

LIST OF CONTENTS

KEY TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS	3
INTRODUCTION	5
RESEARCH TOPIC AND CONTEXT	5
<i>RESEARCH OBJECTIVES</i>	6
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	8
<i>RESEARCH METHODS</i>	8
<i>PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH</i>	9
<i>HEIDEGGERIAN PHENOMENOLOGY</i>	10
LIMITATIONS.....	12
STRUCTURE	12
CHAPTER 1. EXPERIENCES OF FALLING IN AERIAL CIRCUS	15
1.1. AERIAL CIRCUS ARTS.....	15
1.1.2. <i>THE AERIAL APPARATUS</i>	16
1.2. PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH	19
1.3. THE AERIALIST BODY	21
1.3.1. <i>MATERIALITY AND CORPOREALITY</i>	23
1.3.2. <i>TACTILITY, PROPRIOCEPTION AND KINESTHESIA</i>	24
1.3.3. <i>BODY MEMORY</i>	25
1.4. THE ACT OF FALLING	25
1.4.1. <i>SENSORIAL EXPERIENCES OF FALLING IN AERIAL CIRCUS PRACTICES</i> ..	28
1.4.2. <i>GRAVITY, FLOW AND MOMENTUM</i>	30
1.5. RISK AND FREEDOM	33
CHAPTER 2. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO FALLING	35
2.1. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	35
2.1.2. <i>HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY</i>	37
2.1.3. <i>TACIT KNOWLEDGE</i>	38
2.2. PHENOMENOLOGICAL FALLING	39
2.2.1. <i>FALLING IN BEING AND TIME</i>	40
2.3. INTERSUBJECTIVITY: AERIALIST AND APPARATUS	42
2.4. VULNERABILITY, VELOCITY AND ACCELERATION	44
2.5. MODES OF FALLING: MOMENT OF VISION	45
2.6. PHENOMENOLOGICAL RISK AND FREEDOM.....	46
2.7. FLEEING AND DISRUPTIONS TO FALLING	48
2.7.1. <i>AUTHENTICITY OF THE FALL</i>	49
2.8. AN ONTOLOGY OF FALLING IN AERIAL CIRCUS PRACTICES	50
CHAPTER 3. A COMPARATIVE AND CONTEXTUAL DISCUSSION	53
3.1. FALLING AS FAILING: COLLAPSE AND DESCENT.....	53
3.1.2. <i>FAILING IN THE CIRCUS</i>	54
3.2. FALLIBILITY AND FALTERING	56
3.3. WEIGHT AND EFFORT(LESSNESS)	58
3.4. CONTEXTUALISATION: VERTICALITY IN WESTERN CULTURE.....	59
3.4.1. <i>FALLING AS A CULTURAL METAPHOR</i>	60
3.5. TRANSCENDENCE: FASCINATION WITH FLIGHT	62
3.5.1. <i>ILLUSION</i>	64
3.6. SUBVERSIVE DISORIENTATION	65

3.6.1. <i>SUBJECTIVITY OF THE AERIALIST BODY</i>	66
CONCLUSION	69
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY	69
KEY FINDINGS	70
RECOMMENDATIONS	72
APPENDICIES	75
APPENDIX 1. PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH	75
APPENDIX 2. CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIUMS AND PERFORMANCES	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79
ENGLISH SUMMARY	85
DANSK SAMMENDRAG	87

KEY TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS

Aerial circus arts: The art form of aerial circus which takes place on aerial apparatus. In this thesis it specifically applies to performances and aesthetics of the art form.

Aerial circus practice(s): The physical activity of training on aerial apparatus.

Aerial apparatus: The type of equipment or tool that the aerialist works with/on. These vary from vertical material hanging down such as silks/tissu and corde lisse/aerial rope; To static frames such as hoop/lyra and static/swinging/flying trapeze; To other types such as cocoon/slings etc.

Aerial silks: Also called tissu. In this thesis it is sometimes referred to as ‘silks’, when denoting the material of the apparatus. A long piece of fabric, hung from the ceiling on a ‘figure 8’ and/or another type of rigging, to form two long pieces of fabric, equal in length. The length varies depending on venue, contexts etc. Normally it is between two to ten meters. The fabric is similar to cocoon/slings.

Aerialist: A person training and/or performing on aerial apparatus. In this thesis, ‘she’ and ‘her’ is often used when referring to the aerialist. This is due my position as female aspiring aerialist. The intention is not to create a gender bias, and I acknowledge that both males and females train and work as aerialists.

B&T: *Being and Time* (1927) by Martin Heidegger.

Drop(s): Controlled, intentional and rehearsed falls through air on aerial apparatus. The aerialist stays in some contact with the apparatus, from pre-drop to the catch at the end.

Haptic: Kinaesthetic, tactile.

PaR: Practice-as-Research

INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH TOPIC AND CONTEXT

This thesis is the outcome of a qualitative research period, incorporating auto-ethnographic elements from Practice-as-Research (PaR), and phenomenological theory. The research period consisted of 10 months of practical training in which theoretical concepts have been explored¹, and vice versa; theoretical study with embodied knowledge in mind. The auto-ethnographic research elements present themselves in my embodied experiences, which have produced direct knowledge for the research. Tami Spry states that auto-ethnographic work as a methodological praxis approaches the body as ‘a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy’ (2001, p. 706). In my PaR have drawn on certain auto-ethnographic principles about the body as a site of research in a dialogue with theory. Its qualitative nature is evident in the descriptive, exploratory and analytical research. This is not an auto-ethnographic or autobiographical, thesis, as it does not focus on self-narratives, semantics or emotional engagement. I have been committed to avoiding any indulgence into personal experiences. Instead, they act as constructive investigations of theoretical propositions.

The area of research is falling. More precisely: Falling in aerial circus practices, specifically on aerial silks, called drops. And falling in the theory of the German phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger as introduced in his work *Being and Time* (1927) (*B&T*). These two notions of the same word have seemingly little in common. The challenge and focus has been to find ways to compare, contrast and contextualise notions of falling. It is first and foremost studied from the perspective of the aerialist. Thereafter it has been contextualised culturally, literally, physically and socially. The discussion weaves in and out of concrete and conceptual research. Heidegger was interested in metaphysics as much as aesthetics, and the thesis reflects the binary perspective of tangible and ephemeral; theoretical and embodied research. This is both a cornerstone and a key challenge in the thesis. I am deliberately not including much historical perspective or differentiating greatly between traditional or new circus. I do make specific distinctions between purposeful, intentional falls (drops) and accidental falls (for example within high-wire acts). I have chosen not to study the latter.

¹ For details of dates and places, please see Appendix 1

Within the field of aerial circus practices, I am solely focusing on conscious falling, which forms part of the aerialist's repertoire of transitional movements and 'tricks'.

The starting point for the thesis was a genuine interest in investigating specific phenomenological concepts in relation to physical practice, as well as approaching the embodied research phenomenologically. The latter is often applied in performing arts, and with good reason. Ephemeral art forms lend themselves well to phenomenological research methods due to the experiential format thereof. For this thesis I was specifically interested in particular concepts, which hold one meaning practically, and another one phenomenologically. As an aspiring aerialist, only one year and half into training, I am interested in combining embodied knowledge with academic research, to contribute to work in both fields.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overarching research question for this thesis is: What new meaning and knowledge might be produced, by relating the phenomenon of falling in aerial circus practices to Martin Heidegger's phenomenological concept of falling?

In order to answer this main research question, the following sub-questions have been considered: What aspects of falling on aerial silks are transferrable to falling in Heideggerian theory, and how do these connect?

How can phenomenology be applied to Practice-as-Research in falling on aerial silks?

Lastly, I have borrowed a question which Ann Cooper Albright asked three years ago: 'What can the intentional practice of falling teach us about how to survive personal and social crises?' (2013, p. 36).

These questions have been the axis around which the research has centred, and guided the explorations in specific directions.

The overall research aim is to arrive at new discoveries, meaning or socially implicated perspectives on the act of falling, which may serve as alternatives to general views thereon. I did not aim to test aspects of professional practice. Instead, the research was carried out to challenge the limits of researching the same subject both practically and theoretically. My initial hopes for the results of this thesis is that they will offer a) a new way of looking at the concepts individually, and b) contribute to current discourses around falling in humanities, led by for example Emily Claid, Ric Allsopp and Ann Cooper Albright. I have intended to arrive at exploratory-derived conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I am grateful to existing research on falling in aerial circus practices as well as the wider circus genre, dance, and other movement practices and art. Albright's writings about falling (2010, 2013) have been key to this thesis. Her focus on falling bodies and her position between theory and practice relate directly to my research. In Chapter 3 I contextualise falling in Western societies. Here, I will draw on how she relates her research to cultural rhetoric and physical aspects of falling. Claid and Allsopp's (2013) writings about falling have also informed my research greatly. In terms of falling in art and other contexts I have primarily researched the works of Bas Jan Ader and Yves Klein.

For circus research, I have drawn on literature mainly by Peta Tait (1996, 2005, 2006, 2016) and Camilla Damkjaer (2011, 2015, 2016), who is also external supervisor for this thesis.

The following literature has been essential to my research of Heidegger's phenomenology; *Being and Time* (1962, English translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson) by Martin Heidegger, *Heidegger and Being and Time* (2005) by Stephen Mulhall and *Fall and Redemption in the Thought of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Lacan* (2015) by Tyler Akers. My PaR has been influenced by the works of Robin Nelson (2006), Jaana Parviainen (1998, 2002) and Angela Piccini (2002).

I have not found any existing work – literary or in any other format, which explicitly explores Heidegger's notion of falling in relation to falling on aerial silks. The above mentioned works have heavily shaped by research and concluding arguments. Every attempt has been made to avoid repeating existing research, and instead to lead to new perspectives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The etymological concerns for the research regard the construction of knowledge between practical and academic research. The methodology has served to match the overall research objective² and respond to the research questions. The research has a qualitative nature. By qualitative research I denote methods, which study embodied phenomena in its actual environment, and the knowledge or meaning it produces. For example, sensorial information about the researched phenomena. Senses cannot be holistically studied through metaphysical concepts alone as they are affected by active movement, such as falling in aerial circus practices. The qualitative research methodology therefore comprises of theory and practice.

As an aspiring aerialist, practicing conscious falling in drops is a substantial part of my general aerial silks training. However, in my PaR I have approached the training not only from a technical point of view, but from a phenomenological standpoint. This means, I have investigated the experience of falling, by paying particular attention to sensorial stimuli and the ephemeral sense of time fleeing past my body as I drop down. By taking a phenomenological stance to PaR I have been able to a) focus on one very specific aspect of my aerial training, and b) extract new information about the act of falling, by observing experiential elements I did not notice before. This has helped me investigate meaning making on aerial silks in relation to the research objective, by bringing the embodied knowledge back to the desk.

RESEARCH METHODS

A number of research methods and methodologies render themselves as obvious choices to this topic including artistic research, action research, qualitative interviews with aerialists and participant observation. Whilst I have used qualitative methods and inevitably drawn on observation as part of PaR, I have not specifically employed any of the above methods. Artistic research would have been suitable was I focusing on a performative aspect of falling on aerial

² Research question: What new meaning and knowledge might be produced, by relating the phenomenon of falling in aerial circus practice to Martin Heidegger's phenomenological concept of falling?

silks. As I am focusing on the physical aspect and its sensory, kinaesthetic and visceral information for the aerialist, PaR has been more suitable. I chose not to include interviews with aerialists, as I have been less concerned with individual experiences of falling, and more with a conceptual discussion thereof. I have drawn heavily on written accounts of falling, mainly about contact improvisation and skydiving, as tangential reference points.

Observation has also influenced the knowledge production – both by watching fellow aerialists in training and by watching video clips online via the platforms YouTube and Vimeo. Whilst the live observations have been of aerialists practicing drops, online observations have been of falling in aerial circus disciplines as well as other contexts including art, and gravity experiments with objects. Occasionally these research methods overlap. Some footage found online has been tested out in practice in the studio, and some practice has been filmed and re-watched to understand the phenomena better.

PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH

PaR for this thesis has consisted of aerial circus training on aerial silks, which has ‘experiential qualities only accessible by actual engagement’ (Petersen et al, 2011, p. 75). Practice as a medium of research situates analytic experientiality. PaR has been a framework for staging experientiality by connecting exploratory procedures of aerial circus practice with theoretical groundwork. Practice has played an equally important role in the research to that of textual resources, as it has been the only way to physically experiment with theoretical concepts. I have trained a bit on other aerial disciplines too including hoop and static trapeze, on which there is little or no climbing involved. Any drops thus happen at shorter distance to the catching point. Mainly, as complimentary to aerial silks practice, has been additional training on cocoon and rope. The latter because the spatial layout of the apparatus is similar in its verticality. The first because the material is similar. Training occasionally on these tangential disciplines has aided my understanding of the functionality of drops on aerial silks, and the experiences of falling. The empirical knowledge derived from PaR has offered a way into self-referential and self-reflective processes. The research method validifies embodied experiences as a methodology, which encourages different forms of knowledge and knowledge production in academia.

The PaR has been shaped by Piccini's definition of PaR as an act of 'formalising an institutional acceptance of performance practices and processes as arenas in which knowledges might be opened' (2002, p. 53). She further states that PaR 'acknowledges fundamental epistemological issues that can only be addressed in and through practice' (2002, p. 53). I have used PaR because it enables tacit information, which textual sources alone cannot offer. Parviainen notes 'to know a thing deeply means to be bodily involved in it' (1998, p. 53).

As a tangential reference to PaR I have also drawn on Roth's (2012) writings on first person methods. In his phenomenologically-based research he introduces two stages to studying learning via a first person perspective; bracketing of experience and expression/validation. I have attempted to enter both embodied aerial circus practice as well as theoretical literature this way, and tried to suspend any judgement about how a fall might end up or how certain literature meets my embodied knowledge. The following elements have played a part in this knowledge production; perception, motion, visual attention and altering states of consciousness. I have further drawn on Roth's writings on first person methods, as experience is approached as lived, first-hand accounts of the mind and actions. It questions intimate and authentic contacts with the subject – in my case the aerialist.

HEIDEGGERIAN PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is applied in two ways in this thesis; as an approach to PaR, and as a philosophical theory of which specific Heideggerian terms are discussed including 'falling' and 'Dasein'. I have chosen a phenomenological approach to this embodied research, to critically engage with questions of meaning of material contexts, in relation to human movement practices. As an analytical lens, phenomenology 'seeks the intangible obvious, that which lie before our eyes and in our hearts, however obscured through habit, even as its existential conscience' (Fraleigh, 2000a, p. 55). Falling on aerial silks are types of tricks, skills and movement vocabulary employed by the aerialist to make aesthetic choices. For this research, however, the aesthetic element takes a step back, as I have tried to approach the phenomenon as physical, sensory and kinaesthetic. This approach is almost hermeneutic; I use it to investigate knowledge which arises about the aerialist body in the fall. I am specifically using phenomenology as a framework to view part of my embodied research in, rather than the basis

for a large philosophical discussion. This thesis is therefore not a phenomenological paper, but instead uses theory as reference points to view the theme in another context.

Early twentieth century existentialist philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl (arguably the principal founder of phenomenology), Immanuel Kant, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Paul Sartre have all had an imperative voice in the discourse of phenomenology (Fraleigh, 1991). Out of those, Heidegger's writings may seem an odd choice for this thesis, which places bodily experience at its core, as he writes considerably little about the body. Phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty for example write far more explicitly about bodily experientiality. Nonetheless, I stumbled across Heidegger's concept of falling in 2015, and became interested in the challenge of employing this in my embodied research. The topic for this thesis was born. In many ways, Heidegger's falling stand as a sharp juxtaposition to the aerialist's falling. Not the least the distinction between Heidegger's concept, Dasein as a disembodied, abstract notion of existence, and the tangible, weighted body of the aerialist. Nevertheless, as David Ecker argues, 'Heidegger uncovers many practical distinctions between scientific and artistic ways of apprehending the things of immediate experience' (1984, p. 85). I am focusing less on Heidegger's metaphysical discussions, and more on how my PaR can encourage Heideggerian authenticity. In other words: How I can become more authentically aware of my temporal plasticity as aerialist through the act of falling.

Heidegger's writings on humans' engagement with environment and community in practical and personal projects, is interesting in relation the aerialist and her apparatus. I will be comparing Heidegger's notion of the world to the aerialist's apparatus and its surrounding air space. I acknowledge the many potential paradoxes in comparing concrete and conceptual ideas. The difficulty is explicitly present in my focus on sensory experiences as part of my PaR. I have approached the challenge as finding links, connections and platforms for comparative analysis, rather than translations from one sector to the other.

LIMITATIONS

I acknowledge that there are many alternative directions in which this research could have gone. For example, in relation to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which I briefly relate to in the final chapter. Or in relation to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theories, whom, Damkjaer amongst other circus scholars, refer extensively to. As preliminary research I studied literature on gravitational theories and gravity-based art work. Whilst I could have delved further into gravitational theory by Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton or Albert Einstein, I have avoided so, due to the scope of this thesis. It would also have been an obvious route to investigate the phenomena of falling strictly from the perspective of sensory phenomenology. However, as my focus is on Heideggerian concepts, I will suffice to mention this as points for further research in my conclusion. Lastly, I could also have focused on gender issues and the role of the female aerialist, or referring to feminist theory. However, I attempt to steer away from discussions on gender issues, and instead focus on the body as a physical tangible resource for analysis. Bieke Gils argues that 'the gender of the aerial body becomes ambiguous in flight' (2013, p. 159). This claim is partly evident in the muscularity and movement quality of the aerialist and aerial circus arts, which respectively can be seen as stereotypically male and female.

STRUCTURE

The thesis unfolds in three chapters, throughout which falling will be described and discussed in relation to aerial circus, Heideggerian phenomenology and in a wider context.

Chapter One provides a descriptive introduction to falling in a general context, and thereafter places it in relation to aerial circus practices. First the field of research is introduced including the sector, the apparatus and ideas around the aerialist body. This section closes with an inquiry into the sensory experiences of falling in aerial circus in relation to gravity and momentum. The last part of Chapter One explores the discourse in relation to ideas of risk and freedom. The overall aim and contribution of the first chapter is to frame key concepts and situate them in a specific, practical context in relation to ideas of corporeality, body memory, kinaesthesia and momentum.

The focus of Chapter Two is Heidegger's phenomenology, centring around his concept of falling. In order to engage with this concept, some selected terminology will be discussed including authenticity, Dasein and fleeing. First of all, a phenomenological overview is offered, which leads the reader into Heidegger's phenomenology. Hereafter the Heideggerian concept of falling is opened up, from which a discussion in relation concepts from the previous chapter is presented, in relation to intersubjectivity and vulnerability. This chapter closes similarly to Chapter One, in relation to risk and freedom, but here with reference to Heideggerian authenticity and fleeing.

The final chapter places the embodied and theoretical research in a broader context. The focus is on perceptions and associations of falling in Western societies and its preoccupation with verticality across a multitude of scenarios. I will make references to ideas of transcendence and illusion. Last but not least, I propose a positive perspective on disorientating practices as potentially subversive and constructive experiences. Certain topics overlap across sections. Throughout all chapters, both embodied and theoretical knowledge is applied. Efva Lilja (2004) states that for her, embodied knowledge, such as the information derived from PaR, takes a central position in knowledge production. 'This bodily, practical knowledge can then be developed from a theoretical perspective but it is the practical aspect of the project that is specifically generative of knowledge' (Lilja, 2004, p. 93). I have, to a high degree, relied on bodily knowledge to arrive at most of the concluding thoughts, which, without such sense of embodiment, would not have the same multifaceted dimensionality.

CHAPTER 1. EXPERIENCES OF FALLING IN AERIAL CIRCUS

1.1. AERIAL CIRCUS ARTS

In this opening chapter, I will introduce the act of falling from an embodied perspective, relating to the physicality and functionality in aerial circus practices, specifically in the discipline, aerial silks. I will offer some preliminary thoughts on aerial circus arts, the aerialist body and its connection to aerial apparatus. Further I discuss my use of PaR and hereafter the act of falling, including ideas of risk and freedom.

These preliminary discussions lay the foundation for the second chapter, which is written from a phenomenological perspective, and the concluding chapter which compares the previous two chapters in relation to social contexts.

Aerial circus arts is ‘a physical phenomenon for and of bodies’ that ‘fosters bodily tension and release’ (Tait, 2005, p. 142). This is found in the act of falling and catching for example. In my research I am focusing on the practice as corporeal phenomena, not the performative aspect of the art form. Nonetheless, I will refer to Tait’s definition of aerial performance, as it corresponds to the purely physical aspect of it. She states that it is ‘a physical art created with the body, and although widely performed in theatres, is generally associated with circus (...) aerialists perform gymnastic action on and off apparatus suspended in the air’ (2005, p. 1).

For this purpose, I am particularly interested in the physicality of the art form and the contact, or lack of, with the apparatus. I am focusing on the aerialist, as opposed to the equilibrist; on intentional falling and catching, as opposed to the balancing act and accidental falls. Tait comments that the last 140 years of aerialists’ history as ‘bodies performing action contribute to changing perceptions of physicality’ (2005, p. 147). Through the art form, aerialists are able to exercise empowerment and develop individual creative research (Kérchy, 2008). My PaR in aerial circus practices has offered me a platform to creatively investigate the physicality of moving and falling aerial silks, in relation to my theoretical research in phenomenology.

1.1.2. THE AERIAL APPARATUS

While I acknowledge the wealth of disciplines within aerial circus arts, such as cloud swing, cocoon/slings, hoop/lyra, straps, Spanish web and trapeze, I focus on aerial silks, with occasional references to aerial rope/corde lisse as well, as it shares some characteristics. Much of the movement vocabulary is transferable across the two apparatuses, and they share the functionality of ascent and descent through climbing, wrapping, dropping (falling) and catching. This allows for expansive, sometimes dramatic (although that is not my focus) movement in which the vertical length of the material is explored. In order to fall on silks, the aerialist must first climb and manoeuvre the apparatus in, at times, intricate patterns, to ensure a safe landing after the fall. It is possible to perform movement which includes falling on, for example, trapeze and hoop as well, but there, the catching happens on the static frame of the apparatus, and not because of pre-set arrangement of the material by the aerialist. Harness-based aerial work allows for very grand moments of falling, which evoke sensorial stimuli, but always with the aerialist kept enclosed in the harness. For this thesis I am specifically exploring the act of falling on aerial silks, and the opportunities that apparatus offers. The required activity of climbing to be able to descend has parallels in diving and alpine skiing. But as opposed to those two sports disciplines, aerial circus is an art form, and the ascending journey to the top is thus as important as any subsequent falls. Symbolically, there is also a simplicity in the verticality of aerial silks, which will only move when the aerialist does.

The aerial apparatus is perceivable, graspable, manoeuvrable and reachable. A climber uses the rock, a ski jumper uses a pair of skis, a bungee jumper uses an elastic chord, and so forth. The silks as equipment for aerial circus practice offers a synthesis of the external world and the body intentionality of the aerialist in relation to her environment. Gunnar Breivik writes that Heidegger ‘extends equipmentality to include the design and use of the clock in the church tower or the roof above the railway station’ (2010, p. 32). In this sense, equipmentality is not only a tool, instrument or device, which is physically handled by the person affected by it. It denotes something which has a functional purpose of some sort, and enables problem solving. Importantly, equipmentality is always connected to a certain activity. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas argue that Heidegger’s equipmentality ‘depends on some notion of spatial dimensionality and externality’ (2000, p. 219). In order for the spatial dimension to be present, equipmentality also depends on the person relating to the equipmentality, which creates an intersubjectivity. I will discuss this idea of intersubjectivity further in Chapter 2.

For now, I focus on the equipmentality of the aerial silks. Relative to Heidegger's equipmentality, aerial silks differ significantly from colloquial types of equipment in a practical sense. The design and function offers different opportunities of use than objects found in most ordinary homes. In terms of symbolic value, I see parallels between artistic (silks) and colloquial equipment. I argue that the aerialist's limbs function, at times, as additional elements of the aerial equipment. It can help to steer and stabilise the void in which the aerialist falls. In working directly with equipmental contexts, i.e. the aerial apparatus, the aerialist can experience some sense of symbiosis. Heidegger's understanding of equipment is an object that facilitates something else to happen. The aerialist does not 'fly', or fall safely in the air by herself. The apparatus acts as the equipment which ensures this is done successfully and safely. Nonetheless, the aerialist's fall might momentarily create a swift free-fall experience. This responds to an innate, childhood dream of flight, as on the witch's broomstick or Aladdin's carpet for example.

Training in aerial circus disciplines, regardless of the apparatus used, 'involves complex processes of entering into a symbiosis with the equipment and reorganizing the body in relation to a specific activity' (Damkjaer, 2016, p. 133). This activity enables the aerialist to perform physical transformations in the air, and make possible at height what is not on the ground. I draw a parallel at this point in relation to the concept of symbiosis in aerial circus, whether through practice or performance, similar to Damkjaer's discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's theories on becoming.³ She proposes a 'pragmatic yet radical understanding of the relation between the circus artist and her discipline, (...) the involvement with the discipline involves a reorganization of the body that resembles a process of becoming' (Damkjaer, 2016, p. 137). She thus argues that the circus artist not only identifies with the equipment or discipline involved, but further relates her identity to the discipline practiced. Such process requires a connection over and above the technical vocabulary and skillset of the discipline, and a levelling of value between the aerialist and the apparatus. It demands just as much presence and awareness as physical abilities.

Opening the possibility to a symbiosis thus becomes 'a very complex thing in a performative situation: it blends different technical processes, and it looks different depending on whether you experience it yourself or interpret it in the actions of someone else'

³ Damkjaer discusses Deleuze and Guattari's (2003, 2013) writings on gender theory etc. and becoming as always becoming something, in relation to aerial rope.

(Damkjaer, 2016, p. 141). Damkjaer argues that as the practitioner ‘I can try to see how I can manipulate that state by very concrete means: slowness, smoothness, concentration, focus’ (2016, p. 141). The symbiotic relationship is a dialogue with gravity, the apparatus and other factors, which might pull the aerialist in one direction or another. Similar to Heidegger’s notion of Being-in-the-world, Brevik notes that ‘the goal toward which the equipment is used is ultimately human living, being in-the-world’ (2010, p. 31). The aerial apparatus does not exist in isolation from the aerialist, but rather offers artistic means by which colloquial conditions can be explored.

Damkjaer’s research on ‘the intricate relations between the physical body, (...) movement practice and how it transforms the body’ (2016, p. 136) is specifically relevant to the theme of this chapter. When falling on aerial silks, the aerialist must inevitably know exactly how to wrap, drape, twist and hold the material in order to complete a successful drop. In these preliminary actions, the aerialist decreases the proximity between her body and the apparatus, often tightly held around multiple body parts, which then releases in the ephemeral moment of the drop. Generally, within aerial silks, the less contact with the apparatus, the more muscular effort is required from the aerialist. However, in the actual moment of the fall, the aerialist releases the tension and much of the contact with the material. It is in the catching of the fall, that she regains most of the contact again. The preliminary steps before the fall is equally an opportunity to express artistic aesthetics, as they act as safety measures.

Aerial circus arts differ spatially (amongst other ways) from other circus disciplines. Whereas contortionism explores negative space more internally for example, the aerialist is in constant negotiation with the apparatus that she occupies. Similar to a musician working with a musical instrument, aerial circus practices ‘depend on a totality of presence and on its complete visibility (...) the cultural design of the aerialist’s body is to explore outer space’ (Handelman, 1991, p. 213). The spatiality of the aerialist is constructed in relation to her natural orientation towards the silks in space, and she practices physically with an embodied intentionality (Chisholm, 2008). When falling on aerial silks, the aerialist relies on her haptic awareness to complete the drop. By haptic awareness I mean the tactile, kinaesthetic and sensory modalities that the aerialist can attend to. This becomes particularly relevant in quick drops, which generate much acceleration. Here the aerialist employs haptic mobility to catch herself at the end, more than a visual clue of when and where to land. This is apparent in the felt sensations of falling, and the

aerialist's interaction with the silks. John Hockey and Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson notes that 'for many, work involves haptic interaction with the occupational 'terrain', whether that be (literally) the factory floor or the sea, and with equipment, ranging from huge objects such as fishing vessels and earth-moving diggers, to smaller items such as the finely graded brushes of make-up artists' (2009, p. 16). For the aerialist the occupational terrain is the aerial apparatus.

PaR is vital to understanding drops in aerial silks. Observatory research methods would not evoke the same haptic information through awareness of touch with the equipment. This haptic awareness influences the aerialist's perception, and aids her understanding of spatiality, both internally and externally. This touches upon Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility, as the aerialist is perceiving the touch of the apparatus, whilst actively manipulating it by her touch as well. Hockey and Allen-Collinson notes that 'the human body itself may constitute the subject, object and terrain of working practices' (2009, p. 16). The outcome of such 'working practice' is the aerial circus practice. The aerialist's function is far from objectified in this perspective. Rather, the aerialist's embodied agency is highlighted by her status as a perceiving and perceived subject, who can affect didactics of the working practices.

1.2. PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH

The holistic insights I have gained into the experiences of falling on aerial silks would not have been obtainable without employing PaR. The PaR sessions have taken place one to four times per week over the last 10 months, and have been largely informed by the weekly literary research. The PaR did therefore not have a highly systematic structure, in terms of topic or thematic direction. Instead, it was a direct embodied investigation of the theoretical readings of Heidegger's phenomenology, and corresponding to each week's current theoretical preoccupations. This means that during the PaR, the process was largely influenced by the theoretical research. However, in the latter part of the research period, the writing for this thesis was heavily guided by the PaR experiences.

My reasons for using PaR are similar to Damkjaer's embodied academic research. 'The idea of bringing the two together, bringing the physicality back into your research, and your research into physicality' (2016, p. 2). The academic framework has offered specific tools for

explorations on aerial silks, and a chance to reflect physically and intellectually. In particular the discoveries around haptic modalities have aided the knowledge production and transfer thereof between reading and writing, and climbing and falling. The main epistemological areas in which PaR has offered insights, which would not be accessible through literary research, concern sensorial, tacit and kinaesthetic information.

It is worth noting that the PaR did not solely consist of experimentation and observation of falling. Inevitably other physical actions formed part of the research. However, I am not including other technical or physical aspects of aerial silks practice in this thesis. Throughout the PaR I attempted to distinguish between physical, as well as artistic training, and the actual actions of falling. As my research focuses on a specific element in the practice and not the performance of aerial silks, aesthetic aspects are not discussed. However, in observing other aerialists fall on silks, I have gained a better understanding of the processes involved in falling. I appreciate that PaR involves a great deal of reflection and therefore is time consuming. My general aerial experience over the last year has played a part in forming this specific research interest. As a consequence, I started training more in a venue with a higher ceiling, which enabled more virtuosic drops. This was not explicitly a dramatic or aesthetic choice. Instead, it made the explorations of the aerialist body's experiential and kinaesthetic experiences of falling on silks more accessible.

Empirically, PaR is important because it offers experiences of the phenomena first hand. To actively form this experience moves beyond any subject-object dichotomy. From an epistemic perspective, PaR has heightened my bodily sensitivity to the aerial apparatus as well as my aerialist body. Factually, the aerial apparatus is a technical, passive matter. For the aerialist, the apparatus functions as a manoeuvrable partner, required to constitute the aerial circus practice. Karin Knorr Cetina (2005) refers to this idea as an epistemic object. It is through the actions of the aerialist, that the ontology of the epistemic object is created. This again relates to the dynamic dependence and reversibility between the aerialist body and the aerial apparatus. I have relied on PaR to fully comprehend this dependency and dynamic exchange in theory as well as in practice.

Broadly, I recognise that PaR has many parallels with artistic research and other practice-based research forms, for example through the approach which values the process of critical engagement with the subject matter. Vicky Hunter argues that art as research in action requires

critical practice as research, and is the result of ‘sustained embodied knowing, being in the moment: a practice draws from (...) situated knowledge’ (2011, p. 12). Similarly, PaR shifts attention to the knowing over knowledge, which challenges traditional epistemological notions of research.

1.3. THE AERIALIST BODY

I am interested in investigating the subjective experience of the aerialist’s body, moving on aerial apparatus. I am deviating slightly away from the much discussed term ‘the circus body’, as I focus specifically on one type of aerial discipline, and not the wider circus genre. It can be argued that traditionally the aerialist body in performance becomes objectified in favour of spectacle, entertainment and admiration. However, Stine Degerbøl notes that ‘cirkuskroppen er bade privat og offentlig, bade subjekt og objekt’ (2007, p. 2), and that part of the aerialist’s work is to ‘belyse spændingsfeltet mellem som artist at have en egen kropslig oplevelse og samtidig interagere på en særlig måde med sine omgivelser i kraft af sit virke som udøvende artist og dermed i kraft af sin krop’ (2007, p. 5). Degerbøl places the body at the heart of practice, as a sensory communicator of perception and the visceral. My embodied research is moving around this activity of noticing and attuning to my own sensorial experiences of falling in aerial silks. I have been investigating the sensorial responses perceived in the act falling. In aerial silks classes, I have learnt new ways of falling, and focused on understanding each step of the drops. In practice sessions, I have then tried to apply a phenomenological approach to experiencing the fall. Both types of training have been important, as I have needed to comprehend how each drop operates in terms of the wrapping of silks and the order of actions. Only then have I been in a position to hone my attention to the kinaesthetic, sensory experience of falling.

As a contrast to Degerbøl’s view above, I have reflected on Tait’s notion of the circus body as a metaphor for moving over and beyond socio-political freedoms. This, she argues, relates to ‘cultural ideas of circus, reinforced by literature’s imaginary circuses, as well as the historical legacies of the skills of the live circus’ (Tait, 2006, p. 10). This point of view acts as an opponent to established notions, norms and codes. Here, the focus is less on the corporeal aspect of aerial circus, in favour of the socio-political implications. The danger of this notion is the

objectification of the aerialist body as a mere symbol, which denies the aerialist's plasticity and empowerment to form independent aesthetic expressions. Don Handelman notes that historically 'the circus peripheralized the appropriation of the body for statist purposes' (1991, p. 222). The circus body could be seen as a comic imitation of nationalist symbols of muscularity and strength. Handelman further notes that 'to appreciate fully the value of circus bodies, one must see them as one variant of disciplined bodies of modern culture (...) that embodies its own truths, rather than merely complementing those bodies that became mirror-images of dominant social orders' (1991, p. 222). This particular form of tactility - the materiality of the tangible body and the object-status of the aerialist body, is relative to its socio-cultural definitions.

As a contrast to the materiality of the aerialist body stands the ephemerality of aerial circus arts. It is ephemeral both in the sense of the act itself and the mobility of circus. The transient nature of the aerialist body, both in a physical, sensorial and symbolic sense, is inevitable in the aerial act itself and in the traditional constant flux of circus as a moving venture. If the body is shaped by history, as Michel Foucault and other philosophers would argue, the contemporary aerialist body is embedded with symbolic realms of social freedoms, as exercised by 19th century aerialists. Tait responds to an almost Foucauldian juxtaposition, imbued with his disciplining of bodies, between the hard physical labour implicated in the aerialist body's training regime, and the perceived freedom the aerialist body seemed to imply. She asks if aerialists acted as symbols of corporeal freedom, because the discipline, such as aerial silks, transcended its own context. 'The circus appears to exemplify how in the popular imagination the lifestyle of the performers was conflated with the illusion of ease created during performance. The aerial performance could temporarily overthrow ideologies surrounding the body' (Tait, 1996, p. 32). This contrast between the subjectively experienced body of the aerialist, and the perceived, almost sylphide-like figure of the observer, opened a potential for social conventions. 'Aerial acts in particular reversed the social practice of restricting the behaviors of female bodies from explicit demonstrations of physicality' (Tait, 1996, p. 28). Since the 19th century the aerialist body has evolved to a point where it is possible to discuss certain aspects of aerial circus practice, such as the act of falling, without a specifically gendered focus.

1.3.1. MATERIALITY AND CORPOREALITY

The materiality of the aerialist body exists in multiple forms – through thought, body and breath for example. Damkjaer says about these aspects of the trained aerialist that ‘the materialized body is changeable, but not to just any extent, and sometimes only very slowly and over a long time, and the individual artist may have the impression of banging her head against a brick wall, trying to make that body stronger, more flexible and so forth’ (2016, p. 122). Because aerial circus practices require significant strength in order to perform much of the technique, sometimes materiality of thought develops faster than the body. I do not advocate a Cartesian dualism in viewing the materialized body of the aerialist. Instead I note that the knowledge production of aerial vocabulary sometimes moves differently in theoretical and in practical terms. The aerialist’s understanding of spatial and corporeal materiality, affects her sense of embodiment and what Degerbøl described earlier in relation to the aerialist’s own body perception. Knowledge production in aerial circus practices ‘requires an intervention with your own materiality and sensation’ (Damkjaer, 2016, p. 198). Sometimes the theoretical aspects must give way as not to interfere with the non-visual body perception and the body’s inter-orientation with the world – including the aerial apparatus. Aerial circus practices offer a focus on the materiality of the flesh, fluids and folds of the body. This is particularly present in drops. Here, falling creates a shift in awareness towards such (lived) materiality of the body and the environment. The aerialist engages with the material environment (the apparatus) through her own body, and her presence contributes directly to the transformation of space around her.

Returning to the concept of reversibility, corporeality functions as a double notion for the aerialist; of feeling and being felt, of impacting and being influenced. ‘Corporeality does not simply depend on the materiality of the body, but rather on the imagination that stimulates the sensations’ (Unander-Scharin, 2011, p. 97). As the aerialist body inhabits the material environment, the physicality is adapted according to the desired actions. This does not mean that the materiality of the aerialist body is a construct, or it necessarily can be transformed. Instead, I consider it in relation to the connection between corporeality and the aerialist in relation to her surroundings. Anna Kérchy refers to the Semiotician, Paul Bouissac stating that ‘the air is a space of negotiation for the aerialiste (...) which highlights her normally concealed corporeality amidst simulated spectacle and in the air, defying gravity, negotiates space’ (2004, p. 123). The air and the apparatus, as the surrounding environment for the aerialist, act as the influencing factor for the aerialist’s kinaesthetic awareness. Other influencing factors on the

materiality of the aerialist body include transference of weight/weightiness, use of energy, and triggering imagery to form sensations of melting or levitating. Arseli Dokumaci (2013) describes how such factors heighten the awareness of the body and its surroundings. He perceives falling as ‘a disruption of the habitual; falling as a negotiation of physical obstacles’ (2013, p. 107). As the aerialist drops she is interrupting the familiarity of her vertical axis.

1.3.2. TACTILITY, PROPRIOCEPTION AND KINESTHESIA

When falling in aerial circus practices, the aerialist must utilise both proprioceptive and exteroceptive awareness to sense and interpret her actions and the behaviour of the silks. As argued by Tait (2005) amongst others, the aerialist perceives and is perceived mainly through the tactile and visual senses. Parviainen highlights the tactile sense in describing the motility of the body. ‘Instead of categorising motility as tactility, we might say that we have a kinaesthetic sense. Since the kinaesthetic sense belongs to the synesthetic body, the lived movement is immanent to the exercise of each of our senses, vision, hearing, tactility, taste and smelling’ (1998, p 45). In this case, the lived movement is the falling through air on aerial apparatus. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, Tait states that ‘a body in action can create sensory spaces that momentarily enter ‘opaque zones’’ (2005, p. 147). The opaque zones that the aerialist forms, produce the sensory exchanges, mainly visual and tactile. It also offers a weaving in and out of reflective spaces for the aerialist.

Generally, when practicing on aerial silks, the aerialist’s perceptual knowledge of her environment (her relation to the apparatus) is enriched through her sensitive and conscious engagement of both proprioception and interoception. The aerialist attunes to both visual and tactile sensations to climb, wrap, turn etc. When falling, regardless if the head is up or down, the proprioceptive awareness is challenged. In aerial silks, the head often becomes the lowest part of the body during the drop. The aerialist body moves in a constant flux between climbing, pulling, wrapping, twisting, holding, and releasing. This relies on the tactile knowledge and plasticity or adaptability, to catch and recover in correct ways.

1.3.3. BODY MEMORY

As previously stated, I am investigating intentional falls and not the accidental kinds. In either case, the aerialist body relates to muscle memory and habits, acquired or instinctive. In the act of falling, the body finds connections between space and body memory of past falls. Lilja (2004) describes movement in general as memory of the body. Each fall in aerial is an extension of past experiences of the same or similar acts on the apparatus.

Dianne Chisholm describes an example of how a climber utilises her body memory. ‘After kicking off from the top belay, Hill found herself falling. Yet she did not abandon intentionality. Her habit-body saved her’ (2008, p. 23). I have discovered through PaR that this intentionality builds up over a long period of time. In drops, it seems there are certain, functional, stages the aerialist must pass through, before being able to examine the sensational experiences of falling. I had to get familiar with drops and understand how to best set up the preparatory configurations, what body parts to tense or release, where to feel the pressure, where to push or pull more etc. Then I was able to focus on the sensorial experience. There might be a conflict here between visceral memory and phenomenological method. The aerialist has a store of previous visceral experiences of falling and the tactility thereof. This sits in seemingly sharp opposition to phenomenological approach, which attempts to steer away from previous experiences of the same phenomena. However, in order to be able to analyse falling on aerial silks phenomenologically, the aerialist must have a certain level of experience of falling, at least if wanting to explore falling through long, virtuosic drops. The visceral experiences are thus fundamental for a phenomenological analysis thereof.

1.4. THE ACT OF FALLING

Falling as concrete, physical phenomena is open to a multitude of metaphorical connotations and idioms. Albright notes that falling ‘crosses over literal and metaphorical states of being in the world’ (2013, p. 36). This initial introduction to falling is centred around the physical act of falling by performing drops on the aerial apparatus. In the subsequent chapters, I will discuss these initial findings in a more comparative analysis.

From a linguistic perspective, the Latin and Germanic meaning of falling might have connotations to shame and failure. Within the visual arts, especially from the Renaissance to

the Baroque period, falling became more prominently figured for what it is, as opposed to levitating angels or other figures. In literature falling men have often been described as metaphorical characters who sought heavenly heights and fell as a consequence. The linguistic connection to failure is again present, and falling is seen as a somewhat shameful act caused by excessive pride or a desire to transcend human confinements. In the 19th century, the aerialist represented this kind of state in literary works, by comparing aerial circus practices with metaphysical states of transcendence. ‘To create out of the flying performer an abstract divinity who can hover between worlds, defy rational epistemologies, transcend gender norms, and abrogate moral categories’ (Fox, 2016, p. 79). Perhaps this was how the notion of the aerialist as superhuman was created; By reinstating that the act of falling was the result of failing to fly or somehow go beyond what was humanly possible – rather than an intentional act in itself.

In the 20th century the act of falling became part of the avant-garde movement. Charlie Fox (2013) refers to avant-garde artists such as Danil Kharm, when he writes about their search for the real or true art practice. ‘It is in this practice that the hopes, promises and ideals of the mainstream avant-garde, now hopelessly destroyed and shattered, still have the potential for re-ignition. In a concrete or metaphorical sense? In the genuineness and fullness of their practice’ (Fox, 2013, p. 65). Falling renders itself part of an avant-garde expression as the very nature of that expression sought to destabilize existing traditions. Falling, at the time, was not a common feature in art, and was a way to produce new meaning. As avant-garde art often included ‘happenings’, falling was an obvious form of movement. ‘Avant-garde art in the sixties and seventies was characterized by the use of extra-artistic objects (including the human body), accentuating their materiality and objectification, and was also characterized as pure representation’ (Battock et al, 1984, p. 8). Partly due to kinaesthetic empathy, the human body falling through the air was, and is, a strong image. Viewers relate to the sensation of falling kinaesthetically and perhaps also emotively.

As I will discuss in the following chapter, falling practices of such 20th century artists, touch upon the same principles as Heidegger took to be the cornerstones of true, authentic living: To be living on the edge with one’s senses highly alert. In other genres of philosophy, falling can also denote an opportunistic form of insight. Kant for example perceived falling as an important part of human nature in fact. Andrew Hewitt notes that ‘Kantian peripatetic pedagogy (...) accepts falling as one of the processes whereby mankind will learn to walk’ (2004, p. 79).

Somatic practitioners have often used the analogy of the steps of a walk as a mini fall in itself. Falling thus becomes a precondition to be able to walk. That could open up a wider discussion on the act of walking in relation to falling, which is for another academic paper.

From a dance perspective, Claid and Allsopp (2013) describe falling as a movement between two places involving uncertainty, risk and exhilaration. They argue that contemporary dance, physical theatre, live art, and somatic practices support awareness and transparency of falling in art as well as outside of art. This encourages a relationship between the body and the ground, and a sense of letting go and recovering. Falling also has connotations to flying. Perhaps it is possible to fall upwards? Within dance as an art form, postmodern dance was a major instigator of falling choreographically and generally as a part of dance practice.

Albright describes the act of falling as ‘a state of being suspended between earth and air, the finite and the infinite’ (2010, p. 21). This uncertainty occurs when the aerialist hands over control to gravity. In particular the notion of being between finite and infinite is interesting in falling on aerial silks. The action involves a certain amount of specific manipulations of the apparatus, before the aerialist body can release into the infinite air.

As established, the etymology of falling has a double meaning. Heidegger, as described by Akers, distinguished between two kinds of falling; the verb/noun: to fall/a fall as a physical action. ‘Falling is a culmination of a series of a matter of time and being – arising and standing’ (2015, p. 81). And the symbolic and metaphoric form of falling associated with decay and failure and so forth, arguably the condition of Western metaphysical attitudes. ‘This fall is always the co-determining structure of a continuing decision upon the way that Western thinking set upon from its inception, as the oblivion of being’ (Akers, 2015, p. 84). On the ground, one must assume some sort of vertical position to have something to fall from, as there is not far from the top of the head to the ground. In aerial circus practices the aerialist can be in any position when she falls. She has a lot of slack from the apparatus, which enables falling for longer. Before the fall, she is already suspended above ground.

Importantly, there is a big difference between free falls and controlled falls. In free falls the body releases, only to be caught somewhere and somehow on the apparatus. In controlled falls, in aerial circus practices, as well as other body-based art forms, the fall tends to be slower and

seem more like a lowering, melting or placing. Mabel Todd writes that ‘actors and acrobats learn to fall under control, giving way at each joint until the fall is complete’ (1938, p. 202). However, what I term ‘free’ falls in aerial, are never quite free. The body will always be somehow wrapped in the equipment. Actual free falls as experienced in for example skydiving and paragliding, provide a different equipmental fall whereby no strings are attached. Here the body plummets through the void, more untamed than in aerial silks. When falling on aerial silks the aerialist’s sense of verticality, and her horizontal placement of body and apparatus is challenged.

Aerial circus arts, like any other movement-based art form, is ephemeral. The moment the movement or trick has been exercised, it is gone and in the past. In drops on aerial silks the ephemeral state is even more apparent due to the speed of the falls. In the ascent prior to the drop, the aerialist has a sense of placement in relation to own body parts, to the apparatus and to the external framework of the space in which she moves. In the descending fall it becomes more difficult determine those external surrounding factors. The focus might shift to a sense of the extremities and the aerialist’s own physical vitality in terms of the agility of the drop. Thus her body’s responsiveness to the external framework loses its focus.

1.4.1. SENSORIAL EXPERIENCES OF FALLING IN AERIAL CIRCUS PRACTICES

As mentioned, one of the main reasons for using PaR, is that I would not have access to these first-hand sensorial experiences, through any other method than by actively and practically doing it myself. Reading about other aerialists’ experiences offer a secondary understanding of the phenomena and lack the sensorial information I get by doing it myself. Carrying out embodied research alongside phenomenological and other theoretical research, has allowed me to better understand the cross-connections, as well as each research method in detail. Here, Damkjaer’s notion of the professional circus amateur is useful to consider. She refers to professor Marjorie Garber and her notions of the amateur professional and the professional amateur in humanistic research. She states that this concept embraces ‘the heterogeneous meeting between the human body, the texture of the rope, and the conditions imposed by gravity in the vertical space it opens. It is a form of thinking based on the sensual encounters of materiality, which trigger specific problems and questions’ and it questions the relation between

biological matter and bodies' constructions, and between matter and meaning' (2016, p. 192). Damkjaer strives to 'engage in the performing arts as an embodied being with all my senses (...) this embodied engagement or invested sensorium as one of my tools, in order to try to analyse and understand the phenomena of physical and performative practices' (2016, p. 16). The sensorial information I try to decipher when falling on aerial apparatus, act as a field of investigation in itself as well as tools to understand surrounding aspects of the research. Tait terms this heightened awareness of bodily sensations 'sensory catching' (2005, p. 149). This knowledge production is informed and influenced by theoretical and philosophical disciplines, cultural formations and so forth.

According to Heidegger, sensory information is not a viable source for understanding truth, perhaps extended to authenticity and actuality. Instead he sees it as an indirect route, which requires understanding of related concepts. Although I initially disagree, it is useful to reflect upon. One of the biggest research obstacles, has been to shape and conduct the tangible as well as the ephemeral experiences. The tangibility of aerial circus practices is the tactile sensations of moving on apparatus. In this context it has been useful to practice some of the same or similar drops on rope as I do on aerial silks. The two apparatuses share similarities in the usage of it, but differ in the felt sensations of moving on, in and around it. The buoyancy and smoothness of the silks can also become tight and twisted when wrapped around the aerialist body. The rope, which comes in different varieties, can feel robust and rigid for certain movements, and offer a lot of reverberations for others.

The tangible materiality of the apparatus in contact with the aerialist body, blends in with the ephemeral experiences of falling on, with and through the equipment.

In aerial circus practices, the aerialist is able to produce modalities of bodily existence, transferable off the apparatus. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the aesthesiological body (a concept derived from Husserl) has elements, which the aerialist can cultivate in her practice. To describe the term, aesthesiological body, I draw on Chisholm's description which 'signify the cohesive orchestration of synesthesia, kinesthesia, and body-world symbiosis (2008, p. 32). The aerialist body, like the climbing body Chisholm uses as an example, works on a vertical axis on which it is both affecting and being affected by the silks.

In some drops on aerial silks, the sensation becomes akin to levitation, suspension and floating of the body in the void. In others, as plummeting towards earth, giving in to gravitational pulls.

The notion of the aesthesiological body is employed to describe the corporeal experiences of practicing on aerial silks. The tactile sense, employed in sensing the contact between oneself and the apparatus, intertwines with the vision, so that we see the contact with the apparatus and feel where we need to place hands and other limbs on the apparatus.

In the aerialist body's symbiotic relationship with the aerial apparatus, up and down become elongated directions of opportunities for movement. The materiality encountered is a meeting between the flesh of the human body and the pliability of the aerial silks. When the aerialist climbs the silks she is no longer just a body with air surrounding her. She is a body in relation to a non-human material, which must be worked with in order to create movement. The image is not of a body in space, but of a body producing meaning, informed by the apparatus. The aerialist's sense of her own body, is largely constituted by her sensory capacity. Roth notes that 'without the material senses, there would be no ideality that we call sense. Sense is irremediably connected with and indissociable from our living (primary) bodies with senses' (2012, p. 11). Without the apparatus, the aerialist would not have the same access to this kind of material sense which Roth mentions. The tangibility of the apparatus enables a sensory response.⁴

1.4.2. GRAVITY, FLOW AND MOMENTUM

What goes up must come down. At least if that object or that body is on planet earth. 'Falling is a planetary phenomenon, or at the very least, a matter of gravity' (Akers, 2015, p. 78). Gravity (from *gravitas*) and levity (from *levitas*) describe the qualities of heaviness or lightness in objects or subjects such as the aerialist, which determines movement. Damkjaer (2015) notes that through her aerial circus practice, she has gained a heightened awareness of gravity, even when she is not working at height. She feels more grounded when she has descended from aerial work. In certain drops on aerial silks, the acceleration can be aided and is desirable for a

⁴ It is worth noting the relevance of this body-world symbiosis in relation to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological term *chiasmus*. By *chiasmus* I denote a unity between being perceived and perceiving as intertwined. I.e. wrapping the silks around the aerialist body, and the aerialist body being wrapped up in the silks. This concept will not be discussed specifically, as it would require a separate chapter.

successful fall. In other drops, acceleration is not desired, if the focus is on controlling falling. Whatever the fall, gravity ensures that the aerialist will always fall towards the ground.

Using the momentum generated on silks can help create a successful fall, but it also aids the sensorial experiences, especially tactilely. Falling incorporates agility and speed, and an ability to synchronise the aerialist body in a synthesis of body and apparatus. Breivik describes an example from skydiving, transferable to falling on aerial silks, which exudes similar sensations of anxiety and adrenalized joy. ‘The body and its physiological systems are running on high and the brain is flooded by substances like adrenalin, endorphins, serotonin and cortisol’ (2010, p. 36). Falling on aerial silks, although considerably shorter than in skydiving, can produce similar hormones, evoking joy, happiness and excitement. Symbolically, the fall exposes the aerialist to vulnerability and fragility – human conditions, which are recognised in multiple contexts. The working height for the aerialist may contribute to this context.

Depending on the venue aerialists might work at three to four metres height in small-scale settings, or 30-40 metres height in large-scale outdoor performance work (in harnessed work). Regardless of the height, practicing and performing aerial, offers some kind of excitement, adrenalin-kick or flow for the aerialist.

Breivik’s term, in relation to Heideggerian research on skydiving, ‘high sensation seekers’ denote people who seek ‘strong stimulation and challenges and are more willing than others to take risks (...) They are willing to (...) lose control and thus expose themselves to anxiety’ (Breivik, 2010, p. 40). This anxiety may translate to an ecstatic condition, also known as flow.

In the experience of falling, no linguistic aspect is required to understand the phenomena. Roth describes Heidegger’s notion of these experiences as moments where ‘we are completely absorbed in something or in experiences that nowadays are denoted by the expressions of ‘being in the flow’, ‘being in the groove (...) we lose any notion of time: *precisely* because we do not represent *it* or the situation’ (2012, p. 13). Building on from Roth’s comment about ‘being in the flow’, it is relevant to refer to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s 1970’s concept thereof. Flow denotes optimal experiences in which awareness, enjoyment and engagement is heightened. In phenomenological accounts of the physical act of falling on aerial apparatus, Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘flow’ concept is highly apt. One of the differences, however, lie in the consciousness of the aerialist, or experiencer otherwise. Whereas the flow theory describes consciousness as harmoniously falling in to place, falling physically from a phenomenological

point of view, surrenders into a more purposefully unconscious state of being.

What flow theory and experiences of falling on aerial silks share, is a high level of challenge and dexterity required to execute the experience at hand. In order to get to the specific types of drops in aerial silks I am studying, a certain level of skill is required in preparation. The higher level of dexterity of the aerialist, the more advanced and complex types of drops, and therefore more intricate falling, can be obtained. Lauren Bracey lists some common features of flow experiences which correspond to falling in aerial too. These include ‘challenging activities that require skills; require the participant to engage all of her awareness in her actions; give clear goals and feedback; require concentration on the task at hand; involve a sense of control of the situation; cause participants to lose self-consciousness; and cause time to transform, so that minutes seem to last for hours and hours are gone in a flash’ (2010, p. 11). Falling in aerial circus practices shares these kinds of self-perpetuating outcomes through the agility required to be able to fall.

The sensorial experience of catching oneself in a drop, having successfully accomplished all prior steps, is akin to the kinaesthetic sensation of recovering from a suspension in contemporary dance. Whereas recovering in dance requires exact timing from the dancer at the very end of the suspension, the fall in aerial circus practices requires pre-set fixations of the apparatus to ensure a safe landing. How the aerialist executes the catching action at the end is a culmination of her body’s natural intelligence (or to some extent, corporeal intuition), and, to a higher degree, former experience of how to fall and catch efficiently. The body absorbs the fall in a controlled manner after tipping over or tumbling in whichever direction the weight of the body leads.

Artists such as Steve Paxton who experimented with throwing and catching in contact improvisation; Elizabeth Streb whose dancers launch and plummet into the air – often to avoid equipment rather than work with it; and La La La Human Steps – in particular Louise Lecavalier’s athletic, fearless releasing of her body, are all representing, and experiencing similar sensorial impetus.

1.5. RISK AND FREEDOM

Lastly, I will touch very briefly on the notion of risk in relation to falling in aerial circus practices, notably with regards to intentional falling, and not accidental falls caused by loss of balance. Falling in drops exposes the aerialist body to frailty, a moment of willingly handing over control to gravity, before regaining it in the catch below. Amy Sharrocks states that ‘falling deals in the precariousness of life (...) it invites the risk into our fragile bodies’ (2013, p. 48). The contrast between the corporeal aerialist body and the rigid structure of the apparatus becomes even more apparent, and challenges old misconceptions of aerialists as super-humans, flying in the big top circus. Falling offers a juxtaposition between the highly dynamic forces of downward pulls and the aerialist body, which surrenders to just that. Sharrock describes the initial step of falling as ‘contemplating the drop. Preparing your mind and body to accept and allow in the fear, risk and potential for pain’ (2013, p. 48). There is, however, also a certain freedom in surrendering the body to uncertainty, because the aerialist knows she has securely ensured the landing at the end.

‘The most miraculous Victorian acrobats were those who best suppressed their potential falls from grace even as this potential undergirded the excitement of the shows’ (Fox, 2016, p. 82). In other words, the better the aerialist was at disguising plausible falls, the higher the rate of audience enjoyment. Fox mentions Jules Leótard as an example of someone whose ‘skill allows audiences to enjoy a frisson of danger without dwelling on the potential for danger to become real’ (2016, p.83). Similarly, when asked about the level of risk involved in his acts, the high-wire walker, Philippe Pétit stated that there was none. If he deemed it risky, he would not step onto the high-wire. In my case, risk is less present physically, and exists more within the mental part of falling for the aerialist. Danger would be more relevant to investigate in a performance context in which the meaning of risk is reinvigorated as a spectacle.

On the other side of fear, you will always find freedom, an un-authored quote says. The risks associated with free falls and aerial dynamic movement also offer the sensation of freedom – kinetically and perhaps also viscerally. Sondra Fraleigh notes that ‘freedom is functional, not an abstraction. It is a grace we realise in action and experience bodily’ (2000b, p. 9). Might freedom be the goal or result of the falling then?

Where the acts of equilibrists on high-wire may serve as symbols of physical risks in society, or even defying those social norms, aerial silks artists work between dependency and independence. The bodily freedom achieved in falling on aerial silks act as sensorial risky aerial acts, due to the, at times, dramatic effects it creates. From a physical perspective, however, freedom is always contingent on the aerial silks. The aerialist is never ‘free as a bird’, but instead constructs sensations of freedom through bodily experiences.

Tait notes that whilst the transience of circus initially created a social escapism, circus acts themselves, such as drops on aerial silks, almost exaggerated the representation thereof. ‘The tantalizing appeal of the circus performer depended on maintaining an illusion of unrestricted physical freedom in performance’ (1996, p. 27). Perhaps this element of escapism prevails. Nevertheless, beyond the physical sensations of freedom experienced in the act of falling on aerial silks, it might offer metaphoric freedoms of defying gravity, if only for a fleeting moment.

CHAPTER 2. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO FALLING

2.1. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, the issues addressed so far will be considered from a phenomenological perspective. Firstly, a brief overview of the specific phenomenological aspects is presented, with particular references to Heidegger's phenomenological work on falling. Hereafter falling will be discussed from Heidegger's general phenomenological standpoint, which opens up a discussion about wider implications and considerations for falling – physically and conceptually. This chapter's closing remarks address the ontology of falling in aerial circus practices, in relation to the aforementioned philosophical inquests.

Following on from the overview of phenomenological considerations from the introduction, I will expand on the reasons for choosing a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology has experience at its core as the source of descriptive analysis. At first glance, Heidegger's notion of falling stands in sharp juxtaposition to the physical sensation thereof. However, through comparison and contrast I will discuss how these different notions of the fall might offer new perspectives on the action as well as the academic notion thereof.

Although I will not enter a deep discussion about phenomenology, it is worth noting that as I concern myself with Heidegger specifically, my research leans towards existential phenomenology. This field occupied Heidegger, along with Simone de Beauvoir and male counterparts such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Paul Sartre amongst others. Their existential phenomenological studies share the standpoint that being in the world, as we see and know it, is primarily conditioned by others (Fraleigh, 1991). In this specific context I am interested in the subject (aerialist), being in the world with the aerial apparatus, as the 'other(s)'. I am aware of potentially over-simplifying Heidegger's theoretical works on falling, by only bringing in certain parts of his terminology. However, I have done so in order to enable a more specific discussion, which will be contextualised in the final chapter. Certain phenomenological terms, elements and concepts will not be discussed, including Heidegger's distinctions between the ontological and ontic, the Falling Being-in-the-World as tranquilizing, alienating or tempting, angst (as a disruption to falling), theology, entanglement of Dasein itself and other aspects which could have been included.

Phenomenology requires immediate experience as an initiator for experiential analysis. The act of falling is an extreme version of immediate experience. Similar to jumping from a cliff to the sea, once the jump has taken place, inevitably the falling motion will happen and cannot be humanly stopped, paused, or reversed. In this thesis, phenomenology is used in two ways; to formulate layers of meaning condensed in the experience of falling through an alternative perspective; and as an experimental contrasting analysis, using Heidegger's philosophical notion of falling in relation to falling in aerial circus practices. A phenomenologist is concerned with studying experience as if experiencing the particular phenomena for the first time, each time. I have tried to take this approach in the PaR by bracketing my preconceptions about the fall in a drop, and instead settling my preconceptions about the catching at the end of the fall. By bracketing, I am initially referring to Husserl's concept of phenomenological reduction, which alludes to 'take reflection, via a step back, prior to any ideas or presuppositions related to the phenomena that present themselves' (Akers, 2015, p.1). The foundation for this paper is experiential and engages with phenomenological principles of the pre-reflective, non-judgemental aerialist body.

Fraleigh (1991) notes that the researcher's individual subjectivity is influenced and informed by the surrounding world – in this case the aerial apparatus. The level of subjectivity in existential phenomenology allows for irrationality. It acknowledges that no phenomenological study of experience will ever be completely without bias, but instead attempts to enter the experience irrationally and with an open mind.

Although I may not have wholly succeeded in completely disregarding any preconceptions of the experience to come, the dynamic pace of falling during the drop itself helps to avoid it. Because the fall happens at such high speed and intensity of velocity, it has been more accessible to disregard judgements about how it might be experienced, as opposed to researching another phenomenon in aerial circus practices, which happens at lower speed⁵. Fraleigh (1991) states that true phenomenology is without direction because the focus is centered around the present moment and further temporal changes. First and foremost, it should be a tool to access consciousness, and thereafter as an analytical tool with which to develop philosophical perspectives. Phenomenology as a philosophical framework for understanding the body and its action, has been criticised, much like psychoanalysis, for framing female

⁵ For example the actions of climbing, spinning or transitioning in between static positions

corporeality inadequately, because the male is placed as the norm. In this thesis, I try to study the phenomena and the context surrounding it, without any gender biases or gender-related discourses. This is a complex issue, which has not been my focus, and which would need a treatment of its own.

2.1.2. HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY

Beyond his writings about the phenomenological notion of falling, Heidegger's theory is interesting from the point of view of his relation to art. He believed in art for art's sake and that artworks should speak for themselves. For him, art is meaningful in itself, full of connotations and semiotics, and without necessarily requiring a tangent referent. In general phenomenology, art is perceived to give substance to existence by absorbing textures, meanings, and 'motions of a perishable body existence' (Fraleigh, 1991, p. 11).

Parviainen (1998) notes that Heidegger's view on dance and choreography, which translates to aerial circus arts and other bodily based art forms too, is that it can reveal aspects of the world through its bodily movement. 'This ontology of the dance as an artwork installs the lived body as the source and the core of the dance as a work of art, capable of bringing forth meanings of the world through movements' (1998, p. 19). The meaning appears in the moment of the movement, such as the fall. It would here be relevant to lead into a discussion about Gestalt theory and semiotics, but I will suffice to mention the correlation, and continue with Heidegger's phenomenology. Sally Ann Ness (2004) notes that in relation to Heidegger's thinking, 'embodied practice is encouraging a more authentic awareness of temporality than the observationally weighted approaches tend to do' (2004, p. 142). Phenomenology thus presents itself as the obvious research framework through which to study the embodied experience of falling on aerial circus, as it can open up to studying internal experiences, without becoming over-indulgent. Because the focus remains on the phenomenon itself, it can be studied without prior references to philosophical or scientific ideologies.

Parviainen (1998) states how Heidegger's reference to art does not imply a proposition of correctness or representational art. He was interested in how art might reveal certain truths. 'In depicting some being or beings, a work reveals the truth of the whole of those beings by opening

up the world while re-posing it in the earth' (Parviainen, 1988, pp. 146-147). The artwork addresses the artist and viewer through the world as they know it. Is it then possible to relate to Heidegger's notion of art when discussing phenomena of falling in aerial circus practices? Parviainen, writing about another corporeal art form, namely contemporary dance, notes that 'Heidegger's conception of art is based on the idea that the work of art is a 'thing', not a living 'thing' like the human body, but it has an inorganic character' (1998, p. 147). Heidegger did not directly include performing arts in his notion of art works. Nevertheless, I argue that the falling phenomena might be perceived as the material of the art work itself.

2.1.3. TACIT KNOWLEDGE

Another aspect of Heidegger's phenomenology, applicable to aerial circus practices, is his view on tacit knowledge as un-conceptualised knowledge. Heidegger perceived tacit knowledge as skills obtained and acquired practically through habituation – the production of meaning through movement. Parviainen prefers the term, bodily knowledge, over tacit knowledge in her phenomenological discussion, because 'bodily knowledge refers more specifically to knowing in and through the body which has a direct connection to bodily awareness and perception. Bodily knowledge concerns all kinds of movement skills which we have acquired in everyday life or by active study' (Parviainen, 1998, p. 51). Both terms denote a focus on body sensitivity, which exists in the aerialist's sensitising to the fall as she drops through the air. She employs both kinaesthetic sense and motility in experiencing and manoeuvring her body during the fall.

Returning to Heidegger's view on art, this notion of tacit knowledge is interesting in relation to the connections between the artist (the aerialist), the art work (falling) and art form (aerial circus). Parviainen describes his thought process like this: 'The work of art is dependent upon its creator, but also the creator is dependent upon the work. The work makes the artist, for only the work lets the artist appear as the master of her/his art. The artist is the origin of the work and the work is the origin of the artist' (1998, p. 143). The art work (falling on aerial silks) as the making process, presents a tension between the aerialist body and the apparatus. This brings me back to my point in the previous chapter about symbiotic relationships between aerialist and silks. The additional layer to this symbiotic relationship is the surrounding space of the aerialist

and silks, the air. This interdependency between the aerialist and the apparatus, allows art, or physical movement, to arise as a focal point. It is worth noting that the reference to Heidegger's views on art are slightly simplified here, and, as Parviainen notes, his 'philosophy of art and art work is provisional, incomplete and in many respects still ambiguous' (1998, p. 144). The most pertinent aspect thereof is the dependency and dialogue between the aerialist, her apparatus and the space, or void, surrounding her in the fall.

2.2. PHENOMENOLOGICAL FALLING

Falling phenomenologically, in Heidegger's terms, relates to time, which will be described later in this chapter. I will open this perspective with a quote from Fraleigh who notes that Heidegger 'describes time as belonging to the totality of being (...) He chose the vulnerable image of *falling* to describe the lived dimension of present time. Falling is both a movement and a symbol of our existential mode of being-in-the-world (1991, p. 11). This last sentence resonates, as I am studying falling as a physical movement, as well as from a philosophical perspective, in which falling might become somewhat a metaphor. Paul Virilio has argued that falling is not a metaphor because it cannot escape gravitational forces, but is bound by the dynamics of the planet (Bakke, 2006). The actual understanding of falling may overlap across physicality and phenomenology. I argue that falling can be perceived as an act of all things above; the lived dimension of present time, a physical movement, a symbol and a metaphor.

Bakke proposes another interesting contrast, namely the necessity of verticality for falling to take place in general terms versus falling in aerial circus practices, which does not require the aerialist to be on a vertical axis. The latter normally relies on a wrapped configuration instead, and the release thereof is what triggers the fall. Bakke suggests a 'verticality derived from the omnipresent experience of falling' (2006, p. 12). The universal experience she describes accounts for humans (aerialists) but also objects. In other words, she describes the unavoidable gravitational pull, which affects both objects and subjects. Bakke further defines falling from a vertical place, shifting from grounded to ungrounded movement, in which the air does not affect the body falling much. In aerial circus practices the aerialist is already ungrounded when the fall takes place. She *is* affected by the air as she plummets through it, feeling it brushing her skin or affecting the placement of the apparatus.

The general colloquial perception of existence as falling is not about Christian morals or dogmatism of fallenness of humans. Instead, falling, in Heidegger's sense of the word, is the ontological concept of movement. 'What is it to fall, and how does the phenomenological approach to this question lend toward a critical yet constructive revision of the fall itself?' (Akers, 2015, p. 73). Akers's question forms the basis for the remaining part of this chapter, but specifically in relation to the aerial circus practices of falling. What is it to fall on aerial apparatus and how can we understand the physical fall through a phenomenological approach? Parviainen argues that we will never quite understand the body to a full extent, but that phenomenology provides a tool to shed light on certain aspects thereof, such as the falling motion. 'In so far as I live the body, it is *a phenomenon* experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon and perspective which places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible' (1998, p. 33). In this phenomenological perspective, the aerialist body is an embodied subject in itself, acting in response to the aerial apparatus worked on.

2.2.1. FALLING IN BEING AND TIME

Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) (*B&T*), which was published nearly 90 years ago, is a phenomenological analysis of the human situation in relation to falling, amongst other phenomena. Previously the work was perceived as philosophy of existence (Pattison, 2000), but actually the work is more akin to fundamental ontology. *B&T* questions 'being' in the context of positivism and multiple modes of falling. I find the context of *B&T* relevant in terms of falling in aerial circus practices, because it attributes significant value to sensory experience in the process of knowledge production and meaning making. I will be referring to Heidegger's term, Dasein, in relation to the aerialist. Dasein is in short Heidegger's ontological naming for (a hu)man, or the nature of being. There are three elements of Dasein's being; existence, facticity and falling⁶. I will focus on the latter, and transpose its everyday-context to that of aerial circus practices, in asking the question: Is it possible to discuss the existential determination of Dasein's falling as the conscious drops by the aerialist in aerial circus practices?

⁶ Falling is also part of Heidegger's care structure, which further includes understanding, state of mind and discourse.

I am going to focus on one aspect of *B&T*, namely falling; the ontological-existential framework for being-in-the-world. More explicitly, Heidegger's falling in *B&T* can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. One example is from Béatrice Han-Pile who states that in this publication, the action of falling represents 'the movement by which Dasein seeks to hide from its ontological lack of essence by covering it up with ontical identities and roles' (2005, p. 100). William Blattner, writing in the same anthology as Han-Pile, describes falling in *B&T* as 'Dasein's tendency to *fall away from* authenticity and *onto* the world of its mundane concerns in fleeing from the anxiety of a confrontation with death' (2005, p. 313) and also offers an alternative reading as 'Dasein's essential *encounter with* and *absorption in* non-human things in the course of pursuing its possibilities' (2005, p. 313). Common for both descriptions is the context; a correlated complex of lived space- and time, in which the movements (and other actions) of the body express and experience. In this context, using Heidegger's terminology as a reference point, I find some of Blattner's version useful. The reason for enjoyment of the fall in aerial circus practices is individual from aerialist to aerialist. Part of the reason might reside in the excitement of falling away from control, the physical sensations of feeling the grip of the silks loosening as it is released, only to catch again at the end of the fall.

Falling inevitably involves a downward plunge and perhaps turbulent movement. Nonetheless, falling is not necessarily a negative concept or value judgment of moral evaluation in phenomenology. In fact, Akers argues that 'falling is an essentially positive structure in this major sense' (2015, p. 73). It indicates a constitutive structure of Dasein's being, similarly to uncoveredness and other Heideggerian concepts. The constitutive elements become apparent in Dasein's constant pull towards falling, whether it is fleeing threat or itself, as Heidegger would describe the essential ontological structure or framework.

It is now established that Heidegger perceived falling as a fundamental characteristic of Dasein, and in fact is what constitutes its 'everydayness' - the natural behaviour. Falling on aerial silks, however, is not a given experience as it requires specific skillsets. Therefore, the intentionality of the aerialist falling on aerial silks as opposed to a fall in an everyday context will differ. The aerial circus practice is always carried out with particular qualitative attention towards the aesthetics of the art form – even in practice sessions without a direct performative aspect attached to it. One reason might reside in the purpose. Everyday movement practices such as cycling or walking for example might be done with the purpose of getting from A to B and the function is thus transportation. Other movement practices yet are more habitual, and draw

directly on the aerialist's tacit knowledge in completing them, such as yawning when going to bed at night, and stretching the body when walking up in the morning. In aerial circus practices, the aerialist negotiates between her somewhat aesthetically influenced intentionality and the perceived action of her movements. The aerialist is embodying motion, aiming to reach a pure state of presence, what Fraleigh describes aptly as 'a radiant power of feeling completely present to myself and connected to the world' (1991, p. 13).

Before I bring these concepts into a contextual discussion, I will introduce one more part of Heidegger's terminology. Falling is discussed in division one and the related term, fallenness is introduced in division two of *B&T*. The fallenness (*verfallen*) of *Dasein* is not a fall from a primordial, perhaps hierarchical status. Fallenness is structural unownedness, and, like falling, also a structural element of Heidegger's being-in-the-world. Philosophically, in the act of falling *Dasein* is an object from which it has already fallen away. The focus of fallenness, however, is the movement of falling. It is the 'motivated results of *Dasein*'s temptation to "flee" from its own nullity in the face of anxiety' (Wrathall et al, 2000, p. 14). There is an ambiguity to the term fallenness as it is in existence due to *Dasein* fleeing from anxiety. I will bring these considerations back later in this chapter in relation to phenomenological risk and freedom.

2.3. INTERSUBJECTIVITY: AERIALIST AND APPARATUS

To understand how falling affects the aerialist, we need to first comprehend the environment in which the aerialist operates, i.e. with the aerial apparatus. This simplifies the phenomenological thinking to some extent. Nonetheless, it is useful in discussing the otherwise two very distinct discourses – sensorial, physical experience; and the theoretical, phenomenological perspective. Put simply, *Dasein* represents a being-in-the-world conditioned by relations to- and influences by other subjects (aerialists) and objects (apparatus). The relationships between these configurations are built on a mutual understanding. This mutual understanding can be explained as kinaesthetic empathy and tactile perception between the aerialist and the apparatus.

I propose to view Breivik's description of Heidegger's two modes of being as described in *B&T*, humans and things, in relation to aerial circus practices as the aerialist and her apparatus. This parallel becomes useful in Breivik's description that 'things are primarily and most of the time

met, not as pure objects but as equipment (...) available for use for different purposes. This instrumental aspect of things is more basic than their objective characteristics, which come in focus only when we passively stare at them, describe them, decompose them into parts and analyze them as de-contextualized objects' (2010, p. 31). Heidegger's notion of equipment is something that is used in order to fulfil a given task. Certain aerial apparatuses have specific connotations with the circus tradition, such as the trapeze (both static, swinging and flying), whereas other kinds of apparatus present themselves as more context-neutral and unclassified pieces of equipment. This is the case with Chinese pole and rope for example, due to their simplicity in appearance. A rope can fulfil many other functions and tasks in any other context. It is the vertical hanging thereof, which lends itself to circus practices. For the aerialist, her understanding of her own subjectivity is made possible due to her relation with other aerialists, as well as her apparatus. The intersubjectivity created is therefore corporeal and, to some extent, cultural, but not linguistically applicable as is the case in many other intersubjective relations.

Falling is a common, almost primary human experience. 'It would be almost impossible to overestimate how deeply the notions of gravity, and of verticality as well, have influenced culture as it has evolved on the Earth's surface. We live on a specific planet with a specific force of gravity that shapes the conditions of our existence' (Bakke, 2006, pp. 12-13). The notion of verticality, however, loses its original meaning when studying falling in aerial circus practices and other gravity-refining experiences, such as skydiving. These practices are similar, yet very distinct. Falling in aerial circus practices is controlled by carefully constructed configurations of the apparatus, whereas skydiving offers a more direct meeting with the air. In both cases, gravity both enables and conditions the leap into the void. The aerialist, like any human being, cannot truly escape or transcend gravity by resisting it, despite traditional depictions of aerialists as super-humans who defy gravity. The aerialist too has no choice but to fall when being in a gravitational field. To resist it requires constant effort, which at the end wears out. Taylor Carman refers to authentic resoluteness in explaining the twofold tension above, as he describes how a leap into a gravitational field both 'resists and is shaped by the force of gravity, so too authentic resoluteness consists in resisting the "movement" or "agitation" of falling from within the levelling process that is at work in all discursive idioms. Authentic resoluteness is no less compatible with the generic drift of discourse than upward jumping is with the downward force of gravity' (2000, p. 25). Carman's 'authentic resoluteness' resembles the idiom of weightlessness, which neglects gravity's effects without suppressing it.

Such a state of mind necessitates a change in the perception of body and space, encouraging a sense of weightlessness within one's own body.

2.4. VULNERABILITY, VELOCITY AND ACCELERATION

The aerialist is always moving in a binary space between strength and vulnerability; between a position of power and being exposed- physically, socially and artistically. There is a kind of ontological vulnerability inherent in the practice of falling in aerial circus practices, as well as in phenomenological terms. The difference lies in the perspective. For the aerialist, the sense of vulnerability, perhaps even precarity, lies very much in the gaze of the observer, regardless of how well the aerialist is able to emit kinaesthetic empathy through her practice. For the phenomenologist, the subjectivity enhances the individual researcher's vulnerability. I am interested in the vulnerability experienced as an aerialist from a phenomenological perspective. The focus lies within the felt sensations in the fall, not the perceived aesthetics from a viewer's point of view. The aerialist becomes vulnerable in the moment of letting go, taking the leap and releasing the binds of the apparatus. However, the opposite is also possible. Some of the characteristic vulnerable sensations take place in the moment closest to the fall. In my PaR, I have at times felt more vulnerable in the preliminary steps to the drop. This is because of the strength required to get into the position for the drop, which often requires holding on with fewer body parts, at a conceivable height. All these factors vary from drop to drop, which all requires different muscular effort, technical wrapping of material and height of fall.

Regardless of the type of fall, by placing myself as aerialist in a vulnerable position does not necessarily mean dropping anything from my persona or being. Instead, I propose to look at vulnerability as freedom. In the act of falling on aerial silks, the aerialist opens up to the possibility to be hurled in a downwards pull facilitated by gravity. This way of looking at the aerial drop opens up to a sense of softness and subtleness as a juxtaposition to the plummeting action earlier described. It may also open up to the possibility of transposing the vulnerability of the aerialist's fall as a symbol or object. Photographic projects such as Denis Darzacq's *La Chute*, captures this kind of vulnerability, without denying the subjectivity of the photographed subject. In capturing the fall, he submits to an existential vulnerability of the photographed, and releases an elastic potential of this space in-between sky and earth, between fall and recovery

(Albright, 2013).

Similar to the ways Newton's laws of motion describe a body in our universe as subjected to a multitude of forces exerted by other bodies, so too the aerialist is dependent on and affected by her apparatus. According to Newton, the forces exchanged between any two bodies are equal in magnitude but opposite in direction. Respectively, the forces between the aerialist body and the apparatus function in an opposite pull. When the forces acting on a body balance each other, the body either remains at rest or, if it were in motion, moves with constant velocity such as the plummeting motion of a drop. Muscles can strain to go beyond inertia, which releases endorphins in the body and ultimately can lead to a state of euphoria in the aerial drops. I argue that this sense of aliveness created in inertia, is akin to the falling in aerial circus in which the aerialist's senses are heightened in one chaotic being. It is another way to (re)connect with our embodied self. Kinaesthetic impulses are receptive in the moment of falling, which heightens sensorial awareness.

2.5. MODES OF FALLING: MOMENT OF VISION

The existentialist aspects of *B&T* include authenticity, falling, anxiety, death, conscience, guilt, and resoluteness. Heidegger distinguishes between different modes of falling including idle talk or chatter, anxiety, care, resolve, death, guilt and moment of vision. I will concern myself with the latter and its found relation to aerial circus practices. It is worth noting that anxiety lends itself to a discussion in relation to falling, in a simplified context. Falling as aerial drops embrace and meet potential danger to live a more authentic life. According to Heidegger, being authentically enhances our ability to make choices about how to progress in life. This consequence translates different to colloquial contexts compared to aerial circus specifically.

The most pertinent mode of falling from *B&T* in relation to falling in aerial circus practices is 'a moment of vision'; a fusion of past, present and future. This mode concerns temporality; the existential meaning of falling exists in the present. Heidegger offers a temporal analysis of falling in regards to curiosity. Art and existence occur within the context of lived time and the sensed concept thereof. Heidegger notes that the phenomenological concept of time renders

itself vulnerable because it implies a focus on experiential descriptions, rather than logical reasonings.

The characteristics of falling in regards to temporality include temptation, tranquilization, alienation, and self-entanglement, all of which temporalizes the act of falling. Movements which include falling are thus temporalizing, and ‘falling must be seen as essentially temporal and therefore as part of Dasein’s ontological structure’ (Withy, 2015, p. 110). Falling directs attention to the present being, which ultimately heightens the aerialist’s awareness and attentiveness. The concept of moment of vision translates to insight. Within a dance specific context, Albright describes falling as being suspended between time and space. ‘Marked by trajectory between up and down as well as before and after, falling refers to what was while moving towards what will be’ (2013, p. 36). Falling thus exists in both literal physical states such as the fall in aerial silks, and metaphorically or symbolically.

In the fall, time is felt differently than in a suspended movement or other slower actions. The past may feel as if fleeing faster than in a static state. As if falling away from the past (the suspension) and straight into the future (the knot, wrap or configuration that will catch the aerialist at the end). Fraleigh describes Heidegger’s notion of ‘ecstasy of time’, which I think is very relevant in relation to falling. ‘We say we “lose track of time when we become fully involved in an experience; then consciousness is not divided (...) the unity of our being is experienced’ (1991, p. 11). I argue that the experience of falling in drops exercise Heidegger’s concept of moment of vision, in which, as Fraleigh above notes, dualisms disappear in favour of a blending of temporal categories.

2.6. PHENOMENOLOGICAL RISK AND FREEDOM

Although Heidegger is said to have taken a keen interest in sports, his writings do not show much evidence thereof. He did, however, write about daring and failing; concepts, which are relevant to the discourse on falling. Existential activities such as aerial circus practices and mountain climbing, provide a ‘ground-breaking trajectory of transcendence over the sedimented ceilings of (...) the hazardous immanence of gravity and granite’ (Chisholm, 2008, p. 12). I use Chisholm’s mountain climbing example, because it relates to the ascendance and intuitive mobility required in aerial silks.

Mountain climbing and aerial circus practices both include free and habitual movements, which can extend limits of what is possible, ‘one reaches beyond domestic norms, sedimented patterns and restrictive rules (...) with no limit on how freely one might ascend (Chisholm, 2008, p. 13). This is arguably an exaggerated idealisation of the practice of mountain climbing. Yet it resonates with aerial silks practice. The aerialist must ascend to the top of the in order to be able to descend during the fall. Chisholm’s description of mountain climbing - the experience of reaching beyond domestic norms, relate to the almost transcendental state that the aerialist might reach in the descent. The higher the dexterity of drops, the more escalated, perceived, risk for the aerialist. Tait argues that circus’ ‘artistry is viewed bodily in a process of unfolding exchanges that exemplifies body phenomenology’ (2006, p. 5). I argue that in falling through the air, wrapped in aerial silks, the aerialist performs a transcendental act of such phenomenological activity.

Heidegger described a positive concept of freedom as revelation, which he questioned in *B&T*. The problematic is approached as a fundamental category for movement of thought of his deconstructive ontology. In his concept, freedom represents an opening up of possibilities to wider contextual relations. His notion of phenomenological, primordial freedom differs from a colloquial kind of freedom, in the most ordinary sense. Ordinary freedom is to have the choice to each live our lives the way we want. This is an almost German idealistic notion of freedom. Primordial freedom is to reveal historically grounded truths, and goes over and beyond by accessing Dasein’s authenticity. Craig Nichols explains this as ‘a potentiality which reveals the being of beings as they are “in themselves,” including both innerworldly beings and Dasein itself’ (Nichols, 2000, p. 3). Whilst the falling practices in aerial silks may not exactly transcend consciousness, it has the capacity to transcend particular patterns thereof. In practical terms this might appear in the aforementioned ‘flow’ experiences. Whilst I cannot claim to explicitly have experienced transcendental conditions during falling, I relate to the principles of primordial freedom. The experience of falling on aerial silks, which is not a common phenomenon, does provide a sense of autonomy.

2.7. FLEEING AND DISRUPTIONS TO FALLING

Falling and fleeing are distinct concepts, but in Dasein's falling it flees, 'there is no such thing as not falling' (Carman, 2000, p. 15). Carman argues that Heidegger in *B&T* fails to recognise this distinction by offering two versions of the phenomena; structural (falling as abiding tendency to flee) and psychological or motivational (fallenness as generated by Dasein's flight from itself). Carman instead argues that fleeing is an aggravated mode of falling and that 'falling must explain fleeing; fleeing cannot by itself account for fallenness' (2000, p. 16). Fleeing is psychological/motivational (a temptation), as opposed to falling, which is structural (a tendency). Wrathall and Malpas argue that fleeing is the aggravated mode of falling, and not a durational phenomenon. 'Falling in its "intensified" or "aggravated" form often degenerates into full-fledged motivated intentionality' (2000, p. 345). The two concepts thus share similar qualities, yet are different in their mode of existence.

Similar to this ambiguity between falling and fleeing, there is a dissonance between Heidegger's phenomenology and theology, as well as many points of resemblance.

It would be a big deviation to dedicate much space to the relation to theology but it is useful to cast a few thoughts on in this context. Heidegger's notion of falling is somewhat a theological term. 'The fall is the fall of human beings from a higher state of grace into reprobation' (Akers, 2015, p. 91). The Christian notion of falling is nonetheless a metaphysical problematic, which Heidegger tried to solve or escape. Heidegger believed that falling is 'preluded from confessional or theological inquiry because theology does not ask the question without already having answered it' (Akers, 2015, p. 92). This stands in sharp contrast to the basics of phenomenological thinking, which does quite the opposite. It neglects any possible outcomes, answers or consequences of a new phenomenological inquiry. The reason I am including it is that, as Bakke notes, 'the core of Christian belief is based on the Fall, which marks the beginning of our existence in the world as recorded in the story of Genesis. The first woman and man 'fall into reality' (2006, p. 13). In Western Christian civilisation, man falls due to eating an apple of The Tree of Knowledge. In Bakke's account thereof, the corporeality of humans, i.e. Dasein, is a fall in itself.

2.7.1. AUTHENTICITY OF THE FALL

I have already touched upon the concept of authenticity in Heideggerian terms, as the concept which ascribes Dasein a definite character. Authenticity and inauthenticity in Heidegger's terms relate to the everydayness, the ordinary mode of human living.

Carman (2000) describe falling as an ongoing dynamic tendency, which is drawing away from authentic existence. Thus, inauthentic existence is dependent on falling for continuation. Perhaps this could be translated to a form of modern escapism, a way of consciously forgetting? If authenticity is perceived as resistance and authentic living always takes place in a gravitational field, then inauthenticity, one of Dasein's ontic-existential modes, is the releasing action. The authentic behaviour is seen as resisting this constant tendency to fall as a countermovement against falling. Taylor Dix argues that 'man is naturally predisposed towards falling, thus creating an inauthentic life' and that 'only continual resistance to falling can bring one out of the default state of inauthenticity into an authentic mode of living' (2004, p. 32). Somehow, Dasein, or the aerialist, is then caught between the two; behaving in socially constructed manners, which is inauthentic, or in authentic ways with the acknowledgement that life is finite and death is possible. Whilst authenticity and experiences might create nourishment for the mind and body, and Dasein is able to make better-informed choices about how to live life, there is a constant conflict between the two modes. In terms of aerial circus practices this conflict is less about choice. Instead it has to do with fear, and ultimately experiences, which develop confidence. Once the aerialist dares to embrace height and consequently falling through learned drops, she has access to this Heideggerian authenticity.

Dyson describes this position as 'an authentic, transparent self, we know ourselves, our social requirements, our finite time as a living being and the impact of choice on our life. All of our decisions, once seen and taken responsibility for, are what make us authentic: make us 'be-in-the-world'' (2009, p. 4). In this sense, we exist in a flux of constantly falling within the everydayness, having to make choices between authenticity and inauthenticity. When we become authentic, we enter the moment of vision as described earlier. Heidegger's notion of falling is not inauthentic, it is undifferentiated, neutral. Authentic self-focusing is a resolute reach forward, which can lead to finite possibilities of coherence and cohesiveness – a more integral life. According to Heidegger, anxiety offers opportunities to relate authentically to possibilities of death. To be fully authentic then, we must step out of our comfort zone(s) and face real fear on a daily basis. Risk sports, such as aerial circus practices, offer 'a conformation

with oneself and the possibility of more authentic living' (Breivik, 2010, p. 4). Authentic resoluteness is a resistance to falling into the world. Thus turning towards our thrownness indicates authentic falling, whereas turning away from our thrownness is inauthentic.

2.8. AN ONTOLOGY OF FALLING IN AERIAL CIRCUS PRACTICES

To conclude this chapter, I will offer a few thoughts on the ontology of falling in aerial circus practices. To do so, I consider the act of falling as an ontological-existential concept of motion and an essential part of being Dasein – 'an ontological-existential structure of being-in-the-world' (Carman, 2000, p. 15). By ontology I denote the core of phenomenological method; what it means to 'be'. I further consider the ontology of the falling movement in aerial circus practices as physicalizing the falling of Dasein. This does not mean that everybody must start practicing falling in aerial circus in order to live an authentic life. I view falling as an implicit part of the aerialist's movement vocabulary. Ontologically, falling is still a kind of motion, whether Dasein or the aerialist is falling, or collapsing, against the world.

Falling in aerial circus practices takes place in a constructed environment, which is reflected in the aforementioned equipmentality. Conversely, Dasein's falling happens in the 'everydayness'. I propose viewing the two situations as overlapping, and the fall of Dasein as the fall of the aerialist. Further yet, I propose a reversal of the 'faller' from the subject to the environment. The discussions so far have centred on the fall of the aerialist (Dasein). But as Breivik notes, 'Heidegger also showed how the world, falls apart, slips away, and disappears in certain situations and mind states like anxiety' (2000, p. 29). This perspective still places autonomy on the aerialist/Dasein, but makes her/it the observer of fallenness, rather than the subject who is falling. My proposition therefore includes a falling away from the aerial apparatus (world).

In Breivik's quote he refers to skydiving as an analytical tool for the experience of anxiety in the initial jump (fall). I think the same is true for other mind states previously mentioned including exhilaration, thrill and even flow. For either mind state this analysis only becomes possible when Dasein has realised itself in an ontological-existential way. In other words, when the aerialist has achieved an authenticity in her appreciation of the risk and perceived freedom inherent within falling. The aerialist remains in a constant state, and the aerial apparatus (silks)

is the moving object, which falls. In this way, the aerialist becomes the axis of which the void, and the aerial silks moves around.

This is of course a highly metaphorical and symbolic statement. Nonetheless, it offers an alternative perspective on both Heidegger's falling and the aerialist's falling. This is also an attempt to overcome the difficulty between the abstract nature of Heidegger's terminology and the concrete experience of falling. There is a multitude of abstract ideas attached to the phenomena, and this perspective is an attempt to articulate the complex experience of falling on aerial silks. The phenomenological perspective of my PaR has led me to this alternative perception of the subject. By experiencing the same drop repeatedly on aerial silks, the phenomenological approach eventually enabled me to consider myself as the line about which the surrounding sphere rotates. The world is thus falling away from the aerialist, rather than the aerialist falling away from the void.

CHAPTER 3. A COMPARATIVE AND CONTEXTUAL DISCUSSION

In this final chapter I will compare and contextualise the embodied and theoretical findings made so far. I will pay particular attention to inter-relational knowledge production and meaning making on aerial silks.

The aerialist performs asymmetrical acts in the drops on silks. First, by ascending as she climbs in an upward (forced) direction. Hereafter in a downward (natural) direction as she plummets through the air, controlled by the apparatus. In balancing, the body's tendency is always towards a downward motion. Thus, the ascent, or maintaining the upwards reaching level, is an unnatural, forced state. Weight, as measured by balance, is caused by the body's gravity. Said metaphorically: The aerialist climbs towards the sky in her upward ascent, and falls toward the earth in the drop. Earth has many subtexts – cultural, social, spiritual, which I will not go into here. Metaphorically and philosophically, it is however worth noting its binary position for the aerialist: As a void which opens up, and at the same time an innately familiar position, denoting new beginnings or a sense of starting all over again. Falling phenomenologically involves precisely this 'new beginnings' attitude, experiencing each fall as if it was the first. The drop on aerial silks both resists, to a certain extent (due to the wrapping of the material), gravitational forces, and, at the same time, is conditioned by it.

Another association with falling is disintegration or deflation. Might the aerialist experience some kind of disintegration in her drop? - A disintegration of reality, of authority or perhaps a disintegration of the surrounding sphere, in this case the equipmentality of the aerial silks? When we lose control over the equipment we have at hand, be it a vehicle, a domestic piece of equipment or an apparatus used for artistic purposes, it might bring back sensations of such fragility and vulnerability. Ultimately, a sense of failure.

3.1. FALLING AS FAILING: COLLAPSE AND DESCENT

Falling has often been associated with failing. Not just linguistically, but also culturally, socially, ideologically and, in some cases, artistically, although these associations have little to do with the original meaning of the word. These associations have further connotations to idioms of dying, collapsing, fragility, vulnerability and decay. In drops on silks the aerialist is descending into space, sometimes swiftly, sometimes slowly, with varying degrees of control.

If, as Heidegger argued, falling is one of the natural structural forms of being of Dasein, then the aerialist is practically descending into physicality. In this scenario, falling has an ultimately positive agenda. But if falling is perceived as mere collapsing of structures – physical, ideological, economical or ecological, falling can mean the deterioration of cultural paradigms or social spheres. Further yet, the collapsing act can denote anxiety, with sensations of the world and agreed values, identities and narratives collapsing in on themselves. When the World Trade Centres collapsed 15 years ago, it brought with it similar sensations of anxiety. Albright points out parallels to ‘the economic recession and its resulting slippages in employment, from the cyclical plunges in housing values to the periodic crashes of the stock market’ (2013, p. 36). She also writes how this state of almost constant fear of falling and falling apart influences our bodies. ‘As a cultural metaphor, falling carries a pretty heavy symbolism in the West. Whether we are talking about (...) the collapse of stock markets or the public stumbling of the latest politician to have lost his integrity on the Internet, falling is generally seen as a failure, a defeat, a loss or a decline’ (2013, p. 36). Falling has thus symbolically been associated with mainly negative events in mainstream Western culture across situations and eras.

3.1.2. FAILING IN THE CIRCUS

Within circus practices, the relationship between falling and failing varies immensely depending on the discipline. For the clown, falling and failing are quintessential elements in its performance, and what constitutes its access to elated responses from the audience. Thus in clowning technique ‘we might say that the clown fails in order to succeed and get a laugh, whereas we most often perform gender trying to succeed, but fail’ (Damkjaer, 2016, p. 100). For the tightrope/high-wire walker (equilibrist/funambulist), the fall is the all-avoidable consequence of loss of equilibrium. For the aerialist, however, certain kinds of falls are the opposite of failure. Failure would consist in stopping the fall half way down, due to getting caught in the silks or another incorrect pre-set configuration of the silks. Ecker describes falling as the circus artist’s failure to bracket irrelevant information. ‘As in several other circus arts, falling is the failure to bracket out not only present irrelevancies but also those recalled or anticipated situations which may preoccupy one on the ground, especially a fear of falling’ (1984, p. 68). Conversely, I propose that the fall itself is a platform on which the aerialist can suspend, quite literally, preconceived knowledge or assumptions. In the fall itself, the velocity

challenges any intellectual reflection which may occur in bracketing. Perhaps a phenomenological definition on bracketing, also known as- or associated with, suspension of judgement or natural attitude, phenomenological reduction, epoché, or even transcendental reduction is useful here. Although not a concept associated with Heidegger, it has been an important part of my PaR, in which I have tried to incorporate certain phenomenological strategies, this being one of them. Moran Dermot's definition of this concept require 'all scientific, philosophical, cultural, and everyday assumptions had to be put aside (...) We should attend only to the phenomena in the manner of their being given to us, in their *modes of givenness*.' (2000, p. 11, emphasis in original).

For the aerialist, this means attuning to her pre-reflexive aerialist body – a state without any reflections on previous experiences of the fall or what is expected to be experienced in the fall. The aerialist must avoid to let any theoretical, analytical or scientific thoughts influence and form a bias.

The most vital moment for the aerialist in this respect, is the zenith. This is the moment before she drops, where she is holding onto whichever part of the silks is holding her up. This moment requires both literal physical suspension from the aerialist, and epistemological suspension of any thought processes connected to the subsequent fall. In Ecker's quote above, he mentions fear of falling as an irrelevancy for the aerialist. It is irrelevant because that would take her out of the pre-reflective state and out of the phenomenological approach to the fall. However, the act of failing may not necessarily be a destructive act. In reflecting on her academic lectures incorporating aerial rope, Damkjaer writes; 'I failed to fail in the parts where I intended to fail, but that made it more interesting to perform' (2016, p. 97). Failing, in this instance becomes a constructive element, in which new discoveries may occur. This can also be the case for some wider arts contexts.

Fox, for example, illustrates the works of avant-garde artists, Daniil Kharms (1905 -1942) and Bas Jan Ader (1942 - 1975) as artists who made a 'concentrated attempt to harness falling – simultaneously as a leap of faith and of deflation – as a paradoxical *leap* of generative 'failure'' (2013, p. 63). They both used performing arts practices as strategies to explore the phenomena of falling, and, Fox argues, redefined the act of falling as a practice. Kharms' work might have closer ties with phenomenological discourse. Certainly, Fox argues that from an ontological-existential point of view, falling in Kharms' artistic work, 'stands in as some form of disjunctive

miracle in the everyday gloom of existence' (2013, p. 64). I am, however, more interested in Ader's falling practices, which resonate with the fall of the aerialist. I argue that Kharms' approach to falling resembles 19th century circus aesthetics of the aerialist's movement as a sort of escapist, utopian desire. Ader, instead, used falling as a very honest, exposed and fragile artistic act, to provoked a response to the socio-political contexts of his time.

'Ader was a master of gravity. But when he fell, all he would say was that it was because gravity made itself master over him. He understood the necessary surrender and decisiveness of purpose needed to make gravity his companion' (Dean, 2006, p. 1). This was evident even when he failed in his 1975 sea voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Somehow, not failing would perhaps have been the actual fail for Ader. Tacita Dean explains that 'to fall was to make a work of art. Whatever we believe or whatever we imagine (...) not to have fallen would have meant failure' (2006, p. 2). Falling in this sense nods to both metaphor, symbolism and irony. 'His falls make themselves available as symbols ranging from subjective failure and dissolution to that of a theological order' (Spence, 2000, p. 2). The falls of the aerialist dropping on silks are not symbolic of subjective failure, but in contrast quite the opposite. The falling aerialist gains subjectivity and authority, in an interplay between controlling, and consciously not controlling, her environment, the silks.

3.2. FALLIBILITY AND FALTERING

In the fall of the aerialist, there is a certain level of contingency present regarding how she will catch herself at the end of it. A successful catch depends on her pre-configurations of the silks; the wrapping, tying, folding and so forth. The frailty, however, is more in the eye of the observer than the aerialist herself. Although she must accept her own fallibility, she must also trust her own muscle memory from previous drops. What might seem an act of depreciation to the observer, can be performed with internal confidence and trust for the aerialist. Fox comments on this difference in perspective, and that 'falling can denote a certain failure, frailty or deflation, all in a discrete event that can deliver a swift judgement on (our) existence' (2013, p. 63). There is an inter-relational dialogue at play between the realities of the aerialist body and the apparatus to the observer's imagined, potential or remembered realities. Further, there are differences in the observed experience of falling in different contexts. Fox notes; 'In its

everyday rupturing, the fall remains then as one constant reminder of our fallibility, where the metaphysics of the physical world might suddenly be laid bare. In falling, thought and action are juxtaposed however accidentally with the forces of our own nature and with nature itself' (2013, p. 63). Observing another human falling is, across many cultures, deemed humorous. We only have to think of the thousands of video clips online showing people of all ages and backgrounds, even animals, falling. More often than not, it might provoke a response of laughter. This relates to innately human kinaesthetic empathy, and acts as a reminder of every human's fallibility as Fox notes above. Falling thus carries a certain level of comical aspect, perhaps almost tragi-comical.

It is a phenomena present in everyday lives, both from a Heideggerian viewpoint, but also socially. Yet, through the act of falling, of rendering oneself vulnerable to laughter, empathy or even sympathy, new discoveries may be made. Fox again notes that we, in the act of falling, 'come closer to a paradoxical leap of generative failure; not just to fail again better but to leap willingly into 'another place', a utopia of sorts found in the void or gap between realities. Falling is never simply a failure here but a falling into another space' (2013, p. 67). Without over-romanticising the fallibility of humans, falling and failing might be useful to think of as sites of potentiality. Although falling might bring with it connotations of failing social expectations of functionality, it can be deemed constructive.

If we were to take the metaphorical, conceptual meaning of falling further, we might relate it to faltering. As the aerialist falls into the void, the space below her opens up, resembling a kind of faltering of intellectual environment. Conventionally we might think of falling from a high status to a low status, from a point of respect to a point of embarrassment. But as discussed, the phenomena of falling opens up for a reversibility of such hierarchical structures. Tait, referring specifically to the aerial disciplines high-wire and trapeze, sets up a juxtaposition between the most obvious connotations to transcendence; yearning and desire, and on the other hand idioms of falling, failing and faltering. 'Elevating everyday behaviour opens up the possibility of transcending other social limits (...) or should that be opening up to a falling out of such precepts? In overcoming limits, a circus act was and is also representing that which contains and restraints bodies' (2006, p. 3). I think it should, in answer to Tait's rhetorical questions. Aerialists employing falling actions on aerial silks, should embrace any alternative symbolism they might represent, in relation to social constructs. I will bring these ideas back later in this chapter in relation to ideas around transcendence.

3.3. WEIGHT AND EFFORT(LESSNESS)

In relation to the perceived weightlessness of the aerialist, some aerial circus practices share similarities with t'ai chi ch'üan. Both movement forms perform seemingly effortless movements which appear light, fluid and continuous. Yet, as Nancy Allison notes, 'in order to do it the body must be firm, stable, and strong. The mind must be alert and active. The movements of t'ai chi ch'üan are circular, made in curves, arcs, and spirals' (1999, p. 272). Aerial silks too work a lot with these shapes and movement patterns, but with significant strength needed to manoeuvre the silks to do that. The muscularity and alertness required in order to be able to look effortless, and at times weightless, calls for some level of reversibility. The aerialist interchanges between fluidity and tension; between the flowing fabric of the silks and the tension created when wrapping and holding it at a distance. Although aesthetically, martial arts and aerial circus practices might be distinct, they relate in their emerging refinement, as a result of the movement.

Rotation is another type of movement that the aerialist employs to create the effect of weightlessness (whether purposefully or not). By rotating her own body in space and around the apparatus in the drop, the aerialist moves between momentarily free falling and controlled falling in which limbs are manoeuvred to land in specific ways. The development of the fall requires specific resilience and resistance, from the climb to the suspension, to the drop and catch at the end. As opposed to jumping, for example in a trampoline, the aerialist has no, or very little, rebound to carry her back to the beginning of the fall. The fall itself carries all the connotations of virtuosic intensity and escalation, and of delicate force and pliability. These are some of the ideas I have observed in my PaR. Imagine the circus discipline, juggling as a metaphor for exploration, investigation and figuring out an activity at hand – quite literally. The juggler experiences the phenomena of falling over and over again in the practice. In this case, falling is experienced through the juggling objects, and not the juggler him/herself. Whereas falling for the juggler in most cases denotes failure, it is for the aerialist part of the success. Nonetheless, seeing juggling as a mediator between Heidegger's falling both collide and merge with PaR on aerial silks. In both Heidegger's phenomenology and in the case of those circus disciplines, to accept falling as an unavoidable part of being (Heidegger) and practice (juggling and aerial circus), might lead to a more authentic living and understanding of one's physical and artistic practice.

3.4. CONTEXTUALISATION: VERTICALITY IN WESTERN CULTURE

With the movement symbolism described above, I will shift the attention to Tait's description of how circus artists act almost as contemporary antidotes to socio-political conservatism in 21st century. 'In a literal gravity-defying raising-up high of the everyday actions of walking, dancing, carrying, balancing, this circus act also defies the constraints of the habitually lived social order' (Tait, 2006, p. 8). The habitually lived social order Tait refers to is the Western notion of upright, held and balanced positions. Aerial circus practices stand as cultural interventions which develop over time in relation to socio-political contexts. Falling is a counter-movement to responsibilities of adhering to social (bodily) behaviour. Similarly, in Heideggerian thought, 'Dasein inherits a fallen society from its past that automatically and unconsciously socializes it into a world of prefabricated norms, rules and morals' (Dix, 2004, p. 38). I acknowledge that the aerialist's act can be seen as a flight from earth, both positively and negatively, and as a transcendental running away from miseries on earth. Naomi Ritter argues that 'art as flight-from-reality points toward the hermetic attitudes of Surrealism, Dada and the Absurdist movements' (2016, p. 137). Following this view, the aerialist becomes a symbol of superiority simply due to the working height.

In the fall, quite the opposite is the case. It offers a chance for a new perspective on human conditions. Albright argues that 'falls can be traumatic to be sure, disorienting at the very least. But because they stretch across a liminal space in which the present is suspended, falling can also inspire new orientations, including ones that challenge our expectations and economic stability and social success' (2013, p. 36). In aerial silks, this liminal space is the zenith mentioned earlier, the suspension (both physically, and phenomenologically) before the drop. It is akin to the moment the diver takes off from the board into pool, the moment the skydiver jumps into the void, the deep water diver falls backwards into the sea, the moment the cliff-jumper takes the second foot off the ground. Liminal spaces exist in moment of transformation, acting as a mediator between different states or places – imagined or actual.

Consequently, I propose to consider Heidegger's term 'leaping' in relation to falling on aerial apparatus. On ground, and philosophically, a leap is a type of predecessor for falling. One must start from a certain level, to have somewhere to physically fall towards. Heidegger would argue that the leap is grounded in the essence of temporality, and that leaping-away from the present moment, resembles a fall into lostness or nothingness. Perhaps this can be seen as a leap of faith

into the unknown or insecurity. The zenith therefore exists in the moment between the leap and the fall.

Returning to Albright's quote above, I argue that the aerialist's leap, fall and landing can contribute to fight such social anxiety. Falling interacts between theory and practice, between the cultural rhetoric of falling and the physical experience thereof. The knowledge derived from aerial circus practices can play a role in understanding the social world. Degerbøl describes this bodily communication as follows; 'vores krop er et samlingspunkt af betydninger, der forhandles og kommunikeres i samspil med omverden' (2007, p. 4). The aerialist body has the potential to communicate new meanings through the fall, as it is supported through strength (ability) and effort (action). Aerial circus acts mimic social independency in partner-work, which relies on this ability and action. I ask: Can the purposeful practice of falling on aerial silks contribute to overcoming personal and social difficulties too? Within the arena of social mobility and the fear of losing our socio-economic status, falling can act as a parallel form of resiliency. 'While we often interpret resiliency to mean getting right back up to where we were before the fall (...), it can also suggest a certain flexibility, one in which the possibility of re-orientation after disorientation leads one into different directions (Albright, 2013, p. 40). Thinking back on the anecdote of trampolining, I argue that social resilience is not only plausible in the trampolining re-bounce, but also in the re-orientation after the fall. Such re-orientation may lead to greater pliability or precariousness, by changing the way we perceive directionality.

3.4.1. FALLING AS A CULTURAL METAPHOR

As introduced previously in this chapter, Western culture generally encourage a rising upwards and the ability to stay in such poised position. Claid and Allsopp note that 'Western culture, for the most part, continues in its endeavour to resist falling, striving towards verticality, linearity and steadfast uprightness with all its moral underpinnings' (2013, p. 1). In Western societies, the strong presence of verticality is connected to ideas of status, correct behaviour and so forth. Verticality is almost an omnipresent requirement for the fall, or in fact the experience of falling as Bakke (2006) argues. Due to the adherence to verticality, the vertical axis is generally, seen as the ideal and norm in relation to cultural, political, economic and ideological contexts in which the ascent is the positive direction. Contradictory, I am arguing that an acknowledgement

of the downwards direction could prove beneficial to Western thinking. Albright argues that ‘if we shift the orientation of the West’s vertical hegemony, falling can become not just an ignominious ending, but rather the beginning of other possibilities’ (2013, p. 37).

When falling on aerial silks, being upright is not a prerequisite. In fact, the fall often happens from an intricately wrapped and complex shape, not resembling verticality at all. On silks, the momentum is thus not a consequence of the pre-set plumb position, but of the wrapping and height of the apparatus. The aerialist’s vertical world is framed, partly, by the silks, and it is a precarious condition, which has the ability to constantly shift. The dialectics of the vertical movement is therefore not stable. Instead the focus is on the zenith of the vertical plane, just before the fall.

I argue that the phenomenon of falling can be perceived as a cultural metaphor in the Western world, for a lot of the aforementioned reasons. The downward direction carries associations of hierarchical descent across gender classifications. Part of the Western world’s critical standpoint on falling, might be due to the fear of identity loss, or at least unstable identities. As mentioned, circus clowns may use failure as a means to arrive at a successful performance. Notably, the clown’s identity is already unstable and that is part of what constitutes its character. But in other contexts, ‘risk taking with social identity ultimately challenges even the limits of human embodiment’ (Tait, 2006, p. 2). This relates back to the aerialist’s exposure to precarity as she drops on the silks. In the 1930’s the screenwriter Pierre Boost stated that ‘the identities of aerialists were becoming indistinct and seemingly suspended while in the air’ (Gils, 2013, p. 7). I do not agree that the aerialist’s identity becomes indistinct, but I do agree that the sense of identity is momentarily interrupted in the fall. When falling, the aerialist embodies many generic human conditions, and her identity is thus interrupted. Albright, writing in the same year as Gils argues that identities are less fluid now than a decade ago. ‘The experience of growing up in a post-9/11 America has created a real fear of falling, a fear of losing stability in a world that is already so chaotic’ (2013, p. 40). The aerialist’s acts of falling are thus ever more important now, as a way to shift unrestricted movement into the realm of identity establishment.

3.5. TRANSCENDENCE: FASCINATION WITH FLIGHT

Falling, in practical as well as theoretical, theological and symbolic senses, is a form of reversed ascent. In the first chapter I touched briefly on the fascination with flying present in art as well as general human attraction to transcendence. Transcendence, in a metaphorical/symbolic sense, occurs in the plunge of the fall in which the fallen aerialist accepts the unavoidable downward descent, not by attempting to defeat it.

Tilde Björfors and Kajsa Lind write about their practice: ‘I get to practice to fly on the ground...Dare letting go of the little things (...) Not using the instinct to control or correct with the knowledge I have today, but have trust in the unknown that may arise’ (2009, p. 95). The possibility for a transcendental moment thus occurs in the fall itself, as Björfors and Lind note in the last sentence above. Transcending is to not know what awaits in the fall and at the end of it, and yet trusting the mechanics of the fall, whether in contact improvisation or on aerial silks, to catch safely at the end. This stands in contrast to Tait’s (1996) writings on transcendence which she links to the art of trapeze artists and high wire artists. For her, the act of transcendence is within the death-defying acts and the reach towards the sky. I argue for a reversibility of the term in which the aerialist transcends known human states by descending, not by ascending. Similarly, the wider circus context is as a ‘migratory and temporary space, like an open invitation to leave the restrictions and rigidity of society. A popular mythology grew up around “running away to the circus,” suggesting individuals could escape the imposition of social regimentation’ (Tait, 1996, p. 31). The aerialist’s fall is one such strategy to not escape, but transcend the kind of social regimentation that Tait describes.

The kind of transcendence here described relates to experience more than existence, but returning to Heidegger’s notions of authenticity and inauthenticity, we can find links between transcendence and the desired authentic mode of living which can be obtained in falling. Mulhall (2005) writes about the relationship between Dasein and the world that ‘...the Being of Dasein is transcendence and so is that of the world, and the basis of that transcendence in both cases is temporality’ (p. 173). With the risk of over-simplifying Heidegger’s version of temporality, I propose a constructive position between this phenomenological understanding of the concept and as seen from the falling aerialist’s point of view. Mullhall argues that the foundation for both Dasein’s (the aerialist’s) and the world’s (the apparatus’) transcendence is temporality. Falling, then as a mode of ‘thrown projection’ is the existential mode of ‘being open to past, present and future’ (Mullhall, 2005, p. 174). In the previous chapter I mentioned

Heidegger's mode falling that is most relevant to my research on the aerialist's fall; moment of vision. Not only is the aerialist open to the past, present and future. She also experiences all three temporal elements in the fall in her reference to the surroundings. Visually she sees the change of view as she descends from up to down. Tactilely, she feels the air brushing her skin as she falls quickly into the void. These sensorial references make up the heightened sense of temporality an aerial drop can bring forth. Temporality in this sense is the ground for a transcendental synthesis in which past, present and future are all experienced as ephemeral events. I argue that this view of transcendental awareness derived from the aerialist's fall is not idealistic, but ideologically this perception is transferrable between aerial arts practice and phenomenology.

Heidegger, to my knowledge, never wrote explicitly about the aerialist figure, but other philosophers, such as Nietzsche did. He described the aerialist as a representation of 'liberty, the human spirit transcending mundane ties' (Sharrad, 2006, p. 6). Importantly, Nietzsche used the term 'human spirit', and not 'human being'. This denies the corporeality and materiality of the (aerialist) body, and hints at a Cartesian dualism between the flesh and the spirit of the aerialist.

Nietzsche, and 19th century artists too, such as Degas, compared the aerialist to the super(hu)man phenomena, 'Übermensch' and in relation to aesthetic labour. The tightrope walker was seen as emblematic of hope for the future superior mankind, and liberated from contemporary moral, social and perhaps even physical limitations. Nietzsche's notion of the aerialist draws from romantic fables about superiority. For example, the aerialist or poet, over 'common people' because they, the poet and the aerialist, are free spirits, not tied to the mundane, colloquial responsibilities of society. I will turn further to the literary sphere of the aerialist-text for a moment. In Nietzsche's prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1997) he describes the tightrope aerialist as an embodied human transcendence, a literal suspension versus figurative divinity. This metaphoric suspension between the literal and the conceptual, also figures in Kérchy's notion of the aerialist-text, or body-text in other terms, as an attempt to find equilibrium between the sublime serious and the ridiculous subversion. She states this in-between place is 'revealing poetic clichés, archaic diction, lofty tone, historic style, sentimental topos and sublime narrative' (2004, p. 123). The aerialist-text thus sits somewhere like the liminal space described earlier. In most 21st century research the aerialist has the potential to offer the same meaning but through complete opposite connotations; as the human

and real artist that she is. The aerialist has the potential to offer herself as practitioner and to onlookers a way into freedom beyond any performative states of identity. In the aerialist's fall, she is subtly commenting on, almost subverting, the 'sublime narrative' of transcendence and illusion. I argue that this resonates with the embodied, physical aerial experiences I am investigating.

3.5.1. ILLUSION

There has been a gradual shift from the 19th century's awe for flight, and the illusion of a trapeze or high-wire artist as a superhuman, to 21st century contemporary circus.

The dichotomies of human – superhuman are gradually being deconstructed in aerialists' acts, as risk is portrayed in a more honest manner. Nonetheless, illusion has close links to transcendental thinking. If metaphysics is conditioned by falling, there is a dissonance between the transcendence just described and the illusory aerial circus form. The aerialist might give the illusion of liberated freedom, as she 'flies' high above the ground where human bodily movement ordinarily takes place. Yet, when considering the physical training regimes which goes behind such illusion, one is more drawn to discussing Foucault's disciplining bodies, and not the cultural freedom the aerialist seems to represent. Tait states that 'the tantalizing appeal of the circus performer depended on maintaining an illusion of unrestricted physical freedom in performance' (1996, p. 27). The aerialist moves on a balancing act between desire and fear, between illusion and reality, seen from the viewer's point of view.

Whilst a tightrope or high-wire walker aims for the illusory image by avoiding the fall as much as possible, the aerialist embraces it. Common for both is that the fall renders the aerialist 'corporeal' and 'un-metaphorical' (Fox, 2016, p. 81), and uncomplicated too, I would add. Whilst the aerialist's drop on silks can be discussed symbolically, the honesty and exposedness that the fall brings, creates a kind of synonymy between the aerialist and aesthetic transcendence. By aesthetic transcendence I mean a way out of conventional aesthetic presentation, towards a more open representation of the physicality of the act. This resembles Heidegger's notion of authentic living. Living authentically is realising, acknowledging and respecting the daily risks, and the ultimate end to our lives, death, without necessarily dwelling thereon. It relates to the taboo subject of risk and death in many Western societies. This is a

subject which many European countries have started to acknowledge much more in 21st century. For Heidegger, falling is not only an unavoidable element of Dasein's being, it is also a requirement for purposeful living.

3.6. SUBVERSIVE DISORIENTATION

Whenever we turn, spin, tumble and rotate - either on the ground or in the air, our orientation might become fuzzy and our sense of control is momentarily lost. Whilst disorientation, in most cases, is not a pleasant experience whether it happens due to getting lost, losing focus in a turn or spinning too fast for the eyes to catch up, it can be a worthwhile experience. As the aerialist falls on silks, the drop often happens too quick for her to hone in on each detail that passes her eyes on the way down. But the holistic attentiveness can be widened and heightened, because the aerialist is forced to gather all the visual, as well as tactile, impressions during the fall and make sense of it as it happens. During this disorientating act of what is perceived, the senses, especially the visual and tactile senses, are heightened. The aerialist must quickly re-orient herself as she catches herself on the silk in the landing. Albright argues that we should not 'shut off sensation, including the sensation of losing one's ground' (2013, p. 38). In fact, embracing disorientation, destabilising as it might be, might contribute to new discoveries during falling. Albright refers to Sarah Ahmed's writing on falling in phenomenology, when she states that 'falling insists on a shift of orientation, a different perspective from which we might learn, even once we return to the ground (2013, p. 38).

I argue that falling in aerial circus practices has the *potential* to act as a radical gesture or a subversive action. If we view falling as an action of being pulled by the void as Yves Klein experimented with during late 1950's/early 1960's, or as a state of ungrounded-ness as Aaron Siskind (Bakke, 2006) perceived it around the same era, then the kind of falling which takes place on aerial silks, lends itself to a subversive connotation. Symbolically, the aerialist falling on the silks subverts established social (Western) norms regarding verticality and controlled behaviour. By falling these notions are perpetually dropped and discarded in favour of a disorientating state of being, which subverts socially expected behaviour. The aerial apparatus lends itself to transgress the aerialist across cultural and social borders. Aerial circus practices

offer contemporary strategies, which might also be achieved by aforementioned examples such as skydiving, diving in water or other activities in which the action of falling takes place.

The tactics which derive out of these strategies work towards destabilizing or disrupting norms, power structures and social order. This has close resemblance to some of the earliest aerial circus in fact, which could be seen as a form of politically acting against the commonly acceptable or expected. Much contemporary, political circus of 21st century has followed through. Similarly, other contemporary performance forms have the capacity to disrupt common ground. In writing about contemporary dance, Parviainen states that works of performing arts, which offer a different viewpoint challenge the standardised norm. 'By being subversive of perception, an artwork can break through stereotyped social reality and open new horizons prompting both the artist and the audience to reflect on the lifeworld. A subversive dancework, which (...) contemplate the body politics of society through movements, addresses the question of a dancework's capacity to discuss a certain issue through the moving body' (1998, p. 115). Aerial circus arts inhabit the same capacity to promote or proactively encourage this kind of reflection. Parviainen uses the phenomenological term, lifeworld to describe the practitioner as well as observer's interpretation of events experienced. Whereas the dancework that Parviainen describes refers to contemporary dance movements as explicitly or implicitly addressing perhaps political issues, aerial circus arts can let the movement speak for itself, as a subversive metaphor. Within wider performance arts, such subversive art works become even more visible.

3.6.1. SUBJECTIVITY OF THE AERIALIST BODY

Concluding from the propositions above, the aerialist body has the potential to stand as a subversive site for liberation of socially expected bodily appearance and aesthetics. The individual, embodied experience of the aerialist is given greater subjectivity and authority in this perspective. Maria Coelho writes that the aerialist, and in general the circus artist, 'is also a performer who creates her own image, in a subversive act that involves resistance to disciplinary technologies, risk and a certain degree of personal freedom' (2012, p. 55). These three elements; resistance, risk and personal freedom resonate with Heidegger's writing about falling in relation to authenticity for example. Socially, the aerialist can be seen as a minority

figure who is constantly resisting the norm of the community she is in. Resistance in this context is not a negative standpoint, instead it is seen as emancipation. It has the possibility to open up for new ways of perceiving. It offers a constructive juxtaposition to the norm or a repressive situation. Risk is inherent within Heidegger's notion of authentic living, which leads to a sense of freedom. By acknowledging the daily risks that the aerialist/Dasein, faces, she/it can escape inauthenticity. Tait argues that falling on aerial apparatus demonstrated, and I think still does demonstrate, 'a spectacle of unrestricted if unattainable physical freedom. Mastery over the aerial trick created a realm of performative' (1996, p. 33). In other words, by mastering a successful landing after a fall, it is plausible to obtain a state of visceral, as well as social and cultural freedom.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

In this final part of the thesis, I will review and summarize the research, identify the main methods used and discuss their implications in the study. First, I will return to the research objective, and the overarching research question: What new meaning and knowledge might be produced by relating the phenomenon of falling in aerial circus practice to Martin Heidegger's phenomenological concept of falling?

In order to research that statement, I considered the sub-questions;

What aspects of falling on aerial silks are transferrable to falling in a Heideggerian sense, and how do these connect?

How can phenomenology be applied to PaR of falling on aerial silks?

And lastly, mainly in relation to the third chapter; 'What can the intentional practice of falling teach us about how to survive personal and social crises?' (Albright, 2013, p. 36).

Prior to commencing the research period, I expected to develop a critical perspective on the act of falling mainly between aerial circus practices and phenomenology. As the research progressed, I also became increasingly interested in the social and cultural implications of falling. The third chapter reflects this research interest. By placing the main research objective in a wider perspective, I have been able to highlight relevancies, connections, juxtapositions and critical debates about falling. This has helped me understand the act of falling on aerial silks more holistically.

Before I evaluate the key findings of this thesis, I will briefly review the methodology and my research position. The methodology for this thesis consisted of both practical and theoretical research and resources. The qualitative nature of the research design corresponded with the experiential topic, in which experiences of specific phenomena was investigated. My position as an aspiring aerialist allowed me to investigate the act of falling physically, without deviating towards aesthetic or performative elements. Whilst this thesis might not have advanced research in the field of circus research or phenomenological inquiry, it has offered an alternative perspective of existing phenomena in both fields. Its significance is valid as a contributor to contemporary academic research, and as a tangential perspective in a wider social and cultural framework. Through the versatile methodology, I have been able to propose connections and

contradictions, and perhaps instigate a constructive dialogue between the two overlapping fields. Phenomenology has been applied in circus research by numerous scholars over the years, but I have not found any existing examples of this specific comparative work.

KEY FINDINGS

In this paper I have researched and discussed the act of falling in aerial circus practices, in relation to Heidegger's phenomenological concept thereof. I have presented falling, in both physical and metaphorical terms, as a useful and constructive symbol for cultural contexts. From the research objective, the aspects which have been best conducted are the questions around knowledge and meaning production, what aspects of aerial silks can be discussed within Heideggerian terminology, and how PaR can use a phenomenological lens, and to what purpose. The aspect which has been more difficult to answer is in relation to falling as a tool to overcome personal and social crises.

My hypothesis was that through a comparative and constructive evaluation of both aspects of the topic, I would be able to draw out new meaning about the phenomenon. I found that as my research progressed, it became less relevant to try and discover new specific meaning attached to the phenomena. Instead, through the research I was able to find links to wider implications and offer new perspectives on falling. My conclusions resonate clearly with Albright's argument that 'instead of nervously trying to avoid falling (...) in a world in which so many aspects of our social, political and economic environment are being turned upside down, I believe we need to learn how to fall intentionally' (2013, p. 36). Aerial circus practices offer, quite literally, one format in which to do so; to fall with purpose, control and intention. Falling has the ability to not only deconstruct, but also de-orient cultural contexts. There are a multitude of physical practices which offer possibilities for this kind of conscious falling, for example bungee jumping, capoeira, contact improvisation, deep water diving, gymnastics, parkour, rappelling, skydiving or even going down slides with a certain velocity. In Chapter Two I introduced the term haptic. This has become one of the key elements in which falling arguably proves useful in aerial circus and in a wider sense. Haptic perception is a dynamic system of proprioceptive feedback and qualities, in relation to spatial orientation. By adopting a haptic relationship to our surroundings, we open up for a merging of visual (optic) and experiential

perception. This alternative perspective is useful for considering ways to communicating tactile experience – such as falling on aerial silks. The aerialist does this already, by adopting a haptic relationship to her resource, aerial silks.

The overall concluding claim is that falling has the potential to provide a useful, constructive and alternative way to improve resilience and autonomy. As a consequence, practicing falling in aerial circus practices, can aid spatial orientation, creative thinking and subjectivity. These concluding thoughts are supported in particular by Albright's claims. Writing from the perspective of contact improvisation, she notes how falling can teach us to 'move with and through the descent, channelling the vertical momentum of a fall into the horizontal expression of a roll. The experience of falling can teach us a great deal about resiliency (...) helping us, in turn, to mitigate the vague panic that seems to have permeated almost everyone's being these days' (Albright, 2013, p. 36). I have concluded that that falling has the potential to contribute understanding of socio-political issues. Lastly, I argued that the aerialist body has the potential to communicate new meaning through her act of falling, by relating to social independence, pliability and precariousness.

In my conclusion I have proposed that the act of falling is a platform for suspending judgement. This is evaluated in the overall understanding of the thesis which has attempted to constructively engage with both embodied and phenomenological concepts. By approaching the act of falling phenomenologically, I concluded that the aerialist moves between control and giving up control. Such acts emphasise autonomy. The research might provide significant results for anyone interested in researching other types of movements in aerial circus practices, in relation to specific phenomenological terminology. Some suggestions of such further research are provided below. Some of the limitations of the research was the aim to discuss Heideggerian terminology in direct response to falling in aerial circus practices. This has meant honing in on only certain aspects of the terminology in order to find connections. The theoretical research largely shaped what aspects of the falling experience were discussed. In particular, the research focused on resistance, risk and personal freedom.

. It is important to note the qualitative shape of the research, and that the direction of it was partly shaped throughout the research. The research questions have lent themselves easily to contextual considerations, which I have found very relevant and useful for the research. I argue

that the research objectives have been achieved, but with a heightened focus on the wider perspective and implications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the main implications of the research for academics working in circus research, dance scholarship or other fields, which might apply phenomenological theory, is how to avoid any dualistic tendencies. This research has aimed at finding more connections between theory and practice. I have found that in order to do so, I have had to exemplify and clarify each method, which could cause unnecessary divisions.

The findings do not provide any solutions, but they may enter a larger debate about falling practices in various art forms. As experienced in many of the conferences and other events attended during the research⁷, there are many dialogues and debates taking place about the role of practice in academia, and the multifarious kinds of methods including practice-based research, practice research and PaR. This thesis may contribute to the value of highlighting practice on equal terms as theory in academic research. Eventually, this might add to advancing knowledge within the discipline of academic circus research. For Western culture in general, I hope that my findings can bring meaning beyond academic realms. Certainly, some of the wider implications and observations from the third chapter regard society as a whole.

Some of the major issues I would have liked to address and which I will propose for further research are: research of falling as sensory phenomenology, in particular in relation to Sarah Pink's literary works. Especially the first chapter of this thesis introduces some concepts, which would be beneficial to take further into sensory phenomenological study. Another avenue for further research is to study kinaesthetic empathy in falling on aerial silks. This focus would require a different research methodology as it focuses on viewers' experiences. Observation and qualitative interviews would be useful methods. For this avenue I would also suggest researching performativity and narrative on the apparatus. The third and last direction for future research I will suggest is looking at gender studies in relation to aerial circus practices. For this

⁷ Please see Appendix 2

purpose, I would draw especially on Tait's theory on circus bodies. There are many other valuable directions in which the research could be explored, based on what I have discovered. These are the most important in my perspective.

To conclude, I will bring back a statement made in the second chapter. In falling through the air, wrapped in aerial silks, the aerialist performs a transcendental act of phenomenological activity. This anecdote illustrates the argument that falling has the capacity to offer new routes to resilience. It further sums up the aim of the paper; to discuss how falling can construct new meaning and knowledge – physically and phenomenologically.

Word count: 25470

APPENDICIES

APPENDIX 1. PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH

InFlight Aerial Circus Arts Course and Performances

Disciplines: Aerial Bungee, Cocoon/Slings, Corde Lisse/Rope, Silks, Static Harness, Static Trapeze and Wall Running

Dates: May 2015 – July 2016 of which PaR was carried out January 2016 – July 2016

Providers: UpSwing, Scarabeus and WacArts, London, United Kingdom

Link: <https://www.wacarts.co.uk/category/inflight> [Accessed 30th October 2016]

Flying Fantastic Aerial Circus Arts Training

Disciplines: Aerial Chains, Hoop, Net, Silks and Aerial Yoga

Dates: August 2015 – November 2016

of which PaR was carried out January 2016 – November 2016

Provider: Flying Fantastic, London, United Kingdom

Link: <http://www.flyingfantastic.co.uk/> [Accessed 30th October 2016]

APPENDIX 2. CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIUMS AND PERFORMANCES

On Falling and Recovering by Hagit Yakira Dance

Event type: Performance

Date: 9th July 2016

Venue: The Place, London, United Kingdom

Link: <http://hagityakira.com/on-falling-and-recovering-community>

[Accessed 30th October 2016]

Performing Risk: Performing Arts

Event type: Symposium

Date: 27th June 2016

Venue: Canterbury Christ University, Canterbury, United Kingdom

Link: <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/arts-and-humanities/music-and-performing-arts/research/conferences/performing-risk-performing-arts-symposium.aspx>

[Accessed 30th October 2016]

He Who Falls by Compagnie Yoann Bourgeois.

Part of London International Mime Festival

Event type: Performance

Date: 6th February 2016

Venue: Barbican Centre, London, United Kingdom

Link: <https://www.barbican.org.uk/theatre/event-detail.asp?ID=18674>

[Accessed 30th October 2016]

CARD2 - Circus on the Edge

Event type: Conference

Dates: 9th – 11th December 2015

Venue: DOCH: School of Dance and Circus, Stockholm, Sweden

Link: <http://www.uniarts.se/> [Accessed 30th October 2016]

Practice as Research Festival

Event type: Conference

Date: 18th July 2015

Venue: Ivy Arts Centre, University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom

Link: <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/content/practice-research-festival>

[Accessed 30th October 2016]

The Future of Practice Research

Event type: Symposium

Date: 4th June 2015

Venue: Goldsmiths University of London, London, United Kingdom

Link: <https://futurepracticeresearch.org/about/> [Accessed 30th October 2016]

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

This thesis serves to argue the importance of falling, through illuminating connections between aerial circus practices and phenomenology. The act of falling is analysed as a phenomenon, which enables an alternative view on notions of verticality, risk, freedom and disorientation. The qualitative research design includes theoretical research on falling in a multitude of contexts. These include Heideggerian phenomenology and Practice-as-Research (PaR), which consisted of physical aerial circus training, specifically on aerial silks. Through the process of falling on silks, several themes pivotal to aerial circus practices are explored including kinaesthesia, spatial orientation and the relationship to the apparatus. The thesis imparts a comparison between the concrete and the conceptual notion of falling, and demonstrates how the methods can be combined by applying a phenomenological lens to PaR. To discuss the research constructively has required an abstract approach to Heideggerian terminology.

Key literature for this thesis includes texts on falling by Ann Cooper Albright (2010, 2013) and Emilyn Claid and Ric Allsopp (2013), and circus research by Peta Tait (1996, 2005, 2006, 2016) and Camila Damkjaer (2011, 2015, 2016), who is also the external supervisor for the thesis. Phenomenological literature on Heideggerian theory include *Being and Time* (1962, English translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson) by Martin Heidegger as well as secondary literature by Stephen Mulhall (2005) and Tyler Akers (2015). PaR has been greatly influenced by the works of Jaana Parviainen (1998, 2002) as well as Robin Nelson (2006) and Angela Piccini (2002).

The main findings regard the potential for falling as a subversive tool in wider contexts. Various examples of falling are introduced to identify how the aerialist, when falling on silks, performs transcendental acts of phenomenological activity. The overall conclusions view the act of falling as potential for a useful, constructive and alternative way to improve resilience and autonomy. It is argued that the aerialist body has the capacity to communicate new meaning through the act of falling, in relation to social independence, pliability and precariousness. The contribution made to knowledge in the area of falling, academic circus research and PaR is a reflection of such embodied experience.

DANSK SAMMENDRAG

Denne afhandling argumenterer for vigtigheden af at falde, ved at belyse relationer mellem cirkusluftartisteri og fænomenologi. Fald er analyseret som fænomener der muliggør alternative perspektiver på vertikalitet, risici, frihed og desorientering. Det kvalitative forskningsdesign inkluderer teoretisk forskning inden for fald i en række tekstsammenhænge inklusive Heideggers fænomenologi, og på lige fod *Practice-as-Research* (PaR) som består af fysisk cirkusluftartistetræning på *aerial silks*. Igennem processen med at falde på *silks*, er flere afgørende temaer inden for luftartisteri udforsket, inklusive kinæstesi, rumlig orientering og luftartistens forhold til apparatet. Afhandlingen bibringer en sammenligning mellem det konkrete og det konceptuelle begreb at falde, og demonstrerer hvordan metoderne kan forenes ved at bruge en fænomenologisk tilgang til PaR. For at kunne diskutere forskningen konstruktivt, krævede det en abstrakt tilgangsvinkel til Heideggers terminologi.

Hovedlitteratur for afhandlingen inkluderer tekster om at falde af Ann Cooper Albright (2010, 2013) og Emilyn Claid og Ric Allsopp (2013), og cirkusforskning af Peta Tait (1996, 2005, 2006, 2016) og Camila Damkjaer (2011, 2015, 2016), som også er ekstern vejleder for denne afhandling. Fænomenologisk litteratur om Heideggers teorier inkluderer *Being and Time* (1962, engelsk oversættelse af John Macquarrie og Edward Robinson) af Martin Heidegger såvel som sekundær litteratur af Stephen Mulhall (2005) og Tyler Akers (2015). Indflydelsesrige værker for PaR kom fra Jaana Parviainen (1998, 2002) såvel som Robin Nelson (2006) og Angela Piccini (2002).

Hovedresultaterne omhandler potentialet for at falde som et undergravende redskab i en bredere kontekst. Adskillige eksempler på at falde er introduceret for at identificere hvordan luftartisten, som falder på *silks*, udfører en transcendent akt af fænomenologisk aktivitet.

De overordnede konklusioner er at fald har potentiale for at agere som brugbare, konstruktive og alternative måder at forbedre modstandskraft og autonomi på. Det bliver argumenteret at luftartistkroppen kan kommunikere ny mening ved at falde, i relation til social selvstændighed, plasticitet og foranderlighed. Bidraget til viden inden for områder om fald, akademisk cirkusforskning og PaR, er en refleksion over sådanne kropslige oplevelser.