different worlds that exist simultaneously.”¹¹⁴

4.5 The use of soundscape and voice over: Ben Frost, Ernst Karel, and Terrence Malick.

Music is a particularly hard avenue to overlook when you have only moments to engage the viewer. It can take you anywhere, awaken old memories, make emotional connections, or add richness to a scene in a most authentic and unconscious manner. Walter Murch describes our first experience with sound saying, “[W]e luxuriate in a continuous bath of sounds: the song of our mother’s voice, the wash of breathing, the piping of her intestines, the timpani of her heart.”¹¹⁵ SEL; however, labels music a crutch, an easy manipulation of human connection to melodic sound and association with emotions and memories. But it works. The partnership between composer Ben Frost and Mosse in *The Enclave*; for example is particularly successful in lifting the veil of invisibility (of war) with its minimal electronic sounds across an unearthly landscape. Wild sound, vocal performances and dialogue work together to pinpoint the crisis. Director of *The River Where We Live* (2010), Sylvain L’Esperance believes, “Sound is a real language that should be developed. Each film must find it’s own”.¹¹⁶ No longer used for recognition alone, sound provides transformative sensory input which can produce a robust sense of being.

Professors Selmin Klara and Alanna Thain refer to *Leviathan*’s soundscape by Ernst Karel as an immersive sound bath where many events are occurring simultaneously and each has its own rightful place. Writer Trevor Johnston compares the sonic tapestry to a “visceral ‘body genres’ like horror, heavily depend[ent] on the power of sound to emphasise the embodied nature of

¹¹⁴ Moderna Museet. “Eija-Liisa Ahtila- Moderna Museet 2012.” Filmed [2012]. YouTube video, 14:55 min, Posted [February 2012] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bg9IEa9uNGU>.

¹¹⁵ Walter Murch, “Stretching Sound to Help the Mind to See,” FilmSound.org, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://filmsound.org/murch/stretching.htm>.

¹¹⁶ “Capturing Reality: The Art of Documentary,” YouTube video, 1:36:55, posted by “Schweppes Smash 7,” (2008), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE7ZtJXG0kU>.

perception...[while striving] to access the deepest, darkest truths about man and his environments.”¹¹⁷ *G/Q* finally found its own language with complete silence, highline equipment foley, and the visceral sounds of the Gopro making contact with the highliner’s body. Now *flow* has discernibility.

Skillful voiceover can also provide additional dimensionality and perspective. Mainstream fictions: *Taxi Driver* (1976) *Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) and *Fight Club* (1999) take us directly into the minds of their characters, presenting an alternative world that never existed on a purely observational level. Writer Ally Sinyard explains, “Some writers will use voice-over to add a bit of reality to a situation that seems fantastical... [or] to create ironic tension...[or] lull the viewer into a false sense of security.”¹¹⁸ The only danger is in knowing which verbal information is better off left unsaid. Director Barry Stevens of *The Bomber’s Dream* (2006) counters, “It can be an invocation to a dream...a voice in your ear.”¹¹⁹ A way to emphasize a subtle world with little more precision.

The calm, opulent voices found in Terrence Malick’s films: *The Thin Red Line* (1998) and *The Tree of Life* (2011) appear to retain the most helpful elements. A serene, intimate voice elevates emotion while balancing a little detachment and complete tenacity. Actress Jessica Chastian describes her character’s voice as slow, deliberate and emotionally open, referencing the pacing and timbre of Lauren Bacall’s speaking style. There is a crucial combination of authenticity, purity

¹¹⁷ Trevor Johnston, “Sonic Ethnographies,” in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, ed. Holly Rogers (England: Routledge, 2015), 183.

¹¹⁸ Ally Sinyard, “Top 10 Voice-Overs in Film,” *The Script Lab*, accessed December 13, 2015, <http://thescriptlab.com/features/the-lists/1014-top-10-voice-overs-in-film>.

¹¹⁹ “Capturing Reality: The Art of Documentary,” YouTube video, 1:36:55, posted by “Schweppes Smash 7,” (2008), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE7ZtJXG0kU>.

and distance. Nevertheless, Malick does not believe in tight, natural storytelling¹²⁰ and uses dialogue sparingly to keep us within the moment.

Sensory documentary is a construct we need to exploit and balance with our intuitive love of traditional storytelling. By permitting the audio to lead the visuals, and by “build[ing] bridges between the external world and the internal one”¹²¹ we can form tighter bonds with our subject matter.

4.6 The active participant in the gallery space: *The Rink* (2012), *Very Nervous System* (1982-1992), *Force of Nature* (2015), *Rain Room* (2012) and *Transfinite* (2011).

“The space of viewing is also a place of time, both the artwork’s temporality and of the spectator’s time as an experience of duration and change which engages her in a work of memory...The spectator is both a subject of imagination and an embodied subject.”¹²²

For filmmaker Sarah Friedland, this possibility exists. By surrounding the viewer in a cube of screens in *The Rink*, Friedland envelopes her audience in the on-going movement of a roller rink for 20 minutes. Friedland provokes the viewer to flow and move with the skaters – ‘twisting and turning’ while simultaneously experiencing the role of the non-integrated bystander. This unique, positional duality and physical engagement reinforces the importance of sound in directing a gaze and tests the sensory limits of an individual.

David Rokeby’s *Very Nervous System* (VNS) (Figure 14) provides another example of viewer

¹²⁰ DR/30: The Oral History of Hollywood. “DP/30: The Tree of Life, actor Jessica Chastain”, Youtube video [2011] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x93br2iu2Tg>.

¹²¹ Andy Glynne. “Drawn From Life: The Animated Documentary.” Brian Winston (ed.) *The Documentary Film Book*. (London: Polgrave MacMillan, 2013): 74.

¹²² Elizabeth Cowie, “On documentary sounds and images in the gallery,” *Screen* 50:1, (Spring 2009): 125.

participation; however, it requires active participation for functionality. *VNS* is an interactive sound installation where body movements create sound and self-composed music by using computer image processors. *VNS* creates a direct and visceral relationship between body, sound, space and technology with an interface that “is invisible and very diffuse, occupying a large volume of space, whereas most interfaces are focused and definite. Though diffuse, th[is] interface is vital and strongly textured through time and space.”¹²³ Essential interaction with direct feedback was a component *G/Q* initially hoped to incorporate. Perhaps a change in film tint or accelerated film speed with an increasing amount of viewer movement.) However, initial tests proved too distracting.

Force of Nature,¹²⁴ (Figure 15) created by London-based *Studio Field* for Nike Immersive Art is a sensorial experience which amplifies the sensation of a runner's high with immediate and immersive visual effects. The effect is called Kinect interaction and it takes runners on a visual journey of on-screen colour and particle explosions. This effect, controlled by the participant's output on the treadmill beautifully mirrors the immediate feedback of *flow*.

Lastly, *Rain Room* (Figure 16) by rAndom International and *Transfinite* (Figure 17) by Ryoji Ikeda provide spectacular feedback on an even larger scale. *Rain Room* offers an unworldly experience as viewers stand inside a continual rainfall but never get wet. Motion sensors monitor the participant's location and prevent rain from falling directly upon them. *Transfinite*, a moving illustration on 54x40' cyc displays projected and synchronized data in infinite motion makes you stop and consider your small presence within a world of endless information. *G/Q* falls closer to

¹²³ David Rokeby, “Works: Very Nervous System 1986-1990,” David Rokeby, Accessed December 13, 2015, <http://www.davidrokeby.com/vns.html>.

¹²⁴ Nike. Accessed December 13, 2015. <http://www.field.io/project/nike-force-of-nature/>.

the effect of *Transfinite* as the viewer is left to consider the experience rather than alter the qualities of the installation itself.

4.7 Awakening the image with post-production devices: *Simulacra* (2015), *An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale* (2011), and *Bones of the Forest* (1995).

The following contrasting and expanding treatments “shake us out of our dogmatic and perceptual slumbers,”¹²⁵ and bring us into the dynamic present.

An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale (Figure 18) by Raqs Media Collective illustrates the dynamic relationship that can exist between still and moving imagery, time and space. A slow moving ceiling fan and the gradual appearance of a constellation of stars awaken an archival photograph with the use of After Effects. Luring the viewer into another world, the 1911 image entitled, “Examination Room of the Duffin Section of the Photographic Department of the Survey of India” playfully and significantly create “a meditation on the condensation of time in the photographic image as well as a gentle, whimsical disturbance in the serious enterprise of recording and commemorating the imposition of order on a fractious landscape.”¹²⁶ Raqs Media Collective pokes fun at the rigid definition of documentary and finds an opportunity to awaken important research on India’s continually consequential colonial past.

¹²⁵ Lucien Castaing-Taylor, “Lucien Castaing-Taylor (in his Installation Work; on “Sensory Ethnography”); “Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel (on Leviathan),” in *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary & Avant-Garde Cinema*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 405.

¹²⁶ Monica Narula. “An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale, 2011” Filmed [2012]. Vimeo video, 3:33 min, Posted [2012] <https://vimeo.com/84205912>.

Another After Effect's creation, *Simulacra*¹²⁷ (Figure 19) presents 'cubism in motion' and we again entered the hallucinogenic zone. Created by director Mustard Cuffins,¹²⁸ this hypnotic aerial video combines moving landscape with objects of curiosity and endless reflection. Pushing and multiplying the finite representation toward the fantastic, *Simulacra* reinvents a still image within a moving document and then allows it to transform again into screen in screen motion to enthrall the viewer. This wonderment garners continual attention and a wider audience.

Lastly, filmmaker Velcrow Ripper describes his film, *Bones of the Forest* and his post-production devices. "We want[ed] to go beyond the standard palette of nature shots, to show you the time of the forest, it's own pace. Timelapse photography. It's not eye candy...It's really about trying to breakthrough patterned thinking and allow us a fresh perspective on something."¹²⁹ Inspired, *G/Q* attempted a similar unsettling of image by using visual repetition, two-sided screens, slow and fast motion, and synced and unsynced mirroring to strong effect.

¹²⁷ Mustard Cuffins. "Simulacra" Filmed [2015]. Vimeo video, 3:56 min, Posted [2015] <https://vimeo.com/123006429>.

¹²⁸ "Art, Motion, Branding + Visual Innovation," accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.theotagholm.com/>.

¹²⁹ "Capturing Reality: The Art of Documentary," YouTube video, 1:36:55, posted by "Schweppes Smash 7," (2008), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE7ZtJXG0kU>.

5. PROJECT ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

5.1 Judging the efficacy of the installation to create presence through an embodied experience

After a five day run, it was clear that multi-screen had a strong emotional effect on the audience. Not only did it provide a surprising visual delight, floating in a minimally dressed gallery, but it assisted participants' understanding of *flow*. "[It] took me on my own expansive journey"¹³⁰ wrote one participant and highliner Martin Hamm recorded, "[I]n Kamouraska, I experienced... an outer body experience...I can feel it again when watching this documentary."¹³¹ "[It] brought out all of my fears and then some!"¹³² wrote one viewer while another cited "a sort of dream-like buoyancy."¹³³ "If I close my eyes, listen to your sounds, experience your images. I can smell nature. Body and soul are in perfect harmony with your universe and the story you narrate is a feast for the senses... I travelled out of myself into this powerful and yet delicate world of light."¹³⁴ Many felt they could not have experienced it on a single screen and a meditative state was achieved.

5.2 Judging the efficacy of the installation to create an active audience and *flow* within a confined space

Incorporating gallery seating was a crutch similar to the musical soundtrack of the film. It was not necessary, but it helped bridge the gap between a sometimes casual interest and a complete immersion. Most people found a comfortable spot, and remained seated on the bench, the chair, the floor, or leaning against a wall. Viewers more familiar with multi-media art explored the space, moving freely around the screens. There was a playfulness in their movement, but always

¹³⁰ Anonymous, June 9, 2016, comment on Frances Juriansz, "Gravity is Quiet", June 6, 2016.

¹³¹ Martin Hamm, June 6, 2016, comment on Frances Juriansz, "Gravity is Quiet", June 6, 2016.

¹³² Lori Bollinger, June 10, 2016, comment on Frances Juriansz, "Gravity is Quiet", June 6, 2016.

¹³³ Jordan Kawai, June 11, 2016, comment on Frances Juriansz, "Gravity is Quiet", June 6, 2016.

¹³⁴ Eduardo Jansen, June 9, 2016, comment on Frances Juriansz, "Gravity is Quiet", June 6, 2016.

introverted and reverent. Rarely did anyone approach the screens closer than three feet, preferring to view a panoramic over details. Stillness was the preferred state, and surprisingly, the majority of viewers chose to watch the loop multiple times, sinking into their chosen perspective. A retired naturopath wrote, it was “asking to connect deeply with self, with other and becoming the observer, the experience, the witness observing changing. For me *flow* is beautiful, profound, the sweet spot of existence - heaven and earth entwined.”¹³⁵

I urged many to wait for the beginning of the film for a greater chance of immersion; however, this was unnecessary for those who remained for multiple viewings. Their engagement required silence with most people respecting the spontaneously observed silence, and then moving outside the gallery to talk. Viewer movement may have occurred occasionally; however, *G/Q* worked well as a social interaction. Spontaneous group silence increased the overall intensity, and each person had to heighten their own awareness to block out unwanted noise.

Most people related to the piece through their own experiences of *flow*: driving, swimming, writing, playing competitive sport, saying prayers, sculpting etcetera. I was most excited by the non-physical comparisons such as the report: “I feel ‘*flow*’ when I am thinking about a new idea or concept to study or write about.”¹³⁶ Or “[t]hat feeling when your creative urges are fulfilled in a flow of ideas that you can’t work fast enough to materialize as they come to you.”¹³⁷

The installation did not include anything concretely tactile, but several found their own tangible comparison. “*Flow* is experienced by me when I’m underwater, hearing nothing and yet

¹³⁵ Virginia Martin, June 10, 2016, comment on Frances Juriansz, “Gravity is Quiet”, June 6, 2016.

¹³⁶ Diana Humphrey, June 10, comment on Frances Juriansz, “Gravity is Quiet”, June 6, 2016.

¹³⁷ Anonymous, June 10, comment on Frances Juriansz, “Gravity is Quiet”, June 6, 2016.

everything. Feeling the water, touching every surface of my body.”¹³⁸ Inclusion of water in the piece was highly successful with the report, “I feel the current pulling me and my mind switches off and I let the ‘flow’ of water pull me.”¹³⁹

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS:

Describing gravity as quiet, refers to our inability to control the sheer power of nature yet finding a viable opportunity to quiet the forces acting upon us. Quiet our doubts and insecurities by accepting ourselves and our surroundings, and to move through sensation with grace.

G/Q is meant to encourage open ended interpretations of a ‘lived-in’ moment as it unravels real-time potential on screen. There is no particular end or defining statement. Stealing from the mission statement of the SEL, I hope to “[harness] perspectives drawn from the arts, the social and natural sciences, and the humanities, [and encourage] attention to the many dimensions of the world, both animate and inanimate, that may only with difficulty, if at all, be rendered with propositional prose.”¹⁴⁰

The goal of *G/Q* is to create an immersive documentary in a space that is both surprising and illuminating to the audience. It might encourage participants to move, to be still, to follow, to ignore, to listen, to recognize patterns, and to let go. Either an individual experience or a social experiment, the audience must decide. By definition, *G/Q* is not an interactive documentary (as it offers no computer interface); however, it attempts to steal many attributes of interactive

¹³⁸ Rob Radinov, June 11, comment on Frances Juriansz, “Gravity is Quiet”, June 6, 2016.

¹³⁹ Shivanya Mulekar, June 8, comment on Frances Juriansz, “Gravity is Quiet”, June 6, 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Sensory Ethnography Lab, “Projects and Resources” <http://sel.fas.harvard.edu/> (accessed June 15, 2016).

documentary manifesto.¹⁴¹ These include: non-traditional linear structure, an unexpected visual space, strong audio cues for a wider spatial experience, simplicity, continuity before interaction and most importantly, using a medium that inherently suits the material. Specifically, “[t]he relation between format and subject needs to be resilient.”¹⁴²

As a final piece, I feel that *G/Q* achieves an intimate, and intense connection with the audience. There is enough freedom built into the experience, balanced with my own intent to narrow awareness at particular moments. “[I became] more a designer of a pattern of trails through a landscape of images, [and] less the tour bus driver.”¹⁴³

In the future, I hope to present this installation in a variety of venues where self-imposed silence is possible and to widen the audience. An outdoor venue such as Brickworks or the Leslie Spit could underscore the significance of nature and infinite possibilities. The Hearn Generating Station or Pearson International Airport would also make interesting “containers” for nonlinear format and its nomadic, and accidental viewers.

“The Gravity in this film may be for you a health problem, a work situation, a relationship gone sour. Step on the rope of life. Swing in the face of whatever is deep in the gulch, test your feet, stand up, maybe fall but get up again.”¹⁴⁴

words: 11,510

¹⁴¹ Andre Almeida and Heitor Alvelos, “An Interactive Manifesto,” *Interactive Storytelling* v.6432 (2010): 125, accessed June 1, 2016, http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-642-16638-9_16#page-1.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Gerry Okimi, June 9, comment on Frances Juriansz, “Gravity is Quiet”, June 6, 2016.

FIGURES:

Figure 1. 3D rendering of installation of *Gravity is quiet* (2016)

Figure 2. Title wall of *Gravity is quiet*

Figure 3. Artist's Statement for *Gravity is quiet*

Figure 4. *Gravity is quiet*

Figure 5. *Gravity is quiet*

Figure 6. *Gravity is quiet*

Figure 7. *Gravity is quiet*

Figure 8. *Leviathan* (2012)

Figure 9. *The Rink* (2012)

Figure 10. *Sweetgrass* (2009)

Figure 11. *The Enclave* (2013)

Figure 12. *The Diving Bell and The Butterfly* (2007)

Figure 13. *Where is Where?* (2008)

Figure 14. *Very Nervous System* (1982-1992)

Figure 15. *Force of Nature* (2015)

Figure 16. *Rain Room* (2012)

Figure 17. *Transfinite* (2011)

Figure 18. *An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale* (2011)

Figure 19. *Simulacra* (2015)

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1:

DESCRIPTION OF INSTALLATION:

Gravity is quiet (GIQ) is a 3-channel video installation, engaging a sensory ethnographic approach through a fragile mergence of distant spectacle and first person point-of-view. The nonlinear sixteen-minute loop is supported by a combination of voiceover and directive soundscape within an intimate, darkened gallery space. The translucent rear projection screens each measuring approximately 3.4' high x 5.3' wide are hung from the ceiling in a zigzag formation in the center of the room. (Figure 1) Viewers are permitted to walk around the screens, encouraging a more immersive participatory experience. Minimal surroundings are intended to make the viewer simultaneously aware of movements on and between screens, and clearly aware of their own movements within the space. Limited seating is provided.

The title is printed on one wall alongside four intersecting lines (Figure 2) which represent various tensioned highlines, and a short artist's statement is posted to the right. (Figure 3) The multi-screen visuals begin with introductory text across the three screens, gradually introducing the audience to an expansive view. The film begins at a slow, deliberate pace with a mixture of voiceover, ambient sound and minimal electronic music as one screen fades slowly into black and another comes to life. (Figures 4-7).

APPENDIX 2:

NEUROCHEMICALS:

- 1) *Dopamine* arises when we take risks or encounter something new - immediately increasing our attention by “reduc[ing] noise in neural networks”¹⁴⁵ and enabling chunking.¹⁴⁶
- 2) *Norepinephrine* keeps us focused and collecting more appropriate data. It triggers a release of glucose which increases heart rate and respiration. Eventually, norepinephrine will be overrun by a release of nitric oxide (which triggers the release of dopamine and endorphins) which means “the blood vessels [will] dilate, the heart rate [will] decrease, the stress response [will] fade, and inner tranquility [will] take over.”¹⁴⁷
- 3) *Endorphins* block our pain receptors, increasing pleasure.
- 4) *Anandamide* increases lateral thinking, social bonding for effective problem-solving and reduces fear.
- 5) *Serotonin* elevates mood.

¹⁴⁵ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 64.

¹⁴⁶ Chunking refers to strengthening one's pattern recognition by making other factors less important.

¹⁴⁷ Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, (Boston: New Harvest, 2014), 71-2.

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