

Nothing like ...**falling**...

@Susan Melrose

"Pure, senseless contingency...". B. Massumiⁱ



Fig 1. Cornelis Cornelisz, *The Fall of Ixion*, (1588). The common bond of the series of four fallers (Ixion, Icarus, Phateon and Tantalus) or four disgracers, is that each one tried to enter the realm of the gods and was punished for his hubris. Ixion was punished for his arrogance by being doomed to rotate for eternity on a burning wheel. ⁱⁱ

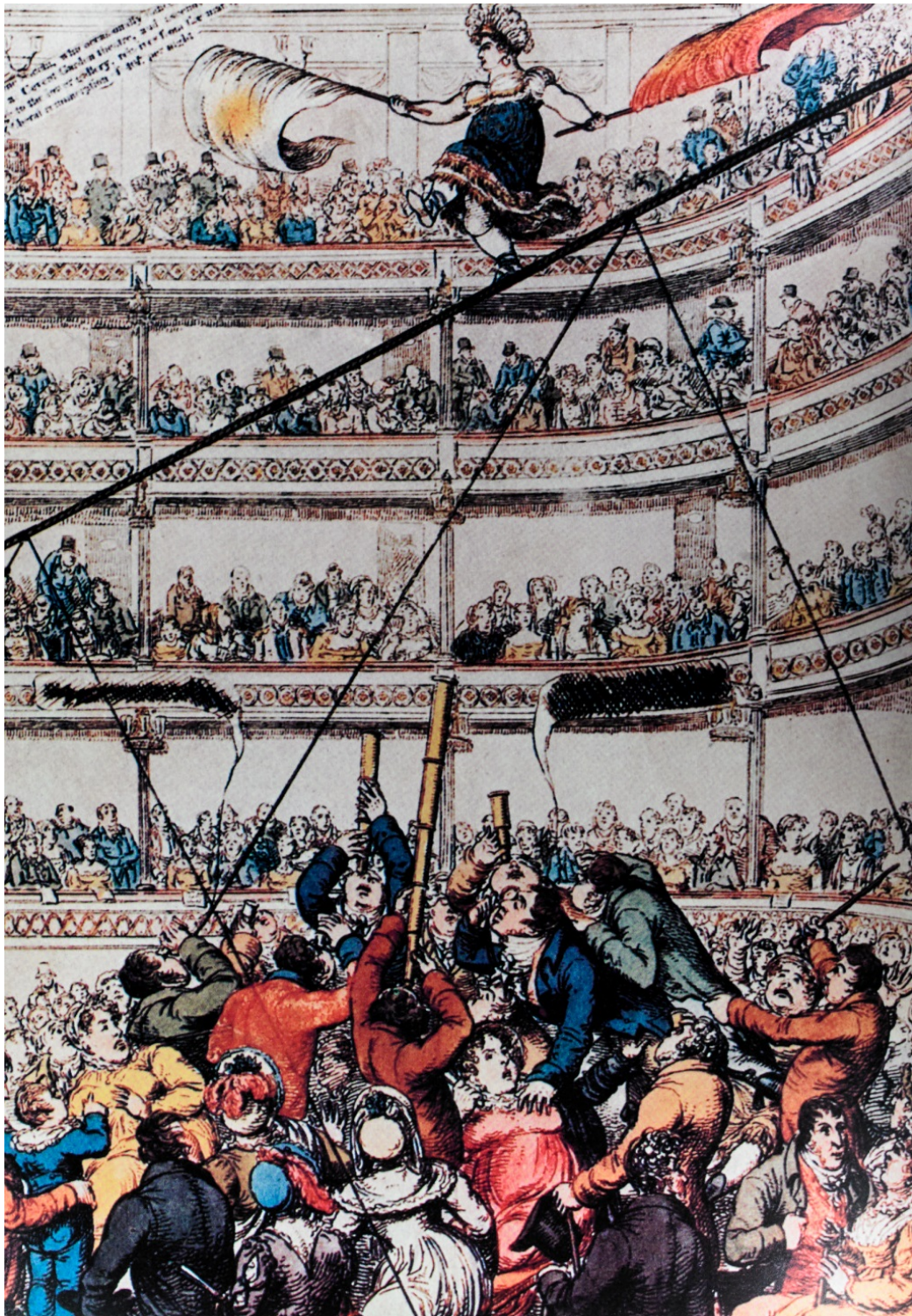


Fig 2. The Italian tightrope walker and acrobatic dancer, Sacchi, in Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Routledge 1991, pp.34-48: "A whole series of tensions is set up just to keep [her] body from falling."

fall (n.)

c. 1200, "a falling to the ground; a dropping from a height, a descent from a higher to a lower position (as by gravity); a collapsing of a building," from the source of fall (n.). (Old English noun *fealle* meant "snare, trap.") Meaning "a sinking down, subsidence" Of the coming of night from 1650s. Meaning "downward direction of a surface" is from 1560s, of a value from 1550s. Theological sense, "a succumbing to sin or temptation" (especially of Adam and Eve) is from early 13c.

fall (v.)

Old English *feallan* (class VII strong verb; past tense *feoll*, past participle *feallen*) "to drop from a height; fail, decay, die," from Proto-Germanic **fallan* (source also of Old Frisian *falla*, Old Saxon *fallan*, Dutch *vallen*, Old Norse *falla*, Old High German *fallan*, German *fallen*, absent in Gothic).

These are from PIE root **pol-* "to fall" (source also of Armenian *p'ul* "downfall," Lithuanian *puola* "to fall," Old Prussian *apallai* "finds," literally "falls upon").

Meaning "come suddenly to the ground" is from late Old English. Of darkness, night, from c. 1600; of land sloping from 1570s; of prices from 1570s. Of empires, governments, etc., from c. 1200. Of the face or countenance from late 14c. Meaning "to be reduced" (as temperature) is from 1650s. Meaning "die in battle" is from 1570s. Meaning "to pass casually (into some condition)" is from early 13c.

To fall in "take place or position" is from 1751. To fall in love is attested from 1520s; to fall asleep is late 14c. To fall down is early 13c. (*a-dun follon*); to fall behind is from 1856. Fall through "fail, come to nothing" is from 1781. To fall for something is from 1903.

To fall out is by mid-13c. in a literal sense; military use is from 1832. Meaning "have a disagreement, begin to quarrel" is attested from 1560s (to fall out with "quarrel with" is from late 15c.).

Falling (*fäl'ing*; / 'fɔ:lɪŋ/ 'fɒlɪŋ/); **present participle of *fall***

Falling (adj.)

present-participle adjective from fall (v.). Falling star is from 1560s; falling off "decrease, declining" is from c. 1600. Falling evil "epilepsy" is from early 13c.

fallen (adj.)

c. 1400, past-participle adjective from fall (v.). Used figuratively for "morally ruined" by 1620s, from the verb in the sense "yield to temptation" (especially in reference to women and chastity), attested from c. 1200. Meaning "those who have died" attested by 1765. Fallen angel is from 1680s; fallen woman by 1748.ⁱⁱⁱ



Fig 3. Gildas Bourdet's *Le Pain dur*, by Claudel, Le Théâtre de la Salamandre, 1984: Turelure, the father, dies, apparently of fright, falling downstairs.

Falling – isn't it the strangest thing? And doesn't the word itself belong, etymologically, to the richest field (variously, above, 'attack[ing]', 'decay[ing]', 'forgiv[ing]', 'salut[ing]', 'yield[ing]', 'deceiv[ing]...)? I trip, I stumble, I tumble, gravity takes my body into and through the air ... I am falling... somewhere... my brain shakes and quivers within the bony casing, and the resulting head wound is boggy and seeping. Oh! Where is my breath? Was I breathing, when I fell – as I fell? It seems to come back, suddenly, when I land on the floor. Clunk. I bump to a halt against the closed wooden door. Where had my breath gone? Who have I offended? Was my breath simply suspended – fine word, suspended! – as the falling starts? But where does it start? What triggers it? Doesn't it start, not with my agency at all, but with gravity, and the "downward acceleration of terrestrial bodies"? I am terrestrial, unable to fly, godless, indeed, and is it hubris that 'falls me', 'befalls me', 'fells me', 'deceives me' ... or is it gravity, that laughs?

gravity (n.)

c. 1500, "weight, dignity, seriousness, solemnity of deportment or character, importance", from Old French *gravité* "seriousness, thoughtfulness" (13c.) and directly from Latin *gravitatem* (nominative *gravitas*) "weight, heaviness, pressure," from *gravis* "heavy" (from PIE root **gwere*-(1) "heavy"). The scientific sense of "downward acceleration of terrestrial bodies due to gravitation of the Earth" first recorded 1620s.^{iv}

"The words gravity and gravitation have been more or less confounded", adds the dictionary, "but the most careful writers use gravitation for the attracting force, and gravity for the terrestrial phenomenon of weight or downward acceleration" which consists of both gravitation and centrifugal force.^v

Is it gravity at work, or does falling start with the gods, as in Cornelis Cornelisz's, *The Fall of Ixion* (1588) (Fig 1, above)? Ixion, one of the four 'fallers' or disgracers (Ixion, Icarus, Phateon and Tantalus), reputedly tried to enter the realm of the gods, mated with a cloud and was punished for his hubris, punished for his arrogance and doomed to rotate for eternity on a burning wheel. Which gods, where – and whose gods do I offend? Didn't I

have, simply, to alter my everyday balance, to “put a foot wrong”, as we sometimes say, in a set-up in which normality consists of minor and normally “successful” everyday negotiations with spatial constructs? And isn’t “wrong” interesting, on that basis?

Gildas Bourdet served as director and stage designer for the Théâtre de la Salamandre (Fig 3, from Claudel’s *Le Pain dur*, staged in 1984^{vi}),) which means that he both designed the stage set-up within which the performers explore the built construct - height, depth and gravity - and he made those creative decisions which both celebrate and constrain the inventive, expert-intuitive^{vii} play of the actors in the multi-dimensional constructed space-time (see Figs 3 and 4).

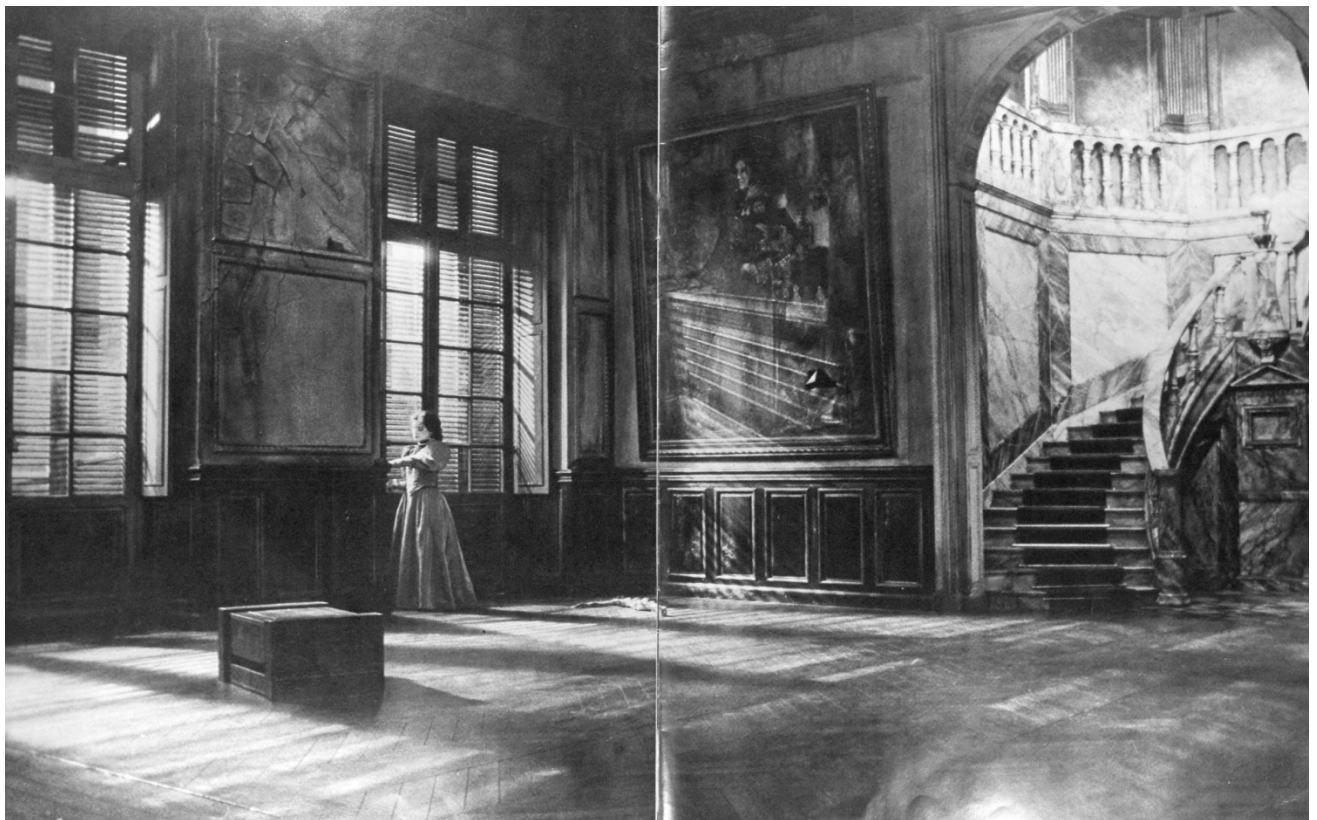


Fig 4 Théâtre de La Salamandre, staging Claudel’s *Le Pain dur*, 1984, at the Théâtre de Tourcoing; Gildas Bourdet, metteur en scène and stage designer.

That scene, whose particulars we see in Fig 4, establishes a minutely-detailed and historically-specific potential for human occupation but also for human elevation and hence for falling. The staircase! From an unfelt weight that seems to hold me to the earth, to the experience of weightlessness: where are my feet – where is my spine – and my head?! Where? Words fail me. I am still, there, on the floor, my head butted up against the base of the wooden door - as though waiting for something else to happen, but in fact I have fallen. I have fallen. I whimper. I am waiting now, because I have fallen, for the world to slow and stop, to return to its everyday order. Pain comes, eventually, with breathing. Breathing? Had my breath stopped? 'I held my breath': the grammatical construct itself attributes agency, but surely *something else was going on?* Falling held my breath.



Fig 5: programme cover

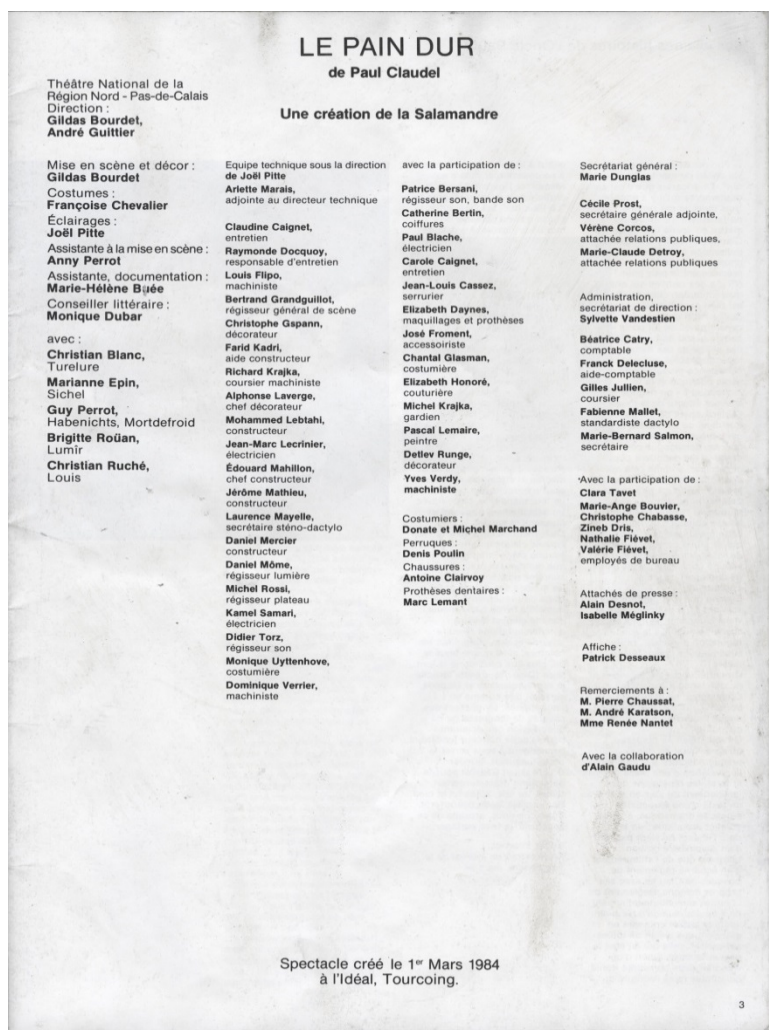


Fig 6

Onstage, performance itself holds the performers in visible and in less visible networks of energies and values, as do the material scene, the notion of event and its times and spaces, as well as the overall direction of the work. Bourdet notes, referring to the decision-making processes involved in making Claudel's *Le Pain dur* for the *Théâtre de Salamandre* (touring in France in 1984), that "the conditions for work with the actors mean, unfortunately, that you have to become sure of yourself very quickly, and that means that there is not much time for uncertainty". He spends much less time, he adds, "being uncertain about the décor, because I made it myself."^{viii} Within this minutely-detailed material construct, which holds the performers at work, Bourdet depends upon their expert inventiveness – because he can. (The company became professional in 1972, allowing me to use the qualifiers 'expert' and 'professional' without anxiety.)

The *theatricality* of the performers' work, its gestural clarity, their precise, rapid movement – apparently “almost mechanical” – the intensity of facial expressivity, bordering on the grotesque (Figs 3, above, and 7, below), in costumes and make-up that draw solely on the limited palette of greys, blacks and white, mean that it is difficult for myself as spectator to avoid engaging with it on its own critical terms. This does not mean, however, that the actors' presence, their evident expertise and play fail to engage in more conventionally empathetic terms: the dramatic elements concern an aristocratic family in the late 19thC, headed by a widower who had been a revolutionary but who is now an arch-conservative industrialist who wants to convert the ancestral home into a paper mill. The dramatic fiction involves a doomed love affair, a son in debt, a Jewish mistress and it unravels around the energetic interactions of the five characters. It is described in terms of alliance and misalliance, pushed to the level of *bouffonnerie*, but it draws, finally, on the myth of Oedipus and the death of the father^{ix}.

My own interest, since I saw the staging in 1984, lies not only in its staging of corruption, of elevation and the endless potential for falling, but in the ways in which the staging doubles the myth, played out, with the critical metapractice of an expert company, whose own work, in turn, was explicitly discursively-informed^x, and the impact of expertise and critical discourse on the performance decision-making processes. Claudel's *Le Pain dur*, written at a time of early twentieth century radical enquiry, is similarly interrogatory and self-regarding: he identifies a godless time, which, logically, can only be grasped if the traces of gods remain – hence the finely-detailed grand house interior, with wall-high heroic paintings and the fine staircase and fittings. Written between 1913 and 1915, the text stages characters who are all, according to Claudel, “*des crapules*” (scum), inhabiting stately houses rather than the gutter; without gods – hence only the traces of what they might have been remain; fatherless, and, according to Bourdet himself, a “sinister parody” of humanity, driven from within by a sort of mechanical necessity (Bourdet, programme notes), and surely visible in

the contortions of the performers' faces. What is particularly striking, in his work with the performers and the constructed scene, is his insistence on the photographic detail of the latter, and the internal conflict of the naturalism of the setting and the theatricality of the work of the actors.

Now, facial expressivity as well as a self-aware body positioning is also key to Cornelis Cornelisz's Ixion (and his fellow betrayers), in Fig 1 above, but expressivity on the face/body of the artist's model can be worked on by the painter, whose choices will have tended toward the representational (Ixion is punished, and doomed to rotate for eternity on a burning wheel). By way of contrast, the female tightrope-walker's face (Fig 2) seems, from here, to be relatively expressionless, focused and apparently indifferent to the telescopic gaze trained on her underwear; whereas Philippe Petit, whose walk between the Twin Towers is reflected on by Chloe Johnston, in "On Not Falling" (2013, *Performance Research*, Vol 18), was "relaxed", while crossing the space, "his head is turned away...and his eyes seem to wander" (Wurmilli 1997 cited by Johnston, p.31).

Bourdet's performers' faces, animated by speaking the complexity of Claudel's writing, are borderline grotesque, *bouffonesque*, whitened with darkly inscribed facial features. In each of the instances above, affect plays its role, but differently. Should a spectator *feel for* the (performed) godless dramatic character, for "scum", for the *always already-fallen*, the clown-faced scurrer, who is also, according to the fiction, a father, a spurned lover, his son a swindler - or might I feel, instead or in addition, for the expert performer at work? Might I admire and engage with performance mastery itself, on its own terms? And if so, what is it in the expert-performer's work that invites a spectator's affective binding-in - and what is at stake if that binding-in fails (or falls)? In the case of Johnston's engagement with Phillippe Petit's *not falling*, she describes his "situation of immediate and astounding risk", and his triumph, as inspiring "an imagined kinaesthesia, a phenomenological response", even in a

secondary audience (p.31), for whom Petit's "performance [is] called into dialogue with the current events of its time" (in the instance concerned, the attack on the Twin Towers, 11/9/2000, and the "falling man"). My difficulty with the way in which Johnston and others engage with this instance of "not falling" lies in the attempt – Petit's, it seems, as well as Johnston's own^{xi} - to account for the exceptional in terms of the everyday: "Like the worker at the end of the day who...ambles home relaxed, peaceful and satisfied". Myself, I dream in the everyday not of flying, but of falling. My dreams are filled with trepidation and fear.

According to John Protevi who reviews the affective tradition associated with the work of Deleuze and Guattari^{xii} through a more recently developed lens specific to what is called the "speculative turn", affect, ("physiological, psychological, and machinic", in D&G, 1987), "feels its power or potential as it encounters other bodies politic and forms assemblages with them (or indeed fails to do so)" (394); affect in D&G, Protevi argues, allows us to identify parallels with "novel positions in contemporary cognitive science....which maintain that cognition operates in loops among brain, body and environment"(394). What interests John Protevi, from the perspective of this so-called speculative turn^{xiii}, is the observation that "both affect and cognition are aspects of a single process, affective cognition, as the directed action of a living being in its world"(395). I want to identify the expert performance practitioner's work in terms first of an expert-intuitive affective cognition, and second, borrowing from Protevi, above, of quite specific and widely ranging "directed action[s] of a living [practitioner] in her or his [performance and dramatic] world". I am drawn by their mastery itself, *as well as* to the situation of risk, *as well as* to the dramatic situation in which their characters are caught up. A whole range of these directed actions, in other words, is informed firstly by expert-intuitive processes whose particularity is specific to individual as well as shared experience, and by a taste for speculation and invention, and thirdly by the deliberative processes specific to the developing *mise en scène*.

I fall. This complex action, born of a senseless contingency, is undirected 'in my own world' – which may be where the sense of failure comes from. I am lost. From an unfelt weight that seems to hold me to the earth, to the experience of weightlessness: where are my feet – where is my spine – and my head?! Where? I am still, there, on the floor, my head butted up against the base of the wooden door - as though waiting for something else to happen, but in fact I have fallen. My face, I imagine after the event, is chalky white, my mouth open, my brows dark and my eyes slits, the scene around me blacks and greys. I am surely grotesque - but isn't this observation the result of hindsight and its reinventions? I have fallen. I see nothing and I am unseen. Self-regard falls away, for the extended moments of falling. I whimper. I am waiting now, because I have fallen, for the world to slow and stop, to return to its everyday hold on me. Onstage, performance itself *holds* the performers, in a webbing of organised energies, as do the different dimensions of the multiply constructed space, plus the notion of event, and the positionality and direction of the work.

For some of us, at least, the memory of falling resonates; the recall of almost falling, of having avoided falling, the balance achieved over time (from early infancy, as dancer Wendy Houston has shown in falling differently to the stage on the basis of a progressively developing infantile command of her muscles^{xiv}) and with care and attention, similarly resonates; and in Bourdet's work on Claudel, I would argue that that memory is figured, in terms of both the mastered space and the explicit demonstration of mastery of performance.

O! Isn't this, in fact, the *memory* of falling! Isn't that what I'm actually writing about here? I am haunted by the memory of falling. But the memory of falling is surely *nothing like* falling. I don't recall the initial impetus. I was caught up, it seems to me, in Massumi's "pure, senseless contingency" – although unlike Roland Barthes, I did not lose my life: I

suddenly lose my uprightness, feet gone from under me, and the everyday-familiar tilts. But then gravity, and all that is grave about it, takes over (takes me over). I recall a movement forward, down, a rush of air – I shout “I am falling!” to no-one. With nothing to hold on to, no toe-holds, objects to clasp at or to bump into, to slow or stop the inexorable downward movement. The revenge of gravity? My brain is shaken within the bony container, and in the downward movement knowledge of what is happening comes looping between brain, body and environment. (“Brain and body communicate neurologically and chemically”, writes John Protevi, “in forming ‘somatic markers’, which correlate or tag changes in the characteristic profile of body-world interactions, which provoke them.” (402)).

In my own experience, the memory of *having fallen* is more like a memory of landing, broken, somewhere. As though my experience of falling is actually of a ‘having fallen’. Clunk. Crumple. It is on the ground that I ask myself: where are my legs? Where is my head? Suddenly – again! - a Lacanian “body in bits and pieces”^{xv}? My helpless words perform that apparently constitutive disarray of the human. What happened? Where are you? *Help me!*

But what does this (falling) have to do with performance or performances? Nothing - absolutely nothing. The expert *performance of falling* has nothing at all to do with Massumi’s “pure senseless contingency” (although perhaps “senselessness” and the impact of contingency might be replicated, in the staging?). The one is not daily, although it is banal; nor, however, is its other extra-daily^{xvi}. *Performance of falling*, in dance, onstage, theatrical or choreographic, is, quite succinctly, a *not falling* that takes place within the circumstances that allow the performance of falling, but prevent its actual realisation. The ‘somatic markers’, “which correlate or tag changes in the characteristic profile of body-world interactions” (Protevi 402) radically differ between my falling and a *falling-performed* in the

context of a staged dramatic writing. That falling-performed is in fact a *not-falling*. Non-actualisation on the part of the expert performer; actualisation on the part of dramatic character – but to what (dramatic) effect? The enabling/withholding circumstances specific to expert practice include the set-up specific to performance-making (the *dispositif*, in J.-F. Lyotard^{xvii}), the mastery of the practitioners involved, and the varying expectations of the different participants involved – not to mention health and safety! The present participle, falling, is widely used in the issue of *Performance Research* that takes the notion as its primary focus, but ‘falling’, in terms of expert-creative performance terms, is no more and no less than an abstraction. The *expert* seems to me to identify a field or fields of practices – including the practices of spectating – that constitutively avoid that “pure senseless contingency” identified by Massumi (1998). Falling, in the everyday, interrupts the subject’s control; it is the antithesis, as a consequence, of creative decision-making; it suspends the “instrumental reasoning” (Massumi, *ibid*) of the expert-creative decision-maker; it breaks with the “abstract mode ...of possibility” (*ibid*) that the expert decision-maker in performance *exercises* – to *proclaim* her or his performance-making expertise, in the event, and, in terms of theatricality, to ostend it.

Falling is *not* performing falling. Do you remember not falling, in the performance space, in its own terms, or do we call the memory of *not falling* something else altogether – because it feels different? Feeling (differently) but *not falling*, in performance terms, displays and indeed ‘speaks of’ – if you like linguistic metaphor - mastery, the mastery of what is in fact a complex abstraction that derives, in turn, from the command of a particular system or systems of bodily practices, of a discipline. Mastery, from the early 13C Old French *maistrie*, suggests “superiority”, “victory”, and, from the mid-1660s, “intellectual command”^{xviii}. In terms then of mastery of a performance discipline or disciplines – I can think of no useful way here to set the notion of a performance discipline aside – we might still want to ask

how it is that actual mastery evidenced by performers at work, can signal, to onlookers, its thematic opposite?

Mastery in performance-making – along with expertise, professionalism and discipline – despite its status as constitutive of expert performance practices across the full range of performance-making in the public sphere, is relatively speaking under-theorised in Performance Studies. Its vital metadiscourse and the wording of its links with expert performance-making practices (metapractice) are largely absent from the weighty body of Performance Studies writing – with the exception perhaps of certain areas of Dance Studies and more recently of writing concerned with certain established modes of performer training^{xix}. A notable exception in the early 1990s was provided by the all too brief illustrated commentary in Barba and Savarese's *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*^{xx}. Despite these rudiments, it remains the case that the writing in these instances is rarely concerned with expert-creative decision-making processes themselves. Yet some basic elements relating to an expert decision-making metapractice (production of the metadiscourse is one of a range of metapractices) do exist: in Lyotard^{xxi}, 1991, the philosopher observed that a growing auto-reflexivity is a vital aspect of the acquisition of expertise.

Mastery, in these terms, in particular in the case of the visual arts and performance-making, is auto-reflexive, self-ostending (from the Latin *ostendere* to show, exhibit, to manifest), and it tends to be mutually recognised amongst expert practitioners across disciplinary fields of practice, whereas theoretical writers' recognition of performance mastery may well depend on their own engagement with the *outcome* of making processes, rather than those processes and the judgements of taste and value implicit to them, themselves.

In the *Inhuman*, Lyotard was particularly interested in the place and role of memory in knowledge, in particular in the context of the acquisition of expertise. Remembering, in that context, he observed, “also entails the engagement,” in the practitioner, “of a *meta-practice*,” which transcends the immediate situation of experimentation, experience and recall: the expert practitioner involved does not ‘simply’ react to present stimuli, nor is her or his action ‘impulsive’ or ‘instinctive’: the impulsive person, in Bergson on memory, “suspends her or his consciousness and stays within the unreflective domain of automatism”.^{xxii}

Rather, the developing expert practitioner’s engagement, which is likely to be strongly intuitive, involves an awareness of the existence of a whole system of possible responses, in which terms the preferred and apparently immediate reaction is rapidly tested before it is applied. The acquisition of performance mastery, in the performer, is revealed in that performer’s evident (and evidenced) ability to run rapidly through a range of options (and the systems to which they belong) that apply or might apply to the set-up of performance-making in question, and to test the options as rapidly in the set-up (or complex of overlapping set-ups) that prevails. These processes of rapid and experimental engagement, in the expert practitioner, are largely invisible to the present non-participant onlooker, but tend to be wholly invisible even to expert spectating and critical engagement with outcome.

Performing “not falling”, in such a performance-making set-up, provides a sharp delineation of a double expertise (an assemblage: expertise in the making, shared with the expert *metteur en scène*, coupled with expertise in the performing); and on this basis I would want to distinguish between Ixion’s archetypal fall into the flaming depths, represented in Fig 1, above, where the expertise is that of the painter (whereas the artist’s model is likely to have been “modelled” by her or his painter, who alone can see the subject from the appropriate perspective); the tightrope walker, in Fig 2, whose professional skills emerge from training and are apparently undisputed, and that of the professional performer depicted in Fig 3. The double expertise of the performance professionals – we see this

equally in the work of choreographer and dancer - merges the expert-intuitivity of the performers with the deliberative processing^{xxiii} specific to *mise en scène*. But expertise itself is largely absent, as a topic, from the expert (Performance Studies) writer's account for reasons that have held my thought processes in suspension for more than a decade: expertise, in my own (suspended) account, involves catalysis between the expert practitioner's singular experience, on the one hand, and on the other, her or his experimentation (three nouns beginning with the morpheme 'exper-'), in the set-ups specific to expert creative performance decision-making. In its singularity it can seem to be resistant to written discursivisation, to involve a first-person embodied and/or verbal account or accounts that might seem in turn, on that first-person and singularising basis, to be resistant to the terms and modes of written discursive generalisation. Expertise, in other words, within the spectrum of expert-creative decision-making by the performer, tends to include the highly-skilled, the singular, the tentative, and the speculative.^{xxiv}

Bourdet's performers' auto-reflexive mastery, briefly depicted in Fig 3, above, and in Figs 7 and 8 below, is discussed in A-F Benhamou and I. Massenet, 1982, *Alternatives théâtrales* (no.12)^{xxv}. Bourdet is quoted in terms of the 'theatricality' he requires of his performers, whose rapidity of choice in making and rehearsing the piece I have elsewhere described as *expert-intuitive*.^{xxvi} Expert-intuitive processing responds rapidly in the sorts of contexts that trigger it, and it responds – usefully or not - to a number of factors present in the set-up particular to expert/professional staging in general and the set-up specific to the individual production. Expert-intuitivity is not, however, "fast and frugal", as some researchers into intuitive decision-making have claimed. Instead more recent research^{xxvii} argues that intuitive decision-making, not least by professionals at work, involves and activates the "rich knowledge" specific to the discipline and to the individual performer's history of experimentation and experience, which that individual has internalised^{xxviii}. It has nothing at all to do with impulse, with the "instinctive", nor is it located on the other side of the

rational; nor indeed, as I have indicated elsewhere, is the expert-intuitive "*just intuitive*"^{xxix}. On the contrary, expert-intuitive mastery has internalised performer-specific and performance-specific analysis and deliberation, as this has been experienced by the individual practitioner, generally in a collaborative set-up; it involves a dynamic and often unstable feedback loop it is key to decision-making in professional practice; it has internalised aspects of performance meta-practice developed in the context of different stagings.

It has internalised experimentation and the outcome of professional experience, where each of these has been experienced in the first person, has been personalised, and is stored speculatively, by which I mean that it is likely to be dynamic, to feel unfinished, and to remain open to renewed experimentation in new performance-making circumstances and set-ups. Where the practitioner's work is subject to *mise en scène*, to a directorial intervention, the knowledge-practices engaged remain, as far as I can tell, for the performer concerned, not just speculative, singularised, tentative, but also more or less open to the deliberative processes specific to *mise en scène*.

On these bases, every expert-intuitive decision taken by the performer-practitioner has swiftly engaged with a system of performance possibilities, and with a network of systems which include possible actions, a calculation, initially implicit, of affective potential, material and interpersonal positionality and relationality (specific in part to an anticipated onlooker/audience), and so on and so forth. That expert-intuitivity tends, as I suggest above, in performance-making that employs a directorial figure as well as expert performers, to require the confirmation afforded by deliberative input and/or modification specific to *mise en scène*, and, finally – and importantly, at least as far as the so-called "observational" research strategies are concerned - it tends to be invisible to the expert spectator, for the

simple reason that expert-intuitivity is involved in tentative processes of invention, prior to the development of the overall performance event as such.

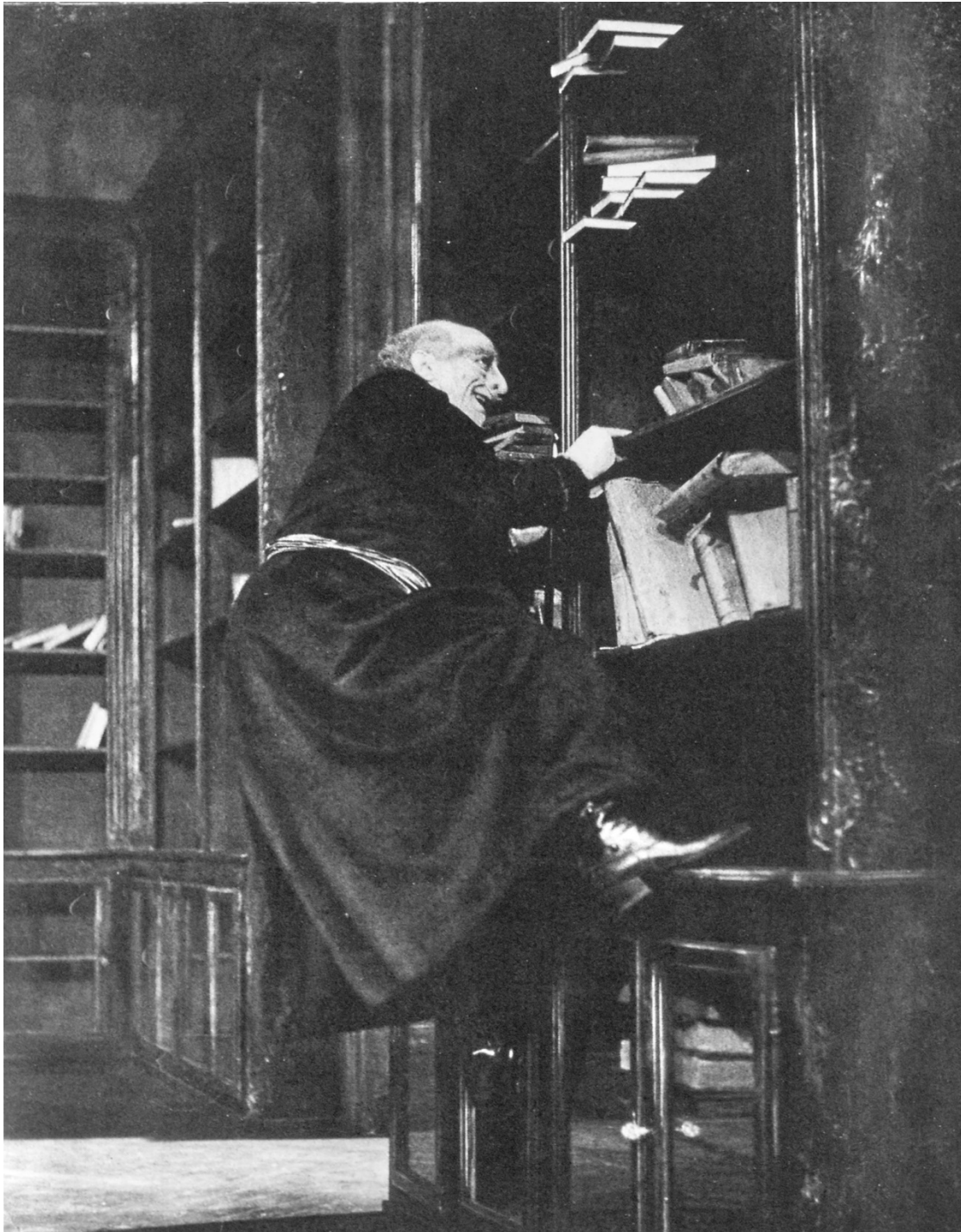


Fig 7, Turelure, Christian Blanc in *Le Pain dur*, 1984.

In Bourdet's *mise en scène* Christian Blanc suddenly and literally climbs the walls and their fittings and in my memory at least, even runs across the ceiling, and hangs there, not falling, and in not falling that performer both displays performance mastery – its “superiority” and “victory” over everyday obedience to the force of gravity - and in so doing equally invokes its everyday opposite. By climbing and not falling they transform the nature of the built everyday space as construct: why would a bookcase *not* be a ladder, a mantel not a window ledge, out of reach of the other, always at risk, but equally a showcase, and a springboard, with considerable downward potential? A ceiling not a floor, to scurry along – the verb suggesting rodents rather than the (formerly) well-born and propertied.



Fig 8: Lumir, Brigitte Rouän

Does this gravity-flouting control signal an “intellectual command” of bodily practices, or is this notion, from the 1660s, superseded by the terminology specific to the so-called “cognitive turn”^{xxx}? Certainly, in Lyotard’s terms, above, the complex action performed – climbing, *not falling* - is doubled by the metapractice of control: that control is ostended as such thereby displaying the theatricality required of his performers by Bourdet, within the

set he has designed, and in relation to the peculiarities of Claudel's text. But expertly performing falling, by expertly '*not falling*', within the given dramatic set-up, flags up the same challenge to gravity itself: for Claudel, speaking metaphorically, the majority of his dramatic characters in *Le Pain dur* have *already fallen*. This is who they are in a world that has similarly already fallen - with all of the implications and associations that apply. The elevation of the ceilings, and the presence of the staircase constructed onstage together gesture upwards, signalling a relatively glorious past - for those who had the right and ability to climb - but that elevation has always already suggested the possibility of falling (not least in the largely Catholic France). Ascent, in that past, was normalised for a specific class, but that ascent was always shadowed by the possibility of falling: gravity retained its everyday force and its potential, but in Bourdet's staging that potential is overruled by the performers' expertise: mastery allows an affective *performance of falling* that avoids the real effects of a body plummeting through space, and landing - hard.

The control remains, and in Bourdet's work the expertise (metapractice) is ostended. Despite all appearances to the contrary, a bracketed 'falling', for the expert performer, involves no loss of control whatsoever. That mastery depends, absolutely, on the individual performer's prior experience, whether that experience has been derived from strongly codified performance traditions or those specific to performance modes which explicitly encourage individual invention. In Bourdet's work the performers' mastery enables some of them to laugh in the face of a gravity they exploit to their own performance ends. It is self-exposing, and – theatrically - it demands to be watched (twice); and, as Eugenio Barba wrote in *Theatre Anthropology: First Hypothesis* (published in English language translation in 1991), with reference in particular to "Oriental traditions" and to "Occidental theatre" (p.34), it is those performers' "precarious balance" that is likely to catch and then hold an onlooker's attention – even if, in research conducted between 1980 and 1990, Barba wrote that it was

only in “strongly codified techniques [such] as mime ... or classical dance” that performers’ “bodies appear to have been broken and then reformed”, thereby drawing and holding the onlooker’s eye. In the section entitled “Balance”, including reference to the so-called “extra-daily...” (34-53), Barba raises the notion that a “whole series of tensions” prevents the tightrope walker from falling. It seems to me to be likely that the tightrope walker, whether it is a matter of the Italian acrobatic dancer, Sacchi “at London’s Covent Garden in 1816”, or of Phillipe Petit’s *not falling*, in his notorious walk between the Twin Towers in 1974, is genuinely exceptional, and that it is the singular performer’s outstanding mastery of physical and psychological tensions, in a context of acute risk, that attracts our gaze – if, indeed some of us can bear to watch, can bear to be bound-in.

The empathetic/sympathetic “phenomenological response” that might allow me to “project [myself] into the story *and share in the triumph*” (31: my emphasis), is missing from my engagement, but so too is the mastery. I have found that there is no acquisition of mastery in falling, nor is there the possibility of a re-remembering (a putting the members back) in Lyotard’s terms. My first-person wording, above, is an invention, a line strung across a space that is far from empty. In the absence of a choreographer, the knowledge-dilemma remains: how did I revolve, on the way down, so that from an upright, standing position, I end up, two flights down, head-first, against the hallway door? Perhaps a clue to the knowledge dilemmas engaged throughout this paper can be found after all in Protevi – who writes however in the context of a de-subjectivized male street violence rather than with regard to the acquisition of mastery in an individual expert practitioner whose acquisition continues to be felt in first-person terms: in the acquisition of expertise, I am arguing, “[b]rain and body [do indeed] communicate neurologically and chemically in forming ‘somatic markers’^{xxxxi}, which are felt to be “...me feeling this way” (402). But in the chaos of my falling that neurological and chemical communication fails, fizzles and short-circuits,

and in the absence of retainable somatic markers, there is no such correlation of “changes in the characteristic profile of body-world interactions, which provoke them”. Falling, in the case of “pure senseless contingency”, is not simply counter-intuitive, as is the extended sequence of movements that take me – how? - to the floor: the lived world around me comes unstuck – I come unstuck – and it seems, in passing, that stair edge and bannister strike at me because their world, too, is shocked and shaken by the chaos of my movements.

In contrast, Christian Blanc’s climb and eventual staged ‘fall’ in Bourdet’s scenographic construct are expert-intuitively inventive, masterly and repeatable, with full knowledge of cause and considerable understanding of effect/affect: the somatic markers correlate with or tag changes in the profile characteristic of his professional expertise, within the (body-world) performance-making set-up with which he operates; nonetheless, it seems to me that he is likely, if called upon to do so, to evaluate his own expert knowledge practices in affective terms, as felt, speculative, creative and systematically in need of feedback – hence relationally-defined and eternally open to individual experience.

ⁱ B. Massumi, 1998, “Event Horizon”, in J.Brouwer (ed.), *The Art of the Accident*, Rotterdam: Dutch Architecture Institute/V2. Massumi reflects here on the curious accident with a laundry van that killed Roland Barthes in Paris, in 1980, just after his lunch with Francois Mitterand.

www.radical empiricism.org/brianmassumi/textes/Eventhorizon.pdf (consulted 1/12/2017)

ⁱⁱ <http://collectie.boijmans.nl/en/object/4340> (consulted 20 November 2017). “The four seemingly varied poses painted by the artist in the period are in fact more or less the same pose (one leg bent down, the other raised; one arm raised, the other lowered) viewed from different angles.”

ⁱⁱⁱ www.etymonline.com/, consulted 1 November 2017.

^{iv} <https://www.etymonline.com/word/gravity>.

^v *ibid*

^{vi} P. Claudel, 1956, *L’Otage suivi de Le Pain dur et Le Pere Humilie*, Paris: Gallimard.

^{vii} I use the term ‘expert-intuitive’ here while recognising the difficulty posed for some in performance-makers and writers by use of the qualifiers ‘expert’ and ‘professional’ (as in ‘expert practices’). Post-2000 research into intuitive decision-making in the context of expert and professional practices has tended to be focused on Professional Studies, Nursing, Education, Psychology and a range of professional disciplines – prompted in part by what are called ‘New Doctorates’; it is relatively rare to find research into expert-intuition in the arts. A notable exception can be found in the work of Daniel Bangert – see Bagert, Schubert and Fabian, 2014, ‘A Spiral Model of Musical Decision-Making’ in *Frontiers in Psychology*. Available online at <<http://journal.frontiersin.org/journal/psychology>> (accessed 19 October 2016), and D. Bangert, 2015, ‘Practice Thoughts and Performance Action: Observing Processes of Musical Decision-Making’, *Music Performance Research* 7 (1): 27-46. Available online at <<http://openmusiclibrary.org/journal/music-performance-research/>> (accessed 20 October 2016). While certain ‘intuitionists’ take up the role of the intuitive in decision-making (cf J. Haidt, “The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgement”,

Psychological Review, no.108, 2001), they tend to continue to blur the distinctions I want to argue for between everyday-intuitive judgement, which we all engage in, and the judgement specific to and practised by professionals at work. See my "Running in Circles, with 'Music' in Mind", in J. Impett, ed., 2017, *Artistic Research in Music: Discipline and Resistance*, Leuven: Leuven University Press.

viii G. Bourdet, 1984, Programme notes (my translation).

ix http://www.theatre-et-compagnie.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=79&Itemid=474 (consulted 1 Nov.2017).

x The cultural policy of decentralisation, long of political interest in France, became a reality between 1959 and the 1970s when Malraux as Minister of Culture founded and funded regional *Maisons de la Culture* – the first at le Havre in 1961, followed by Caen, Bourges and Paris (Théâtre de l'Est parisien). It was judged politically useful to offer 'interesting' young theatre directors posts at regional Cultural Centres. 'Interesting' young directors tended, at the time, to be what the French called 'intellos de gauche', which suggested an art practice informed by theories of the Left.

xi C. Johnston writes: "I argue that Petit's walk invites us to project ourselves into it and practice this space...in the air between the Twin Towers..." C. Johnston, "On Falling", *Performance Review*, Vol.18, issue 4, p.31,

xii G. Deleuze, 1988, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. R. Hurley, San Francisco: City Lights, and G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, 1987, *A Thousand Plateaux*, trans. B. Massumi, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

xiii L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, G. Harman, eds., 2011, *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism And Realism*, Melbourne: re-press. The speculative turn critiques the established tendency of continental philosophy "to focus on discourse, text, culture, consciousness, power or ideas as what constitutes reality. Humanity remains at the centre of these works, and reality appears in philosophy only as a correlate of human thought....[S]omething is clearly amiss in these trends [and] it is not clear that the anti-realist position is equipped to face up to" developments such as "looming ecological catastrophe" (p.3).

xiv Documentation and Performance Conference, University of Lancaster, Nuffield Theatre, 1994.

xv J. Lacan, 1977, *Écrits, a Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, London, Tavistock

xvi Both Richard Schechner (2006, *Performance Studies. An Introduction*, New York) and Eugenio Barba (op cit) take up the notion of a close correlation between everyday and "extra-daily" practices. The notion was widespread in the 1980s/early 1990s, developing theoretical ideas established in the work of E. Goffman, P. Bourdieu and later M. de Certeau, and resonating with the ideas of artists like Allan Karpow and Joseph Beuys.

xvii J-F. Lyotard, 1973, *Des Dispositifs pulsionnels*, Paris: Union Général d'Éditions. See also J-F. Lyotard, 1984, *Driftworks*, ed. R. McKeon, New York: Semiotext(e).

xviii www.etymonline.com/word/mastery, consulted 1 November 2017.

xix As was the case for Feldenkrais's *Awareness Through Movement* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), much writing on performance training published in the 1990s was characterised by its association with the name of a specific, major practitioner. This situation changed to some extent in the 2000s, with writing from Ali Hodge and Bella Merlin, and others, which explored training more generally, although performance training modes still tend to be associated with the names of notorious practitioners.

xx A. Barba and N. Savarese, 1991, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, ed R. Gough, trans. R. Fowler, London & New York: Routledge.

xxi J-F. Lyotard, 1992, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington & R. Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

xxii H. Bergson, 1919, *Matter and Memory*, trans M. Paul and W. Palmer, Allen & Unwin, *Matière et mémoire*, first published in 1886/1946. . Bergson contended that we do not know our body only "from without" by perceptions, but also "from within" by affections. According to T.D. Senior, Thomas D., "Epistemological Problems of Memory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, "That most of our knowledge is in memory at any particular time is a given". He goes on: "What is perhaps surprising, however, is the degree to which even our current conscious knowledge typically depends on memory", yet memory, in my enquiry into expert-intuitive process, is central to the development of expertise.

xxiii Recent research into intuitive process in expert or professional decision-making identifies what are called "dual process theories of cognition", which position the intuitive and the deliberative as stages in cognitive process, rather than opposing processes – see for example T. Bastick, 2003, *Intuition: Evaluating the Construct and its Impact on Creative Thinking*, Kingston: Stoneman and Lang and P. Barrouillet, 2011, 'Dual-process theories and cognitive development: Advances and challenges', *Developmental Review*, Volume 31.

xxiv *The Speculative Turn*, op cit

xxv Quoted in Programme Notes, Théâtre de la Salamandre, 1984 (my translation).

xxvi www.s.f.melrose.org.uk

xxvii C. Harteis, T. Koch and B. Morgenthaler, 2008, 'How Intuition Contributes to High Performance: An Educational Perspective', *US-China Education Review*, 5 (1): 68-80.

xxviii The notion of 'internalisation' is complex and rests on a spatial metaphor (internal vs external) which may not be particularly useful to an enquiry into expertise, not least since findings in the cognitive sciences are more widely disseminated. Plainly references to 'the body' as vessel, the head as cavernous, the psychological as 'interiority' do little to help us understand where practitioner expertise might be located. To attempt to account for it as embodied helps us little unless we accept, as does Protevi's reading of both D&G and of Damasio (2003,

Looking for Spinoza, New York: Harcourt), that “affective cognition” “operates in loops among brain, body and environment”, and produces “somatic markers” which correlate or tag changes, in the performance set-up that we might want to call ‘characteristic’.

^{xxix} [www.s.f.melrose.org.uk/just intuitive](http://www.s.f.melrose.org.uk/just_intuitive)

^{xxx} When Protevi writes of “neuroscience”, of “affective cognition” and of the “subjective appropriation of affect”, he is drawing on research material from the neurosciences as well as the work on affect from Deleuze and Guattari; he is participating in the “cognitive turn” rather than in the neurosciences themselves. A ‘turn’ tends to be a complex model and its terminology borrowed from another discipline and largely applied metaphorically, operating to one or another ‘model of intelligibility’ (or ways of seeing and understanding) brought to the subject or process under enquiry.