

P[R]

LIVING IS A HORIZONTAL FALL:

Living Is A Horizontal Fall was a theatrical adaptation of the Jean Cocteau novel *"Opium"* by Serge Tampalini and Andrew Robinson at Murdoch University Theatre, and performed by Andrew Robinson and Sarah Cullity. They were joined by Bouchra Ijourk, Aziz Rajil and Mounir Fatmi at the Theatre De Sidi Belyout and the Institut Francais, Casablanca, Maroc, September, 1995. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

The work of P[R] began formally with a presentation of *Living Is A Horizontal Fall* that was designed and produced as part of the International Theatre Festival in Casablanca, Maroc [September, 1995]. The first performance of the work was given at the Murdoch University Theatre, August 1995.



Poster design. Serge Tampalini. *Living is a Horizontal Fall*. [Casablanca, 1995] Artist: Mounir Fatmi. Performers: Aziz Rajil, Bouchra Ijourk, Sarah Cullity and Andrew Robinson. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

The title *Living Is A Horizontal Fall* was drawn from Jean Cocteau's novel *OPIUM: The Diary Of A Cure*; a text P[R] used as source material for the performance, in parallel with the physical and theoretical investigations outlined below. *OPIUM* loosely describes Cocteau's journey from addiction to cure, touching along the way on the nature of creativity and the human need for certainty in an uncertain existence. The fragmented structure of the novel, and its deviation from conventional narrative, meant that it was ideally suited to become one of the multiple strands drawn out by P[R], in this performance process.

P[R] attempted to develop a performance practice that could both generate and make use of "states of flux" [what were to become know as *sites of transformation* and finally *energetics*] that were directly related to contemporary social discourse interwoven with the tangled webs of *information, communication, and relationship*, that involve us all. The concept of *energetics* is explained and discussed later in this report but may usefully be thought of as a state of heightened awareness characterised by an intensification of sensory input and processing.

Living Is A Horizontal Fall took these *energetics* and attempted to present them in a highly developed form that allowed for full audience engagement, at the same time as remaining open to the possibility of their transformation and for the emergence of new *energetics* within the performance itself. In order to accomplish this, a conceptual performance structure seemed necessary; a structure capable of linking the audience's ontology with the extremely complex ontological matrix of the central part of *Living is a Horizontal Fall*.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

Conceptualising the performance as a map proved beneficial; a map at first unmarked, but upon which the performers moved from one place to another, guided by their internal (*subjective*) journey -leaving behind traces of where they had been. Often returning by different routes to the same places, their traces would begin to build a pattern that would eventually, slowly, release the individual stories of each of the nomadic inhabitants; individual stories that remained both disparate and connected as the inhabitants remained both strangers and allies on this strangely familiar landscape.

P[R] conceived a "place" on the map, as an established *site of transformation/energetic*, in which a specific performance activity, developed during rehearsals, was embedded. Only by being spatially and temporally present in these "places" could the performer engage the specific performance activity embedded there. The action of moving from "place" to "place", was seen as part of a continual metamorphosis between "becoming" and "being" -arriving and residing, all consumed by the ineluctable constancy of change. The overriding direction of the work was to give visibility to this "constancy of change." Even when the performers resided at a place on the map where they had been before, the different choices made on their journey transformed it -in much the same way as one's favourite city is transformed each time we return to it. P[R] worked towards mapping both the internal landscape of the performer and the terrain on/in, which they worked. It focused on exploring the temporal and spatial exchanges negotiated by the performer, highlighting their appearance and disappearance central to performance itself, and integral to the spectator's experience of conscious perception.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

P[R] argued that there existed a form of communication that preceded the need for semantic meaning; a language [as it were] whose closure was not to be found in understanding, but in satisfaction –a language that both the “spoken” and the “written” can only represent. While acknowledging an awareness of this language, P[R] focused on using the performer’s body as an agency for giving visibility to the physical states it conjured. Previously, performers were accustomed to a set of established conventions out of which “ideal” bodies were constructed. By resisting these conventions, P[R] found that the body was at times able to give visibility to unpredictable volatile states.

The “performance map” for *Living is a Horizontal Fall* was drawn from the following performance activities developed and assembled during training and rehearsals.

THE PLACE: Prologue: The Opium Ship.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

I believe it was Marguerite Duras [Duras, Marguerite. *India Song*, [Trans. Barbara Bray], Grove Press, New York, 1976. p. 11.] who first spoke of the necessity for a theatre audience to be carefully brought to the site where the performance could take place; where they could engage with it free of the violence inherent in an abrupt start. It was with this in mind that the *place*, *The Opium Ship* was devised.

CONTEXT:

Using the selected extract from the source text [below] the performers began, from separate parts of the auditorium, by speaking the text in English, Berber, [The Berbers are an ethnic group indigenous to North West Africa, speaking the Berber languages of the Afroasiatic family], Arabic, or French -or a mixture of all the languages. They slowly made their way to the front of the stage, where once having arrived they evoked the presence of a ship [referred to in the extract], through ambient soundings that in turn slowly mutated into music, then song, and finally into a *site of transformation/energetic* which the performers used as the agency into the complex performative modalities of the central part of the work.

TEXT:

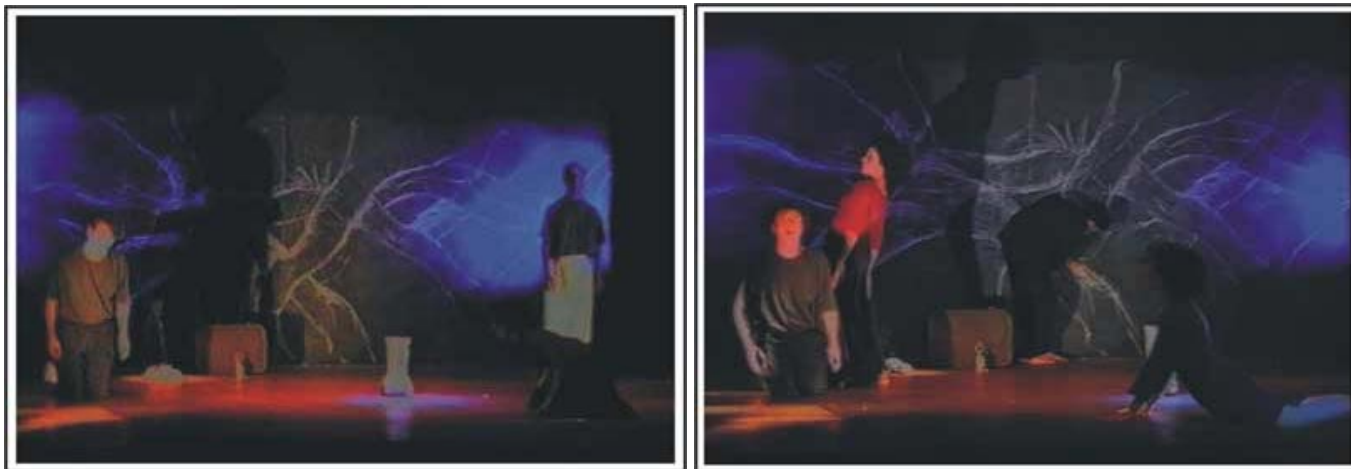
"I close my eyes, I see again the boys' berths on board the X..., one of the largest steamers on the Marseilles-Saigon line. The X was waiting to get under way. The purser, one of my opium smoking friends, had suggested the escapade to me. At eleven o'clock at night we crossed the deserted docks and climbed up the ladder onto the deck. We had to follow our guide at full speed and avoid the watch. We climbed over cables, worked around columns and Greek temples, crossed public squares, labyrinths of machines, shadow and moonlight, we mixed up the companion ways and the corridors so much and so well that our poor guide began to lose his head, until, softly, that powerful strange smell put us on the right path.

Imagine enormous berths, four or five dormitories, where sixty "boys" lay smoking on two tiers of planks. In each dormitory a long table filled up the empty space. Standing on these tables, and cut in two by a flat, unmoving cloud half way up the room, the latecomers were undressing, tying up the cords where they liked to hang up their washing, gently rubbing their shoulders.

The scene was lit by the dim lights of the lamps, and on top of them burnt the spluttering drug. The bodies were wedged against each other and without causing the slightest surprise, or the slightest ungraciousness, we took our place where there was really no place left, with our legs doubled up and our heads resting on stools. The noise we made did not even disturb one of the boys who was sleeping with his head against mine. A nightmare convulsed him: he had sunk to the bottom of the sleep that stifled him, entering into him through his mouth, his large nostrils and his ears, which stood out from his head. His swollen face was closed like an angry fist, he sweated, turned over and tore at his silken rags. He looked as though a stroke of the lancet would deliver him and bring forth the nightmare. His grimaces formed an extraordinary contrast with the calm of the others, a vegetable calm, a calm which reminded me of something familiar. What was it? On those planks lay the twisted bodies in which the skeletons, visible through the pale skin, were no more than the delicate armatures of a dream. In fact, it was the olive trees of Provence which those young sleepers evoked in me, the twisted olive trees on the flat red earth, their silver clouds hanging in the air. In that place I could almost believe that it was all this profound lightness that alone kept this monumental ship floating on the water.

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. pp. 66-67.]

THE PLACE: Writing with the Head.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

We are so accustomed to the process associated with communication, that we forget the facilitating structures involved. The luxuriant marks on paper, the evocative movements of the head, the shaping of the lips, and the uttered sounds, all seem to have been unintentionally overlooked by our enthusiasm for the conscious end product of communication. This *place* investigated the intricate vocal and physical rhythms and textures inherent in acts of communication.

CONTEXT:

Keeping their bodies neutral and looking straight ahead (either standing or sitting) the performers, using only the heads, focus on writing a sentence which they have independently selected from the source text by

tracing the letters directly in front of their eyes. At the same time as each letter is traced, they are also sounded. This process is repeated, until the sentence is both written and sounded fluently. Meaning emerges from unprecedented combinations of shapes and sounds.

TEXT:

Independently selected sentences from the source text.

THE PLACE: Conversations.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

At first seemingly disconnected voices intersect the performance space. Gradually a sense of their connectivity is found in what appears to be a curiously common theme. What we eventually hear is a conversation; what we do not see is its instigator or its receiver. What we witness is a conversation that has escaped its context. In this *place*, the spectators are subjected to familiar words in defamiliarised contexts. New meanings may be found in their unexpected and accidental connections. Meaning is being played with here.

CONTEXT:

The performers may choose to speak [by instigating or answering] in French, Arabic, English, or Berber. Sometimes the instigated conversation remains unanswered, sometimes incomplete, but always dislocated from whatever other performance work is taking place. The conversations are seen as accidental intersections. It is at the intersections where new meanings may be found.

TEXT:

Conversation One:

Voice One: *Why live this existence? It would be better to throw yourself out of the window.*

Voice Two: *Impossible, I am floating.*

Voice One: *Your body will quickly reach the bottom.*

Voice Two: *I shall arrive slowly after it.*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 80]

Conversation. Two:

Voice One: *This telegram is dead.*

Voice Two: *It's just because it's dead that everyone understands it.*

[From *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* by Jean Cocteau, quoted in: Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 93]

THE PLACE: Sound-Sense-Meaning-Song.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

The performance activity associated with *Sound-Sense-Meaning-Song* clearly illustrates what P[R] refers to as a "form of communication that precedes meaning". All vocal communication begins with sound. As an agent of communication, sound moves towards "meaning" through an infinite series of minute transformations. However before becoming "meaning", sound may be invested with "sense"; a quality that alludes to meaning without being replaced by it. This *place* attempts to give shape and form to the stages of transformation associated with the production of verbal meaning. Sometimes in the communication process, words become inadequate -they are unable to convey the nuances of our intended meaning. At this point we need another level of communication; a level beyond the purely semantic realm becomes necessary.

CONTEXT:

The performers independently select a sentence from the source text. They begin by lying on their backs on the floor and envisage they are lying at the bottom of a body of water. Slowly, very slowly, rising they begin vocally exploring all the disparate sounds that constitute their sentence. At the same time they explore how the sound impacts on the movement of the body. The closer they get to the surface of the water, the more their sentence is allowed to take on the "sense" that it holds for each individual performer. As the surface approaches so does the "meaning" of the sentence, until finally as the surface is broken the semantic meaning of the sentence is heard. Once through the surface of the imagined body of water, each performer continually repeats their sentence...a repetition that mutates meaning into rhythms. Through subtle vocal shifts the performer's rhythms begin to orchestrate themselves into at first an individual song, and finally a group "song" -that in turn becomes the *energetic* that moves the performer to another *place* on the performance map.

TEXT:

Independently selected lines from the source text.

THE PLACE: Improbable Places.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995] Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

PRETEXT:

There is an undeniable fascination held by a body suspended in a position or shape that seems in opposition to its natural laws. In such positions, the body can be the site of unexpected strength and emotional intensities. "Balance" is one such possible site.

CONTEXT:

The performers begin by exploring states of physical balance and extending them to their limits. When a state is found, it is held, still, and its physical nuances explored in detail so that this "state of balance" is in a sense finely tuned. Finally each performer adds a vocal sound/note that does not disturb the body's balance. It is as if the vocalisation is the point or edge on which the body is balanced. In this delicate balance, not only is the body's physicality made apparent but the emotional intensities of the performer may also be visible.

TEXT:

The performer's body and their independently selected vocalisations.

THE PLACE: Falling down.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

The absurdity of life is not expressed in nihilism but in the impossibility for anyone to simply do nothing. Betrayed by a need to create a meaningful existence, we are condemned to a Sisyphian-like fate of always

needing to act. Sisyphus was, according to Homer, a wise mortal who scorned the Gods, loved life, hated death, and for this was punished to a life in the Underworld where he was given the absurd task of spending eternity pushing a large boulder up a hill, only to find that when he finally reached the top it rolled back down and he had to begin his task again. It didn't take Sisyphus long to realise that this was absurd, but his realisation that all of life's tasks were equally as absurd, because they were all subject to death, gave Sisyphus victory over his jailer. Aware of the absurdity of life we, like Sisyphus, must be happy in the knowledge that we have escaped the dilemma of this existence.

CONTEXT:

The performers concentrate on falling to the floor as if unable to counter the force of gravity. They fall towards a state of rest, but just at that moment when rest might be attained, they are propelled back into action, only to find themselves once again drawn to collapsing. This rising and falling is repeated, and during the time available in the liminal space between falling and being propelled into action, the performers attempt to speak selected extracts from source text.

TEXT:

1. *"Satie wanted to make a theatre for dogs. The curtain rises. The set consists of a bone."*
2. *"In England they have just made a film for dogs. The hundred and fifty dogs who were invited hurled themselves at the screen and tore it to pieces."*
3. *"When I was staying at No.45 rue La Bruyere with my grandfather who hated dogs and had a mania for tidiness, I went out for a walk (I was then fourteen) with a fox terrier of a year and a half old, which was just tolerated. At the bottom of the white steps in the hall my terrier arched his back and relieved himself. I rushed forward, ready to strike him. Agony dilated the poor beast's eyes; he ate his droppings and sat up begging."*
4. *"At the clinic, at five o'clock, the old bull-dog who is dying is given a fatal injection of morphine. One hour later he is playing in the garden, jumping and rolling about. The following day, at five, he scratched at the doctor's door and asked for his injection."*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 61, 62, 113]

THE PLACE: The Public Prosecutor.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

"Legend gathers round poets who live in glass houses. If they hide and live in some unknown cellar, the public thinks: 'You're hiding; you want us to believe there is something where there is nothing'. On the other hand, if they look at the glass house, the public thinks: 'You are deceiving us, you are mystifying us', and everyone begins to guess, distort, interpret, search, find, symbolise, and mystify."

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p.

Sometimes we must give evidence in our defence; sometimes we must redeem the moments in our lives that have been claimed by others –if only to satisfy our sense of self and assure our place in an often uncertain existence.

CONTEXT:

The exercise is devised for two performers. The attention of performer one is focused on delivering their lines in the quality of voice imagined as belonging to someone giving evidence in a court of law in which their life is on trial. However they must attempt to remain as detached and objective as possible -they remain still; their work is vocal. At the same time performer two focuses on trying to externalise the internal state that the narrative of the performer one evokes in them -they are animated; their work is physical. As part of the exercise, the performers counterpoint their work, so that the performer who is initially still and vocal, will eventually become animated and physical, and vice versa.

TEXT:

"I do not give evidence, I do not plead. I do not pass judgement. I merely produce documents, for and against."

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 15]

THE PLACE: Rooms within houses.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

"Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains various aspects in which it presents itself to me could not possibly appear as views of one and the same thing if I did not know that each of them represents the flat seen from one spot or another, and if I were unaware of my own movements, and of my body as retaining its identity through the stages of those movements. I can of course take a mental bird's eye view of the flat, visualize it or draw a plan of it on paper, but in this case too I could not grasp the unity of the object without the mediation of bodily experience, for what I call a plan is only a more comprehensive perspective: it is the flat 'seen from above', and the fact that I am able to draw together in it all habitual perspectives is dependent on my knowing that one and the same embodied subject can view successively from various positions"

[Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*, [Trans. Colin Smith], Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1974. p. 203]

We intimately know the rooms of our homes. They are filled with memories. Sometimes these memories are released as we enter the rooms. It is a familiar world. Consider: What happens when we find ourselves lost in it, when we, perhaps even sometimes along with others, appear as strangers?

CONTEXT:

Prior to beginning this exercise, each performer has selected a number of short extracts from the source text, and has mentally placed them in private places, in specific rooms of their individual homes. The exercise begins by each performer moving from one room to another, by way of an imaginary map of their homes on the performance space floor. Each performer's imaginary map takes up the whole floor, so that conceptually they are layered on top of each other. This intentional structuring provokes not only the possibility, as each performer moves from one room to another, of meeting a stranger in one's own house, but of becoming lost in one's own familiar world. The exercise proceeds in four stages.

1. The performers move through the map of the house, from room to room. Attention is initially given solely to evoking the presence of the room.
2. Once having established their rooms, the performers respond to the memories of each room through a refined/minimal set of gestures associated with them.
3. Next the activity is layered with the performers speaking either all or traces of the text that they have placed in each of their rooms.
4. The final stage of the exercise involves the concentration of the work by slowly restricting the size of the floor space on which the performers have imaged their maps. This reduction of space refocuses the work of the performers off the physical concretisation of their individual rooms and houses, onto the corporeal spaces opened up by the negotiation of spatial exchanges between the performers.

TEXT:

Independently selected passages from the source text.

THE PLACE: Peripheral vision.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

Traditionally, as I have discussed in the chapter *Sight*, seeing is generally only associated with the central portion of our vision. Its periphery is in most instances ignored, thus significantly limiting the ways we respond to what we see. By being consciously aware of our peripheral vision we may attain a way of seeing that gives equal emphasis to both the centre and extremities of our visual field, affectively allowing us to consciously respond to what we see in ways that are unavailable to us in the traditional/habitual way of seeing.

CONTEXT:

This exercise is potentially active throughout the whole performance. Within the *place* of peripheral vision the performers are able to visually follow and engage each other's work, without any predetermined rules of collaboration. With the performers constantly alert to the possibility of working in this way, the *place* exists in a state of potentiality that may, at any time, be filled with a mirroring and reflecting of each other's gestures, or with a doubling of each other's movement that alludes to a pre-existent order, and yet is only in that instant constructing itself. The exercise also allows the performers and audience the surprise experience of brief transitory moments of unity.

TEXT:
The performer's peripheral vision.

THE PLACE: The Island.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

Each of us has a part of ourselves *"which we have inhabited ever since we were born and which we cannot leave"* -an island; a private place that we long to share. We are used to it; we endure it, even if it pains us. Sometimes we need the *"report from a tourist"* [Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 116], one that speaks our language; to help us understand our isolation. Our physical bodies too are islands, both personal and public, private and shared, protected and penetrated.

CONTEXT:

In the first part of this work, the performers, motivated only by having to remain at the furthest distance from each other, move around the performance space trying to pass, unobstructed, through its centre. Gradually the space, in which they move is restricted; shrunk as a deliberate provocation of the moment when it is physically impossible to avoid each other. Its aim is to release the physical and emotional intensities discovered during the first part of the work.

TEXT:

"Monsieur Teste would like to explore the desert island which I have inhabited ever since I was born and which I cannot leave now. Sometimes he reaches the shore and wanders about, trying to overcome the deadly sleep that emanates from the outer trees. It is a moment, after dinner, when Madame Teste watches him move away, still seated, leaving in the armchair only a great empty smoking mass.

If I, a man from the centre, were to venture out, I would be able to see him a long way off leaning up against a tree, resembling his column in the Opera House. But it frightens me to leave the middle of the island and then, what is the use of it? I put up with it. I need a report from a tourist, from a Teste, and a Teste does not penetrate into it."

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 116]

THE PLACE: Memory.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

The world of memory implies a desire to make present an irretrievable past. In this *place* the performers, through sound and gestures, attempt to give visibility to this desire.

CONTEXT:

The exercise was devised for two performers. Performer one speaks the selected extract that tells of a person slowly remembering their youth. As the memories slowly return, the performers simultaneously explore how their embodiment of the memories, impacts on their corporeal modalities. What we witness is a counterpoint between their memory and their physicality...the shape of desire, perhaps. By vocally exploring the quality of "memory sounds" associated with the nostalgic emanations of a gramophone, performer two opens up a memory space that travels parallel to and supports performer one's narrative...the sound of desire, perhaps.

TEXT:

"One day, I was going to the rue Henner, passing the rue La Bruyere, where I had spent my youth at number 45, a house where my grand-parents lived on the first floor while we lived on the mezzanine floor (the ground floor, consisting of store rooms and the hall, including only a study looking on to the courtyard and the trees of the Jardin Pleyel). I decided to overcome the anguish which usually made me run along this street like a man both deaf and blind. Since the main gates of number 45 were half open, I went in under the archway. I looked with surprise at the trees in the courtyard where I used to spend the summer bicycling and decorating Punch and Judy shows, when a suspicious concierge, appearing from a high attic window which had been kept closed in the past, asked me what I was doing there. When I replied that I had come to have a look at the house of my childhood, she said: "You surprise me"; left the window, came through the hall to join me, inspected me, refused to be convinced by any proof, threw me out and banged the gates, giving rise, with this sound of distant cannon fire, to a host of new memories. After this setback, I thought of going along the street from Rue Blanche to number 45, closing my eyes and letting my right hand trail along the houses and the lamp-posts as I always used to do when I came back from school. The experience did not yield very much and I realised that at the time I was small and that now my hand was placed higher and no longer encountered the same shapes. I began the manoeuvre again. Thanks to a mere difference of level, and through a phenomenon similar to that whereby a needle rubs against the grooves of a gramophone record, I obtained the music of memory and I discovered everything again: my cape, my leather satchel, the name of our teacher, some precise phrases I had said, the marbled cover of my notebook, the timbre of my grand-father's voice, the smell of his beard and the material of the dresses worn by my sister and mother, who were at home on Tuesdays."
[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 117]

THE PLACE: The Nurse.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

In our traditional experience of theatre, we are accustomed to furniture and objects either having been set before the show or carried onto the stage without any sense of them having a history or existential significance. We do not expect them to be meaningful in themselves; we do not expect them to be performers. This *place* explores the transient ambience suggested by the presence on stage of a single suitcase. It is about forgotten hotel rooms, dreams of empty cities, lost love and sunsets -about a suitcase and a sense of the past and an uncertain future.

CONTEXT:

As part of the prologue [*The Opium Ship*] an old suitcase is ceremoniously brought onto the performance space by one of the performers. It is the single, most present signifier in the space. As the performers find themselves next to it, they incorporate it as part of the work. It is from this *place* that the selected extracts from the source text, may be spoken.

TEXT:

1. *"Those small hotel rooms in which I have camped for so many years, rooms to make love in, but where I make friends unceasingly, an occupation a thousand times more exhausting than making love.*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 37]

2. *"There is one kind nurse, a war widow from the North. At table her colleagues question her about the German occupation during the war. They sip their coffee and wait for the horrors. 'They were very kind' she replies, 'they used to share their crusts of bread with my little boy and even if one of them did behave incorrectly, one did not dare to complain to the Kommandatura, because they were punished too severely. If they pestered a woman they were tied to a tree for two days.' This reply dismays the table. The widow is suspect. She is called the Boche. She cries and little by little she changes her memories, she slips in a little horror. She wants to live."*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 51]

THE PLACE: Characterisation



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

Work on character development in contemporary dramaturgy has more often than not acknowledged it as a site of unity. The implication is that “character” is a singular, fixed and stable entity. This is supported by a cultural tradition that sees our personal identity as also singular and constant. [The idea of “characterisation” is discussed and critiqued as part of the performance *Crossing Body Shadow*.] In this *place P[R]* has conceived of “characterisation” as capable of accommodating a plurality of constantly changing identities and is acknowledged as only one of the multiple ways of dramatic representation.

CONTEXT:

The performers independently select an extract from the source text that is character driven. Through the traditional dramaturgical conventions of *selection*, *internalisation* and *externalisation*, a character is invented. Each time the performers return to this *place* the dramaturgy is repeated and the character reinvented. Significantly, each time the character is reinvented it is ineluctably changed by the performer’s experiences that led them back to the *place*. The assertion is that “character” like “identity” is never constant and fixed, it is always negotiated.

TEXT [One Example only]:

“It is impossible for me to remember any first meeting with Proust. Our group has always treated him as a famous man. I see him, with a beard, seated on the red cushions at Larue’s. I see him, without a beard, at Madame Alphonse Daudet’s, plagued by Jammes as by a gad-fly. I find him again, dead, with the beard he had at the start. I see him, with and without a beard, in that room of cork, dust and phials, either in bed, wearing gloves, or standing up in a washroom like a magistrate’s office, buttoning a velvet waistcoat over a poor square torso which seemed to contain his mechanisms, and eating noodles standing up.

I see him among the dustsheets. They lay over the chandelier and the armchairs. The naphthalene lit up the shadows. He stood erect against the chimney-piece in the drawing room of the Nautilus like a character out of Jules Verne, or else, near a picture hung with crepe, in a dress-coat, like Carnot dead.

Once announced by Celeste’s voice on the telephone, he came to collect me at three in the afternoon so that I could go with him to the Louvre to see Mantegna’s St Sebastian. This canvas then occupied a place in the same room as Madame Riviere, Olympia and Le Bain Turc. Proust was like a lamp lit in broad daylight, the ringing of a telephone in an empty house.

Another time he was supposed to come (perhaps) at about 11 o’clock at night. I was with my neighbour on the first floor, she of whom he wrote to me: “When I was twenty she refused to love me: now that I am forty and have been the delight of the Duchesse de G..., must she refuse to read me?”

At midnight I went back upstairs. I found him on my landing. He was waiting for me, sitting on a seat in the darkness. “Marcel”, I cried, “why didn’t you at least go in and wait for me? You know the door is left ajar.” “Dear Jean”, he replied, in a voice that was a moan, a laugh – “dear Jean, Napoleon had a man killed because he had waited for him in his room. Of course I would only have read Larousse, but there could have been letters and so on lying about.”

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 80 – 81]

THE PLACE: Imaging.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

My use of the term "image", in this context, is not to be confused with my use of the term when distinguishing between *images*, *signs*, *symbols* and *metaphors*. It is being used, here, as an expedient way of referring to an imagined visual impetus or stimulus. A belief in the ability of images to engender somatic responses in the performer [potent responses that act directly upon the spectator's nervous system,] was fundamental to the performance work embedded in this *place*. Informed by one of the energising principles of Butoh, the performers focus on the external expression of internal corporeal modalities engendered by a series of images; not as final products, but rather as a constantly mutating sequence of *energetic states*. The work was held together not by an explicit narrative, but simply by the fact that the images were drawn from a common text.

[Butoh: A Japanese dance form, established by Tatsumi Hijikata in the 1960's that focused on the expression of the body's anarchic and occluded memories. Comprehensive accounts of this dance form may be found in: Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul. Photographs by Ethan Hoffman, commentaries by Mark Holborn, Tatsumi Hijikata, Yukio Mishima, Sadev/Aperture, Tokyo, 1987, and Viala, Jean and Masson-Sekine, Nourit. Butoh: Shades of Darkness, Shufunotomo, Japan, 1991]

CONTEXT:

An assemblage of images, drawn from the source text, is common to all the performers. Simultaneously the performers randomly draw on the images as the source of their corporeal movement. It is critical that each performer does not reside in/on an image long enough for it to establish any narrative connectivity, but that they move through them in a constant state of visual metamorphosis. As each image arrives, it suspends the continuity of each performer's movement and it veers off to become something else; each suspension is a critical point, a point of bifurcation. At each point we get a *flash of the real* that leaves its trace like an "after image." This point perhaps best illustrates what P[R] posits as *performing*, for it is here that one is *at the edge of the future, where the present is being created*; where the *real*, unencumbered by learnt cerebral responses, may be glimpsed and where the distinction between virtual and actual is rendered obsolete.

TEXT: [from which the physical expression is built]

- You take a deep breath and the air turns solid in your mouth.
- You watch a wound growing on your arm in slow motion.
- You are an egg being held up by a fountain of water.
- A black curtain of smoke creeps tightly around your neck.
- Your legs slowly collapse as gravity pulls you down.
- Your body diffuses in water like Chinese ink
- You are a snake drinking from a bowl of milk.
- You open a tiny window that overlooks acres of abandoned garden.
- Your mind spreads out and you watch it do so.
- You rise like a balloon but are pulled weakly back to a cold moon.
- Urine runs down your legs and it smells like violets.
- You have a very ancient book in your hands and you slowly turn the pages.
- You dance with your own shadow.
- You are a mirror that falls and shatters on the ground.
- You see flashes like moiré before your eyes and you are startled.
- Tiny steps appear all around you as you continue to climb.
- An express train rushes behind your head.
- You put your hand in a spinning fan and it passes right through.
- You are a bull rushing into the ring and come to a sudden halt.
- You are a peacock and you close your tail with a Spanish gesture.
- You have a sea sponge in your hands -you squeeze it and words come out.
- You fall to the ground in a state of euphoria.

THE PLACE: Epilogue.



Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

Just as it was important for the audience to be brought to the ontological space where the performance could be experienced, so it was equally important that they be returned to the world whence they came.

CONTEXT:

From the front of the stage, facing the audience [echoing the position of their first entrance onto the stage], the performers slowly recede to its back, while delivering selected extracts from the source text. The exercise is completed, by a layering of independently selected lines from the extracts, to form a vocal collage that slowly fades to silence, stillness...darkness.

TEXT:

Voice One: *"The tables turn. The sleepers speak. This is a fact. It is revolting to deny it."*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 36]

Voice Two: *"I have lived each period of my life so passionately and blindly that I have completely forgotten one of them. An object or a person, which typified it leaps into my memory without an anchor. Where did it come from? I search. I do not find. The background has disappeared."*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 115]

Voice Three: *"One must never get excited about mystery, so that mystery may come on its own and not find the path confused by our impatience to make contact with it."*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 36]

Voice Four: *"Now that I am cured, I feel empty, poor, heart-broken and ill. I float. The day after tomorrow I leave the clinic. Where should I go? Three weeks ago, I felt a sort of pleasure. I was asking M..., questions about altitude and about little hotels in the snow. I was going to come out. But it was a book that was going to come out. A book is coming out, is going to come out, as the publishers say. It is not I. I could die...the book does not care. The same game always begins again and every time one allows oneself to be taken in. It was difficult to foresee a book written in seventeen days. I had the illusion that it was a question of myself. The work which exploits me needed opium; it needed me to leave opium; once more, I will be taken in. And I was wondering, shall I take opium or not? It is useless to put on a carefree air, dear poet. I will take it if my work wants me to. And if opium wants me to."*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 125]

Voice Five: *"One must leave behind a trace of the journey which memory forgets."*

[Cocteau, Jean. *OPIUM*, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 20]

In his review of *LIVING IS A HORIZONTAL FALL*, the theatre critic for the Maroc national newspaper, *Liberation*, Driss Ksikes offered his impression of the work:

"...Sarah Cullity and Andrew Robinson and two Moroccan academics, Aziz and Bouchra: improvisation was the order of the day. Meaning had to be inferred by the spectators at each and every moment for them to forge a pattern out of fragments and to integrate them into a coherent whole. Through gesture and mood the director, Serge, gave visible shape to meanings emanating from the body. He gave audible shape to internal rhythms, turning sensation into sound. He enveloped it all in incense. And he expressed virtual or latent meaning by endless falls, which becoming commonplace, paradoxically expressed the drive to live through words by the very desire to communicate without the mental obstacle of language."

"As the aim of the director is not to condition characters but to let beings produce meanings by exposing themselves without artifice, he opted for a double challenge. The first is to communicate the essence of a text without reproducing it in its textual integrity. And the second is to rely on the capacity of actors to rid themselves of theatrical reflexes in order to let meanings become apparent through their bodies. This is one way of exploring the limits of the self and of the communicative being. His ambition is to restore the power of the sensual as potent metalanguage between humans. It's a yogi's wager which refuses the intellect as a barrier to sensual perception. The actors were able to speak in Arabic, French, English or in Berber. This was enormously important for the creation of unconscious signposts in the spectators' unconscious. But what mattered most was intonation, the sensation of sound accompanying the words. And, stemming from that, was the effect created by the diverse movements produced by the four shadows on stage. Experimental theatre from start to finish."

LIVING IS A HORIZONTAL FALL

DISAPPEARANCES

SILENT MOVES

CROSSING BODY SHADOW

