

In stormy waters, the vowels* simply travel better

by Vanja Smiljanić, for *Língua de areia*

* A vowel is the first phonetic gesture of a human voice:

(short) ah – eh – ih – o – u

A vowel is a sound that emanates from the human mouth without constriction of the lips, tongue, teeth, or palate:

(long) aah – ay – ee – oh – ooh

Because of their unobstructed nature, vowels can effectively cut through the noise and be understood.

This makes them more resilient within turbulent or chaotic conditions.

The sea is dark and we are in the whirlpool of events. (literally)

You (plural, singular, or hypothetical) are in an enclosed gallery space, looking at the shallow black pool with three sculptures.

An installation, one could call it.

An installation by Gonçalo Sena, more precisely.

Now, a scene is opening up in front of you.

You start mapping out the complex network of relations between the objects,

however, you are unsure if they are objects, quasi-objects, sculptures, or entities.

Are they becoming or disappearing?

Are they trying to communicate, or just inhabiting the space, doing their own thing?

If you are not there during a vernissage event, maybe (probably) you are outnumbered and feel a bit off balance and intimidated by this community?

After all, they are made of concrete, fiberglass, bronze, polyurethane, copper, plastic, metal, dripping water ...

and you – just skin.

I invite you to take a deep breath, and, as a response, growl one long, loud vowel

(perhaps start with ‘A’)

AAH! /ɑ:/

again

AAH! /ɑ:/

Now (again), a scene is opening up in front of you.

Location:

Room 1 (*Língua da areia**)

* *Língua de areia* is yet another example in a long row of Portuguese terms and idioms that are impossible to convert into any other language without losing their magic, poetic aura, and pathos.

While translated into English as ‘sandbank’, or Serbian as ‘sprud/спруд’, these renderings create a rudimentary image of an obstacle or a barrier, overlooking the ephemeral essence inherent in this natural phenomenon.

With *Língua de areia*, Sena embraces this geomorphic feature, creating a space that is simultaneously unstable and vulnerable.

Action 1:

Three actants are sharing one dark pool. (waiting)

Possibly operating in different time dimensions.

In this moment forming a multi-temporal community

provisional (on a quantum scale)

but there is a certain *logos* between them

non-verbal.

They do have names though:

Rocha Rouca (sol sol nuvens sol nuvens vento chuva vento chuva)

Lágrimas de vento

Língua de areia

The latter two are louder.

Faint apparitions of suburban modernism lead singers.

Their texture revealing the ghostly presence of an industrial wooden structure

the wood is far gone, but the fibreglass, pigment, and resin remain

cement dust and sand in a crystallised state

suspended

never reaching the water to attain their full potential.

They are casts.

Abstractions of the previous selves

holding the posture

/maybe casts, maybe fossils, maybe both/

lo-tech hybrids

casts that gained autonomy

fossils that leak*

* Sculpture-fountains is the medical term that Sena uses.

By conjuring the campy aura of a fountain, often seen as urban decor, and emphasising its social connotation as a space for gathering and interaction, he subverts the perception (and a slight arrogance) associated with monumental sculptures.

The sculpture-fountains are soft and permeable, standing as humble monuments to porosity.

water is an interlocutor between them

in constant need of hydration

they lustfully slurp the water

and then spout it again.

in an endless loop

their bodies become hollow vessels.

Action 2:

A memory comes to the surface

a mirage:

There was no snow in that area

but there was water

a lot of it

now, nowhere to be seen

but we could sense it –

clinging and sticking to everything

pressing down

colouring the air white.

Tingles from the scorching sun intertwined with daydreams of a breeze.

sitting

sitting in a white plastic chair

sitting under the scorching sun, in the white plastic chair,

in the middle of the field

shirtless.

Leaning on the back of the chair, I see five vertical stripes imprinted on his back

could be a palm tree

red and shiny-from-the-sweat.

His body holding a memory of an encounter

of a short-term symbiosis with that plastic entity

‘Ah’ /æ/ – He releases a soft and timber sigh.

His warm breath blending with the heat around him

the sound of ‘Ah’ /æ/ persisting in time and space while the body

crumbles,

leaving just a few petrified lumps as a memorial of this encounter.

Train of thought interrupted by muffled sounds coming from

another room

iiih /eə/

YOU:
Eh? /eh/
(carefully listening)

the room echoes:
Eeh, eeh, eeh, /ɛ/, /ɛ/, /ɛ/

YOU:
Oh /oʊ/ ... OK.
(you follow the sound)

ih ih ih ih ih
/ee/ /ee/ /ee/ /ee/ /ee/

STEP STEP STEP STEP STEP

Location:
Room 2
(interior, neon lightning, one door opening without a door,
no windows)

Action:

20 drawings on paper, framed
pulsating
their arrangement dictating a rhythm
a distinct rhythm
repetitive
can't really call it a beat
it is more like being trapped inside of a wooden rattle ratchet
or in one of Muybridge's early models of zoetrope
repetitive
trance-inducing
providing a distraction as much as guidance.
Your eyes spirographically swirl around the room
until your body/breathing comes in tune with their tempo
now you're pulsating in synchronicity
the moment you grasp it, it runs away.

On a closer look
each drawing has their own pitch and a volume
each of them an exploration of a tone,
a vibrato of 'Ih's /ee/
long iiiiiiuh /i:/

The frequency oscillates
rising and falling
ascending and waxing
in a loop.
With each cycle collecting more data
adding a tactile noise
making the sound grittier.*

* In the series of drawings titled *Língua da areia*, we see Sena's continuous fascination with concrete. By using this infamous material in its dust (non-goal-oriented) state, he once more evokes the unpredictable and unstable nature of a sandbank. Continuously retracing the elementary form of a triangle, and layering multiple materials such as concrete, clay, paint, and water, he creates an a-symphonic orchestra of alien metronomes that bring forth the stratified notion of time.

Suddenly the soundscape becomes intertwined with the sporadic clinking of rusty cans, the crushing of plastic bottles, the rustling of bamboo sticks, and the scraping noise of a chair being dragged around.

iiiiiiuh /i:/ BOOMP
iiiiiiuh /i:/ iiiiiiuh /i:/ THUD iiiiiiuh* /i:/
you listen
you incorporate the new elements
enjoy your monster body for a while
and then leave the room.

* Eu guardo o som fonético de iiiiiiuh /i:/
Tentei, mas não consigo dá-lo ao Gonçalo
O iiiiiiuh /i:/ continua a trazer-me de volta a março de 1999
altura em que me mudei para Portugal
(não apanhei a Expo98)
descobri que em português e em sérvio usamos o mesmo som
para a conjunção
“e” “i/ u”
👉👉
vitória pessoal sobre a mentalidade dualista de either/or.
Neste momento estou longe de Lisboa,
com o desejo de me agarrar novamente a este sentimento, procuro
na www por mais exemplos
os resultados:
1. Banana – Banana/ Банана
2. Chocolate – Čokolada/ Чоколада
3. Internet – Internet/ Интернет
4. Taxi – Taksi/ Такси
5. Hotel – Hotel/ Хотел
6. Radio – Radio/ Радио
Estou tão aliviada por encontrar essas novas âncoras de significado

STEP STEP STEP STEP STEP

Location:
Room 1 (*Chuva e Suor**)

* there are three benches in the room
yellow, pink, and blue
yellow and pink summon the spirit of suburban architecture
while the blue is blue and has a cuttlefish bone resting on it and
risograph prints of an artificial spring spread out around it.

'I invite you to sit with me' – the bone says
you sit
you sit and look
you wait

you share the moment of boredom
you indulge in a split second of idleness

For a moment you think this could be the perfect setting for filming
Un Amour d'UIQ Felix Guattari's unfortunate attempt to make a
sci-fi film with Hollywood production.
You imagine that you have supervision and that the Universe of
Infra-quark is majestically unfolding in front of you.
Or maybe even better, a scenery for the cinematic adaptation of Ursula
K. Le Guin's novel *The New Atlantis*.
You hear the cello playing and from the far depths of the dark pool the
whole continent of Atlantis is emerging, destroying everything around.

You exhale one long uuh /u:/

STEP STEP STEP STEP STEP

Location:
Antechamber / corridor (*Coluna Passagem*)

Action:

You are leaving Room 1, and there it is again
the double L column
adorned with printed snapshots of ceramic tiles by Maria Keil
the underrated heroine of Lisbon's underground.
A daily passage through the urban grotto of Intendente
on a continuous cycle
a soft spot for hand-made geometry.