

## Research Grant – Fall 2014

**Faculty member:** Bliss Kohlmyer

**Unit:** School of Theatre & Dance

**Project/Proposal Title:** *Amidst Before and After*

### Abstract:

*Amidst Before And After* is an evening-length contemporary dance work, created by my SF-based company *project agora* that physicalizes liminal states specific to the human experience. The work will premiere at the San Francisco International Arts Festival (SFI AF) in June 2015. These funds will be used to buy round trip plane tickets from San Francisco to Tampa for my USF colleague, David Fries, and myself December 8th-14th, 2014. During this 2nd research process, we will incorporate wearable technologies and other technological inventions, created by Fries, to the established choreographic/musical structure (created Summer 2014) of *Amidst Before And After*.

### Proposal:

*Amidst Before & After* aims to create a space wherein audience and performer may reflect on personal reckonings with liminality pertaining to human-to-human exchanges. The word liminal means “threshold,” the door between one season of life and the next, the time between the wound and healing, the period between childhood and adulthood. Liminal states are most known to be periods of discomfort, of waiting, and of transformation that lead to extreme moments of violence and compassion.

Where does the modern self begin and end? Has technology’s obsession with progress amplified humanity’s perpetual state of liminality? How has the search for a newer, bigger, better, and faster mode of communication and expression affected the body’s physicality? What are the ways perpetual liminality depletes or enhances our empathetic potential as a culture?

For *Amidst Before And After*, Kara Davis and I, Co-Artistic Directors of SF-based *project agora*, have assembled a team of artists to reflect on these questions and invigorate conversations regarding technology’s impact on the physical body, both of which operate in a perpetual state of flux. Collaborating with creative technologist and inventor David Fries, we will infuse the process and final work with current wearable technologies, among other devices invented by Fries, beckoning audiences and performers to reflect upon where the post-human self begins and ends. Fries will be utilizing Kinect for Windows, body tracking, and adaptive spatial light modulation. This research will take place December 2014 in San Francisco and is the portion of the project for which I am requesting funding. *Project agora* has been invited to premiere this work at SFI AF in June 2015. An invitation from such a highly regarded (nationally and internationally) presenting and producing organization such as SFI AF will enhance not only my reputation as an artist but also the reputation of the University of South Florida. The status of the contributing artists will inevitably lead to attention in both the dance and music press. Presenting my work on the west coast will further USF’s visibility and help to increase COTA’s recognition as a “distinguished center for study, creation and research preparing next generations to forge ahead and create new knowledge.”

The 2013-2018 draft of USF’s Strategic Plan places emphasis on “partnerships to build significant locally- and globally-integrated university-community collaborations through sound scholarly and artistic activities and technological innovation.” My creative research with *project agora* and this particular work *Amidst Before And After* are building on my already strong relationship with the San

Francisco dance community. This relationship will benefit USF students for it has the potential to lead to future engagements for USF Dance Faculty and students on the west coast. In addition, this work is establishing a connection between USF and SFIAF, a world-recognized arts organization.

Lastly, USF honors collaboration, invention, and the conflation of research and teaching. This project is a multi-disciplinary collaborative work that exploits wearable technologies invented by USF's David Fries. And, my students have been involved in much of the work's movement research thus far.