

PEDAGOGICAL GUIDE

# VERTICALITY, WEIGHT AND GRAVITY

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPTS OF VERTICALITY,  
WEIGHT AND GRAVITY IN CIRCUS ARTS' PROFESSIONAL TEACHING

STATIC TRAPEZE, CHINESE POLE, ROPE AND TISSUE



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# **VERTICALITY, WEIGHT AND GRAVITY**

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WEIGHT AND GRAVITY IN PROFESSIONAL CIRCUS ARTS TEACHING**

**STATIC TRAPEZE, CHINESE POLE, ROPE AND SILKS**

**AUTHOR: AGATHE DUMONT**



# A brief summary of the INTENTS project

The INTENTS project was born out of the necessity and desire to give a structure to the professional circus arts training, to harmonise it and make it more professional; the INTENTS project specifically addresses the training of circus arts teachers.



## BACKGROUND

A teachers' consultation launched by FEDEC in 2011 (SAVOIRS00) highlighted the lack of teaching tools and common methodologies with regard to initial and continuing training for circus arts teachers. A need also emerged to define the profession and to meet on a European level in order to exchange know-how in the context of continuing professional development, springing from a shared concern and wish to define the learning achievements and to give a framework to the skill strengthening by teachers in the continuing professional training sessions organised by the FEDEC network.

These issues are at the origin of the INTENTS project and its two main components: defining the teacher's profession (SAVOIRS01) and organising continuing professional training sessions. This teaching tool is the result of discussions, debates and teaching that took place during a continuing professional training session "Verticality, weight and gravity" organised from the 30th March to the 3rd April 2015 and hosted by ENACR.

These continuing professional development sessions aim at being innovative in their approach: cross-disciplinary, divided by theme, across different professions, international and intergenerational. Following a mono-disciplinary continuous training programme, our cross-disciplinary INTENTS training tackles questions across different disciplines that support the development of new teaching methodologies and which are not specific to one discipline but can enrich the teaching and learning of all disciplines and domains. These sessions stem from the realisation that teaching and creation need to evolve. The projects come from working on the framework of continuing professional development and educational tools carried out by FEDEC during the project "European Pedagogical Exchanges" – EPE, Leonardo Da Vinci 2005-2007, without a project grant, between 2010 and 2012, in order to create some pilot training sessions. These sessions made it possible to make some tangible points of reflection and to focus more on sensations. The strength of our network is the ability to foster and share the knowledge of schools and teaching teams. Peer meetings, discussions and exchanges on teaching practices and vocabulary are necessary in order to accompany teaching and arts in the midst of their change.

The cross-professional approach, i.e. opening up the discussion to different types of professions and profiles (artists, researchers, physiotherapists, safety specialists, innovators of new aerial equipment, psychologists) enables us to have different kinds of expertise and points of view.

The teachers' continuing professional development is key to ensuring a richer and evolving training method for their students. For participants, it will require going beyond the exchange of practices between professionals and highlighting the artistic and pedagogical innovations linked to their disciplines, in order to develop the teachers' and the students' professional skills.

The new continuing professional development training sessions also aim to approach the technical and artistic aspects as a whole, to go beyond the diagrams of moves and stages of learning tackled in previous FEDEC manuals.

## INTENTS 2014-2017

After the project started six years ago, in 2014 it finally received the support of the Erasmus+ programme. It has the resources necessary to carry out the ambitious task of defining the profession and promoting the recognition of the profession of circus art teachers.

The main objectives are:

- Outlining a European profile of the profession of circus arts teacher
- Updating skills through thematic sessions of continuing professional development
- Developing innovative teaching tools for initial and continuing professional training
- Support for increased professional recognition
- Strengthening the collaboration between partners and the sector

The main activities are:

- Carrying out 3 pilot sessions of continuing professional development
- Drafting 3 teaching tools linked to pilot training
- Carrying out two studies:
  - 1 SAVOIRS01: competencies framework or European profile of the profession of the circus arts teacher
  - 2 A typical continuous training programme: framework of professional development

◇ The teachers' continuing professional development  
◇ is key to ensuring a richer and evolving training method  
◇ for their students. For participants, it will require going  
◇ beyond the exchange of practices between professionals  
◇ and highlighting the artistic and pedagogical innovations.



The French Federation of Circus Schools (FFEC) and the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools shared the skills and expertise in terms of training and defining the profession acquired in the EPE, CATE and PEYC projects in order to coordinate and complete the project. The two federations continue their dialogue on the coherence and harmonisation of the sector and its training pathways. The project brings together 33 official partners located in 12 different countries, including 2 federations, 2 research organisations and 29 secondary, professional, preparatory and higher education circus schools. The project benefits from the support of FFEC; 145 circus member schools as well as its partners (Groupement national des arts du cirque (GNAC), Coordination française des associations de la culture et de communication (COFAC) and the Syndicat des compagnies et cirques de création (SCC); and of the FEDEC network; 6 national circus school networks, 5 organisations supporting the development of circus arts, 2 European networks, 2 national centres of information and resources and 1 artists' trade union as well as 2 European partner networks: Circostrada, a network of professional organisations acting for the development and structuring of circus arts and street arts in Europe and beyond, as well as the European Youth Circus Organisation network.







# Foreword

By **Anne Morin**, educational coordinator of the continuing professional development training session “Static trapeze, Chinese pole, rope and silks - Reflections on the concepts of verticality, weight and gravity in professional circus arts teaching”.

## **THE INTENTS PROJECT: THREE WORKS IN PROGRESS**

Following the first internal FEDEC conference at the Barcelona General Assembly in 2010, FEDEC’s Focus Group No. 2, which works on the training requirements of circus arts teachers, identified the need for a cross-disciplinary approach to circus arts teaching and the need for teachers to have different approaches in their teaching.

Following the publication of SAVOIRS00, a reflection tool on teachers’ competences, a need was felt to resort to the know-how and support of specialists and researchers in order to delve deeper into the work on skills and work scenarios through visits, observations and focus groups in approximately 15 schools.

## **A NEW GENERATION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION SESSIONS** **Objectives of the session**

– Participants: The aim of the get-together is for teachers to put themselves into question starting from the participants’ experience and points of view; to exchange doubts, responsibilities, fears and satisfactions amongst colleagues; to find ways of improving their teaching, opening up to other ways of seeing and doing things, looking for new or different tools to help students search for their own language on the basis of reflection and discussions. One of the objectives was also to convey these reflections to the teaching teams at their schools, to get to know each other better and to promote mobility within the network.

- Devising a pedagogical guide: thanks to these reflections and discussions, the aim was to come up with ideas to devise a pedagogical guide for the teachers. This tool was created on the basis of presentations given by speakers and the topics and practices that were presented. Its intention is not just to give a thorough report of the exchanges that took place during the session in Rosny-sous-Bois, but also to raise some open-ended questions and invite us to rethink our professional practice.
- The researchers’ assessment: the aim is to carry out an assessment based on observing the session that will help to improve future and cross-disciplinary European training sessions and to draft a continuing education template programme to be used by the schools that wish to enrich and expand their teachers’ continuing professional development plan.

## **Workshops**

The training lasted five full days. The first four followed the pattern below:

- A theoretical and/or practical presentation in the morning, followed by an exchange session between participants and speakers.
- Breaking up into groups of 6 people to focus on two topics suggested by the coordinator.
- Each group reports back via a spokesperson chosen by the teaching coordinator at the beginning of the work session.
- Plenary discussion with all the groups, in a round table format
- Writing a short individual overview of the day

On the last day:

- Group work to assess the week and share views
- Overview of the week, immediate assessment of the training given by Vincent Grosstephan (expert from Cérep<sup>1</sup>)

Conducting work sessions with peers is always a challenge; one has to find the right words, ask the right questions and stop enthusiasm from making us digress from the main topic and keeping it anecdotal.

This was a fascinating job and I have personally learnt a lot from it. The participants' feedback showed that this week allowed them to question their way of teaching and helped them to reflect on their role and their actions as teachers.

Thanks to the first two interventions by Roberto Magro and Clare Anderson, we discovered two innovative work methodologies. Roberto Magro suggests creative training around space, rhythm, levels, body alignment, intensity of gesture, and freedom and continuity of an organic movement from the floor to the equipment.

Clare Anderson presented her work on understanding the physical principles of movements on the equipment, weight transfer, friction, tension, balance, tempo and suspension.

We realised that these new approaches were easily intertwined and that we no longer talk about positions but moves with the equipment.

Marie-Céline Daubagna presented another approach from a student. She told us about the importance of writing and feeling in writing, putting feelings into words, sincerity and authenticity, giving feedback that is not judgemental, coordination between teachers, and accepting doubt, mistakes and fears.

Finally, Chloé Moglia, explained how she reinvented her training starting from martial arts, body awareness, tension and attention, holding and letting go, breathing and the importance of a real focal point in space.

She highlighted the necessity of physical preparation without losing the feeling, human aspect and know-how. She spoke of the danger of a premature and forced search for individuality and the need to pay careful attention to the students' pain management.

The world we live in is changing constantly, just like circus arts, and our students change from year to year.

Our task as teachers is to adapt with this evolving world and strive to keep learning in order to improve our teaching. This was the aim of the session.

Working methods change depending on the country or circumstances, either cultural, human, political or economic.

This European gathering has been an enriching experience. Our approach to students is also constantly changing.

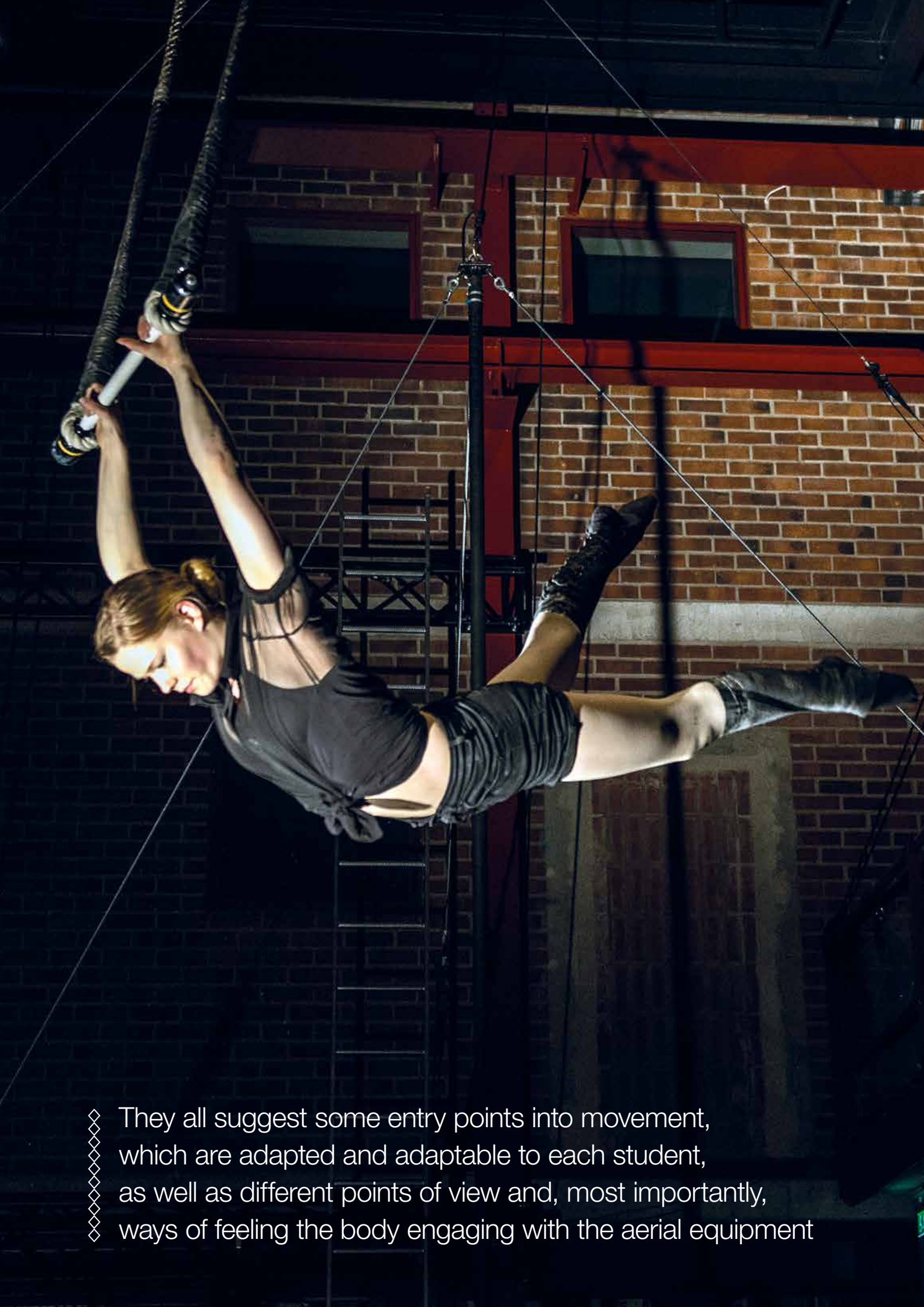
The innovative working methods that were presented to us, took us away from moves in order to put more of an emphasis on the movement principles instead, leading us to question our practices. Two of them led to the question: how and when can we stimulate authenticity in the future artist? They gave us an opportunity to reflect on subjects that we experience every day but that we don't discuss much, such as fear(s) and pain.

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<sup>1</sup> Centre of studies and research on professions and professionalisation (CEREP), University of Reims. Champagne-Ardenne, research lab associated with the INTENTS project.







◇ They all suggest some entry points into movement,  
◇ which are adapted and adaptable to each student,  
◇ as well as different points of view and, most importantly,  
◇ ways of feeling the body engaging with the aerial equipment

# Introduction

The *INTENTS* “Verticality, weight and gravity” session suggests a cross-disciplinary approach. By combining the expertise of teachers and speakers from many different countries, schools and backgrounds, the objective is to share skills, reflect together and ask questions about how to act.

Taking their experience in the field as a starting point, the four speakers— Roberto Magro (*La Central del Circ*, Barcelona, Spain), Clare Anderson (*National Centre for Circus Arts*, London, United Kingdom), Marie-Céline Daubagna (*Le Lido*, Toulouse, France) and Chloé Moglia (artist and artistic director of the company *Rhizome*) – suggested approaching the concepts of verticality, gravity and weight in the language of aerial disciplines starting from their own individual experiences. The idea was to recommend tools and avenues for reflection and then experiment on the body, in the specific place where they are conveyed to each individual person. This manual takes into account their experience as well as the testimonials of the teachers that attended the continuing professional development course led by educational coordinator, Anne Morin<sup>1</sup>.

They all suggest some entry points into movement, which are adapted and adaptable to each student, as well as different points of view and, most importantly, ways of feeling the body engaging with the aerial equipment. It is about developing a physical awareness in relation to the equipment, wondering about the common grammar shared by different techniques, developing new sensations, reflecting on the topic of risk, whilst striving not to separate technique from creativity. Sensations, movement principles, parts of the body, action verbs, poetic or real images are all keys to a cross-disciplinary approach to aerial disciplines and to coming up with one’s own way of doing things.

This manual reviews the suggestions made by the four speakers and engages in discussions on the different issues tackled during the session. It is supported by a series of individual interviews conducted by the author, Agathe Dumont, with participants and speakers regarding the exercises suggested, as well as complementary tools borrowed from the fields of sport science, history, aesthetics and social sciences among others. A video provides the finishing touch, with images taken in the sessions on several themes (presentations, discussions, workshops). Some clips from the video are referenced in the manual, in relation to the issues discussed. The video extracts are available on the FEDEC YouTube channel (the link is available in the bibliography on page 64).

After exploring the definitions of the terms verticality, gravity and weight, an itinerary is suggested that starts from the notions of space, musicality and tempo, risk-taking and creative language. Going back to the sessions’ workshops, each notion is explained, illustrated by examples and enhanced with reading suggestions or made clearer by other points of view, like a toolbox from which everyone can draw different ideas or resources. The manual provides an opportunity to create better definitions for terms related to the body and its movement, and to raise new pedagogic questions.

These are sensitive approaches, rather than methods dictating hard and fast rules or protocols. They will enable us to make our practice more structured and easier to convey. They go beyond spoken and written words and can only be fully realised when engaging with the body. The suggestions can be applied to the various pieces of equipment and allow us to embark on a cross-disciplinary reflection on aerial skills or, more generally, on how circus arts continuously face the issues and difficulties of verticality, weight and gravity.

.....  
<sup>1</sup> The list of participants and the speakers’ profiles are available on page 67 to 71.





# WHAT ARE WE DISCUSSING?

Terminology and uses  
of verticality and gravity in circus  
arts teaching and pedagogy.

01



# A variety of definitions...

The terms verticality, weight and gravity can each be defined in different ways.



Physical sciences might give us very specific definitions but what about our feelings? How do we perceive these terms in our daily practice and teaching? How do these notions take shape in movement thinking and in circus arts discussions?

This section suggests some reflection points, testimonials and definitions. It does not aim to reach a definitive understanding but to capture the several subtle and intelligible meanings of verticality and gravity through our pedagogical and artistic practice.

## POINTS OF VIEW ON VERTICALITY, WEIGHT AND GRAVITY

*What is verticality?*

*What is gravity?*

*What is weight?*

*Does being vertical mean being perpendicular to the horizon?*

*Can we fight against gravity?*

Some of the answers collected from the participants of the INTENTS training in April 2015<sup>1</sup>.

## Verticality: points and lines in space

In 1923, in *Point and line to plane*, the painter Wassily Kandinsky, who belonged to the *Blaue Reiter* movement and taught at the Bauhaus school, wrote: “The geometric line is an invisible thing. It is the track made by the moving point; that is, its product. It is created by movement – specifically through the destruction of the intense self-contained repose of the point. Here, the leap out of the static to the dynamic occurs. [...] The forces coming from without which transform the point into a line, can be very diverse. The variation in lines depends upon the number of these forces and upon their combinations. In the final analysis, all line forms can be reduced to two cases: 1. Application of one force and 2. Application of two forces.”<sup>2</sup>

After reading these few lines we could ask ourselves if the painter is indeed describing an aerialist.

The line is the equipment; the point is the aerialist.

The forces are movement, hanging, rotation and the hanging point; the acrobat becomes a line in space – a dynamic trace.

**Verticality** is one of these lines in space and it marks the intensity, which is essential, of our orthostatic posture, i.e. our standing one, balancing on two feet. Verticality is also defined as the central line in our body i.e. the spine.

1 The list of participants and biographies of speakers are available on pages 60 to 62.

2 Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and line to plane* [1923], Folio Essais, 1970 for the French Edition

**Gravity** defines the earth's environment. It is what keeps our body on the ground. The body fights to remain upright and can straighten up thanks to its anti-gravity muscles.

And where is circus in all this?

### **Verticality, a sensation within our body...**

"It is first of all about body in space. But not just the human body, also the equipment. It means using and creating space."

**CAMILLA THERESE KARLSEN**

"We are vertical, we use lines. Circus is vertical but we need horizontal lines to know that we are vertical."

**GRISELDA JUNCÀ**

"We come from cells; all evolution of species takes place through a vertical process. This vertical dimension also has a spiritual dimension. Symbolically, a vertical line joins the earth and the sky."

**ISABELLE BRISSET**

### **.... and a projection into space**

"It is an axis to look for support. It is a reference point in space."

**ISABELLE BRISSET**

"Some pieces of equipment are vertical like the Chinese pole, the straps, the trapeze and the rope... But there is a difference between doing exercises on verticality, reaching verticality and then looking for the tricks."

**SACHA DOUBROVSKI**

"It is something which is very specific to circus. It is a lot less important in theatre. It is a question of space, levels and planes. They are lines, itineraries, directions in space."

**MICHELE WEAVER**

"In dance, we have the horizontality of the floor and the verticality of the body but in circus, verticality, horizontality and diagonality are all equally important!"

**NIKOLAY PYASTA**

Therefore verticality is a reference point, both in relation to one's body and to elements in space. Verticality is what fundamentally defines us, as a result of evolution; it is a reference point. Our proprioceptive sense allows us to orientate ourselves in relation to that verticality when we perform aerial figures. Circus forces us to put our verticality into question, to lift it off the floor and reinvent it. Like Roberto Magro, we could think that "everything is related to verticality and weight. Verticality is above all a shift between different levels: the floor, standing and working on the equipment".



"Verticality is an internal, continuous process.

It is going upwards, continuing to climb, to lift yourself up."

**CLARE ANDERSON**

### **Playing with gravity: weight and heaviness**

“Getting up, staying upright, moving: no movement is possible without involving gravity and engaging in an exchange with it”, says Ushio Amagastu, choreographer, teacher and iconic figure for *butô* dance, in his work *Dialogue avec la gravité*<sup>1</sup>.

Further on, he continues by saying “But there is a fifth surface: the stage plane. A tangible construction element, it consists of the imaginary planes that very diverse works will create taking it as a starting point. It is the horizontal plane that appears when the artist has straightened up, started walking with his own two feet; when he has discovered his verticality, it is the archetype of horizontality that is found everywhere. It is the seat where the dialogue with gravity is tested through our feet touching the floor”<sup>2</sup>.

Whether it is confidently on the ground, on equipment, or in the air, the body always ends up anchoring itself to a point, in order to orientate itself. Gravity, a physical phenomenon that nobody can escape from, acts as a reference point. If the body challenges it, it brings it back to its physical reality. If it imagines going higher, it sculpts its gestures and leaves its mark on its figures. The work on gravity is what allows the acrobat to reveal other spaces and to give an insight into other times.

### **Being pulled to the ground...**

“Gravity, body weight, the body’s heaviness, the body being pulled to the floor. Circus tries to break the principles of gravity or work with them. Circus invents ways of cheating gravity. It is the notion that circus plays with.”

**MARIE-CÉLINE DAUBAGNA**

“Gravity is what permanently affects us when going downwards or upwards. We need to understand that there is a force pulling us downwards and that we need to fight.”

**CAMILLA THERESE KARLSEN**

### **...to escape gravity**

“I always need to try and go up higher and hang because if I don’t do anything, I fall. It is by giving or releasing my weight that I can hold. There are always these two aspects from the verticality point of view: if I release my weight, I can hold. These two forces go in opposite directions: one towards the sky and the other towards the earth.”

**ISABELLE BRISSET**

“It is this idea of ‘going down upwards’. It is not flying, it is something else. It involves working with gravity and body awareness.”

**MICHELE WEAVER**

“Circus teaching means using dynamics and techniques to overcome Earth’s gravity.”

**SACHA DOUBROVSKI**

How can we do things differently with our body weight? How can we make students understand the concept of weight? How can we teach them to work with their body’s weight? These are the questions asked by participants in the training session. Weight and heaviness are strongly linked with verticality and balance. Like Clare Anderson, Roberto Magro speaks of the space ‘in between’, of weight transfer, of finding ways to compensate through weight, in order to find that balance where gravity becomes the acrobat’s ally in performing moves.

Therefore verticality, gravity and weight are a question of perception and feeling. Many of our senses are involved in order to learn this: sight, touch, kinaesthetic sense or kinetic sense, haptic sense (grouping together the kinaesthetic sense and touch).

They are complex notions, which are difficult to define, but are shared by all in circus practice and teaching, especially in aerial disciplines.

1 Ushio Amagastu, *Dialogue avec la gravité*, translated from Japanese by Patrick De Vos, Arles, Actes Sud - Papiers, “Le souffle de l’esprit” coll., 2000.

2 *Ibid.*, p.42.

## VERTICALITY AND GRAVITY, SOME BIOMECHANICAL PRINCIPLES

The concepts of gravity, verticality or weight are commonly used in the biomechanical language. They are essential in the comprehension of kinematic analysis and/or the dynamics of movement; their definitions are based on physical theories.

### In movement science

**Mass is the quantity of matter** in a body. Simply put, it is of varying size and measured in kilograms.

**Weight** is a force, due to the effect of gravity acceleration on a mass (9.81 m/s on land).

**Gravity on Earth** refers to the acceleration that the Earth imparts to objects due to gravity.

The **centre of mass** of an object is an **imaginary point** located at a point where the body or different body segments are equally balanced.

The centre of mass is also called the **centre of inertia**. On Earth, it is confused with the **centre of gravity**.

When you're **standing still**, in the upright position (on your feet, both arms along the side of the body), the body's centre of gravity is approximately located between the second and third sacral vertebrae.

**As soon as you move a segment, the centre of gravity shifts** because the masses are no longer distributed in the same way. The centre of gravity moves and is not necessarily located inside the body.

In biomechanics, **verticality** refers to the concept of the axis (around which a movement is organised) and the **force**.

One can describe movement from three directions in space (**Galilean geometry**): horizontal, longitudinal and vertical.

Whatever its orientation in space and its support, the human body is traversed by these **forces**.

There are three: the horizontal force, the anterior posterior or longitudinal force and the vertical force.

In biomechanics, two forces define the upright vertical posture: weight and the reaction force working through the feet, a **vertical force**. Balance is only possible if these two forces cancel each other out and if the centre of the foot support is aligned with the body's centre of gravity.

**Posture** is the active maintenance of the various body segments in space.

We model the human posture in the form of an inverted pendulum, an unstable state, which forces us to constantly perform **postural adjustments** to prevent us from falling. Thus, **verticality** is constantly playing with these two forces to maintain balance.

To understand these movements, acrobats use a variety of senses, notably their sense of balance, using their **kin-aesthetic receptors** and other **proprioceptors** (sensory receptors of touch, Golgi tendon organs – in the tendons, muscle spindles in the muscle, the vestibular system – body orientation in space, sense of balance).

In movement, the external forces are combined with the body's internal forces and produce what is sometimes described as **energy** or **power**.

The concept of **vertical force** is therefore relative to the organisation of the body in space and its support.

Other concepts are specifically related to aerial movements.

**Inertia** is also a concept used in biomechanics. **The moment of inertia** characterises the distribution of body mass **about an axis of rotation**. In a movement, it depends on the mass, shape, mass distribution with respect to the axis of rotation. Its size is variable and is measured in kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

In an aerial movement, the further away from the axis of the body, the greater the moment of inertia. The larger the moment of inertia, the harder it is to rotate the body.



In an aerial movement, **the trajectory of the force of gravity describes the shape of a parabola**. In the air the body is subject to the law of **conservation of angular momentum**. The amount of rotational movement during take-off remains constant until landing. Playing with the organisation of the body's segments (rotation, inertia) can induce a change in its organisation in space and the speed of rotation, but cannot, however, increase the speed or overall duration of the movement.

**Velocity** is the rate of change of displacement of a point with respect to time.

**Acceleration** is the change in velocity of a point with respect to time.

Circus arts teachers often implicitly use these biomechanical concepts. "Our body is an internal and external mechanism," explains Patrick Mattioni. "In my teaching, they are always present but never spoken of. Words like 'gravity', 'verticality', or terms such as 'torque' or 'potential energy'". The aim is to allow the person that we are training to feel and experience them.

By putting it into practice the artist can understand, naturally build and work on his or her mechanics or body effectively from the point of view of feelings."

## IN SUMMARY

- **Posture** is the active support of different body segments in space.
- **The vertical axis** is a direction in space (a vector) and a force.
- **The centre of gravity, centre of mass or centre of inertia** is an imaginary point, at the crossing of the centres of gravity of all body segments. It changes according to how these segments are organised.

## FURTHER READING

### Some bibliographical elements on the scientific analysis of posture and acrobatic moves.

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**Mathieu Boucher, Arnaud Decatoire, Ridha Jeddi**, "Description mécanique de la gestion proprioceptive du dégrouper lors d'un salto arrière", *Staps*, n° 62, 2003, pp. 89-106.

**Patrick Lacouture, et.al.** "Energetic requirement of three gymnastic take-off techniques from the floor", *Journal of human movement studies*, n° 36 (5), 1999, pp. 237-251.

**Raphaël Dolléans, et.al.** "Psychological processes involved during acrobatic performance, a review", *Sport Science*, n° 4 (1), 2011, pp. 19-29.

**Spiros Prassas, Young Hoo Kwon**, "Biomechanical research in artistic gymnastics: a review", *Sports Biomechanics*, volume 5, n° 2, 2006, pp. 261-291.

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**Clément G, Rézette D**, "Motor behaviour underlying the control of an upside-down vertical posture", *Experimental Brain Research*, n° 59 (3), 1985, pp. 478-484.

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# Verticality, weight and gravity: from a scientific discourse to a poetical language

We can easily associate circus with verticality and gravity. Beyond those words, there is a whole imaginary world: we have the myth of flying, emptiness, fear, inverted reference points, transformation...



Literature, art and philosophy have taken an interest in circus moves, which are both fascinating and terrifying in equal measure. Anthropological research on gestures or movement analysis is currently trying to analyse those practices and understand their principles. We will attempt to present some of these reflections, on the basis of some discourses and discussions.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Canadian choreographer Edouard Lock dreamt out loud, saying, “One day we will create choreography without gravity and we will be asking ourselves how we managed to create choreography where every jump involved a fall.”<sup>1</sup> Gravity, verticality and weight spark questions, awe, and different and varied explorations. Which discourses are being created in different fields around this topic? Let’s look from the point of view of gesture analysis, aesthetic, human and social sciences or the cultural history of physical and artistic practices.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRAVITATIONAL CHALLENGES

In an article entitled “Le spectacle vivant, arène de la modélisation”, Sally Jane Norman speaks about the appearance of the first flying trapeze acts in 1870: “This apparatus allows Léotard [Jules Léotard, one of the first French trapeze artists] to evolve in an aerial space, by adopting a way of moving that would normally be impossible; he therefore reaches the status of what we could call the impossible body”.<sup>2</sup> Is this search for the “impossible body” that defies gravity and forgets about verticality the model for a circus figure?

What do we discover in the history of the homo acrobaticus? Myriam Peignist, historian and anthropologist and acrobatics specialist, explains that history reveals several facets of a unique art movement that features the hallmark of creativity and is crossed by a “deformed beauty”. Looking at the history of ‘acrobatic dance’<sup>3</sup>, from ancient times to today, we can see how the acrobatic body has crossed

1 Chantal Pontbriand, “Le corps flou, entretien avec Edouard Lock”, *Parachute*, n° 64, Montreal, October, November, December 1991, pp. 6-13.

2 Sally Jane Norman, “Le spectacle vivant, arène de la modélisation du corps”, in *Du corps au corpus technologique*, proceedings of ODYSSUD meeting, Blagnac, February 1996.

3 Myriam Peignist, “Histoire anthropologique des danses acrobatiques”, *Corps*, n° 7, second semester, 2009, pp. 29-38.



discourses, changed names and practices, but has always been present in literature and performances. From images from ancient Egypt to those of ancient times, the acrobat is the one that breaks a vertical order while the first aerial acrobatics are born in the 16th century (the first acrobatic treaty is by Archangelo Tuccaro, *Trois dialogues dans l'art de sauter* published in 1599). Although condemned by the church, acrobats and tumblers pursued their quest of defying gravity. It is by escaping gravity that the body can metaphorically escape the social, moral and political order. "If the word ballerina refers to the verb 'to dance', the word acrobat refers to the irregular jumping, contortion and twists that relate to a decisive moment, hence the nuance between "saltarine" and "ballerina"<sup>1</sup>, says Myriam Peignist. Actually the Greek origin of the term is akrobatos (ἀκροβάτης), 'the one that walks on tiptoes'. The acrobat does not adopt men's walking style but he or she invents another way of moving on a vertical plane.

While prowess and apparatus gained pace in the 18th and 19th centuries, an "inverted world" took shape, which belonged to acrobats and aerialists. Little by little, it was the extraordinary strength and amusing power of tightrope artists and acrobats that fascinated people, as remarked by Guillaume Depping in *Merveilles de la force et de l'adresse: agilité, souplesse, dextérité*, published in Paris in 1866<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, painters and poets were fascinated by aerialists and could not stop describing and depicting them. In his work *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque*, Jean Starobinski highlights this fascinating duality of the aerialist that attracted 20th century artists such as Guillaume Apollinaire who, in a poetic text about the painting *Saltimbanques* (1905) by Pablo Picasso, talks about a "painstaking agility"<sup>3</sup>.

The work on verticality and gravity in aerial disciplines does not only concern forces so, in order to better comprehend this concept, why not explore from other points of view, such as body sensations and gestures?

## GRAVITY: THE ACROBAT'S FRIEND OR FOE?

Hubert Godard, a researcher in gesture analysis, has theorised and analysed half-pro and half-conflicting relationships between the body and the gravitational pull of the earth in order to determine the parameters - both functional and expressive - that are behind our posture and gestures. From a symbolic point of view, he talks about a gesture construction on the Earth-sky axis determining our body awareness. To him, the "dialogue with gravity" constitutes our gravitational identity; our posture carries our history, our emotions. "Behind each posture, each gesture, we can see a watermark of the psychophysical organisation that established our relationship with verticality and gravity"<sup>4</sup>. Since then, to what extent can we defy gravity and what are the disruptions caused by this gesture?

Posture is also the tone that we find in several physical practices and movement analysis methods (Eutony, the Alexander technique, Body Mind Centering®, Laban's effort theory) and takes part in **verticalisation work**. Benoît Lesage, researcher and psychomotor specialist, explains that: "The body receives information from the weight leaning on a support so we must remember that it is not just data but a process. It is built through an encounter and an interaction with its surroundings, of course, but also with a physical environment and especially a support". **This support** is key in the verticalisation process to reduce the support, modify it, like we do on circus equipment. It is also about modifying one's own verticality.

## FROM THE TRICK...

Moving to an acrobatic trick constitutes a symbolic but also neuromuscular paradigm change, as Philippe Goudard reminds us, speaking about a **virtuosity** for **going beyond the reference universe**: "They may be postural, cognitive or behavioural reference points. Thus, standing serves as a ref-

1 Myriam Peignist, "Inspirations acrobes", *Sociétés*, n° 81, De Boeck Université, third trimester 2003, p. 23.

2 Guillaume Depping, *Merveilles de la force et de l'adresse : agilité, souplesse, dextérité. Les exercices de corps chez les anciens et les modernes*, Paris, Bibliothèque des Merveilles, Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1886.

3 "One cannot confuse these saltimbanques with mere actors on stage. The spectator who watches them must be pious, for they celebrate wordless rites with painstaking agility", Guillaume Apollinaire, 1905, quoted by Jean Starobinski, *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque*, Paris, Gallimard, "Arts et Artistes" collection, new edition, 2004, p. 100.

4 Hubert Godard "À propos des théories sur le mouvement", *Marsyas. Revue de pédagogie musicale et chorégraphique*, n° 16, dossier "Le corps qui pense", Paris, Cité de la Musique, December 1990, p. 19.

erence for the contortionist; and behaviour, adapted to a situation or a usage, represents a landmark that the actor departs from in a humorous way. The artists' talent and virtuosity reside in their ability to deviate as much as possible from a steady condition, to make postures and movements appear."<sup>1</sup> Outside, against, with, despite, through gravity – there are many ways to reveal the complex relationship between an acrobatic gesture and heaviness.

In order to keep us upright, the antigravity muscles that maintain posture are constantly engaged. This sensation is built through becoming aware of the details of each support and allows us to reconstruct the **vertical sensation**, even in an inverted posture: "The body's extremities are dynamic; they are never static anatomical parts, fixed areas. [...] The critical points, the key balancing points, coordination and sensitivity pivot points are subtler. These are micro, discrete points."<sup>2</sup>

### ... TO THE SUSPENSION

Weight awareness and tensions: hanging is not a relaxed state but a wavering one that results from adjusting the tension to make it appropriate to the circumstances. The sensation is difficult to describe; it is linked to **weight**, to a **space sensation**, and the **body's orientation**. In literature, flying is one of the most commonly used metaphors to decipher this hanging position. Dominique Dupuy, dancer and teacher, describes it like this:<sup>3</sup> "Abandoning the idea of standing up vertically, which made him the man we know, the flying man abandons his body to space in a double dip, where the climb is precipitated backwards and the descent is an inverted climb, in an almost limitless plunge. In order to succeed, standing up must not be gravity's only prerogative,

but each element of the body must be confronted by itself, all the time, in his own flight."<sup>4</sup> Isn't that what the aerialist looks for? Going even further into what takes us out of our gravitational habitus: something that escapes our grasp, missing a step, climbing a pole or a rope, hanging from a trapeze or a hoop; the smallest to the largest degree of movement. There would also be much to say about the receiving side, or what we call 'kinaesthetic empathy'. There is a paradox with aerialists, says Peta Tai: "The aerialists' art awakens the imagination of artists working in other fields and philosophers; the aerial bodies are often described as giving the impression of being ethereal, the physical matter of an aerialist comes from strenuous physical training."<sup>5</sup> Whilst the body looks light and suspended to the onlooker, for the aerialist it is still in resistance, fixed and in muscular tension.

### NEW LANDMARKS

Today, research in motion analysis and the cognitive aspects of performance allow us to create a 'model' of what happens during these changes in posture. For acrobatic moves, we talk of 'closed skills', that is to say, these movements are executed in a stable environment devoid of any uncertainty, as opposed to open abilities for which adaptation is constant (sports team, for example). Although it needs nuancing, this approach helps us to understand how the acrobats, and aerialists in particular, manage such a transfer of common postural reference points. Denis Hauw's work on cognitive neuroscience shows that acrobats construct their image mainly from the position of body parts in space, which allows them to find reference points while changing direction.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, during an aerial rotation, acrobats will use different reflexes involving neurobiological systems to steady themselves (vision, vestibular

1 Philippe Goudard, *Le cirque entre l'élan et la chute. Une esthétique du risque*, Saint-Gély-du-Fesc, Éditions espaces 34, 2010, p. 44.

2 Myriam Peignist, "Acrobaticus et corps des extrémités", source : Directory of Open Access Journals, URL de référence : <http://www.doaj.org/doi/func=abstract&id=460456> [En ligne].

3 Dominique Dupuy, "*Danser outre. Hypothèses de vol*", *Io*, revue internationale de psychanalyse, n° 5, "Etats de corps", Ramonville Saint-Agne, Éditions Erès, first semester, 1994, p. 45

4 *Ibid.*, p. 47

5 Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies. Cultural identity in aerial performance*, Routledge, London & New-York, 2005. « (...) Aerial artistry inspires imaginative response from artists working in other fields and from philosophers, and although mid-air aerial bodies are frequently described by them as leaving an impression of insubstantiality, the substance of aerial performance comes from intense physical training. », p.2.

6 Denis Hauw, "Comprendre l'organisation du geste acrobatique", *L'acrobatie*, Éditions EPS, 2010, pp. 45.

system ...); there are several strategies. But the analysis can even go beyond this because the acrobats are also subject to shifting environments. Their strategies to perform the same move will vary from one moment to another. According to Denis Hauw, “Every acrobatic performance can therefore be considered as a singular achievement that is only possible by making specific adjustments to the effects of actions taken by the acrobats themselves. When carrying out their performance, they create a situation that is not fully known.”<sup>1</sup> An unknown for the acrobat just as much as for the viewer.

## FEELING THE VOID

Playing with gravity oscillates between the fear of jumping into the void and enjoying the unsteadiness. For kinaesthetic empathy, the audience is confronted with a body that plays on the emotional ability to receive or perceive this game with gravity. However, as Magali Sizorn, sociologist and specialist in circus arts, says about the trapeze, there are different perceptions between the person above and the person watching him or her... “Images of the trapeze artist or memories of a thrill felt during a flying trapeze act, the lightness and possibility of a perceived flight mark the fundamental difference between the one spinning above and the one who is looking from further down.”<sup>2</sup> **Fear, inhibition, an ambiguous relationship with gravity, exhilaration or dizziness** are all factors to take into account in a gesture that takes us out of our vertical reference points.

From an aesthetics point of view, a vertical exploration involves what Francine Fourmeaux, a researcher in sociology and anthropology, called a “**thrill aestheticisation**”<sup>3</sup>,

conceived as a quest for endangering the body through the vertigo of a [potential] fall. From the perspective of a spectator, the use of height “puts him or her in a unique and disconcerting dimension of an enigmatic vacuum drama.”<sup>4</sup> An impression of emptiness sparked by a scenography, a gesture, a picture, a theatrical choice. The aerialist’s act refers to the imagery of void... Even when risk-taking is not high, the smallest presence of the gravity defying makes the spectators feel the presence of an immense void; the void of this position that they are not familiar with, in weightlessness.

## IN SUMMARY

- A historical analysis of acrobatic dancing reveals that the acrobat is often depicted as the one who breaks the **vertical order** (human posture) and seeks to **defy gravity**. Representations of aerialists oscillate between a fascination for the strength and a fear of the fragility and precariousness of the one who is escaping from the human condition.
- From a symbolic point of view, the action unfolds in an axis between the ground and the sky that determines our body awareness. This is what constitutes our **gravitational identity** through our verticality. Our posture is thus a carrier of our history, of our emotions and modifying this gravity order disrupts this gesture.
- From an aesthetic point of view, a **vertical exploration** jeopardizes what Francine Fourmeaux calls the “thrill aestheticisation”, which is often a component of circus theatre to varying degrees. In the fields of architecture and scenography, **verticality marks the intensity**, while circular lines mark the length of time.

1 Denis Hauw, “Activités gymniques et acrobatiques. Recherches et applications”, *Revue EPS*, n° 25, 1996, pp. 65-76.

2 Magali Sizorn, “Une ethnologue en Trapézie. Sport, art ou spectacle?”, *Ethnologie française*, vol. 38, 2008, pp. 79-88.

3 This expression refers to Francine Fourmeaux’s article, “Le nouveau cirque ou l’esthétisation du frisson”, *Ethnologie française*, n° 36, vol. 4, “Sports à risque, corps à risque?”, 2006, pp. 659-668. The author sees the enacting of an aesthetic more physical risk in contemporary circus. The action is less virtuosic than the sensation it provokes in the spectator.



## FURTHER READING

**Some bibliographical elements on verticality, gravity and weight in circus from the point of view of social and human sciences and aesthetics.**

**Chalanset Alice (dir.),** *Légèreté: corps et âme, un rêve d'apesanteur*, Autrement, Paris, 1996.

**Fourmeaux Francine (dir.),** *Aux limites de soi les autres. Enquêtes en sciences sociales*, Éditions Persée, 2011.

**Keen Sam & Worden John,** *Learning to Fly: Trapeze, reflections on Fear, Trust and the Joy of Letting Go*, New York, Broadway Book, 1999.

**Lartigue Pierre,** *La course aux trapèzes volants... L'exploit de Jules Léotard*, Les Presses de la Tarasque, 2009.

**Le Breton David,** *Passion du risque* [1991], Paris, Métailié, "Sciences Humaines" collection, third updated edition, 2006.

**Sizorn Magali,** *Trapézistes. Ethnosociologie d'un cirque en mouvement*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, collection "Des sociétés", 2013.

**Starobinski Jean,** *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Arts et Artistes", new edition, 2004.

**Streb Elisabeth,** *How to become an extreme action hero*, introduction by Peggy Pelhan, City University of New York, The Feminist Press, 2010.

**Tait Peta,** *Circus Bodies. Cultural identity in aerial performance*, Routledge, London & New-York, 2005.

**Arts de la piste**, n° 4, "Les aériens", February 1996.

**Arts de la piste**, n° 26, "L'art du trapèze", October 2002.



◇ The aerialist's refers to the imagery of void... Even when risk-taking is not high, the smallest presence of the gravity defying makes the spectators feel the presence of an immense void; the void of this position that they are not familiar with, in weightlessness.



# METHODS AND EXPERIENCES

Challenging and experimenting to test the body

02





# Spaces, thresholds and transitions: from the floor to the equipment

“Verticality” says Roberto Magro, “is above all a transition between two levels.” The practical workshop he delivered addresses this by exploring the spaces “between” the floor and the equipment, the body and the equipment and between the moves. By working on improvisation starting from tasks or verbal instructions, it brings into play the continuity of space through the body.



For the warm-up, Roberto Magro suggests the action verb “to stretch” and the instruction of “going through the positions.” On the floor, then on the equipment, practitioners explore this continuum without stopping. The movement does not have the objective of reproducing a technique on the trapeze, the pole or the rope, but the aim is to reach a quality gesture, a physical state, while preparing physically and artistically. The teacher then suggests three entry points into the movement: rhythm, levels and body parts. These three axes are of course combined with each other to make improvisation more complex. The work leads to unusual pathways and postures, trying to break away from the methodology of the move and the temporality that results from it.

## Images

Chapter 1: “A creative training”, workshop by Roberto Magro

## TOOLS

### What is a task?

The concept of *task*, in improvisation, was developed in the United States in the 1950s by the dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin, then taken up again by post-modern dancers such as Yvonne Rainer. In this context, a *task* allows the invention of concrete, immediate movements without an expressive aim. Today we can say in a more general way that a *task* is a movement inducer. In an improvisation, it can take the form of an imaginary or physical instruction, to refer to a material, a sensation, a body part, a tangible action, etc.

“When I talk about running, I don’t say how to run or where to” ANNA HALPRIN

Anna Halprin also talks about three levels of awareness in movement: the **physical** level (anatomical and physiological), the **emotional** level (kinaesthetic) and the **mental** level (with regards to the imagination). Improvisation **tasks** alternate or combine these different levels.

**Source:** Anna Halprin explains in a DVD Rom, *Dancing Life / Danser la vie*, Brussels, Contredanse editions, 2014. Bold by the author.



## KEEPING A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE FLOOR AND THE EQUIPMENT

In each exercise, Roberto Magro suggests working on the transition between the floor and the equipment. This work “between” levels allows the deconstruction and reconstruction of the gesture. He places emphasis on the transition areas and points out the details in our relationship with verticality: the gaze on the equipment, the grip, the position of the hands, the moment the weight is lifted off the ground, etc. According to Roberto Magro, this consciousness develops in a constant back and forth between the floor and the equipment. Understanding the floor exercise before moving to the equipment, going back to the floor and up again and vice versa. It is about constantly maintaining the link between the floor and air, to pass through verticality and feel its effects.

It is a continuous exploration both in time and in space. This has the effect of putting a strain on the performers’ body – for example, strength and explosiveness – but especially endurance (aerobic capacity and muscle endurance against fatigue). But they must also prove to be creative, to constantly reinvent the improvised situation and their relationship with the equipment.

◇ It is about constantly maintaining the link between the floor and air, to pass through verticality and feel its effects.

## SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

### Exercises suggested by Roberto Magro

**Instruction No.1:** go from top to bottom in one movement. Go up. Go down.

**Instruction No.2:** add intermediate levels. Level A is on the floor. Level B takes us from the action of standing up to the maximum body extension in verticality. Level C is getting off the floor by jumping or mounting the equipment, leaving your grounding.

How then do we go from level A to level B or from level B to level C?

**Instruction No.3:** move to the equipment. How do we go from level A to level B or level A to level C in one go, without stopping and maintaining the same tempo? For example on the static trapeze, level A is below the bar, level B is on the bar and level C is at the level of the ropes.

Do the same thing but more quickly.

Do the same thing but more slowly.

Maintain the rhythm.

Maintain the elongation and fluidity even if going fast.

Don’t look at the equipment.

Don’t look at your feet.

Keep the object in mind even when you have left it.

From the workshop suggested by Roberto Magro with several participants in the continuing development session, “Verticality, weight and gravity”, 30th March 2015.

### Images

Chapter 1: “A creative training”, workshop by Roberto Magro

Sequence II. “On the equipment”, 13’54

Sequence III. “Rhythm”, 16’25

Sequence IV. “Musicality and silences”, 31’09

Sequence V. “Spaces and levels”, 34’33

Sequence VI. “From the floor to equipment”, 49’35

## FINDING SPACES IN VERTICAL WORK

How can we vary rhythms while maintaining a continuity of form? How can we play with time in order to travel between different heights, on the floor or on the equipment? According to Roberto Magro, the approach is organic. By learning to walk across the levels (low, medium and high) on the floor, we learn to do it on the equipment and it blurs the line between what we do below and in the air. Owning these tools also teaches us to stretch time and work with our entire body. While performing the exercises, Roberto Magro suggests guiding performers by indicating the moments to stop or be in silence, sometimes in precarious positions. The body stops in a position, sometimes an uncomfortable one, and then starts again. This alternation of silence and continuous movements allows one to work from the top down and vice-versa, developing a creative physical piece, a journey into the space of the body and on the equipment.

These tasks, instruments and instructions can then be transferred to every individual's practice to build their own methodology or invent new ones. Clare Anderson, for example, was interested in the notions of space and of the body as a gateway into the movement. Antonio Harris on the Chinese pole focuses his work on space and varying heights. Patrick Mattioni takes the space of the body as a starting point. It evokes both the importance of mastering the technical movement and of providing it with an intention, a projection in the general space. This link between inner space and outer space is associated with the issue of the relationship between the floor and the vertical height. An exercise suggested by Patrick Mattioni illustrates this: "In the floor-pole relationship, I direct my work to link the energies that we put on the floor and on the pole (balancing and separating energies). For example, I place a chair under the pole. The student always starts and finishes his work on the chair. Gradually I take the chair away from the pole and thus increase the space between them."

In this work, the transition from one move to another becomes more important than the move itself and develops a different feeling of verticality and gravity on the equipment.

## BALANCE, FRICTION, TENSION

Clare Anderson explores these concepts with the same holistic approach by proposing four movement principles: the transfer of weight, balance, tension or friction with the equipment and the idea of the tempo and suspension.

The **balance** point feels like a state between the two moments of a **weight transfer**. Clare Anderson therefore suggests focusing our attention on this little moment in time, which requires a degree of technical precision in order to stay balanced on the equipment; but which can also be exploited as a creative opportunity.

**Friction/tension** are two terms used by Clare Anderson to describe the relationship between the body and the equipment, the resistance forces and the forces of the contact of the object on the body and vice-versa. What makes the support possible in order to maintain a position? How can we use the least possible force to keep that connection? Once again, it involves learning to manage these transitions, between the body and the equipment, between two moves and two positions.

Identifying these principles allows us to build a language made of **phrases** and not just some **interrupted sequences** or **moves**. While improving their strength, flexibility and technique, students should become aware of the finesse of their aerial work. Thanks to a better integration of fundamental schemas, they can then delve into the details of these threshold moments and shifts that make these techniques unique. They can deconstruct and reconstruct a move to understand it better.

### Images

Chapter 2: "Movement principles to develop teaching programmes", presentation by Clare Anderson

### THREE QUESTIONS FOR...

**Clare Anderson**, aerial teacher at the National Centre for Circus Arts, London, United Kingdom

#### **What is your relationship with the floor and how do you use the floor in your teaching?**

We often need to work on the floor before going to the air for different reasons. One is to understand the movement we are going to do in the air with movements, shapes, positions you already know on the floor without the stress of going up. I break down the aerial movements to the floor to make them easier to understand if you try to replicate them in the air.

#### **Is it difficult to transfer this to the air where the sensations are different?**

#### **And how do you work more artistically on that transfer in the air?**

It's very difficult. The aerial equipment exists in a different space. In the air you are in a whole different dimension. But having worked on the floor still really helps.

For example, a hip lock on the rope involves an arabesque shape and a tempo into an arabesque shape. We will often do that tempo into the arabesque shape on the floor, then we will do the position and finally put the two together.

I also do character work and movement quality on the floor and then we transfer it in the air. Of course it's different but I consider it as a gift of the aerial equipment. If you're doing something on the floor (for example leaning on the elbow) that you cannot do in the air, then we will find another way, another body part to do the same action. It's a challenge but it's also a gift and we will find something unique. I also sometimes work on a body part which can become the "focus", it's leading the movement and it opens the body and the space. To avoid risk-taking and fear is to keep the students relatively low in the air and to work on a simple movement or sequence they already know and to explore every movement in that. For example just with "sitting on the trapeze" we can explore

every angle of that movement, all the directions in this position. We can also work on details and explore levels of suspension, levels of speed or heaviness, lightness...

#### **How do you feel about the transitions in the air?**

Transition is a word that I use a lot in the air. An aerial transition is when you move from one figure to another. We often recognize the aerial language as a series of movements (a front balance, a back balance or standing, sitting). The transitions are the things that link those together, like a dance on the floor that does not have a start and an end point but is a continuous movement. It's all about how to do two those transfers from one point to the other. With the transitions I will give the student a rule to follow: you need to stay upside-down in the transition, you must do it very slowly, almost like a "butô" style ... I might also give two rules: you have to work on heaviness by staying upside-down and ending up in the other direction. Then, they improvise. If we find a movement that the student really likes and that he or she wants to put in a sequence, we often try different techniques, different ways of doing a transition.

**Roberto Magro and Clare Anderson's presentations allow participants to learn aerial skills and techniques without sticking to a preconceived definition of a move but by understanding what the body does in space or on the equipment.** For example, weight transfer helps us to understand our fight against gravity and working on rhythm can help us understand hanging.

◇ Finally, how can we play with the use of varying heights by using movement principles and developing our perception of the body in space?

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

### “Going up to go down...”

Conversation between Michele Weaver and Isabelle Brisset, participants to the INTENTS session on “Verticality, weight and gravity”

**Isabelle Brisset** is a staff teacher and specialist in the high-wire at the Ecole Nationale des Arts du Cirque de Rosny-sous-Bois (ENACR in France). She trained at the Annie Fratellini circus school and has been a circus artist, acrobat and high-wire artist for the past ten years.

**Michele Weaver** is an artistic director, choreographer and designer; she is the director of the Stumble Dance Circus Company. Trained in cloud swing and double trapeze at the National Centre for Circus Arts in London, she was in charge of aerial teaching at the centre and she currently teaches at Circomedia in Bristol (United Kingdom).

- **Michele:** When you are on the rope, there is that idea of going up to go down and start again...
- **Isabelle:** We play with these notions and what they symbolise. In the act of going up or lifting yourself up, in the relation with gravity and weight, going down is like breathing.
- **Michele:** Students seek out this idea of “going down upwards” I like it. It is not flying, it is something else. It is about working with and around gravity and body awareness.
- **Isabelle:** It is also about inverting things. They are spaces for playing and trying to defy these notions.

### How can one work on the transition between the floor and the air? How can we make students understand the difference in sensation between the floor and the air?

- **Isabelle:** The sensation and supports are completely different. If the equipment is vertical, your support will be on a vertical axis, which is not at all the same as when you are on the floor. The difference needs to be experienced first of all. Then it is about knowing how to experience it, how to reach fluidity, keep the same rhythm, not highlight the difference; but there is a difference. You are not in the same conditions. It is also a different state of mind.
- **Michele:** As a cloud swing student, I did a lot of study on weight. Up there is where you have most of the weight and verticality. On the cloud swing, we try and feel vertical by feeling the weight on our feet. What I enjoy when I am teaching is working with a vertical line, understanding weight and working with it.
- **Isabelle:** If you anchor yourself, you can grow. The weight is your roots, and you can go further out on the branches. Then you have oscillations, vibrations and breaths..

## IN SUMMARY

- **The floor is often a fundamental element in order to talk about verticality**; it is starting from the floor that we become vertical, it is part of the human condition.
- Many circus techniques are vertical and verticality does not only indicate a **space** but also a **direction**.
- Therefore we need to make a distinction between **verticality** and **vertical movement**.
- Is there something specific about the **aerial equipment**? How can we define it? Where is it? In the **vertical movement**, the **grip**, the **support**?
- Working on the **transitions**, the ways of **transferring** a movement into different spaces (floor, equipment) means becoming aware of these two great principles of gravity and verticality and improving our perception of them on the aerial equipment.

## READINGS

### Moving towards vertical position

We take Sylvie Guillermin's work as a starting point. A dancer and choreographer based in Grenoble, she has been exploring verticality in dance since her first solo *La tête en l'air* working on pieces of equipment such as the pole or the perch. During this research, she collaborated regularly with circus artists. This piece relates her experience as a dancer on a vertical piece of equipment.

### Verticalising

“Based on the teachings of Sylvie Guillermin, the feeling of vertical height develops in a reassuring space that is the ground. First of all, letting the body fully relax resting on the floor, the choreographer focuses on the core: abdominals, pelvic girdle and lumbar area. My perception moves to uncharted places: the exercises suggested don't leave me the choice of taking strength from anywhere else but the pelvis, and I try to relax my arms and legs so they won't help me move from one stage to the other. Once I am on the perch, it will be impossible to hold on only by my arms. But the gap between the floor and the perch is huge. Once I am facing the equipment, its height, rigidity and narrowness scare me and make me lose all automatism. Finding the posture of the body, with hands and feet clutching the perch, sitting or suspended by the arms in order to rotate or slide, holding on using the hip strength and holding your core is hugely difficult and it is complicated to find resting positions.

[...]

Due to this loss of gravitational and postural reference points, the body doesn't know anymore. Is it a feeling of identity loss? What is it that pushes me to adapt my dance at 13 feet off the ground?”

Excerpt from “Transposition verticale. Récit d'un travail de la danse vers le cirque”, Agathe Dumont, *Repères – cahiers de danse*, n° 21, “Le travail des danseurs”, April 2008, pp. 24-25.







# Tempo, musicality, weight and hanging: Finding your own rhythm

## WEIGHT AND TRICKS

When she talks about the trapeze, Chloé Moglia quickly addresses the issue of weight. “Our technique” she says, “includes all this. It tells us about weight, lightness, flight and the risk of falling... One thing that I really questioned is the issue of weight and lightness. Freedom is associated with the notion of lightness and weight is a concept of responsibility, but the two concepts cannot function without each other; the trapeze comprises all of this.”

**If weight is a biomechanical principle that one can easily identify with, it also evokes an imagery and poetry that make this a complex issue to tackle.**

Clare Anderson, for example, places the term “weight transfer” among the four fundamental physical principles used in the air. Weight structures the language on vertical pieces of equipment and allows us to go beyond a list of words and towards the idea of constructing sentences in the learning process. It is an ally in the construction of a sequence or improvisation. “In my method,” says Roberto Magro, “there are a lot of exercises on weight. For example, in an exercise in which we move from one posture to another, one can work without hands, in order to look for weight compensation in the body.” Then how can we ‘feel’ weight in the aerial vocabulary and make it a fundamental element of our practice?

## TOOLS

### Principles and physical skills in aerial work

Clare Anderson

PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITION	IN AERIAL DISCIPLINES	EXEMPLE OF FIGURE
<b>Weight transfer</b> Moving the centre of gravity from one point of balance to another	Leaning Rotations Transitions	Sitting to standing up on trapeze
<b>Balance</b> A balancing of weight in order to not fall	Positions without hands	Back balance
<b>Friction/tension</b> The resistance of the equipment against itself or against someone / The tensioning of the limbs in order to hold a position	Holds Drops Hanging	Amazon – tensioned, wrapped position on trapeze
<b>Tempo/suspension</b> The speed of movement / the space or moment when the body doesn’t go up or down	Leg swings Leg lifts Drops Rotations	Hanging using a leg swing transition to the tucked pike position under the trapeze bar.

**Source:** Clare Anderson, “Developing an aerial programme”, National Centre for Circus Arts, presentation during the continuing professional development session “Verticality, weight and gravity”, 31st March 2015.

## ► Images

Chapter 2: “Movement principles to develop teaching programmes”, presentation by Clare Anderson  
Sequence II. “Teaching situations”, 5’19  
Sequence III. “On movement principles”, 10’2

Detailing the physical principles of the movement, Clare Anderson explains that many movements are related to weight or weight transfer.

**“Rotation, for example, is a subset of the weight transfer principle. It is a transfer of weight around a pivot point.”** Thus, weight transfer can be defined quite simply as the **“movement of the centre of gravity from a balance position to another”** and will be involved in rotation, tilt and transition movements. Working on the weight transfer, the student develops his or her **body awareness**, says Clare Anderson. We can thus develop exercises where, through working on weight transfer, the student will find other ways to perform the same move. The intention is not to try and reproduce a move but **to feel** how the weight is distributed between its parts and how, through weight transfer, the body can tilt, change its orientation, go upside down and go through a move rather than keeping it fixed.

### ▶ Images

Chapter 2 “Movement principles to develop teaching programmes”, presentation by Clare Anderson  
Sequence II. “Teaching situations”, 5’19

**Weight is at the centre of our relationship with gravity and the entire aerial vocabulary derives from it: slashing, rising, falling, turning are just different relations to weight.**

## TOOLS

### Another point of view. Laban’s Effort theory – Laban Movement Analysis

In 1947, the Austrian educator and choreographer Rudolf Laban published “Effort” within his eukinetic theory on energy and movement dynamics. According to Laban, there are four phases in movement: attention, intention, decision and precision. Effort has to do with the attention phase that comes before movement, a “tonic condition”, a “readiness to act”. The notion of weight is fundamental in his movement analysis.

### The Effort parameters and their dynamics:

**Weight:** strong/light

**Space:** direct/flexible

**Time:** quick /sustained

**Flow:** bound/ free

According to Laban, these four parameters define eight fundamental actions that determine **eight fundamental relations to weight**, on the basis of which we can understand movement.

These actions go from a maximum intensity (“**fighting against**”) to a minimum intensity (“**letting oneself go**”)... *punching, slashing, gliding, wringing, dabbing, pressing, flicking, floating.*

**Source:** Rudolf Laban, “*The mastery of movement*”

◆ Weight is at the centre of our relationship with gravity  
◆ and the entire aerial vocabulary derives from it:  
◆ slashing, rising, falling, turning are just different  
◆ relations to weight.



## SUSPENSION

Although the management of body weight involves force to fight against gravity, it also involves letting go.

**To describe this physical state, Clare Anderson uses the principles of tempo and suspension. The suspension point, she says, is where the body neither goes up nor down. The concept of tempo, on the other hand, refers to the speed of movement or its musicality, its accents and breaths, in connection with weight.**

Chloé Moglia tells how her journey through circus techniques and then through martial arts has taught her to let go. “I worked a lot with strength, with my muscles. The swinging trapeze is a discipline that can be painful. In this sense, I generally denied the sensitive aspect. The most complex thing on an aerial piece of equipment is feeling **the hold-release**, the essential movement principle in the air,” she says. Her martial arts practice with T. Bae, J-M Chomet and J. Kadian allows her to specifically address this notion.

**“This seemed interesting to me because it made me get out of the “hold everything” or “drop everything”. Something takes place in between the holding and the releasing. Working on the hold/release in a sequence or working simultaneously on holding tightly on one side and releasing on the other... “**

Hanging can therefore be described as managing weight between **holding and releasing**.

This acute feeling of the body weight is also a matter of well-being. Chloé Moglia explains how this state allows her to tame fatigue. Through martial arts practices, she trains her nervous system to better regulate the activity of the muscular system. In relation with weight and hanging, there are also the notions of **exhalation, consciousness and attention**.

### 📺 Images

Chapter 4 “Hanging”, presentation by Chloé Moglia  
Sequence II. “Holding-releasing”, 1’30  
Sequence III. “Sleeping in pull-ups”, 4’17  
Sequence IV. “Attention”, 6’33  
Séquence IV. « L’attention », 6’33







## THE TEMPO

When working on a piece of equipment, how can we link the physical work and the work on gesture **qualities**? According to Patrick Mattioni, gestures can be worked on musically at all levels: “What I think is important in our practice are the tempo, rhythm and musicality that we give to the exercise we perform. Our body, its weight, hanging, gravity and weight: together with physical preparation, they are the tools to achieve the right gesture. Becoming aware of these parameters is a long process. Tempo, rhythm and musicality are the basis of my work on the pole, and physical preparation is the essential tool to progress. On the equipment, I work with and without a load and I change the dynamics (strength, explosiveness, endurance...)”.

**Thus, we work on musicality both in the muscles and in our attention processes.**

As we saw, in the aerial approach suggested by Clare Anderson, **weight transfer** is the main principle. It is the shift of the centre of gravity to remain stable.

**Balance** is a position held in between transferring weight.

**Friction** is added as a support to fight gravity.

**Tension** uses a force to make itself stable.

Once we understand these principles, we can vary them to create more complex or difficult movements. By adding the concepts of **tempo and suspension point**, the principles become more complex to master and require motor control and an awareness of finer movements. Then it is about dealing with **silences** (a freeze), **accelerations** or **crescendo** (a fall), or other ways of looking at the move.

As Clare Anderson explains, we could establish other ways of performing these fundamental movements and look at different ways of linking them to each other, imagining **transitions** that create a phrase and a tempo.

## SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

### Use of movement principles for a beginner rope student

By Clare Anderson

PRINCIPLES	FIGURES
Using <b>weight transfer</b> to go up	Basic climb
Using <b>weight transfer</b> to go upside down	Inverting on the rope
Using <b>tempo</b> to lift and secure the knee above the hands into an inverted move	Single leg knee hang, rope wrapped around back
Using <b>tension</b> and <b>friction</b> to stay on the rope	Hand hold, wrapped and tensioned in an inverted position or climb
Using <b>friction, weight transfer</b> and <b>balance</b> to wrap and stop the rope at hip height	Hip lock
Using <b>suspension</b>	Lift point between flag into front balance
More advanced use of <b>suspension</b>	Axis of rotation for drops or cartwheels

**Source:** Clare Anderson, “Developing an aerial programme”, National Centre for Circus Arts presentation given during the continuous training session, “Verticality, weight and gravity”, 31st March 2015.

We can find these principles in all the aerial moves. They need to be understood and felt in order to interpret them in a musical way, not just technically.

## MUSICALITY

Beyond the technical aspect, working on the **tempo and suspension point** also means working on the **musicality** of the gesture, specifically explored by Roberto Magro. Through the four principles outlined – **space, levels, body lines, rhythm** – the issue of musicality is approached in different ways.

Seen as a music within the body, musicality depends on the way artists lean, their relation with weight, with the piece of equipment, the way they move their hand or foot and the way they gaze into space.

This dimension is therefore subjective but Roberto Magro suggests **fully integrating the physical preparation process by focusing on this dimension and integrating into improvisation sequences** (where “physical” tasks let the body warm up).

## SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

### A walk to start

An exercise suggested by **Roberto Magro**

1. Walk normally without looking at the floor, look around
2. Try to feel and maintain the weight but without applying pressure when you step
3. Walk, stop, speed up the walking rhythm while maintaining that quality
4. Faster and faster
5. Stop and start again
6. Keep focusing on the weight on the feet
7. Work on rhythms, *crescendo* and *decrescendo*
8. Explore degrees of speed, from + 6 to – 6
9. Go down or up by a 0.5 increments
10. Work on musicality

### Do a similar thing on the equipment

**Based on the workshop suggested by Roberto Magro with several participants during the continuous training session “Verticality, weight and gravity”, 30th March 2015.**

### Images

- Chapter 1 “A creative training”, workshop by Roberto Magro
- Sequence III. “Rhythm”, 16’25
- Sequence IV. “Musicality and silences”, 31’09

Seen as a music within the body, musicality depends on the way artists lean, their relation with weight, with the piece of equipment, the way they move their hand or foot and the way they gaze into space.

**“Musicality as a phrasing of the relationships woven between space and time”** Jean-Christophe Paré in *Repères-cahier de danse*, n° 20, November 2007

“I dance with my rope,” said a Lido student to Marie-Céline Daubagna, the teaching director of the school. Is this not the expression of musicality? So how and when can we train it?

According to Marie-Céline Daubagna, one can detect elements of musicality in the first contact of the artist with the piece of equipment. “This can be in their touch, how they will hang from it ... If their grip is engaged, we feel that something real is happening. That alone can tell a lot. Sometimes nothing happens, everything is in the small details, in our presence.”

Therefore, the musicality of the circus movement arises from the infinitely small and training it means above all integrating it as a **conscious principle**, as **attention**, in training or technique work. The musicality of the gesture can also be trained using **images**, says Antonio Harris. We also develop a special attention to physicality and musicality by trying to work on the same movement though **different emotions** or by playing different characters, by **challenging** the student and allowing the movement to come through these different states.

Finally, the quality of phrasing may also depend on the student’s **attentional focus**.

## TOOLS

### Attentional focus

The concept of attentional focus is widely used in sports science. The work of various researchers has shown that the performance is different depending on where the athlete or student’s attention is focused. Related to learning, the concept of attentional focus refers to the different neurocognitive processes involved in carrying out an action. Different types of focus will lead to a different relation with a gesture and have a great influence on performance.

### Types of focus

The **internal focus** is most used in learning. The instruction given to perform a gesture refers primarily to anatomy, to biomechanical elements, a part of the body for example.

The **external focus** may be close or distant. It will give an indication in relation to movement and can be of different types: a sensation, an image, a reference point in space, an external support (the equipment, for example), music...

*The study conducted by researcher Gabriele Wulf shows that working on the **external focus** increases an athlete’s performance by approximately 10 %. While the **internal focus** promotes speed of execution, strength or ability to adapt, the **external focus** allows a greater motor precision and faster learning. In the case of physical and artistic activities, like circus, it allows movement qualities such as musicality to be developed.*

**Source:** Gabriele Wulf, *Attentional Focus and Motor Learning*, Human Kinetics, 2007.

## IN SUMMARY

- How can the notions of musicality, weight and hanging be incorporated into a basic **move**? How can they be identified, where are they activated and why do we activate them?
- What are the **drivers** that help to develop the movement and to work on feelings?
- Must we pay attention to one principle more than another in order to create other **physical pathways** and create a **language**?
- How can instructions be changed to develop the various **physical qualities**, which are necessary to tackle this or that equipment?
- How can the musicality of a gesture be worked on in the physical work as much as in the work on **feelings, images** or **attention**?

## READINGS

### “Circus and music language”

*In this text, the art critic and educator Gwénola David explores different ways of expression in the circus: its vocabulary, grammar and syntax. In this excerpt, she uses musical terms to try and convey the specific features of this language, its musicality, accents and textures.*

### “The alphabet and the grammar”

“The circus has its own phenomena and grammar. There is an alphabet of basic moves, different modes of rhythmic variations and spatial configurations, building rules imposed by physical laws: flick-flack, somersault! The art lies in playing with combinations and alliterations as well as intervals and alterations. Emancipated from linear discourse structures, circus produces an analogic and discontinuous syntax that resembles contemporary writing. Meaning escapes through frays, it dulls some resonances in the fabric of language, body movement and structuring of space.”

Excerpt from “Les accidents du récit: une poétique de l'espace-temps”, Gwénola David, in Emmanuel Wallon, *Le cirque au risque de l'art*, Arles, Actes Sud – Papiers, “Apprendre” collection, 2002, pp. 129-130.







# From fear of the void to risk taking

**“When I work at the heights of aerial disciplines, which are not quite the same as those of dance that involve verticality, I feel more solid.” Satchie Noro, *Stradda*, No. 19, “Cirque et danse, performance. Corps extrêmes”, January 2011, p. 11.**

The risks of falling, injury and muscle fatigue are well known to aerialists. On top of this, there are different kinds of fears: fear of the void, heights, vertigo... When working with a combination of technique and creativity, how can we manage the **fear and feeling of the void**? How can we deal with the **risk** of improvisation in training, both on a **physical and emotional level**?

Certainly the development of conscious awareness and focus are cognitive elements that require specific training, which may make it easier to face one’s fears and risks. Teachers should convey these key principles in their teaching: recognising the limits of the body, working on developing good habits and trusting oneself. In this sense, the preparation must be done on a **physical and emotional level** in order to encompass the dimensions of fear, risk or pain.

## FEAR OF THE VOID

The fear of the void is above all a **feeling** of void: A fear that is both of heights (vertigo), empty spaces, or the vastness of spaces (agoraphobia). “Aerialists might not be afraid at a height yet be very afraid on the ground in an empty space,” says Michele Weaver. Naming or identifying fears that may be related to aerial work seems to be an important issue in teaching. So perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of **danger awareness** on one hand and **fear** on the other.

## 📺 Images

Chapter 3: “How movement becomes a carrier of meaning”  
Sequence III. “Reflections on fear” collective  
exchange between participants, 8’56

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

### A repertoire of fears

Comments by participants at the INTENTS session  
“Verticality, weight and gravity”, April 2015.

“For beginners, fears may come from a lack of physical fitness and coordination. Psychological elements can also cause fears. Fears related to the piece of equipment and the different suspension heights are largely psychological.” (*Feedback from working groups*)

“For vocational students, it is often the level of the suspension, the relation with the equipment, the apprehension about different spaces or physical conditions that generate fears.” (*Ibid.*)

“Stage fright, stress

Fear of being wrong

Fear of other people’s judgment

Fear of falling

Fear of pain

Fear of injury

Fear of the first time

Fear of the teacher

Fear of fear

Fear is protection” (*Ibid.*)

“Fears are physical reactions, reflexes. The mind is overwhelmed by the body. It takes time through analysis in order to overcome, and notions such as weight are there to help this analytical process and gain confidence [...] Fear can be beneficial. The aerialists’ fear is different from the acrobat’s fear.” (*Isabelle Brisset*)

“In circus, risk is always present. Being afraid can also be beneficial because it helps to develop a more acute awareness and reduce mistakes. But we must find a way to work with our fears. As teachers, we teach students to face their fears and we can give them the tools to do it, because we have been through it ourselves. We must find a balance between managing risk and taking risks.” (*Nikolay Pyasta*)

## RISK TAKING: BETWEEN TECHNIQUE AND CREATIVITY

It is possible to face one's fears by trying **to build progressive learning stages**, taking the time **to know the equipment before doing** and learning **to be and do** simultaneously.

"In the first few days, I leave students to freely explore the pole," explains Luca Morrocchi. "I let them manoeuvre around the pole to explore what it is: what is it made of, which sensations are involved – e.g. the pole burning the skin when there is friction. Before climbing it, we must understand what it is." Understanding the move and gesture seems to be essential in order to prepare for training at height. This is what Antonio Harris also recommends. **Building steps** in order to develop a strong trust, encouraging a **physical preparation and visualisation work** and climbing gradually are all keys to overcoming the fear of heights.

Risk awareness is partly subjective and there can be many teaching strategies to learn it.

A type of learning that is tailored to each student, like the one suggested by Clare Anderson at the National Centre for Circus Arts, seems well suited to address this issue. "There are different ways of learning and different student profiles," she says. "Some are more visual, others more kinaesthetic, logical or auditory. We can show the moves, but first we must give them different means to approach the movement and suggest different ways of learning."

Similarly, the Municipal Centre for Circus Arts Lido in Toulouse in France offers a highly individualised approach in its educational program. The issue of risk is tackled both as a real issue which is linked to circus practice and also as an individual relationship with one's own practice.

### ▶ Images

Chapter 3: "How movement becomes a carrier of meaning", presentation by Marie-Céline Daubagna

## THREE QUESTIONS FOR ...

### Marie-Céline Daubagna

Teaching director, Circus Arts Centre Lido, Toulouse, France.

### Working with risk – an example of a teaching program

#### How can we teach the unique features of the circus? The issues of movement and risk?

The concept of risk involves some rules provided by the teacher. For example, the use of mats, harnesses, etc. But it is also about playing with the presence of danger and seeing to what extent we can take risks. An institution takes a risk with its students. The concept of creativity can be included in this limit. We will push it as far as possible, where it is normally **no longer possible**. This status of **no longer possible** opens up to the possibility of poetry; a dreamy space where there are no words and the imagination can grow.

#### The concept of verticality involves some very physical and concrete things but also a fantasy. How can we intertwine these two aspects in aerial teaching?

Teaching can bring students to the limits of their comfort zone so that the body can express itself. We listen to students, their fears, their physical limitations and this can lead them to places they could not even imagine. This is what a creative place is.

#### These moments are not necessarily the most technically difficult ones so is it a different limit, which is not purely physical?

There is some discomfort. The pole teacher talks about a difficult journey where we fall, where we can't make it happen. It is about encouraging students to find a solution to make it work. So the journey becomes more important than the destination.

We can imagine that this concept of gravity is what makes us question reality and imagination; it is at the intersection between the two. Reality is the accident, the fall. Imagination is when we make it happen and it is wonderful. Welcome to circus!



**If the issue of risk is also present in aerial disciplines, it is because it is deeply related to working with heights, verticality, gravity and weight. Teachers are constantly faced with risk and one of the challenges of aerial teaching is teaching how to face this dimension of risk. We must acquire good technical skills in order to face the danger, but risk also brings creativity.**

## READINGS

### Void and risk in aerial disciplines

*In two issues of the magazine "Arts de la piste", one of which was devoted to the trapeze and the other to aerial disciplines in general, the issues of risk and void are specifically approached. This text echoes the teaching issues mentioned above from a legal, aesthetic or historical point of view.*

### The conditions of risk

"Historically, circus artists and especially artists from aerial disciplines have been faced with the dilemma of an artistic practice which is partly based on physical risk. The issue of safety on the trapeze arose from the appearance of this discipline whose purpose was not so much based on the artist's physical endangerment but on athletic prowess and the aesthetics of a moving body. This might be the reason for the relatively low number of accidents, which are often the result of a technical failure rather than an excessive risk taken by the artist. From the times of Leotard (1859) who spread a thick carpet of sawdust in order to absorb more or less effectively a potential fall, until the more recent appearance of the auto-lunge in the last few years, circus artists have had to constantly develop safety conditions to make artistic innovation possible. This phenomenon is even more remarkable as it developed within an inadequate legal framework and in an economically precarious sector."

Excerpt from "La condition du risqué", Antoine Billaud, *Arts de la piste*, n° 26, "L'art du trapeze", October 2002, p. 26. **To read the full article, [www.rueetcirque.fr](http://www.rueetcirque.fr)**

## PAIN MANAGEMENT

Learning to identify pain, knowing one's limits or developing work to better understand a movement's difficulty are actions which are closely linked to risk-taking in aerial disciplines. Although the feeling of height can sometimes be described as "power and lightness" (Griselda Juncà), it can also be difficult. "The hardest thing with students" continues Griselda Juncà "is anxiety", which generates tensions which can be a source of pain. **Working on breathing is an interesting tool to use then.** "Relax, breathe," says the teacher to her students. "Breathing is a very important word," added Camilla Therese Karlsen, "we can learn a technique, but we must constantly think about breathing."

Chloé Moglia explains the need to revisit **breathing awareness**. "Different types of breath are more or less relevant for different types of stress. **Respiratory blockages block the muscular system; releasing the breath is very important.** This has as much effect on the body as awareness and attention." This area is also fundamental in learning, whether on the floor or on the equipment. It is on a different level to motor learning because, as Griselda Juncà says, "Technique is something very concrete, but feeling what you do is much more difficult."

## Images

Chapter 4: "Hanging" presentation by Chloé Moglia  
Sequence IV. "Attention", 6'33  
Sequence V "Practice", 8'09  
Sequence VI. "Presence", 12'45  
Sequence VII. "Space", 16'00  
Sequence VIII. "Singularity", 18'09



## THREE QUESTIONS FOR...

### Chloé Moglia

Circus performer and artistic director of the Rhizome Company.

#### **If the notion of weight is essential in aerial work, in which places is it relevant?**

In a society that emphasizes fun and lightness, weight and gravity are scary. Even the pain it causes, the effort it requires. This will upset the current standards and I find it interesting to keep pursuing this.

#### **How can we address the issues of real and symbolic weight and risk in teaching?**

#### **How can we train listening to these things?**

What is often missing in teaching is this dimension of curiosity and listening, how to respond to the teaching that we are experiencing. Suddenly, the body is mechanical, we have words describing the body that make it mechanical and we forget about breathing. Breathing is what drives us - a subtle element. When the body is working well, when we work on something while inhaling and exhaling, something different happens. We hang but without ever holding our breath. In martial arts, there are matters of life and death and one of the basic principles of teaching is to never hold your breath.

Aerial disciplines and martial arts have these symbolic issues of life and death in common. They share the energy it takes to catch the bar and not fall. There is no cross-disciplinarity, it is an aspect that they work on differently from each other but that can be joined.

#### **How can we manage the issue of pain, which is also linked to the activity, but also the issue of safety that goes hand in hand with risk?**

The issue of pain is very important in circus and martial arts. Which tools do we have? The issue of strength is also common, the opponent's or the equipment's; how does this force penetrate your space? These are questions that we have in common. In martial arts I found a place where I can work on issues that are specific to my circus practice.

To me, safety is linked to attention. From the training point of view, it is interesting because it requires listening to the body. When we are doing a pull-up or when working aerially, we cannot be surprised by a muscle cramp. They must be trained to sense a cramp before it even appears, because we can hear ourselves breathing, because we know what we ate and drank ... It's a level of global awareness about what we do and what we experience. Once we are up there, I hate being scared so I go to a place where I am not scared, where I know that everything is fine. I am aware of the border. The issue of risk on the equipment involves personal responsibility. Listen, be curious, and feel. Your mind must be focused on your body and not drift elsewhere. During physical work, you must feel, and in order to do that, you must stop thinking, which is not so easy! Thinking comes later, at another stage. Feel how the body responds to the work, what is contracting, what is relaxing, see if the pathways are correct, etc.

◇◇◇ To me, safety is linked to attention.  
◇◇◇ From the training point of view, it is interesting  
◇◇◇ because it requires listening to the body.

◆ A teaching challenge would be combining physical preparation and mental preparation within the same training.

**On the issue of pain, teaching must make students understand that the body gradually adapts. Physical and mental preparation methods are time-consuming; however, it is essential to implement them in order to prevent and heal injuries. A teaching challenge would be combining physical preparation and mental preparation within the same training.**

Sacha Doubrovski reminds us of the importance of this. Should an “inner training” be carried out with students within a technical course? “Absolutely, like with biomechanics, **researching feelings** is essential. In an exercise we must understand the starting point, the arrival point and the continuity of the movement between these two points ... It’s important to feel how we can continue a movement, how to find the right timing, how the body arranges itself in space. **We must always feel in touch with the apparatus.**”

### IN SUMMARY

- Working on **breathing** and on **feelings** also means integrating the concept of **inner body awareness** in aerial teaching.
- How can we approach our work on **attention** and **tension** in a different way, and why?
- Aerial teaching makes us face **risk** and **danger**. Thinking about integrating these concepts in our teaching allows us to listen to **pain** and **work differently** in order to protect the body.
- So what is the importance of **both physical and mental preparation** in aerial work?

### READING

#### **Pain – a means of understanding the body**

*Magali Sizorn is a sociologist, researcher and lecturer in sports science. She is also a dancer and a gymnast and she chose to focus on trapeze artists for her thesis. In order to understand the object of her study “through her own body,” she immersed herself in trapeze practice. In this article, she recalls how pain was part of her learning and how this issue was expressed by trapeze artists.*

#### **Body knowledge: experiencing pain “to discover” oneself better**

“Is the trapeze lightness, grace, flying and fluidity? Well no, it is also pain, heaviness and violence. These words have not always been offered spontaneously by our respondents - except for those artists who embrace a type of aesthetic that wants to make the difficulty and effort visible to the audience. These unspoken words carry a meaning of course and, because we knew the necessarily painful relationship with the apparatus, that we gradually led trapeze artists to go beyond reciting a tale that emphasizes the joy of performing and being an aerialist”. By practising on the trapeze ourselves, we could experience and then question the excitement and fear experienced when doing the first swing, learning moves; hands turning red by training, feet burnt by the trapeze ... This physical experience was recorded in our corpus of participants’ observation and also allowed us to improve the way we conduct interviews and collect first-hand recollections. When their story hid - perhaps unconsciously - their difficulties, injuries and fears, we were able to bring in our speakers to address these issues, through our common experience. It is thanks to this knowledge that our view of the trapeze artist has changed. This common experience led us to a more global understanding of their activity but, above all, to their feelings. [...] It led us to deconstruct some artists’ embellished discourses on their daily life on the trapeze or the words of spectators watching from below, often in awe of the performance taking place above.”

Excerpt from “Quand les mots amènent les maux: une ethnologue en trapézie”, Magali Sizorn and Betty Lefèvre, International Symposium “Ethnographies du travail artistique”, Paris, 21-22 September 2006.



# Developing a vertical language: linking technical and artistic teaching

## ABOUT THE CREATIVE LANGUAGE

In higher education institutions, students practice for about eight hours a week on their equipment, and four to five hours at a preparatory school. In addition, they will often work in dance, theatre or various creative workshops. The languages they develop differ among these practices and objectives may also diverge; they may be physical and technical on one side, artistic on the other. These two approaches seldom meet on the piece of equipment, thus creating a separation between the technique and other artistic practices. Integrating technique in artistic teaching and vice versa allows the connection between them. This is why Roberto Magro conceived the idea of a physical and creative *training*.<sup>1</sup>

## ▶ Images

Chapter 1: "A creative training" workshop by Roberto Magro  
Sequence VII. "What is a creative training?", 45'14  
Sequence IX. "Sensitive work, creative work", 50'37

A physical and creative training should allow us to develop a **body awareness** that makes sense in relation to the equipment, drawing on resources from different areas. It is not about developing a style or giving rules but it is about building creative tools which are integrated with physical work and help develop autonomy and freedom in training. Both technical teachers and artistic expression teachers are affected by this work, which requires a **transfer between practices**.

## THREE QUESTIONS FOR...

### Roberto Magro

Director and professor,  
Centre d'Arts de Circ Rogelio Rivel,  
Artistic Director, the Central del Circ, Barcelona, Spain

### Towards a creative training

#### How to work on the links between training elements, between training on the floor and training on the equipment in order to develop a language?

Working on the floor and then moving those elements to the equipment is a system that I use constantly. It helps us to understand specific features of circus. It shows us that in order to achieve the same result, there is something much more difficult than in theatre or dance. The sooner we have our teaching tools at hand, the faster we can understand the concept. Working on the floor allows us to understand some of these concepts more quickly. In the following stage, we no longer need to be on the floor but we can go straight to the equipment and incorporate training elements.

#### Can we train and prepare physically while being creative?

The training must already be creative. When I work on training through improvisation with students or artists, I try to give as few examples as possible. I give verbal instructions and let their imagination work. The imagination must be offered more and more room in training, as it will enable us to use the equipment without a filter,

<sup>1</sup> We use the term employed by Roberto Magro. The term training incorporates the notions of training and more generally student's training or daily work

>>> without getting stuck in stereotypes or in an academic language. Creativity comes from a metaphor; if we want to give another value to a movement, we must develop a metaphorical language from the training stage.

**Can we combine technique and creativity and how can we do it?**

This is what I am constantly striving for. I suggest methods to ensure that people can become interesting from both a physical and creative point of view, as quickly as possible. There must be a musicality there... Creativity and imagination are linked to music and to an image. Even in a purely physical or technical work, we never function “in a void”. The goal is to train in creative improvisation. *Training* by improvising allows the invention of a new language.

◆ The imagination must be offered more and more room in training, as it will enable us to use the equipment without a filter, without getting stuck in stereotypes or in an academic language.

**TOOLS**

**The training at Odin Theatre, by Eugenio Barba**

In his speech, Roberto Magro evokes the idea of *training* as a toolbox. Preparation consists in making oneself available, using a language that is our own, the aerialists’. There is an interesting example with the actors at the Odin Theatre, in Denmark. This company was founded in 1964 by Eugenio Barba and has developed a physical theatre that requires extremely rigorous *training*. Putting the actor in a physical and creative state, the training draws on different techniques and traditions including martial arts, dance and also acrobatics. The physical training includes simple exercises such as jumping, twisting, going off balance, falling to the ground, stopping energy when it is at its maximum.

**Some principles:**

- Daily practice and extras
- Balance in action
- The dance of oppositions
- A confident body

*“For the actor, the energy is a “how?” and not a “what?”. How do I move? How do I remain still? How do I see my own physical presence and turn it into stage presence and therefore expression? How do I make the invisible visible: the rhythm of thought? However, it is useful for the actor to think about the “how?” in a similar way to a “what”, an intangible substance that can be manipulated, shaped, faceted, projected into space, absorbed and danced inside the body. These are not dreams but effective imaginations.»*

**Source:** Eugenio Barba, *Le Canoë de Papier. Traité d'anthropologie théâtrale*, L'Entretemps, 2003.

**For further information**

<http://www.odinteatret.dk/>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUJH4i6-UUM>

**To read more about the concept of training:**

Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, a quarterly journal published by Taylor & Francis:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtdp20#.VUzlftrtmko>



Training helps to prepare for all points of view, it gives resources and allows us to go beyond our comfort zone. It can develop sensitivity on the basis of each person's movement. The challenge is to think about technique and creativity in one place, to create a language in a common space.

## THE EXAMPLE OF A TEACHING PROGRAM

### How to integrate these concepts into the program of a circus school?

A circus arts training should enable the control of the performance on the equipment, the progressive acquisition and transfer of skills, the students' discovery of their own resources and their self-development. It evokes a **holistic approach** to teaching, as described in the discussions during the session: "This is teaching the student how to not only work on a single skill but see the student as a whole. How they work, what they eat, how they sleep, what works with them. By working more individually, we can go further with someone."

These remarks resonate with the approach developed by the Lido School in Toulouse presented by Marie-Céline Daubagna. Close to the progressive education or "éducation nouvelle" movement in France, the school places the individual at the centre of a project to support autonomy, considering the group as a space for individual building through shared experiences. In the aerial field, for example, teachers will work on movement qualities as well as technical elements. This is to develop the relationship with the equipment and surrounding space, to invent new spaces, to question the position of the equipment and their way of learning.

In the research workshop, we work on the concepts of **presence, accuracy, truth and conviction**: "I'll ask them to see how they exist outside. How, when they come on stage, we understand that they do not come exclusively to go on their equipment, they have something stronger coming from within. This can be an obsession, fatigue ... that's where we find some interesting things," says Marie-Céline Daubagna.

### ▶ Images

Chapter 3: "How movement becomes a carrier of meaning", presentation by Marie-Céline Daubagna

## SOME SPECIFIC ELEMENTS

*During her speech, Marie-Céline Daubagna suggested watching three successive videos of a student on the hoop. We thus see the change between the first and the last year; we see the student asserting her technique and gradually building a more creative approach to the apparatus. Space, time, energy, contact with the apparatus and the look take shape little by little and an artistic identity asserts itself while the physical performance becomes increasingly solid.*

Vocational training at the Lido School lasts 2 years. It is followed by a third year for professional integration.

"This is a school at the service of the artist. It is student-centred; the training works on the uniqueness of each one of them to lead them to their signature style and artistic authenticity. It is a journey that goes through an empowerment process by working with flaws, sincerity, artistic gestures (the relationship with the apparatus and the technique), respecting everyone's individual pace as much as possible."

*Among the examples given by Marie-Céline Daubagna on the issue of the students' uniqueness and the development of an artistic language, there are:*

### A research workshop

Which is offered during the three years of training. The first year is an exploratory year. Initially, students present an excerpt of their choice that they will work on later, and try to put into words what they are looking for. The rest of the group then gives feedback and shares their feelings, without any judgment. Gradually, as presentations progress, by giving things a name, working on feelings and putting these elements together, an artistic identity develops.

### ▶ Images

Chapter 3: "How movement becomes a carrier of meaning", presentation by Marie-Céline Daubagna  
Sequence II. "The research workshop", 02'22



### Circus shows

As part of the research workshop, once a month, students face an audience. This is about trying without pressure and without certainties. Performances may differ from one to the next, in order to learn from mistakes and develop in between performances. At the end of each show, some feedback is given to the entire group. The aim is also to learn to observe what we do from a distance and have a critical look at our practice.

### ▶ Images

Chapter 3: “How movement becomes a carrier of meaning”, presentation by Marie-Céline Daubagna  
Sequence III. “Giving critical feedback”, 06’31

Every teaching has the same intention. For aerial teachers at Lido, teaching revolves around what the student wishes to express. It is about searching in the sphere of feelings, suggesting a starting exercise and letting the student develop within that framework.

From **Marie-Céline Daubagna**'s presentation during the training session, “Verticality, weight and gravity”, 1st April 2015.

### CHANGING DIRECTIONS

Offering a work that is both technical and creative, which takes shape through the body and experience, sometimes requires moving reference points and changing instructions. Chloé Moglia, for example, explains that physical preparation is not only at the musculoskeletal level but also relates to **the nervous system**. “On the swinging trapeze,” she said, “there is a time when there is so much movement and so many parameters that everything gets tensed. There, you have to learn how to go within yourself. There are exercises that can be done every day to make changes to the system and, slowly but surely, regulate the process.” Similarly, Isabelle Brisset’s experience in Body Mind Centering© allows her to approach teaching in a different way and to encourage students to tune into their bodies more and their potential. She names different systems that BMC© works on, such as the nervous and lymphatic systems, bones and muscles. Antonio Harris explains that there are several types of responses to an instruction: a technical response but also a creative one that enables one to find one’s own response. Creating a character (based on a body state or a feeling), for example, can help accomplish physical tasks which sometimes can be very complex<sup>1</sup>.

All these approaches allow us to use more **resources** simultaneously in order to respond to an instruction and perform a task.

◆ Offering a work that is both technical and creative,  
◆ which takes shape through the body and experience,  
◆ sometimes requires moving reference points  
◆ and changing instructions.

1 Pour aller plus loin: José Luis Moraguès, Psychologie de la performance, corps émotionnel, corps pulsionnel, Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2012.

## TOOLS

### Resources in physical education

*The notion of resources is frequently used to describe sport activities. In the case of a physical and artistic activity such as circus, more resources must be used together in order to accomplish a task, which makes it very complex. The use of tools to develop these different resources is interesting and paves the way to more creativity.*

### Definitions

“All the knowledge, abilities, skills, mechanisms and instruments available to a subject and that he or she can modify in order to accomplish a task.” (J-P Famose, “**Tâches motrices et stratégies pédagogiques en EPS**”, in *Dossier EPS*, n° 1, Paris, 1983.)

“The set of tools available to a subject in order to meet the demands of the tasks he or she faces.” (D. Delignière et P. Duret, “*Lexique thématique en sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives*”, Paris, Vigot, 1995.)

### Classifying resources

- Bio-informational and cognitive resources
- Bioenergetic and physiological resources
- Biomechanical resources
- Motor control resources
- Emotional and relational resources

**The simultaneous use of different resources helps develop both the student’s physical potential and his or her creativity, understood as the ability to consider a wide range of solutions to a problem, to imagine and produce new shapes, in a unique way, to approach movement differently and to resort to the imagination.**

## SOME SPECIFIC ELEMENTS

*Chloé Moglia explains how working on attention and intention in a gesture enabled her to work differently with regard to hanging and to develop her creative writing using verticality.*

### The intention in pull-ups

“During a pull-up, do we rise above a bar or do we lower the bar? The movement is the same, but the reference point is not. Do we consider it too difficult or do we try and see how we can internally cut gravity below our feet and let go? If we ask ourselves enough questions, when a student does a set of pull-ups, it will be within the framework of exploration and research. The teacher can pay attention to where the breathing stops, or where something is easy or difficult.

If we take a roll-up, when we are under the bar and wrap our legs, it’s obvious that everyone speeds up and slows down at the same time. The movement is slow initially because it’s easy, then we accelerate when the move becomes more difficult. **We could explore inverting the deceleration and the acceleration as muscular work becomes completely different. This could even become a “trick” in a show. If the artist slows down while hanging when the audience expects him or her to go quickly, the whole room is left hanging.**”

### ▶ Images

Chapter 4: “Hanging” presentation by Chloé Moglia  
Sequence IV. “Attention”, 6’33  
Sequence VI. “Presence”, 12’45  
Sequence VII. “Space”, 16’00  
Sequence VIII. “Singularity”, 18’09

## IN SUMMARY

- The **cross-disciplinary** nature of aerial disciplines is very interesting and allows for a lot of exploration and the use of different **resources**.
- **Parallel skills** can help develop other models, feelings and movement perceptions.
- If this approach requires **adjustments** and **transfers**, it can be beneficial for both teachers and students.
- Looking at teaching in a **cross-disciplinary** way helps to find a balance between creativity and technical learning.
- It is by working on these different resources and principles on the body and **on the equipment** that the approach will be most satisfactory and will enable **physical and creative work to be combined**, taking a step towards **autonomy** in circus learning.

## READING

### The circus school, between artistic and athletic skills

*In this article, the sociologist Emilie Salamero shows how preparatory and higher education circus institutions see the relationship between the artistic and sport dimensions of circus. Both artists, athletes and circus students acquire different skills during their training that allow them to gradually affirm their artistic identity. Starting by working on the floor and studying several teaching programs, she tries to assess the role of teaching during this journey and how students perceive it.*

“The school can be a transitory place to socialise between a sports career and an artistic career and is specialised in the integration and optimisation of sporting, artistic and circus abilities. This form of socialisation appears conducive to receiving many individual profiles, pathways and careers. It allows apprentice artists to navigate between different schools in competition with each other (with a stronger emphasis either on the artistic, sport or circus techniques elements), on the basis of their own wealth of experience. It thus offers them the opportunity to consider a potential professional retraining since circus is associated with other kinds of art (theatre, street art, dance, etc.).”

Excerpt from “Les frontières entre le sport et l’art à l’épreuve des écoles professionnelles de cirque”, Emilie Salaméro and Nadine Hascar-Noé, **Staps**, n° 82 (4), 2008, pp. 85-99.

◇◇◇◇◇ The cross-disciplinary nature of aerial disciplines is very interesting and allows for a lot of exploration and the use of different resources.







# CONCLUSION



“The experience seemed to him sufficient to shed light: we can teach what we do not know if the student is emancipated, that is to say, if he is obliged to use his own intelligence. The master is he who encloses intelligence in the arbitrary circle from which it can only break out by making itself necessary to itself. To emancipate an ignorant person, one must be, and only need to be, emancipated oneself, that is to say, conscious of the true power of the human mind.”

**Jacques Rancière**, *Le maître ignorant. Cinq leçons sur l’émancipation intellectuelle* (“The ignorant schoolmaster: 5 lessons in intellectual emancipation”) Paris, Fayard, 1987.

The INTENTS training devoted to verticality, gravity and weight allowed us to share knowledge and know-how as well as raise many questions.

From working on physical parameters to writing, to fear or injury risk management, the theme is rooted in many issues of aerial teaching and, more generally, circus arts teaching.

Moving between different teaching practices, whether they are technical or artistic, and between different teaching frameworks (leisure, preparatory, professional schools) allows us to take stock of the knowledge acquired and to be developed, to change a way of seeing or doing things, and above all to spark a personal reflection, as an artist or a teacher.

By putting pedagogical questions at the heart of the reflection, comparing points of view and associating them with skills, one can develop more thoughtfulness about sharing in circus, borrowing from the knowledge and know-how of other disciplines. This manual wishes to offer those tools that anyone can use and adapt to his or her teaching, as well as spark the desire to look elsewhere, to read and enrich one’s vision of circus practices.

## ▶ Images

Chapter 5: Final reflection on the session and group discussion

◇ Moving between different teaching practices, whether they are technical or artistic, and between different teaching frameworks allows us to take stock of the knowledge acquired and to be developed, to change a way of seeing or doing things, and above all to spark a personal reflection, as an artist or a teacher.

The themes explored in this session link back to FEDEC's work on young professional circus artists' key competencies in the framework of the MIROIR project<sup>1</sup>. The key competencies identified by this study are physical, theoretical, creative, analytical, organisational and, more generally, artistic. The work carried out within INTENTS and the "Verticality, weight and gravity" training with teachers from different European circus schools show to which extent these entwined competencies are at the core of their pedagogical reflections and how fundamental it is to prioritise a global or holistic vision of the circus arts student, whether or not he or she will have a professional career.

Verticality, weight and gravity are notions that can be found across different disciplines, practices and areas at stake in circus arts' training. Whether we talk about technique, creativity, musicality, physical or mental preparations, risk-taking or confidence-building work, these three terms underpin every approach to gestures and define a language specific to circus, that everyone tries to convey in all its wealth and specific features.

Going up a pole or a trapeze, hanging into the void, falling, catching oneself again, balancing and throwing oneself again have a special relationship with verticality, weight

and gravity. Even if everybody knows these concepts and they can seem like clichés, asking ourselves questions about them and the circus language means trying to understand what they represent "in essence", in the intimacy of everyone's practice and the role they play in transmission. Asking ourselves questions about the movement principles that are *incorporated*, means giving back the manual to the profession and re-questioning our teaching practice and knowledge which are anchored in the body.

The different fields we explored are primarily areas for reflection and meant to spark curiosity, to lay the groundwork for a more global reflection and to propose a deeper exploration in some of these areas. This is why it was decided to leave some questions open as they were discussed during the INTENTS sessions. The tools, testimonies and readings in this document are not prescriptive and do not set out to give out recipes. Rather, they offer ingredients to mix and match to invent new tools and convey them.

Starting from the INTENTS session or navigating through the experiences and testimonies collected here, we can rethink our practice, question our gestures, look elsewhere and continue our journey.

◇ The different fields we explored are primarily areas for reflection and meant to spark curiosity, to lay the groundwork for a more global reflection and to propose a deeper exploration in some of these areas. This is why it was decided to leave some questions open as they were discussed during the INTENTS sessions.

1 FEDEC, *MIROIR project, Part 2. Analysis of key competences of young professional circus artists*, 2009.

See FEDEC's website : <http://www.fedec.eu/en/projets/miroir>







# ANNEXES

A photograph of a highly muscular man performing a handstand on a vertical pole. He is upside down, with his head near the bottom of the frame and his feet near the top. His arms are extended downwards, gripping the pole. The background is a clear blue sky, and there are metal truss structures and a camera rig visible, suggesting an outdoor performance or training session. The word "ANNEXES" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters at the top of the image.

## Images

Video excerpts of the INTENTS training session  
on verticality, weight and gravity, 2015

FEDEC YouTube Channel, Playlist "INTENTS -  
Training session «*Verticality, weight and gravity*», 2015"

<https://goo.gl/3RyYtM>



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# Speakers' biographies

## CLARE ANDERSON

Degree Year Manager & Aerial Teacher  
*National Centre for Circus Arts, London, UK*

Clare Anderson has been an aerial specialist for twenty five years. She was a prize winner of *La Piste aux Espoirs* in Belgium, where she performed a double trapeze act. Her performances have toured the world at various events. She has worked with traditional and contemporary circus companies also opera, theatre, cabarets, clubs, television and cinema. She has toured with bands such as *Westlife* (an Irish pop band) and other musicians. An aerial consultant for companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, she choreographed an Olympic show in 2012 called "Godiva Awakes" in Coventry, UK. Her varied background has always been linked to verticality, weight and gravity. She worked as a rescue climber at the London Eye and qualified as a yoga teacher before joining the Degree programme at the National Centre for Circus Arts. She also teaches on the Street Circus programme at the Roundhouse and collaborates with Aerial Days.

## MARIE-CÉLINE DAUBAGNA

Teaching Manager  
*Circus arts centre Le Lido, Toulouse, France*

Awarded with a higher education scientific diploma in social psychology, Marie-Céline Daubagna started her career as a player in professional improvisation matches. Trained at the Théâtre de Serge Martin school in Geneva, actress and improviser, over the past 30 years she has been taking part in several adventures in sideshows, live, street, theatre or circus shows: *La Mastication des Morts* by the Groupe Merci, street shows by the circus company CIA, *La Gare de Pavlov* by Kosmos Kolej, *La Vicking Komédia* at the Lazzi Théâtre, *Le Mondial d'improvisation* by LIS in Switzerland and Belgium. As a director, she cre-

ated, researched and conceived the shows at the Théâtre Jeune Public et Cirque Contemporain, *Cru* by the circus company Fet a Ma or *Grunsvagen7* by La Tide. Over the past 23 years, she has been contributing to the conception and development of a professional training project at the Circus Arts Centre Le Lido in Toulouse, as head of teaching, teacher and director.

## ROBERTO MAGRO

Artistic Director, *La Central del Circ*, Barcelona, Spain  
Director and teacher at the *Circus Arts Centre Rogelio Rivel*, Barcelona, Spain

A multi-disciplinary artist, Roberto Magro has been playing European stages over the past 15 years, searching for emotions that will set him in motion and that he can make his own in order to convey them. After studying psychology, he studied at the International Centre of Performing Arts Annie Fratellini and joined the contemporary circus company *Les Oiseaux Fous* in 1999 as a clown specialising in the aerial rope. In 2002, he founded the circus company *Rital Brocante* with his partner François Juliot. Based in Brussels, they collaborated regularly with dancers on the Brussels scene. In 2005, he became artistic director and teacher at the FLIC circus school in Turin. That same year he directed his first show, *Sentimental Manteau* for the circus company *Albatros* and since then he has worked on several professional shows and creation workshops for end-of-year shows in circus schools. At the same time, he sharpens his writing skills and his vision as a playwright in different projects; since 2007, he has been in charge of a creation workshop at the *Deltebre Dansa* festival. In 2006, he founded the *Contemporary Circus Festival* of Valcovera (Italy), which is in its 10th edition. For many years, Roberto has been working with European circus schools as a director, namely at the Circus Arts Centre Rogelio Rivel, Barcelona, Spain; the

# Thanks

Higher School of Circus Arts (ESAC), Brussels, Belgium; Crescer e Viver circus school, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Fontys Academy for Circus and Performance Art (ACaPA), Tilburg, Netherlands; FLIC circus school, Turin, Italy; University of the Arts Codarts, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

## CHLOÉ MOGLIA

Artistic director of the *Rhizome* company  
Artist, teacher of aerial energetic arts

Chloé Moglia grew up in the world of ceramics, nourished by the interaction with earth, water and fire. She learnt trapeze at the CNAC and martial arts and energetic arts with Jean-Michel Chomet and Laurence Cortadellas. In 2000, she founded the circus company *Moglice-Von Verx* with Mélissa Von Vépy. Together they created several shows and in 2007 they won the SACD prize in circus arts. In that period, she came across the *Fattoumi Lamoureux* circus company and took part in research with Kitsou Dubois with movement in zero gravity. In 2009 she founded *Rhizome* in Brittany, integrating her martial arts practice in her artistic journey and she looked at facing the void from an experimental point of view. These experiences gave meaning and raised silent questions in her shows and performances: *Nimbus* (2007), *Rhizikon* (2009) *Opus Corpus* (2012) and as a duo with Olivia Rosenthal *Le Vertige* (2012). In 2013 she started a creation project called *Aléas*. She advocates for an embodied thought, as well as a thinking and sensitive physicality and she strives for attention and a careful perception of the link between physical practice, reflection and sensitivity.

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#### **Associate author**

Agathe Dumont, postgraduate expert in performing arts, dancer, teacher and researcher in dance and circus arts

#### **The educational coordinator**

Anne Morin, member of the INTENTS committee, FEDEC's administrator and member of the pedagogic team and central management team at the Centre de les Arts del Circ Rogelio Rivel.

#### **The four speakers of the continuing training sessions**

**Clare Anderson**, *National Centre for Circus Arts*, United Kingdom, **Marie-Céline Daubagna**, *Circus Arts Centre Le Lido*, France, **Roberto Magro**, *La Central Del Circ*, Spain, and **Chloé Moglia**, *Compagnie Rhizôme*, France.

#### **The participants of the continuing training session were:**

**Sophie Albasini**, *Ecole de Cirque Zôfy*, Vex-Valais, Switzerland, **Zenaida Alcalde**, *Escuela De Circo Carampa*, Madrid, Spain, **Isabelle Brisset**, *École Nationale des Arts du Cirque* de Rosny-Sous-Bois, France, **Gérald Oliveira**, *Escola Profissional de Artes e Ofícios do Espetáculo*, Chapitô, Lisbon, Portugal, **Sacha Doubrovski**, *Académie Fratellini*, Saint-Denis-La-Plaine, France, **Stéphane Germain**, *Piste d'Azur*, Centre régional des arts du cirque, La Roquette-sur-Siagne, France, **Marie Seclet Guillouart**, *École supérieure du Centre National des Arts du Cirque*, Châlons-en-Champagne, France, **Antonio Harris**, *National Centre for Circus*

*Arts*, London, United Kingdom, **Griselda Juncà**, *Centre de les Arts del Circ Rogelio Rivel*, Barcelona, Spain, **Camilla Therese Karlsen**, *Die Etage*, Berlin, Germany, **Patrick Mattioni**, *École nationale des arts du cirque* in Rosny-sous-Bois, France, **Alexis Molina Altunaga**, *Imre Baross circus school*, Budapest, Hungary, **Luca Morrocchi**, *Scuola di cirko Vertigo*, Turin, Italy, **Thierry Pecqueux**, *École nationale des arts du cirque* in Rosny-sous-Bois, France, **Nikolay Pyasta**, *University of the Arts*, Codarts Circus Arts, Rotterdam, Netherlands, **Regine Rother**, *Staatliche Artistenschule*, Berlin, Germany, **Michele Weaver**, *Circomedia*, Bristol, United Kingdom

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# VERTICALITY, WEIGHT AND GRAVITY

## REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPTS OF VERTICALITY, WEIGHT AND GRAVITY IN PROFESSIONAL CIRCUS ARTS TEACHING

### STATIC TRAPEZE, CHINESE POLE, ROPE AND SILKS

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## **AUTHOR:**

### **Agathe Dumont**

Agathe Dumont is a dancer, teacher and independent researcher, and she holds a PhD in performing arts. She works as a teacher and expert in the fields of dance and contemporary circus. She also holds a degree in expertise of sports science from the University of Poitiers.

After training in dance at the Conservatoire and University, she devoted her PhD to the analysis of the work of dancers and acrobats around the concept of virtuosity.

She has taught dance and circus history, dance practice and pedagogy or composition and improvisation in the performing arts (University Lyon 2) and sports sciences (ParisOuest University). She currently teaches movement analysis aesthetics and the history of dance and circus and supervises master degrees in higher education institutions (EAC, school of arts and culture, Paris) and higher education art schools (including the National Centre of Contemporary Dance in Angers and the National Centre of Circus Arts in Chalons-en-Champagne).

She was the coordinator of the Dance Researchers Association and carried out several missions, some of which are on-going: Laboratory for observation of contemporary creation (LOEC2), the Ministry of Culture, Académie Fratellini, CircusNext Centre National de la Danse (“dance and health” mission), the Paris Opera.

Her research has been welcomed in several scientific journals (Ligeia, Interrogations, STAPS or Recherches en danse) and she also writes for the Stradda (circus and street arts) and Repères (dance). She is currently a resident artist at Théâtre de l’L (Brussels, Belgium) for a practice-based research project on how dancers train with Mariam Faquir.

## **TEACHING COORDINATOR**

### **Anne Morin**

Member of the management and educational leadership team at Circus Arts Centre Rogelio Rivel, Barcelona, Spain

Anne Morin worked as a contemporary dancer from 1976 and in circus from 1995 before devoting herself to creation and pedagogy in 2004. A contemporary dance teacher since 1985, she was involved in the founding of the Escola de Circ Rogelio Rivel (1999). She is currently a teacher (dance, body awareness and creative workshops) and member of the management team, responsible for teaching coordination. She is also interested in the development of methodologies to approach the creation process in circus and contemporary dance. In terms of creation, she is the artistic director and director of performances and acts, the last one being Incert for the Pistol company. In Catalonia, she worked as an expert in drafting the professional qualification of the circus artist and the contents of two professional training cycles. She has been a member of FEDEC’s second Focus Group on the continuing training of teaching staff and their competencies since its creation in 2010. She participated in drafting the report SAVOIRS00 Intents and currently chairs the INTENTS committee, where she is in charge of ensuring the smooth development of new generations of continuing training programmes. She is also involved in the preparation of SAVOIRS01, a competency framework for circus arts teachers.

