

FALLING ABOUT
research lab

December 14-15 2013

Siobhan Davies Studios, SE1



CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	4
INTRODUCTION	5
Participants	7
Lab Structure	11
DAY ONE - SATURDAY	12
FALLING IN CODE	14
Martha Graham Laughing to Fall	14
A Limon Swing	16
A Small Dance	16
Tai Chi Preparations	17
Aikido Surfacing	17
CROSSING FIELDS	19
The Fall	19
Falling Buildings	20
Sound Weights	21
Taranta	22
Barefoot Running	22
When Falling is Funny	23
Match-sticks	24
LIVE ART INSTALLATIONS	25
Shoe Constructions	25
The Falling Shift SE1	27
Kinbaku	27
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION	29
PERFORMANCE RESEARCH 18.4 'ON FALLING'	
DAY TWO - SUNDAY	31

A Promise of Falling	31
Catch me I'm Falling	32
A Falling Story	34
Push Me Pull You	35
RELATIONAL FALLING	36
Falling Faces	37
Can I Let You Fall?	38
POST LAB REFLECTIONS	40
Space to Fail	40
Falling out of Codes	40
Embodied Memory	41
Laughing	42
Nothing	44
Comments	45

ILLUSTRATIONS

All drawings by Hamish MacPherson
Photography by Eulanda Shead

Fig. 1 A Conversation (front cover)	1
Fig. 2 Arrivals	12
Fig. 3 Introductory circle	13
Fig. 4 Anticipation	14
Fig. 5 A Graham Fall	15
Fig. 6 A Small Dance	17
Fig. 7 Flat Surfaces	18
Fig. 8 Small Group Discussion	19
Fig. 9 The Fall	20
Fig. 10 Lurching Building	21
Fig. 11 Bare Feet	23
Fig. 12 Clowning About	24
Fig. 13 Match Sticks	25
Fig. 14 Foot Wear	26
Fig. 15 Letting Go	28
Fig. 16 'On Falling' Panel	30
Fig. 17 Catch Me I'm Falling (1)	32
Fig. 18 Amaara's Fall	34
Fig. 19 Catch Me I'm Falling (2)	36
Fig. 20 You & I	37
Fig. 21 Face-to-Face	38
Fig. 22 Laughing	42
Fig. 23 Falling About Laughing	43
Fig. 24 A dancer falling	46
Fig. 25 Catch me I'm Falling (3)	46

INTRODUCTION

Falling About research lab evolved through curiosity to share practices, thoughts and experiences of falling – physical, metaphorical and psychological - and to discover how other practitioners, across disciplines engage with the theme.¹

As I write this report I find myself looking back over my own life line of falling processes - from transcendent vertical heights of pink point shoes to the stomping weight of doc martens, from balletic leg extensions to somatic body work, from expectations of white wedding to the ambiguities of queer living, from hierarchical institutional structures to the messy failures of collective working, from high, youthful leaps to ageing realities of wrinkling skin, from the theatrical narratives of Christianity to an existential acceptance of nothingness - and more. Falling is living.

The further I embrace falling, physically, metaphorically and psychologically, the more energized, feisty, creative and alive I feel. Not as a response, nor as a rebound, or a recovery post falling, but in the process of letting go itself. Creative energy seems to be inherent to falling, if I accept, rather than resist, falling's negative connotations. Letting go (falling out) of a fixed identity taps into a potential for unknown possibilities. I am well supported here by my professional practices in somatic movement, live art and choreographic performance processes alongside relational existential psychotherapy, all of which encourage and embrace falling as a way to access creativity and change.²

At the same time I am acutely aware of the consequences of physically falling, which is painful, fearful, dangerous, and can destroy lives, communities and infrastructures. Because of the consequences of falling, gravity can be

¹ Extended writing on the background to Falling About research lab can be found on <http://roehamptondance.com/falling/>

² I work as a professor of choreographic practices and a Gestalt existential psychotherapist and research projects such as Falling About emerge between the two fields.

mocked or disregarded only at our peril. It silently and invisibly affects us with every step we take, asking us to beware, to notice and to respect.

This is a paradox: in falling we are victims and agents of change. Falling is dangerous and painful and a source of creativity. The paradox invigorates this research project just as it gives breath to my life story.

Furthermore the act of falling is shameful and embarrassing, an act of failure for Western culture that persistently enforces a hopeful hierarchical fixed point as a shining concept, where we take pride in following an upward line of individual, cognitive and identifiable knowledge as an ideal for a life well lived.

The idea that falling could be a creative source for change plays in tension, not only with risk and danger but also with the affects of shame that falling/failing conjures in Western culture. A tension that David Williams poignantly yet playfully teases -

Why not lament (briefly) the very notion of permanence and move on? 'God', 'Truth', 'Progress' - looks to me like these are all cover stories, formative human delusions... Let their heart-break go. Why not? It would be an act of kindness. Of realistic optimism. And an occasion for invention. We've been pointing in the wrong direction. Let's use the fact of transience for our fictions. That's the way to turn a death story into a life story. If you want to be remembered, give yourself away.

David Williams October 2011³

A question reverberates at the heart of Falling About:

If a healthy creative life requires an acceptance of falling, how might we work within different communities, to embrace falling as necessary for living change when, ethically and physically, falling holds risk of shame and fear of death?

This question reverberates through the research lab and is shared with practitioners and academics working across different fields: live art, dance, music, theatre, architecture, theology, art therapies and psychotherapy.

³ From 'The Sea: wave 6': <http://sky-writings.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/sea-wave-6.html>

A focus on processes of falling as core to the project is the aim, not the fallen, nor falling to rise, where rising is more important than falling. Although recovery is important, this project seeks to give full weight to acts of falling in the knowledge that recovery is already taking place. The point being that a process of falling/failing (and this is such a miniscule change – an ‘i’ for an ‘l’, a dot breaking a line) as an act in itself is recovery and change – however terrifying that might be to acknowledge.

PARTICIPANTS

The lab was not a conference nor was it a workshop, (although in retrospect it tended towards the latter). Rather a shared, open space within which people could meet, engage with a range of physical tasks and discussions on the theme of falling. In the early days of preparation I invited a range of practitioners to offer interventions during the lab. I then choreographed a skeleton structure for the two days using their responses. Information went out on Roehampton and Independent Dance websites and over 60 artists, academics and students contacted me wishing to attend. Here is the list of participants – the interventionists are highlighted by *.

David Williams	Dramaturg with Lone Twin. Royal Holloway University of London
Mark Harvey	Performance Artist and Senior Lecturer Dance Studies National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries The University of Auckland
Benjamin Pohlig*	Independent Dance Artist
Jean Paul Zaccarini	Circus artist (unable to attend at last moment)
Frances Holliss *	Architect & academic. Workhome Project, London Metropolitan University
Amy Sharrocks *	Live artist, sculptor and filmmaker

Simon Limbrick *	Composer, sound artist
Kuldip Singh Barmi	Performer, choreographer, senior lecturer at Falmouth University
Alan Frank *	Printer, Philosopher, Cattle Stockman, Master Carpenter, Senior Lecturer, Designer, Artist, Sculptor, Photographer, Writer, Dancer, Cricketer, OAP
Stefanie Sachsenmaier *	Tai Chi practitioner, Lecturer in Performing Arts, Middlesex University
Peta Lily*	Performer, theatre maker and independent workshop leader who has developed a body of practical research with her own approach to Dark Clown
Peri Macintosh *	Psychotherapist, composer, performer and martial artist
Susan Sentler *	Dance Artist, Senior Lecturer of Dance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
Veronica Mauro *	Performer and demonstrator for Susan Sentler
Heather Pennington *	Performer, academic, and practitioner of kinbaku, the Japanese art of rope bondage
Tatiana Gordeva	Dance artist from St. Petersburg. Manager for the MA degree programme for dance artists at the Vaganova Ballet Academy
Eimir McGrath	Psychotherapist and Play therapist. Dance teacher
Amaara Raheem *	Writer and theatre maker
Erica Stanton *	Principal Lecturer in Dance, University of Roehampton
Joe Kelleher	Head of Theatre, Drama & Performance at University of Roehampton
Tania Batzoglou	Theatre performer, drama therapist
Johannes Hoff *	Professor of Systematic Theology at Heythrop College, University of London

Eliana Corbari *	Post-Doc Research Fellow in Religion and Theology, University of Bristol
David Slater	Director, Entelechy Arts
Katja Nyqvist	Dancer, senior lecturer at University of Roehampton
Vicki Amedume	Artistic Director UPSWING
Lalitarāja *	Senior Lecturer Dance Department, Roehampton University
Noyale Colin	Performer, Choreographer, Lecturer in Dance at University Campus Suffolk
Rachel Gomme	Artist, performance maker, researcher
Revital Snir	Actress, movement director
Paola Napolitano	Contemporary dancer
Franziska Scherner	Performing Artist, Body Sculpting Movement Teacher, Choreographer
Bettina Neuhaus	MA Creative practice Independent Dance/Laban Trinity. Choreographer, dancer, teacher
Silvia Battista	PhD research at Royal Holloway. Visual & Performing Artist
Robert Vestry	PhD research at Royal Holloway in interdisciplinary improvisation. Lecturer in Performing Arts Middlesex
Ariadne Mikou	PhD research University of Roehampton
Charlotte Nichol	PhD research Middlesex, Dance & Screen. Dance Lecturer Buckingham New University
Maxine Badger	MA Creative Practice Trinity Laban
Miku Tsuchiya	MA Creative Practice Trinity Laban
Ella Hurman	MA Creative Practice Trinity Laban
Fiona Tolland	MRes University of Roehampton, dance teacher
Emilia Robinson	MA in Contemporary Performance Practices at Royal Holloway

Susan Kempster	MA Contemporary Performance at Royal Holloway. Performer, choreographer, naturopath
Heather Stewart	MA in Advanced Dance Studies London School of Contemporary Dance
Clementine Telesfort	BA dance Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
Harriet Macauley	MA Choreography University of Roehampton
Zoya Sardashti	Performer, theatre maker, MA Performance & Creative Research, University of Roehampton

Production Management:

Luke Pell	Performance Maker – Curator. Co-facilitator for the lab
Rachel Shipp	Production Manager

Archive group:

Simon Ellis	Archive Manager
Stacie Bennett	Videographer
Hamish MacPherson	Drawing
Eulanda Shead	Photographer
Alice Underwood	Video
Terrynan Davies	Video

LAB STRUCTURE

The lab is structured to fall apart, the first day being structured tightly, with a range of interventions one following another. The second day allows more time for talking, letting go and experiment. Nobody has to do anything and there is freedom to come and go – suggesting possibilities to fall into gaps of unplanned moments and meetings in other spaces.

Saturday morning begins with interventions from dance practitioners working with movement techniques where falling has core significance. The final session on Sunday afternoon offers physical tasks that encourage letting go of dance codes and social conventions, experiencing falling as relational uncertainty. Between Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon a range of different interventions, performances and installations are offered from the fields of live art, theology, physical theatre, music, circus and architecture.

DAY ONE - SATURDAY

Rachel prepares the roof studio with two projectors and a sound/technical desk. Simon and his team install recording and film equipment in the different spaces.

Sixty chairs are placed in a scattered arrangement throughout the vast lofty studio, twos, threes, some single chairs and some clusters. There is no single perspective or front focus offering a relational seating structure, choreographed to encourage interaction between people.

As participants arrive they are invited to sit and chat with others in the space.



Fig. 2

In the days preceding the lab I spoke with 5 participants asking them to intervene during the arrival time. I asked them to walk between the scatterings of chairs and fall to the floor, without drama or affectation - directly and simply falling, getting up and continuing to walk. In this way falling is introduced as an everyday occurrence, giving no special or emotive attention to the acts, setting an atmosphere of surprise and spontaneity, allowing for spatial distance between vertical and horizontal to become visible and making our unrelenting relationship with gravity transparent.

At 10.30am we draw our chairs into a large circle and each person introduces her/himself by name and field of practice.



Fig. 3

I give a short introduction that includes identifying the team responsible for managing the weekend; sorting space, health and safety details; thanking University of Roehampton, the editors of Performance Research and Independent Dance for supporting the event; outlining the background and core concerns for the project; describing the skeleton structure for the weekend.

I lost my voice the night before (an apt occurrence given the theme of the event) so Luke, co-facilitator, introduces the morning's interventions – five explorations of physical fallings as represented within dance and movement trainings.

Chairs are pushed to the sides and we move into the space, anticipating falling.



Fig. 4

FALLING IN CODE

Susan Sentler
Erica Stanton

Martha Graham – Laughing to Fall
A Limon Swing

Lalitaraja	The Small Dance
Stefanie Sachsenmaier	Tai Chi Chuan preparations
Peri Mackintosh	Aikido surfing

Susan Sentler

Martha Graham – Laughing to Fall

The 'Graham fall' is initiated from what Graham refers to as 'the contraction' or simply, the 'out breath'.

One of Graham's simplest routes for tuning into that root was through a 'laugh or cry'. In fact, some of her first exercises were called 'the laugh' and 'the cry'.

By laughing, the body responds with an uplifting curving in the spine, around and up. As you begin to fall back onto your lower back/lumbar, 'lower back fall'... one keeps increasing the shaping that was initiated by the breath. Also in the Graham fall, there is always an oppositional force/pull/focus, so one does not completely 'give in to the fall'... but reflects in the visibility of the body a resistance, the desire of the recovery.

Susan Sentler 2013

Susan's demonstrator, Veronica Munroe, a student at Laban, expertly performs the Graham falls for us while Susan directs the action, counting a rhythm out loud to which Veronica phrases her falls. As I watch Veronica I physically sense these excruciatingly complex moves which require honed muscular strength to resist falling - while falling. My body echoes with memories of 1960s New York, repetitively practicing similar moves at the Graham studio, attempting a perfect fall.

Now, I find myself fascinated by the relationship between Susan and Veronica, the close intimacy of teacher witnessing student where, through their close spatial connection, Susan also appears to experience Veronica's movements in her own body, while also observing Veronica's movements for precision in timing and shape - an inter-kinetic and interdependent dialogic practice.



Fig. 5

After the demonstration we all have a go at a Graham fall. We sit on one buttock, with our legs tucked up close to the side of our bodies and we begin to laugh. And as we laugh our stomachs' contract and we begin to fall backwards and I find my body suspended between up and down, unsure whether I am falling or floating.

Erica Stanton

A Limon Swing

This way of moving relies on basic principles which include - breath, weight, suspension, fall and recovery, succession, time and musicality and an awareness of space. The first person experience is emphasised in Limón - 'what happens if...' 'see if you can ...', and the falling aspect of the class can be exhilarating.

In this intervention, I wanted to enable colleagues to explore (play with) their mass and volume inside three dimensional action - rising v falling, opening v closing and advancing v retreating (to use the Laban terms!). In the end, we only had time to explore falling with the weight of the head leading and to examine 'the ubiquitous undercurve' in an exploration of weight-transfer as 'swing' (continuous falling and rising - particularly of the pelvis with opening and closing in the upper body and arms.)

Erica Stanton 2013

The studio is pulsating with bodies moving, falling to rise. I am reminded how this rhythm of swing is core to contemporary dance training. There is no upward movement without a drop, every breath in requires a falling out, and every lift off the floor demands a downward push in a Mobius continuum of

swooping and soaring.

Lalitaraja A Small Dance

Lalitaraja invites us to close our eyes and he leads us through an experience of a 'small dance', as initiated by Steve Paxton in the 1970s. Giving mindful attention to infinitesimal movements that are occurring in stillness allows us a physical understanding of how every miniscule movement depends on letting go of another in order for it to happen. As I internally consider the possibility of transferring weight from one foot to another, or prepare to move my head from one side to another I experience the enormity of this gap between one gesture and another, a gap that I must inevitably live through if I am to move into action.



Fig. 6

From the small dance Lalitaraja guides us slowly down to the floor and then suggests partnering one another with basic contact improvisation tasks supporting each other down to the floor and back up to standing.

Stefanie Sachsenmaier Tai Chi Chuan Preparations

Steffi leads us through the basic stance and initial gestures of a Tai Chi sequence.

The notions of 'dropping' and 'sinking' are very important in the practice of tai chi chuan. This takes place through 'putting the mind into the dan tien (centre)', and involves what is called 'breathing into the dan tien.'

The basic premise for tai chi chuan is a physicality that is loose and relaxed. Power comes from a sense of 'letting go' of physical, emotional as well as mental tension. Such tension causes what is called 'double-weightedness' where the practitioner is 'stuck' or 'delayed' in her reaction.

Stefanie Sachsenmaier 2013

Peri Mackintosh Aikido Surfing

Peri demonstrates an aikido fall that leads him into a roll across his shoulders before returning to a standing position. He moves as if on ice, falling becomes sliding rather than dropping, and his movements have a momentum that allows his rolling to shift through space, as if gently gliding and surfing the surface of the ground. He explains how he imagines his body as a flat surface ready to receive the floor.



Fig. 7

We have a go and then we are then invited to support someone else down to the floor.

Welcome your partner into your own sinking verticality.
Invite them into your own drop. Peri Mackintosh 2013

We have practiced five different movement based representations of fallings. Now we gather in small groups, drawing our chairs into intimate circles to discuss the morning's work. The space is buzzing with lively debate.

These interventions demonstrate how falling in space and time is inherent and necessary to most dance and movement forms. Experienced in succession, I see how each fall illustrates core elements of its host technique and

represents its stylistic frame. Each fall can be identified with the form, structure and aesthetic quality of each technique. Each fall is constructed to play a significant part within a movement system and follow a set of rules associated with the codes of each technique. This is not to deny the skill, relationship to gravity and metaphorical significance of each code – yet these fallings also maintain a known-ness, where a physical sense of falling into uncertainty is confined within strict frames and firm boundaries of identifiable and shared knowledge. For the most part these codified falls, particularly those of modern dance techniques, emphasise physical falling as a necessary preparation for return and recovery rather than an acceptance of falling for what it is – letting go as all there is.



Fig. 8

CROSSING FIELDS

Saturday afternoon offers four interventions, exploring the theme of falling in theology, architecture and music. Participants are invited to move freely between the events.

Johannes Hoff
Francis Hollis
Simon Limbrick
Eliana Corbari

The Fall
Falling Buildings
Sound Weights
Taranta A Christian Dance of Falling and Rising

Johannes Hoff

The Fall

Johannes gives an academic style seminar with power point presentation in the parlor space at Siobhan Davies Studios. He shares his views on transcendence and 'The Fall' in Christianity.

According to Helmut Plessner, laughing and crying are the most elementary forms of human transcendence: Our expressions and gestures become transcendent when we lose control. This explains why laughing and crying are the most common responses to the experience of falling.

When I recently asked Rosie, the 11 year old daughter of my partner, what she thinks about falling, she answered as follows: "children love falling down, because they can complain about the injury, but what they hate about falling is the embarrassment." This leads us to a fundamental example of Falling in the history of mankind: "The Fall".

In the following, I want to explore the phenomenon of falling in the light of this prototypical example... which is to be interpreted in the light of the (according to Badiou and the Apostle Paul) 'truth event' par excellence, the "event of Christ".
Johannes Hoff 2013



Fig. 9

Frances Hollis

Falling Buildings

Frances shows provocative images of buildings that actually fall, or make us feel they are falling or are playing with falling.



Fig. 10

Of particular interest to me is her ongoing research project about homework living. Frances' images reveal spaces constructed to function for living and working and offer an intriguing illustration of a kind of social/cultural falling – out of high rise office blocks, away from hierarchical and institutional working, towards a horizontal, collaborative living network of communities of people.

Simon Limbrick Sound Weights

Simon works in the studio with a group of dancers, experimenting with sound and the impact of high and low frequencies on bodies and physical movement.

Music is sometimes described as rising and falling, as if somehow it has weight and exists in gravity. Heavy music pulls the body around, possibly the energy of the lower frequencies resonates the torso and limbs. Light music, with higher frequencies, is more agile as it moves more easily through the air and impacts the bones and nervous system... The interplay between high and low sounds plays with a wide range of physical sensations. Different articulations or rhythms emphasise different parts of this balancing act and dynamics reinforce the musical shape and phrase... Through a combination of live percussion and electronic impulses, a delivered rhythm-score is varied in order to gain feedback, both through movement and dialogue, about the impact of low to high frequencies on the body in a gravity-field.

Simon Limbrick 2013

Eliana Corbari

Taranta. A Christian Dance of Falling and Rising

Eliana shows two videos of Tarantella from Southern Italy. The first is a performance by professional artists;⁴ the second a documentary directed by Gianfranco Mingozzi.⁵

If the *taranta* stings with poison, the Tarantella is a dance that heals from the effect of such poison. The documentary shows and contextualizes a healing dance performed by women at a particular time of the Christian liturgical year. Through their falling and rising again at the rhythm of the music, with the participation and in full sight of the local community, these women heal themselves and others. Recognising the somatic and psychotherapeutic expressions of rhythmic bodily movements,⁶ I propose this documentary as an example of vernacular theology and in particular a healing ritual, performed mainly by women. The tarantella, in its context, is a dance that exalts the falling and rising body as a mean of purification of body and soul.

Eliana Corbari 2014

The final interventions of the day roll along three different pathways:

Benjamin Pohlig	Barefoot Running
Peta Lily	When falling is funny - the success of failure
Alan Frank	Match-Sticks

Benjamin Pohlig **Barefoot Running.**

Benni led a group out of the building and into the local park – running barefoot. The experience was so exhilarating he repeated the event with another group on Sunday morning.

Why barefoot running for a research lab on falling? Well, I quickly realized that running like walking is very much about knowing how to fall safely. The structure of the workshop was intended to be simple and hands-on. After giving some thoughts to why running relates to falling; why the landing of the foot will most likely change from a heel strike to a midfoot landing when barefoot; to some tips on safety, we went out to run a short stretch along the pavement and then into the park.

⁴ Alla Bua, "U rusciu te lu mare" (2002). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jryWN38HfQ>

⁵ Gianfranco Mingozzi, "La Taranta" (1962). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmbXOd1yhE>

⁶ See for instance Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (New York/London, 1994).



Fig. 11

I expected people to be somewhat sceptical of my proposition because I shared that scepticism before I trusted my body to know how to fall into a run. But I was delighted to see how quickly people of such diverse backgrounds, ages and physical conditions were taking pleasure from running this way.

After the run, we spent about 15 minutes sharing our thoughts and experiences. People were delighted by the range of stimulation that their feet had not been exposed to for years, the difference in surface texture between various pavements and/or the grass, about the reactions pedestrians gave us as a group of +10 running around the city barefoot, and the fact that they decided to, figuratively speaking, trust me and fall into the unknown and scary place of taking off shoes, that social norm, and expose those seemingly vulnerable sense organs and limbs to their daily environment.

Benjamin Pohlig 2013

Peta Lily When falling is funny - the success of failure

Peta's clown workshop lifted energy at the end of a long day. With passion, skill and knowledge she led us through exercises that released our inhibitions, gave us confidence to creatively fail and offered an inspiring learning experience.

With my intervention, I decided to put the 'I' in falling to share with the participants the gift the clown brings to humanity - the freedom to fail. The Masters of Clown - including Chaplin, Lupino Lane, Keystone Cops - have explored a ballet of skillful falls.



Fig. 12

I chose not to concentrate on the mechanics and craft of falling in my session, but on the physiological/ social connotations of falling: tripping, stumbling, making mistakes... The basic exercises we did on the day are designed to release the imperfect 'idiot' we are under our social mask and to set aside judgments and interact spontaneously with other players, audiences and inanimate objects in each fresh new moment. It is a more resourceful, flexible and creative place to be. The Clown reminds us that the beautiful and sad (along with all the other polarities) are inextricably linked.

Peta Lily 2013

Alan Frank

Match-Sticks

Alan shares the studio with Peta, working quietly with a group, using long wooden sticks to construct a sculpture that can also collapse. This collaborative effort became an ongoing challenge, repeated on Sunday, striving for a fine balance between form and failure.

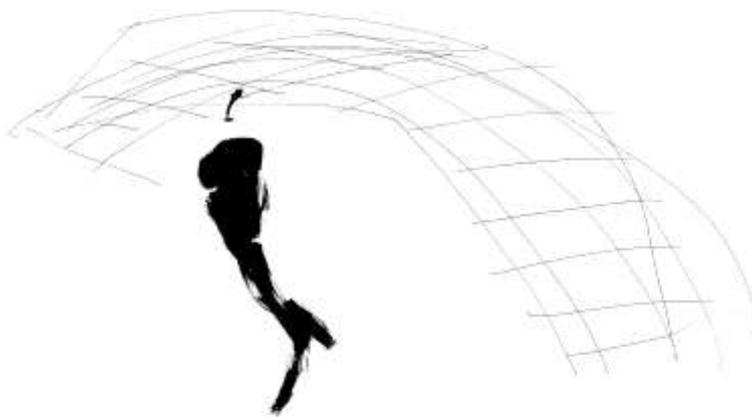


Fig. 13

I brought wooden sticks and a small group of us gathered and mused on how to make a structure that could both stand up and fall down. We decided on the earliest known method of construction, namely weaving, and we wove the sticks to make a rather delicate arch that we lifted aloft. To hold it up, having run out of strong sticks we used a rather flimsy wand and moments later, to I suspect our mutual delight; the whole thing came crashing down and scattered across the floor in a sticky cacophony.

Result: Homo Sapiens 0 Gravity 1

Alan Frank 2013

LIVE ART INSTALLATIONS

Amy Sharrocks
 Hari Marini & Sarahleigh Castelyn
 Heather Pennington

Shoe Constructions
 Falling Shift
 Kinbaku

These live art events were installed throughout the day and animated through a relational engagement with participants.

Amy Sharrocks

Shoe Constructions

I first saw Amy's shoe installation as an integral part of Time to Fall a live art performance and installation that Amy created in summer 2013. She kindly agreed to install the collection again at Falling About. An assortment of pairs of shoes is displayed on rostra mounted on one side of the studio. All the shoes are associated with falling, from ballet pointe shoes to precariously high heels, stilts to Chinese clogs. Pairs of butter shoes and ice shoes are

particularly enticing for their slippery changeable constitutions. Throughout the weekend, we could try on the shoes and experience how our bodies adjusted - or not - to the different postural balances evoked by wearing the shoes.



Fig. 14

I find myself smiling ironically as I write, aware of a contrast between Benni's barefoot running and Amy's shoe installation. As we run barefoot we sense every movement of our uncontained feet as a small falling, yet simultaneously we feel in control of our movements. In contrast, Amy's shoes, which appear as constructed architectures and provide an artificial frame for our feet to prevent falling, actually take us out of control into the uncertainty of falling. In other words barefoot running, which invites falling, offers more stability than running in shoes.

These shoes demonstrate how, culturally, falling is resisted and we restrict ourselves with fixed and binding constructions. These shoes evoke fear of falling in their effort to create safety.

Hari Marini & Sarahleigh Castelyn

The Falling Shift: SE1 6ER⁷

⁷ Hari and Sarahleigh have made a film of Falling Shift. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTQEiGeiTr4>

Hari Marini & Sarahleigh Castelyn's live performance intervention took place throughout the day. During arrival time they invited participants to specify a time - a precise hour and minute. During the day, at these allotted times, Hari & Sarahleigh poured rice from one bowl to another, at different locations throughout the building. At each specific time this duo had to leave the group event in which they participating, to go and pour the rice - as if the rice had been falling all day but captured and documented only at these specific moments. Often the women's departure created a disruption, sometimes the rice falling happened unnoticed, but noticed or not the eruptions of falling rice provided anchored pauses in time throughout the day.

Emptying and filling the containers with rice (which are placed at various locations in the building), created an hourglass that disrupted visually and spatially the daily flow of participants and visitors.

Our first 'Falling' of the day at the event in Siobhan Davies building disrupted the introductory session that had just started:

11:45. The studio on the top floor of Siobhan Davies building is rather quiet; one by one the participants introduce themselves. There is high level of concentration within the large circle of the participants sitting on the floor.

The sound of rice falling was heard; people stopped for a moment; their attention was drawn out of the circle in the back corner where rice was poured from one container to another. The effect of falling echoed in space.

Hari Marini & Sarahleigh Castelyn 2013

Heather Pennington

Kinbaku

Throughout the day Heather could be found binding herself in ropes and suspending herself from various parts of the stairwell. Others were invited to be 'models' - and be suspended.

The art of kinbaku (japanese rope bondage) involves artfully tying someone so as to control, restrain, or limit their movement. This often involves suspending the person in the air, though it need not. The person who ties is often called the rigger, and the person being tied is often called the model.

Kinbaku involves falling as an ever present concern for models, as ones movement is limited, and for riggers, who must take care not to injure their models. Because kinbaku also centers on creating a connection between model and rigger, which often involves the model giving up control over their body, the art of kinbaku can also encompass an

emotional falling, or surrender.

First, the tie that will be used on the model's body is conceptualised (or sometimes improvised). Then the model is tied, and, for suspensions, secured to an aerial anchor point. Ties can be applied to the body and then secured to the anchor, or secured to the anchor as they are applied to the body. Parts of the body are then raised section by section. To aid in a feeling of surrender once the model is fully suspended, a blindfold may be applied.
Heather Pennington 2013

We gathered in a circle to end the day, sitting on the floor sharing experiences and anticipating Sunday's events. We moved downstairs to the parlor for a glass of wine before the Round Table Discussion at 6.30pm.



Fig. 15

ON FALLING
Round Table Discussion
December 14th 6.30-8.30
Siobhan Davies Studios.

Writers for Performance Research 18.4 'On Falling' meet to share and debate their different writings on falling, before opening discussion to the audience.⁸

Chaired by Prof. David Williams

'Undergirding this issue of Performance Research is a paradox. Falling is fearfully dangerous, the consequences can be devastating, painful if not life threatening and processes of falling offer opportunities for life change, opening up new pathways... These writings emphasize being in our bodies, in relation to the environment, in the actuality of falling, where we come face to face with uncertainty and the loss of empirical self and linear time. Not as a negative nihilistic experience – but rather as a pathway to curiosity – falling to fly. '

(Performance Research 18.4 2013)

The Panel:⁹

Charlie Fox	Artistic Director: Counterproductions
Amy Sharrocks	Live artist, sculptor and filmmaker
Mark Harvey	Live artist. Senior Lecturer in Dance Studies at The University of Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand
Wendy Hubbard	Director and dramaturg. Currently a PhD candidate in the Drama Department at Queen Mary, University of London
Swen Steinhauser	Director, performer, dramaturg and lecturer of contemporary performance, currently writing a PHD thesis in Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds

⁸ Performance Research 18.4 'On Falling' is co-edited by Ric Allsopp Head of Dance & Choreography Department of Performance Falmouth University and Emilyn Claid. Performance Research 18.4 is available at <http://www.performance-research.org/current-issue.php>

A recording of the round table discussion will be uploaded onto the Falling site. <https://roehamptondance.com/falling/>

⁹ All panel members have written articles for Performance Research 18.4 On Falling

Catherine James	Lecturer in Modern & Contemporary Art, Christie's Education
Hari Marini	Teaching Associate at Queen Mary, University of London
Chloe Johnston	Assistant Professor of Theater at Lake Forest College, Chicago
Francisco Lobo	Teaching Assistant in the MFA Art Writing, Goldsmiths College, Currently PhD Art Student, Goldsmiths College
Emilyn Claid	Professor of Choreographic Practices University of Roehampton. Gestalt psychotherapist



Fig. 16

FALLING ABOUT RESEARCH LAB

DAY TWO – SUNDAY

The day begins informally and a sense of uncertainty trickles through the assembled group in the studio. We are scattered, sitting on the floor chatting, unsure of what is going to happen – we are waiting.

Mark Harvey

A Promise of Falling

Without warning or introduction Mark begins to run... fast... backwards... occasionally glancing over his shoulder, barely avoiding our bodies. He tracks a pathway for himself running round the outside of the space. He stops abruptly, pauses, and leans backwards until he tips into running again. He repeats this pattern of running, pausing and tipping for 20 minutes. Seated on the floor, we scramble to safety in order not to be crushed. We form a cluster in the centre or line the outside of the space.

Mark performed this piece in Auckland as part submission for his PhD thesis. As one of his external examiners I had seen him perform there and asked him to recreate it for Falling About. There is something exhilaratingly risky about looking up at an adult man running backwards, dangerously close to our bodies, a runner who cannot see where he is travelling, his feet beating the ground and his breathing becoming persistently louder.

After this performance we gather in small groups to talk. The weekend structure is loosening up by this point, unlike yesterday when the interventions were structured tight and thick. There is now time and space for discussion, drinking tea, forming fluid groups, repeating events from earlier, such as Alan's Match–Sticks and Benni's barefoot running.

Emilyn Claid

Catch me I'm falling.

I invite participants to form small groups of 6/7 people. I introduce a task that is familiar to physical theatre contexts. A group moves together and at any time someone in the group can call out 'I'm falling' or 'now' or 'catch me' and

begins to fall. At which point the group endeavors to catch this person before he/she meets the ground.



Fig. 17

However if nobody catches then this person falls. Having practiced falling numerous times over the weekend, this drop is not so frightening and many people choose to fall on their own rather than be caught. There is a playful atmosphere while experimenting with this task, lots of laughing. A marked contrast comes apparent between dancers and those from other disciplines. Dancers tend to fall in technical dance codes and non-dancers fall more vulnerably. There seems to be greater risk involved for non-dancers. However there is risk for everybody in the uncertainty of relational play, as timings of falling and catching are played out in the here and now. Alan Frank reflects on this task noting different characteristics and strategies that participants use within the group:

'The Groupie:

These individuals either made sure that they were in the middle of the group or they began to fall very slowly. In both cases they ensured that the group came to support

them. They relied totally on the group and displayed a high degree of trust in the group members

The Games Player/Rebel:

These individuals turned the activity into a game. They called out when they were in awkward places, or they called out quickly, or they called out at the same time as someone else. In each case they wanted ultimately to be helped by the group but deliberately made it difficult for the group. Thus the groups' attention and resolve were tested and challenged. Under the guise of 'fun' the games player made this threat to the group acceptable. Their trust in the group was hesitant and ambivalent.

The Loner:

These individuals made sure that they either called out and then fell very quickly or called out and fell more slowly but placed themselves on the edge of the group. In both instances they ensured it was impossible that the other group members could help them. They were totally self-reliant and fell in such a way that they protected themselves. Thus they bypassed any reliance on the group and so exhibited zero trust in the group.

What I was seeing played out before me were, I believe, three of the basic reactions to living in the 'herd' as we humans do... Some 'fall into line' and adapt to the herd easily, some 'fall foul' of its rules and part accept and part rail against them and some 'drop out' and seek isolation.

Alan Frank 2013

Word has spilled out that it is my birthday. A cake arrives with candles accompanied by much clapping and singing with expectations that I will make a speech. The singing stops and I do not make a speech. We experience an awkward thud of silence, as I do not catch the group's suspended expectations, which spill embarrassingly around us. Given the theme of the lab my failing to speak seems an apt - if potentially shameful - non-response!

Amaara Raheem A Falling Story

A group joins Amaara Raheem who has written a story on falling.

We sat on chairs and cushions and I read them my story. We talked a lot about the use of the second person in storytelling/writing. We talked of the intimacy of 'you'. Part of the discussion was also on 'consequences' and how falling can point to a series of other fallings - like a house of cards. Amaara Raheem 2013¹⁰

¹⁰ For a full version of Amaara's story see the 'writings' page on <http://roehamptondance.com/falling/>



Fig. 18

Inherent to Amaara's story intervention are provocative thoughts on falling between cultures:

... falling in-between countries, citizenships, places & identities. Falling in between art forms and disciplines. The falling inherent in migration, falling into a new land, falling into new skin, new language, new systems... war - about coming from countries of war - civil war (Sri Lanka), invisible war (Australia), about the notion of 'the fallen' in war poetry. Amaara Raheem 2013

Returning to the studio after a break Mark Harvey sets up a playful intervention. Standing in the doorway he greets each of us with an invitation - push me away or fall with me.

Mark Harvey

Push Me Pull You

I stand here waiting. Millions of questions go through my head. What will they say to me, will they understand my invitation, will they drop with me, will they take a risk with me, will they try to avoid interacting, how will they respond?

The first person arrives. I ask him to read the instructions. He chuckles. I ask him if he would like to drop with me. He looks at me perplexed. I realize my instructions sheet is not so clear. I explain to him what I

want. He immediately says yes to it all and pushes me and I take him down with me. Crash. He's heavy, very heavy. Ouch. I spread our weight through the floor as much as I can. Luckily he's not hurt. Lucky I'm not. I roll him off me. We laugh. We laugh a lot. 'Thank you' he says.

It takes me 3 or 4 attempts at this until I abandon my written instructions. It makes so much more sense to give the instructions to people while I welcome them. 'Hi, welcome, I'm Mark, what's your name [all the while holding polite eye connection], when you'd like me to stop welcoming you please push me over. If you'd like me to take you with me when I fall, please tell me'.

The more I do it with people, the more they and I seem to laugh. And, the more they seem to want to drop with me with me pulling them. It feels like I and my participants have this large spoon and through our dropping we are stirring up the studio inside into something warmer, lighter. Of course, this might perhaps sound a wee bit new-age for my liking, but there's something about this collective experience we're sharing in doing this action and in the responses of people inside and outside the room.

Some who join in are very hesitant at first. They appear to be taken by surprise. But 90% of them take the plunge and drop with me. Splat, splat and splat. Perhaps this is some kind of ice-breaker for some? It could be interesting to do this now with lots of ice in our pockets... (Crushed ice preferably, so that we don't land on it.)

Something I am excited about is the moment of taking people's hands and letting go in my legs and pulling them with me and there's a kind of dead-in-the-air moment. A kind of 'oh my god, how's this going to all end?'. The sense of physical surrender feels for me each time like a place where my heart skips a beat. And their hearts skip a beat. It's all that playing bulrush (what some in other parts of the world call British Bull Dogs). The sense of absolute physical risk that this promises takes me there. The thrill of the promise of making it out alive without any bruises.

I'm ready to do this again.

Mark Harvey 2013



Fig. 19

RELATIONAL FALLING

Peri Mackintosh and I introduce falling tasks that bring face-to-face social conventions into focus to explore how we understand ourselves and each other through the ways we physicalize our presence for each other; how we socially experience expressions of joy and loss, togetherness and separation, and how, intersubjectively, our social behaviours are intimately connected with physical gesture and memory.



Fig. 20

Peri Mackintosh Falling faces

We stand individually and practice smiling. In our culture this is an expression of joy. Peri asks us to slowly release the smiling muscles from our ears to our chins, let go of our jawbones, letting our mouths drop open. We are invited to notice what happens and whether we feel any bodily changes and if so where in our bodies. As I perform the task I sense a clear connection between my dropping jaw and my stomach where I feel a distinct heavy ache. I feel embarrassed to let go of my socially acceptable face. What will people see? I cannot hide my age!

Following on, we work with a partner, attending to sensations as we repeat the task. I am thinking intersubjectively here. When I smile you recognize that as joy and the way you respond tells me that I/you feel joy. You feed joy back to me in your face by smiling because I am smiling. Is it possible for you to feel my joy when I have a relaxed jaw and dropped mouth? Because seeing my face like this makes you feel something other than joyful. We are intersubjectively connected through facial gesture.

Emilyn Claid Can I Let You Fall¹¹

Working in pairs I ask participants to face each other.



Fig. 21

Begin with letting go of your smile as before and then continue to let go of the muscles in your neck, upper back, the back of your knees until you are falling - slowly. Your partner witnesses, noticing and sensing what happens for her/him as you fall.

The falling person is choosing to fall, moving slowly and has been practicing falling all weekend. So there is little to fear in this falling. Yet the witness is

¹¹ This is also the title of an article for Performance Research 18.4 On Falling (Routledge 2013)

affected kinesthetically. As a witness, I watch my partner falling and her physical movements and images evoke emotional memories - for me, the witness. Yet the faller is safe, choosing to fall, executing a physical gesture and is in charge of her actions. Observing each other's falling affects us, evoking memory through witnessing.

Another task:

I hold you close, in a tight hug, my arms clasped around your back. You give your full weight to me and allow yourself to be held by me. Very slowly I begin to let go of my clasp and allow you to fall. I notice how I feel as I let go of you. Can I allow myself to let you go? What is happening to me as I let you go?

These tasks are physical actions, constructed without narrative, without a call to expression or emotive content. Yet during the action, memory, emotion and expression emerge. An empty gesture becomes full, particularly for the witness.

Watching someone falling, letting go of face-to-face relational contact, seems to evoke emotional memory for the witness even though the faller is in charge of falling. Perhaps these emotions are evoked because socially acceptable face-to-face contact has been broken, and in the breaking a sense of failure and loss is provoked. Yet who is feeling this? Not just the faller.

Possibly, movement tasks such as these offered on Sunday afternoon are physical and metaphorical ways to work with issues of a sense of self in relationship. The physical act of letting someone go from a hug can hark back to childhood, issues of attachment and separation and can connect to relational pre verbal movements.¹²

¹² See: Stern, D. (1998) *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* London: Karnac.
Frank, R. & LaBarre F. (2011) *The First Year and the Rest of Your Life* New York: Routledge

POST LAB REFLECTIONS

Space to Fail

The lab was set up to fail to conform. From the start the scattered seating arrangement suggested there would be no fixed leader for events unfolding and displaced a fixed perspective familiar to conventional conferences and workshops. Participants could let go of expectations and needs for identifiable objectives, because there was no hierarchically defined leader or a fixed visual reference point. By arranging the space without a fixed front, each participant took an active role in owning his/her presence in the space and as a consequence experienced a relational yet uncertain process as a way of entering into each event.

Undoing formal spatial arrangements also undoes individual shameful experiences of failing to conform. By undoing hierarchy and bringing ourselves into relationship with one another we transform 'the experience of shame into the experience of connection in the field' (Wheeler, 1995:84)¹³

Falling out of codes

Falling is integral to learning to dance for contemporary dancers. Within a dance context – the studio or stage - dancers fall through coded techniques and somatic knowledge and falling becomes spectacular and/or safely performed. Through training, falling becomes beautiful to watch and offers both a 'wow' of risk and danger while performed as an act of centered, balanced and muscular control. Non-dancers, i.e. most other people, get hurt when they fall, feel vulnerable, clumsy and ashamed, and do not have access to physical, anatomical knowledge and muscular cushioning. Falling hurts and has little aesthetic beauty. At Falling About this difference was noticeable. The dancers enjoyed performing falling, while participants from other disciplines often felt tentative and less secure.

¹³ Wheeler, G. (1995) 'Shame in Two Paradigms of Therapy' in *British Gestalt Journal* Vol. 4 NO. 2 pp76-85

Perhaps non dancers come closer to a felt experience of falling than dancers, who, through repetition to learn and perfect, often lose touch with the here and now-ness of falling, with its inherent fears, excitement and pain. In contrast, un- trained dancers are in touch with the here and now sensations yet, on the other hand, lack skills to cushion their falls and avoid injury.

So the research lab revealed two different approaches that might be useful for working with falling. For dancers and movement practitioners the focus is to encourage the whole person into the studio, to be in the here and now of relational uncertainty, and to notice sensation rather than be guided by code. And for non-dance people the focus is to physically experience falling with enough somatic knowledge to make it safe, and to gain some choice and control over how to fall, while staying relationally present and aware of the risks.

Embodied Memory

The tasks of relational falling on Sunday afternoon invited connections between physical gesture and emotional memory. Tasks were introduced as physical action, yet embodying them provoked emotions to surface for many participants suggesting that memory is held within gesture, within our bodies and between bodies. When we slow down an act of falling we can notice this relationship, this fine line between empty gesture and full emotional narrative as a practice of being present.¹⁴

This discussion about memory and physical gesture is wrapped up and inseparable from an understanding that we are relational beings, we live intersubjectively and we create affect with each other. I know myself in

¹⁴ I wrote of this relationship as 'full body/empty body' (2006). I remember performing gestural movements in that liminal space just before the empty shape tips over into emotional fullness, a space that allows spectators to creatively interpret rather than becoming overwhelmed by a performer's expression. Claid, E. (2006) Yes? No! Maybe... Seductive Ambiguity in Dance Theatre Performance London: Routledge

relation to you.¹⁵ Witnessing each other falling demonstrates the inter-relational affects we have on each other through movement. Sunday afternoon's tasks allowed participants to experience relational falling safely and slowly and to notice affect. Allowing each other to fall is not necessarily as frightening and shameful as previously assumed. And much of what is being experienced emotionally is conjured by what we witness rather than by the active faller. As a consequence an instinctive desire to assist someone back up to a fast recovery, might be replaced by being with falling, an acceptance of falling, supporting someone to explore going down more fully. If we accept falling as part of our daily lives and except each other's fallings (fallings), as a source of creative change rather than (only) despair, then we might initiate ways of working with people in different communities, across mental health and across age groups.

Laughing



Fig. 22

Frequently, throughout the weekend, we laughed, metaphorically and in our bodies: Susan's Graham falls, Johannes's notion of human transcendence, Peta's clowning workshop, Mark's doorway interactions, Emily's 'catch me I'm falling' and Peri's smiling faces. Charlie Fox gathered quotes from participants, printed onto strips of paper. At the end of the lab he strung them together on a long piece of ribbon and let them fall down the stairwell like a

¹⁵ 'The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question. (Levinas 1984 quoted in Hand, S. (1989) *The Levinas Reader* Oxford: Blackwell
See also: Buber, M. (1970/1923) *I and Thou* New York: Scribner & Sons

peal of laughter.¹⁶ We laugh and in this explosive extended moment we experience a vital sensation of uncontrollable imbalance between one known state and another. Hence that phrase - falling about laughing and there was plenty of this during the lab. Laughing seems to occupy an ambiguous emotional and physical space in our bodies between fear, joy, relief, failure, social interaction and embarrassment. Laughing seems to call attention to the absurdity of our worthy upright intentions.¹⁷



Fig. 23

Nothing

A thread that became apparent and remains with me after the lab is an attention to micro rather than macro falling. We do not need a spectacular, fast or dangerous fall to notice affect. Slowing down falling, experiencing just a release of a smile, or the drop of a head evokes falling, out of social face-to-face certainties and into a liminal space where we can experience the possibilities of nothing happening. Falling becomes those moments of

¹⁶ See the ribbon of quotes in 'posts' <http://roehamptondance.com/falling/>

¹⁷ 'It is not funny that anything else should fall down; only that a man should fall down . . . Why do we laugh? Because it is a gravely religious matter: it is the Fall of Man. Only man can be absurd: for only man can be dignified'. --G. K. Chesterton.

Absurdity – 'the plight of a transcendent, meaning-seeking being who must live in a world that has no meaning' (Yalom, I 1931 Existential Psychotherapy, New York: Basic Books}

encounter between us, where we experience gaps, failings, silences, silliness, absurdity and uncertainty – different kinds of fallings - not as moments to be brushed aside or glossed over, but as a source for creative play. Doing nothing becomes full of potential and possibility.

Comments

'The event on Falling held on the 14th and 15th Dec was in itself not unlike falling into and out of something. A meeting with people from a range of disciplines drawing on areas such as arts, theology, architecture and psychotherapy that allowed for the sharing of diverse perspectives. With the opportunity to come together, the days snapshots of practices such as running bare foot, rope work, body and psychotherapeutic practices and sound, acted as encounters and journeying between them through modes of discussion and reflection provided a platform for an exploration into a kind of 'language' to articulate aspects of 'falling'. Most notably for me - how we fall encompassed themes of control, spontaneity, proximity, space, metaphor, resistance and context. The more detailed quality of falling in terms of its 'felt sense' was often difficult to locate and the politics were often situated in the relational tension between those that fell and those that were in the vicinity of falling.

Highlighting particular gems. Conversations arose regarding how architectural practice dictated by bureaucracy might be eroding the development of our somatic sensibility, thus directly affecting our ability to keep ourselves safe. How the notion of Paxton's small dance could be transposed to small or micro falling and more broadly what constitutes a fall or a sense of falling and the extension of this mode of falling into other forms even from an embrace with someone.

How could I neglect probably one of the most obvious things. During the event - I fell. Coming from a background of movement practices and dance I pride myself on my ability to fall safely and to plot a trajectory for myself, to comprehend directional forces and a responsibility of self to self. I fell ... Uncontrollably meeting the floor in a sudden and unexpected impact. Firstly - I notice my damaged pride.... But persuaded myself that falling at an event on falling could not have been a more spontaneous and unedited example. Harder still to realise I did not protect myself and others were not there to catch drew my attention to a predicament of responsibility to self and expectation of others... The fall generates response and that can overwhelm our ability to completely ingest the experience of falling... But on the flip side.... Sometimes people are there and have seen you fall and might provide a compassionate cushion to the blow. I recall someone later suggesting, in saying I found it an important experience, they felt I was being positive. However I have never been into happy-ever-afters and falling is painful, disorientating and alarming. We have spent a long time learning not to fall as children and when falling comes we want it on our own terms'. Lotti

'It was so enlivening to attend the on falling round table discussion on Saturday. How exciting to hear from a group of such eloquent, articulate speakers, I feel profoundly touched and mentally excited by the nature of this project, which seems so unusually to dwell fundamentally both in the highly academic and physically embodied'. Zoe

'The Falling About lab was wonderful. Thank you. I really enjoyed it and now there has been a bit of space to think about why I enjoyed it so much! Other than being able to connect with so many interesting people and to re-connect with some old friends, there seemed to be a particularly open atmosphere of enquiry. I am not sure if this comes about naturally when you put people in a room who have come there through a wealth of experiences (both personal and professional), but I felt strongly attached to the ease of communication. This was in stark contrast to the somewhat competitive atmosphere that can prevail in conventional conferences! In Foucault's terms, you managed to create both a utopian and heterotopian space!' Erica



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

With thanks to Hamish MacPherson for formatting expertise.
Emilyn Claid ©