

theory the reflective account considers how site-dance and intimate performer–audience encounters might bring them closer to an experience of site in the present moment, challenging individuals to be conscious of themselves and their actions facilitated through a located sense of present-ness.

6 **Homemade circus**

Investigating embodiment in academic spaces

Camilla Damkjaer

In guise of an introduction

For a moment I imagine seeing myself from the outside – ‘I’ pass in front of the door to the lecture room, and through the round glass window I see two feet, bony and rough, pointing upwards towards the ceiling. The next instant, I am back in the lecture room focusing on my hands on the hand-balancing blocks, still painfully aware of my feet, and especially what the students might make of them. In this space, the feet appear to be an incredibly private body part.

‘Homemade Academic Circus’ is a series of lecture performances, mostly performed in academic settings that I have constructed in order to reflect on the embodied knowledge of circus practices. Paradoxically, but not surprisingly, this has led to a continuous reflection on the habits and expectations of embodied practices in academic spaces. In this chapter I consider how performing ‘homemade circus’ in academic spaces has urged me to reflect on the spatial and embodied practices of academia, the movements and bodily postures in the lecture room, and their consequences for knowledge production and practices of sharing knowledge.

What happens when the spatially upright position of academic lecturing practice is, literally, turned upside down? What happens to the processes of knowledge production when the lecturer stands on her hands or hangs inverted in a rope? What does that tell us about the lecturer standing on her feet? Through these questions, I want to address some of the issues that occur in site-specific performances in academic spaces.

Homemade Academic Circus

Homemade Academic Circus is a performance practice that I have undertaken over the last five years. It consists of a series of lecture-performances in which I simultaneously discuss and perform circus, as a way of bringing this art form into an aesthetic discussion. Each lecture-performance deals with specific research questions and conceptual

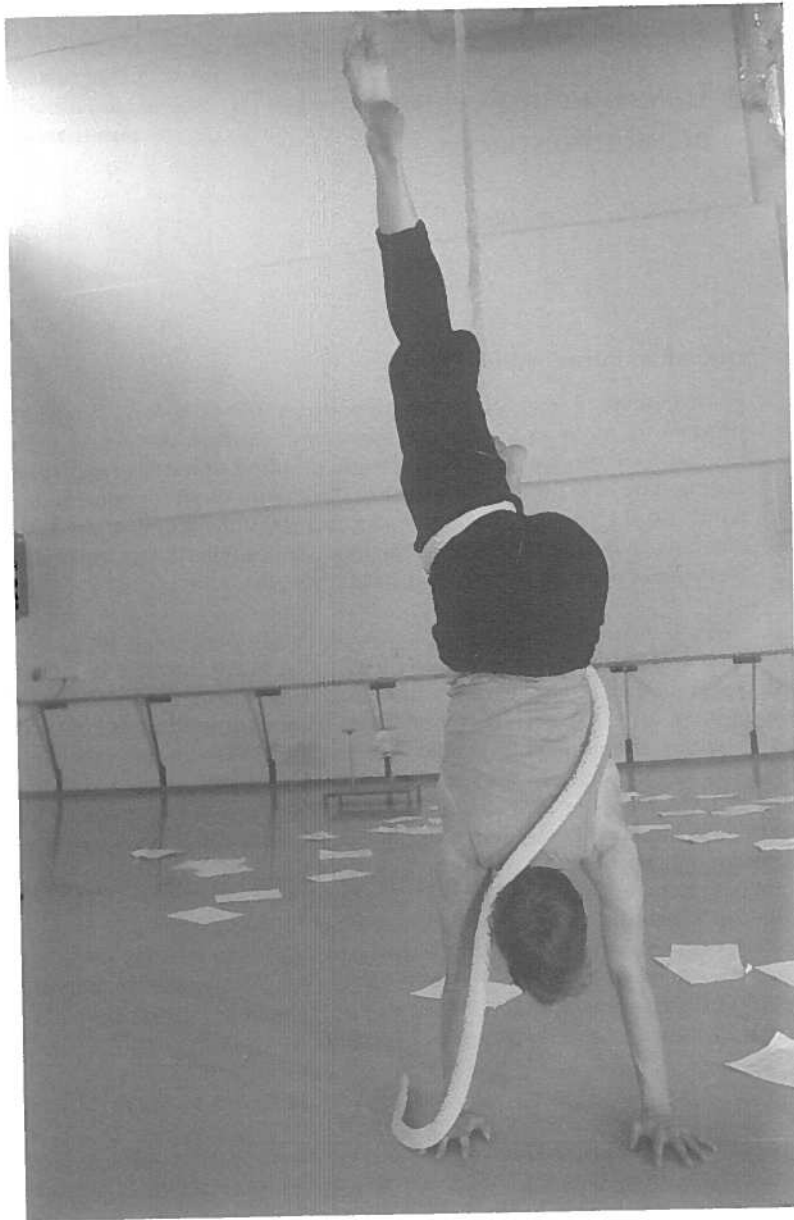


Figure 6.1 'Citournelle for Rope, Podium and boxes' (2011).
Credit: Stacey Sacks

problems related to circus and the performing arts. Therefore the Homemade Circus is an academic practice. Homemade Academic Circus is constructed and performed by myself, and it is made with a minimum of logistics and technical support. Therefore Academic Circus is Homemade.

As Homemade Academic Circus is also performed in conferences, seminars and teaching situations,¹ it has to be sufficiently simple to be performed in almost every space. However, the act of performing circus already means that the spatial expectations of the academic paper are challenged. Some of the lecture-performances have involved vertical rope work and even the most well equipped lecture rooms generally lack rigging points that support the weight of the human body suspended in the air. Homemade Academic Circus has therefore been performed in a variety of spaces with very different functions and associations including entrance halls, where people pass through, gymnasiums, seminar rooms, and also black boxes and small proscenium stages.

What I am concerned with here, however, is not so much these spaces in themselves, though they have given various frames to these experiments and thus highlighted the different expectations connected to performance spaces and academic spaces. What I am particularly interested in is the embodiment of the spatial position of the lecturer, and how that embodiment has been highlighted through literally being turned upside down.

Standing straight – the upright position

To the story belongs an understanding that research and academic teaching is my profession, and that most of my professional training has consisted of the following set of physical exercises with specific spatial movement patterns: sitting and listening (eyes moving from the person talking to an angle up and to the left, when trying to imagine some abstract term); sitting and reading (head bent slightly forward); sitting watching performances (knees tucked tightly due to the row of chairs in front, leading to painful walking if the position is sustained for more than two hours). As I slowly gained more responsibility as a faculty staff member, these patterns were expanded somewhat: running up and down stairs (filling in papers and leaving them in the correct places), standing in corridors talking (to colleagues also running up and down stairs), standing in lecture rooms or auditoriums talking and gesticulating (often wildly and quite unconsciously, as when teaching or lecturing).

This experience, and some pragmatic observation of academic environments, seems to confirm that the upright but immobile position such as when standing or sitting has a privileged position within the embodied practices carried out in academic spaces. This position also carries with it a specific set of cultural and historical meanings (such as associations of

self-containment, propriety and authority), and has a central position in the disciplining of the European body in pedagogical practices and techniques (Vigarello, 2004). Though we no longer have detailed regulations regarding how to sit or stand, as observed by Foucault in his analysis of the disciplining of the body (Foucault, 1991), we are nevertheless constantly invited to either stand or sit in academic spaces and move only in between these positions; preferably in a straightforward and non-imaginative way.

However, the standing position is not only part of the disciplining of the body. From a phenomenological point of view it can also be seen as a prerequisite for our embodied being, or even our embodied mind. As Gallagher and Zahavi write, the upright position has 'far-reaching consequences with respect to perceptual and action abilities, and by implication, with respect to our entire cognitive life' (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008: 132). They point to how the upright position makes it possible to 'maintain distance and independence' and shapes our cognitive abilities through influencing the relation between the senses (*ibid.*).

I do not doubt that this is the case, but it seems to me that within academic life this position in space has become the default mechanism to such an extent that we do not even ask ourselves what this position makes possible or impossible.

The ontology of immobility in academic spaces

André Lepecki observes that dance in modernity 'increasingly turns towards movement to look for its essence' (Lepecki, 2006: 7) and discusses how this imperative to move becomes a part of dance's 'political ontology' (*ibid.*: 8). He reflects on the manner in which some contemporary choreographers have begun to disrupt this relationship through, amongst other things, the use of stillness. On the other hand, physical and spatial stillness has been an imperative for the embodied practices of academic spaces, an imperative that is increasingly becoming disrupted in recent years due to the growing presence of 'embodied research' (Cooper Albright, 2011: 15), and practice-based and artistic research (Barrett and Bolt, 2010; Biggs and Karlsson, 2011). By inverting Lepecki's terminology, it could be argued that academia's dominant political ontology has been one of immobility, a position that, through developments of more embodied approaches to teaching and learning, is currently under attack.

Here, it is not my intention to simply oppose the spatially upright and static position privileged within academia with different movement practices (such as circus) and their modes of reflection in order to deplore the physically limited practices in academic spaces. Rather, I would like to explore in sensorial details how these spatial positions affect embodied reflection, social interaction and verbal exchange within academic life as it appears to me through the practice of 'homemade academic circus':

Perhaps the upright and fairly immobile position does in fact allow an embodied and sensorial approach too, one that we tend to be unaware of?

To develop this argument, I would like to explore two different positions (or sets of positions) that I have encountered through performing homemade circus in academic spaces: hanging upside-down (as in vertical rope work) and standing upside-down (as in hand-balancing). Subsequently, I will return to a consideration of the upright and immobile position of the lecturer in order to see how these experiences might enhance or highlight the embodied spatial position of the standing lecturer.

Hanging upside-down

As I lift my legs above my head, I see some of the observers underneath me. I lock my leg around the rope and feel the rough surface of the cotton even through my clothes. With some difficulty I find the piece of paper with my manuscript that I have kept close to my skin while climbing. I try to recuperate my breath and start talking. But as soon as my breath becomes calmer and disappears from my attention, another part of my body pokes at my consciousness. This time it is my thigh that reacts to the weight of my body held in the knot of the rope, slowing nagging its way into my skin. The longer I speak, the tighter the knot gets, the more it hurts. I read the manuscript as if I did not know the meaning of what I was saying, as if the words were purely a physical, vocal material.

The practice of Homemade Academic Circus has included lecturing while hanging in a rope. In most of the lecture-performances the rope sequences are within the ordinary length of a circus act (around seven minutes) and contain only some talking. However, in a lecture entitled 'The Representation of Space' (NOFOD Conference, Denmark 2011) the challenge I gave to myself was to give a paper presentation whilst up in the rope, which meant climbing and talking for about 20 minutes. However, even when lecturing in the rope for a shorter time, the simple fact of being in or executing rope work has consequences for my embodied experience of lecturing.

As performing vertical rope is a quite strenuous activity, the idea of time changes, as I constantly have to focus on how to manage my energy. I need to be much more economical with text and words, to make sure that I can both climb and talk. (This often means cutting my text to less than a third.) Whereas sitting or standing renders it possible to talk without limits, climbing introduces another limit to the performer's use of breath, and suddenly even talking becomes physically exhausting. The notion of the tongue as a muscle suddenly acquires another meaning, as I struggle to control it and get it around the words.

Even in the rope, I am not always upside down. I often notice that I have choreographed the sequences so that I speak whilst having my head positioned higher than my feet. In the few sequences where I have spoken

whilst having my head down, I have noticed that for some reason it seems even more difficult to speak. Furthermore, it also takes a couple of seconds to find out what it means to address someone while having my head in another direction, particularly when talking about conceptual issues. There is something slightly comical about this, no matter what I say – simply because it inverts our expectations of lecturing and the lecturer's role.

Furthermore, when climbing with a manuscript at hand, I sometimes need my mouth for carrying the paper, as my hands are needed for climbing. When standing or sitting, the hands are liberated for other things (and often we do not pay attention to what they do when lecturing). Now, my attention is constantly directed towards my hands and feet, as my grip (and therefore my safety) totally depends on them. The body parts that are normally at our disposal due to our upright position are suddenly available for no other activity than survival. The relation between different body parts internally is changed for example, when only the mouth is available for carrying objects, it means that it is less available for talking.

For the grip to work there needs to be a certain friction between the rope and the skin, and this also changes the relationship between the senses. Although I am up in the air and thus in a certain sense have an overview of the space, I am also brought into a haptic space where the rope is close both visually and in a tactile way with my skin receptors. Though the audience sees my movement as spatial formations from a distance, I see mostly the space around the rope and my own body. The rest of the space is just part of a dim peripheral sight; despite the fact that I am working at a height I am mostly aware of the space within my own kinesphere.

The element that induces these changes of time and space, the awareness of extremity and core body parts, visual and tactile sensations, is of course not only the rope as such, but what gravity does to a body hanging in a rope. Though the body is subjected to this force all the time in everyday life, it becomes much more evident and palpable when experienced whilst in a string of rope suspended several metres up in the air. In this position I largely depend on the arms to defy gravity and simply holding the upright position is not enough. However, even when I come down, the attention I pay to gravity tends to stay with me for a while.

Whether it is because the attention paid to movement enhances my bodily awareness, or whether it is the sensation of gravity and its affect on the body in the air, I tend (paradoxically) to have an impression of being more *grounded* when coming down from the rope. During the accompanying discussion with students that follows, I tend to be calmer, gesticulate less wildly, master my movements more carefully, and be more aware of the people around me. One could think that through the adoption of a performance persona, I would be more eloiigned from the listeners than when embodying my habitual lecturing persona. However, it seems to me that, paradoxically my address tends to become less distanced, even if I am spatially set apart from the listeners while in the rope. Even though I am, or

perhaps because I am hanging several metres up in the air I find that I need to focus on and pay attention to the listeners visually, through sound or through mental pictures in order to share the space with them.

Standing upside-down

When including vertical rope in a lecture-performance, the object of the rope in itself and the way it includes height immediately marks that situation as out of the ordinary compared to an everyday seminar. Simply the fact that the lecturer is hanging five metres up in the air is a statement as is standing on your hands, but in a somewhat less spectacular way. The physical risk may seem less pronounced as I am standing on the floor or quite close to it. However, the risk of failing is much more pronounced as balancing is a tricky thing, and so easily influenced by nervousness and the reactions of the autonomous nervous system to stress. Therefore, hand-balancing and the upside-down position on the floor, highlights other embodied processes at stake in the act of lecturing, for example proprioception and the pre-reflective processes of the body, such as breathing.

The thing that is so striking and fascinating in the practice of hand-balancing is perhaps this: how it can be so entirely different to balance on your hands rather than your feet, even if you are apparently in the same upright position? Due to the human skeletal structure, the required alignment of the body is completely different when standing on your hands, as is the way the muscles need to work together to stabilise the position. When standing on my feet, I generally do not need to focus on my balance, but when practicing to stand on my hands, it becomes obvious that I tend to take this for granted. If lecturing in the vertical rope has made me more aware of intra-bodily and inter-bodily space, then hand-balancing brings my attention towards the body's 'proprioceptive frame of reference' to use the distinction of Gallagher and Zahavi (2008: 144).

When working and lecturing in the rope, there is often confusion between egocentric space (the space relating to the position of my body) and allocentric space (geometric conventions of space, such as directions and relations between geographical points) (ibid.: 141–144). For example, as I am often hanging upside-down, and because I work *around* the rope which furthermore often keeps turning, it becomes confusing to talk about left and right (especially if talking to others who are not upside-down). When working with hand-balancing there is another spatial 'gap' which makes itself felt, namely one between the spatial position that I feel proprioceptively, and the spatial position of my body in the geometrical/allocentric space. Whilst I sense that my right and my left legs are equally close to the floor (when balancing on my hands with the legs in a split position), this might not at all be the case. As one leg is more flexible than the other, it may feel so, however observed from the outside, they are often at different heights. This is just one example of how hand-balancing, even

if it requires a high degree of body control, also confronts us with the fact that we only ever 'master' the body very little. I may think that I know where my legs or shoulders are (through proprioception), but that impression might not be precise enough yet to actually stay in balance on my hands. Through this work therefore, the fact that our bodies are partly out of volitional control becomes obvious. For instance, in hand-balancing there are moments when the (pre-reflective) body-schema and the (reflective) body-image seem to clash. As defined by Gallagher and Zahavi, the body-schema is constituted by the automatic pre-reflective functions of the body and the body-image by reflective and culturally informed bodily practice (2008: 145–146). For instance, the body-schema directs our breathing pre-reflectively, meaning that I do not have to consciously think about breathing, and that breathing happens in ways I do not consciously control. But in hand-balancing breathing operates in a manner that is sometimes counter-productive. For instance, we tend automatically to (temporarily) stop breathing, when something becomes exhausting and difficult, but not breathing when balancing on your hands will eventually make you fall, as you need to breathe as regularly and calmly as possible to maintain the bodily position. In a similar way, the reaction of my autonomous system to stress, might be devastating to my capacity to stay in balance on my hands.

It seems to me that whilst, with time, one controls the exercise more and more precisely, hand-balancing also confronts us with the body as alterity; though the body is mine, my access to knowledge about it is actually quite limited. What can I really know about what goes on within my shoulder joint? To which degree can I actually understand my own process of breathing? Even if my capacity to perceive nuances in the position whilst balanced on my hands grows with time, the body poses itself as an enigma and is no longer 'experientially transparent' (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008: 144).

Whilst hand-balancing demands a strong focus on the proprioceptive situation of the body, it does not mean that the spatial relation to others disappears. In fact, I tend to be even more aware of the others' gaze than when lecturing in the rope, as I am often at the same height as them. This also makes it all the more revealing, and performing hand-balancing close to others is like inviting someone into a process we as adults rarely share with each other: the simple difficulty of standing and as such it tends to display a certain kind of vulnerability. Even if I cannot actually see the people present in the room (or only through the extreme periphery of my sight) when standing on my hands, I tend to become extremely aware of what I may or may not share with them. As when balancing blind-folded in a lecture-presentation called 'The Teacher as Student: Learning Practice through Theory' (2012):

I take a firm grip of the blocks – balancing blind-folded is almost like making sure that you will not make it. As balance depends on the interaction between proprioception, the vestibular system and visual

input, taking away your eyesight when standing on your hands throws everything else off balance too (at least until you become a real Master). Imagine that when standing and teaching you would risk falling every time you move your visual focus, for instance to look at one of the listeners or answer a question, or even if you would move your focus ten centimetres from the top of the page to the bottom. Without seeing the audience, I hope that they are looking not only at my legs and their spatially extensive movements, but also at my hands and the tiny movements that to some extent reveal the proprioceptive process which involves my whole body. I know from my own experience as a spectator that it requires a certain proximity to see these details, and in this case some of the audience members are sitting higher than floor level. It is as if the steady and stable position of the standing lecturer is a guarantee of any knowledge proposed, and here I am struggling to stay upright, sharing not abstract thought and complex arguments, but the simple difficulty of dealing with my own balance.

Returning to my feet: clumsily gesticulating while lecturing

By sheer contrast, lecturing when hanging upside-down in a rope has thus made me more aware of the way I use speech, my spatial relation to the listeners (inter-bodily relations), the way my own focus is distributed to different body parts and different senses (intra-bodily relations), and the way I attend to movement (or not) when lecturing. Similarly, lecturing while balancing on my hands, has made me much more aware of the constant work of proprioception and the complex processes of the body at stake even when doing something as simple as standing. But what remains of this when I return to my feet?

Lecturing upside-down has gradually made me more aware of my bodily disposition even when lecturing in less extreme conditions. But how is it that when not having these physical constraints, I frequently tend to be less in control of my movement, less aware of my gesticulation, to the point of being clumsy?

One way to understand this, would be to examine the intentional focus and layers of pre-reflective and reflective consciousness when teaching or lecturing. When lecturing in the rope or while doing a handstand, some part of the movement is of course pre-reflective, but to a higher degree there is a simultaneous reflective focus on movement and balance. When standing and lecturing, I tend to not reflectively address my posture and movement. Of course, being too reflectively focused on your own posture and movement while lecturing might limit the focus on the content. However, when talking after a physical lecture, I tend to be more focused both on my own bodily energy and the people around me as the focus on my body leads me back to the present moment of the situation, and reminds me that talking is also a performance situation.

Whether it is an advantage or not to reflectively focus on the movement or position that one is engaged in, is something that has been discussed within many performance practices. In the chapter 'Body Consciousness and Performance – Somaesthetics East and West', Richard Shusterman (2012: 197–215) proposes that often a reflective approach to the task at hand is necessary in order to continue learning and correct mistakes. Being aware of the standing position of the lecturer may not so much be a question of learning to stand, but of becoming aware of the performative situation.

However, attending to the performative situation when lecturing, is not only about being able to perform smooth and controlled movements and thereby avoiding ridicule. If, for a short moment, I think of myself as a clown rather than a lecturer, then the skill I am supposed to master is not only the content and the delivery, but also the manner and mode of contact with the audience. The technique of the clown as understood in contemporary clowning (based largely on the teachings of Jacques Lecoq and others who have followed him), is based on the capacity to connect to and establish a complicity with the audience, in order to be able to *play* (Lecoq, 2000; Peacock, 2009; Wright, 2006). One way to attune oneself to this play is to direct the attention towards one's own body and its interaction with others. Or, as Stacey Sacks observes, you need to be able to be both *in* and *on* the moment (Sacks, 2012), being both pre-reflective and reflectively engaged at the same time. Perhaps then a consideration of the standing position of the lecturer as a form of movement and interaction might help bring this to attention.

Standing: postural balance and alignment – an experience of the unknown?

Even if the standing position may seem to be one of the most banal spatial positions of the human body, this is not actually the case. Fully understanding how we are capable of balancing on our two feet, and how the automatic functions of the body-schema and the reflective layers of body-images interact is far from simple. As Shaun Gallagher writes, the spatiality of body posture is not just 'equivalent to represented positions in objective space; rather it involves a prenoetic spatiality that is never fully represented in consciousness or captured by objective measurement' (2005: 139). What Gallagher is proposing here, is that a neurological understanding of the postural balance is not sufficient, as neurological, spatial and experiential layers overlap.

As a hand-balancing practitioner it is not difficult to relate to this statement. Through the practice it is absolutely clear that the spatial position of the body cannot be reduced to its position in objective space. From my experience I also know that the position of the body often is not really represented in consciousness; the position that I imagine is not the same as the one that I feel, or the one that the body has in allocentric space. Many somatic practitioners working with the body's alignment would also recognize and

confirm the complexity of the simple task of standing. So, what might the consequences be for the lecturer? Might a heightened awareness of this relationship have other consequences than simply rendering the lecturer more aware of the performance situation? How might this understanding relate to or influence other cognitive processes?

If the classical understanding of the cognitive consequences of the upright position tends to be related to visual overview, distance and the execution of tasks (as mentioned above), then a consideration of the upright position as a balancing act could perhaps inform an understanding of related cognitive processes. Rather than looking at the assurance and efficiency of the upright position, this would mean looking at its fragility and probing nature. Balancing is not something you have, but something you constantly search for, something that constantly needs to be readjusted.

In *Difference and Repetition* (2004) Gilles Deleuze describes how certain physical experiences can lead to what he calls the 'transcendental exercise' (2004: 178). By this he understands the process in which one is confronted with something in the world in such a way that it unsettles what we already think we know, through creating a disrupted chain between what we sense, remember, imagine and think. As an example of such a physical experience he refers to the condition of vertigo (2004: 297). I am proposing here that a similar disrupted chain, questioning the knowledge we take for granted, can happen from the simple task of paying attention to alignment and balancing in the upright position.

Thinking of the upright position in this way, would mean undoing the idea that the one standing and talking *contains* a certain knowledge, and instead consider how standing and talking could mean *confronting* the world and our knowledge about it. Such an understanding of the position of the lecturer also looks beyond the status and power apparently *displayed* by position, to consider a position of constant doubt and instability that we can possibly *sense* even when we stand still.

Thinking on the spot

The spatial thinking of Deleuze has mostly been used to argue for a consideration of transversal, continuously spreading and moving spaces (Doal, 2000), as exemplified in the idea of the rhizome which spreads horizontally and exponentially in all directions at the same time (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003). But in his writing he often favours another figure too: the one of standing or travelling on the spot (for a closer analysis see Damkjaer, 2010). Or as he writes with Guattari, 'Voyage in place: that is the name of all intensities, even if they also develop in extension. To think is to voyage' (2003: 482). I believe that he favours this figure as it facilitates an understanding of intensive space, a situation in which quantity and quality are indistinguishable. Intensity is not a difference in quality, and not a difference in quantity, but a relation in which quality and quantity are

reciprocally defined. 'An intensive quantity may be divided, but not without its nature' (Deleuze, 2004: 297).

I propose that even something as simple as the standing position contains the possibility of creating an intensive space. The position of hand-balancing, for example, demonstrates in concrete terms what such an intensive space might consist of. When standing on your hands any change in the extended position of the body simultaneously introduces a qualitative change in muscle tension and energy. And in a reciprocal manner any change in muscle tension will immediately introduce a slight change in the spatial position of the body. The quantitative and qualitative aspects of hand-balancing therefore are reciprocally defined. Just as an intensive space can occur when standing or hanging upside-down, then even standing on your feet can comprise such a situation.

However, what is important is not only the fact that even balancing on your feet is a complex movement task with subtle variations, but how we represent that task to ourselves. In my interpretation of Deleuze's thinking, standing or travelling on the spot can mean several things: the possibility to travel far in imagination or thought as when he writes about his way of working that 'the rare movements that I experience are interior' (Deleuze, 2003: 218, my translation), or the possibility to dig into the sensorial process of knowledge as proposed in the idea of the 'transcendental exercise' (2004: 178) and the manner in which perception is confronted with something which forces us to think. For Deleuze, thinking is an intensive exercise:

It is true that on the path which leads to that which is to be thought, all begins with sensibility. Between the intensive and thought, it is always by means of an intensity that thought comes to us. (2004: 182)

Traditionally, we often use the standing position of the lecturer to travel far in terms of examples, fields or abstractions, but we tend to ignore the sensorial aspects of the exercise. It is often used to embody status and authority as opposed to a way of thinking. However, I believe that we could also view the standing position of the lecturer as an opportunity to examine the sensorial aspect of knowledge, starting from where we stand.

Attempts at a conclusion: towards an ethics of posture

Through considering disruptions to academic sites of performance via alternative modes of delivery that challenge spatial and professional conventions, we can begin to uncover some of the implicit expectations concerning the relations between spatial and embodied positions and the presentation and transmission of knowledge leading us to consider these relations differently.

The embodiment of the spatially upright position makes something possible and other things impossible. Due to the quasi monopoly of the upright position within academic situations, we do not know what else might be possible through other embodied spatial positions and relations. As the upright position has become a default mode, even the fact that it is embodied seems to elude us, and thus an important part of the performance situation involved when assuming it is ignored. Artistic or practice-based research and the way in which these practices bring in other spatial designs for exchange of knowledge, is one way of expanding the spatial vocabulary of academic life.

However, even without moving out of the upright position, we can address it as an embodied and perceptual situation and thus begin exploring other possibilities related to it, other understandings of it, and perhaps re-consider the cognitive functions embedded within it. If we move our focus from the upright position as an example of containment, overview and control, to an exercise in which the fragility of our embodied nature and therefore our embodied thinking is at stake, then this simple act of balancing on our two feet takes on other dimensions.

We live in a world in which knowledge production is linked to professionalism, status and authority. However, when we look at the process of knowledge it is filled with insecurity, doubt and stumbling. This is important to remember especially at times when the guarantee of knowledge is supposed to be embodied in the person of the productive, confident, infallible and steadily upright researcher. I would like to imagine, based on my experience of embodying other spatial positions while lecturing, that even standing still is a reminder of this complex confrontation with ourselves and the world that happens through sensibility. Standing still and talking is a moment where complex perceptual layers interact as we negotiate both proprioceptive, egocentric and allocentric space in a manner in which we constantly need to listen and adjust. This conceptual and physical process of re-positioning would, perhaps, posit academic practice not as a spectacular display of skill, but as a perceptive performance of the process of knowledge.

Notes

- 1 Lecture-performances and presentations in academic spaces that I am referring to in the text: 'The Representation of Gender' – first presented (horizontal version) at the conference *Women & Circus* within the festival *Novog Cirkusa*, Zagreb, 2009-11-27, later performed in seminars and courses in Stockholm. 'Introduction to the complexity of circus through one exercise' – seminar at the Department of Musicology and Performance Studies, Stockholm University, 2012. 'The Representation of Space' – At: *Dancing Space(s) – Spacing Dancing*, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, 2011. 'The Teacher as Student – Learning Practice through Theory' – At *Contemporary Dance Didactics, DOCH* – University of Dance and Circus, Stockholm, 2012.

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7 Sharing occasions at a distance

The different dimensions of comobility

Jen Southern and Chris Speed

We look on *Comob* and think "where on earth is he now?!"

(Liz, *Comob Net User*)

Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies have become an integral and often invisible part of mobile technologies. We use maps on mobile phones to navigate from A to B on a daily basis without a second thought. The capacities of GPS are, however, greater than "just" navigation, and this chapter explores a speculative art project *Comob*, which has become a widely available mobile phone app.

The *Comob Net* app simply shows the locations of multiple members of a group, and joins together their locations with a line. It was originally built for use in participatory workshop situations, and was used experimentally in live art, performative walks and at a number of conferences in Europe and North America between 2009 and 2013. During these events we observed how it was used, and recorded discussions and conversations about collaborative and collective use of GPS. In analyzing these responses we identified an emerging sense of what we call "comobility," of being mobile with others at a distance. For ease of use in early workshops we submitted the app to Apple's App Store. Subsequently we realized that people worldwide were downloading the app and using it. For some this was just as a one-off experiment, others used *Comob* over several days with a group of friends, over a year with a family, or in some cases on a daily basis over many years.

This chapter describes comobility and explores how one family used the app to enhance their sense of connectedness whilst at a distance, mediating absences and presences in a highly mobile familial group.

While the term comobility is new, it builds upon already established social phenomena, from the "wish you were here" on postcards (Kurti, 2004), the sharing of mobility in travel blogging (Germann Molz, 2012) and the portable personhood of intimately mobile lives (Elliot and Urry, 2010) to a sense of mediated proximity, identified in analysis of the Japanese locative game *Mogi* in which players collect geographically located tokens through their mobile phones, and are able to see and communicate with