

SYRINX, A PASTORAL FICTION

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**One Element,
Six Guidelines
and
One Post-Scriptum,**

Or how one is included in the syllabi

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**e Storey Projects
asked for a prompting gesture, an
instigating action, an element with
which to initiate a new curatorial
process. In other words, they
were asking for collaboration, in
accordance with what has always
been their working method since
that seminal moment in 2008
when they began developing their
curatorial practice as a collective of
individuals with a diverse range of
curatorial, artistic, and theoretical
interests.**

**This concern with
collaboration might sound like
nothing new, or as something which
does not necessarily entail critical
reflection. Indeed, collaboration
is neither new nor necessarily
reflective. Collaborative endeavours
have always abounded in the art
world, not to mention the wider
context of social practices at
large. In the art world in particular,**

they are far from implying a real engagement with a reflective, critical, and dialogic praxis. In fact, there is no exhibition, publication, or site for the emergence of curatorial and artistic practices without some sort of collaborative component. However, although collaboration in general does not constitute an immediate index of criticality, the collaborative ethos which is an integral part of Five Storey Projects' working method does become the site for the group's reflective, critical, and dialogic praxis for several reasons. Firstly, collaboration applies equally to the internal relations between its members, as well as to the external relations between the group and their invited collaborators. Secondly, collaboration is envisaged as a way of self-consciously relinquishing some sort of control over the curatorial process. Finally, it is a means of questioning the fixity and hierarchy of the roles typically

ascribed to the individuals, groups, and institutions involved in the curatorial relationship, such as artists, curators, writers, technicians, artist-run spaces, museums, and galleries.

In the case of 'For Inclusion in the Syllabi', that sort of collaboration – one which deliberately seeks, through open and non-hierarchical exchange with (an)other, what cannot be thoroughly predicted or controlled – was extended to the beginning of the process. This extension of collaboration to include the moment of inception distinguishes this project from the group's previous exhibitions. Before, either through external invitation or their own initiative, they had always started by brainstorming with their own ideas, which would then become open frameworks to be sent to their invited collaborators. This time, however, they purposely invited someone, 'a fifth impartial member', to provide them with

SYRINX, A PASTORAL FICTION

SYRINX, FICÇÃO PASTORAL (I)

Vou pôr um anúncio obsceno no diário
pedindo carne fresca pouco atlética
e nobres sentimentos de paixão.
Desejo um ser, como dizer, humano
Que por acaso me descubra a boca
e tenha como eu fendidos cascos
bífida língua azul e insolentes
maneiras de cantar dentro de água.
Vou querer que me ame e abandone
com igual e serena concisão
e faça do encontro relatório
ou poema que conste do sumário
nas escolas ali além das pontes
E espero ao telefone que me digam
se sou feliz, real, ou simplesmente
uma espuma de cinza em muitas mãos.

SYRINX, A PASTORAL FICTION (I)

I'm going to put a dirty ad in the newspaper
asking for fresh, not especially athletic meat
and noble feelings of passion.
I want a – how shall I put it? – human
being who'll discover my mouth
and who, like me, has split hooves,
a blue bifid tongue and a rude
manner of singing under water.
I want someone who'll love me and leave me
with equally tranquil concision
and who'll record our encounter in a report
or a poem for inclusion in the syllabi
of the schools beyond the bridges.
And I wait by the phone to find out
if I'm happy, real, or just a foam
of ashes passing through sundry hands.

SYRINX, FICÇÃO PASTORAL (II)

Debaixo do colchão tenho guardado
o coração mais limpo desta terra
como um peixe lavado pela água
da chuva que me alaga interiormente
Acordo cada dia com um corpo
que não aquele com que me deitei
e nunca sei ao certo se sou hoje
o projecto ou memória do que fui
Abraço os braços fortes mas exactos
que à noite me levaram onde estou
e, bebendo café, leio nas folhas
das árvores do parque o tempo que fará
Depois irei ali além das pontes
vender, comprar, trocar, a vida toda acesa;
Mas com cuidado, para não ferir
as minhas mãos astutas de princesa.

SYRINX, A PASTORAL FICTION (II)

Stashed under my mattress I've got
the cleanest heart on earth,
like a fish washed by the rain
that floods me deep down.
I wake up each day with a different body
from the one I went to bed with,
and I'm never sure if what I am
is the project or memory of what I was.
I hug the powerful but accurate arms
that brought me last night to where I am,
and as I sip coffee I read today's weather
in the leaves of the park's trees.
Later on I'll cross the bridges
to buy, sell and trade life on fire,
but cautiously, lest I scorch
my artful, princess's hands.

SYRINX, FICÇÃO PASTORAL (XVI)

Podes pegar em mim, pesar-me na balança
do sim e não, medir-me às polegadas a bondade;
ainda eu guardo o coração em sítio seco
e fresco, e longe de palavras.

E agrada-me estar só, na mais pequena cela
de uma prisão estéril entre os montes,
toda a noite a cantar contra a janela
donde se avistam outras grades iguais.

Podes até dizer (mas não as dizes)
as engraçadas frases em que voas
por distantes colinas, espantadas
de tão solene e nova madrugada;
e trazer-me água fresca, que me enrolo
em mim como um novelo e nem sequer
me movo quando o monstro inexplicável
com as suas garras rasga o meu lençol.

SYRINX, A PASTORAL FICTION (XVI)

You can pick me up, put me on the scale
of yes and no, and measure my virtue in inches;
my heart is still stored in a cool,
dry place, far away from words.
And I like being alone, in the smallest cell
of a sterile prison on the slopes,
singing all night long against my window
that looks out on to other, similarly barred windows.
You can even recite (but you don't recite)
those funny sentences in which you fly
over distant hills that tremble in awe
at such a solemn, utterly new dawn,
and you can bring me cool water; I'll still roll
myself into a tight ball and not budge
even when the inexplicable monster
rips my bedsheet with its claws.

SYRINX, FICÇÃO PASTORAL (XVII)

Perdoa, não sabia que cantavas
Em sossego, silenciosamente. Neste calor
é preciso beber água gelada; também convém
não adorar ídolos, por exemplo a imagem
que aí trazes de ti e te atormenta
(ou me atormenta a mim?).
Outros exemplos incluem jardins de babilónia,
Erupções do etna, o efeito
afrodisíaco do diamante,
as ciências da educação.
Vou-me sentar aqui, respirar até doer
as coisas possíveis nunca reais,
aprender, nó a nó, como te soltas;
Vamos cair num poço, sem
bússola e pára-quedas, vamos ser o primeiro
amor a dois no mundo.

SYRINX, A PASTORAL FICTION (XVII)

Sorry, I didn't realize that you sing
in silence, all alone. In this heat
you should drink ice water; it's also a good idea
not to worship idols – including, for example,
your own self-image that torments you
(or that torments me?).
Other examples include babylonian gardens,
eruptions of mt. etna, the aphrodisiac
effect of diamonds,
and the arts and sciences of education.
I'm going to sit right here, breathe possible
but inevitably unreal things until it hurts,
and learn knot by knot how you untie yourself.
We'll fall into a well without
parachute or compass and be the first
twin love in the world.

© 1999, António Franco Alexandre
From: Quatro caprichos
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon, 1999

© Translation: Richard Zenith

something, anything really, with which to start. Not their own idea but the idea of (an)other, and any idea for that matter. They were not only, once again, taking the risk of working with very unpredictable outcomes with which to make a coherent exhibition, but they were also now asking for unpredictability as far as the instigating idea was concerned. Even if they have always been the real instigators of the project, they nevertheless chose to relinquish control over what would initiate the process. 'Whatever you wish to give to us', they said. So, this time the group sent their extremely open framework backwards to a real but also pseudo-instigator, so that subsequent open frameworks could be sent forwards to artists and writers. The only constraint was that the prompting gesture, action or element should in some way reflect the group's overall interests and working method regarding curatorial practice. Consequently,

this 'fifth impartial member' had to be someone sufficiently acquainted with such interests and method so as to be able to (dis)place the group in their zone of (dis)comfort – dialogue and openness, as usual, but also challengingly. A former member of the group, who had been undertaking a journey through other territories, even if always at close distance, was therefore asked to return temporarily in order to become the first of a series of collaborators. And so she did. Unwittingly, she had just been included in the syllabi, and had unwittingly included all the others. But by then she had already left again.

It was not easy but it was surprisingly quick. Sign of a familiarity which had not been lost. I opened the Four Whims by António Franco Alexandre and the 'Syrinx, A Pastoral Fiction' emerged. This had to be the igniting element. Poetry. Dialogue within poetry. Poetry about dialogue. Inescapably

open, yet simultaneously hermetic. Poetry containing dialogue, but also opening up its poetic and dialogic structure to further dialogues with whatever languages and voices the group of curators could think of. Only four poetic fragments out of a poetic whole of twenty, which was absent to the group, or at least not easily accessible in its entirety in English.

Four fragmented translations.

The 'Syrinx' was the point of departure not only for the group of curators to invite artists to participate in the exhibition, as well as artists and writers to contribute to the publication, but also for the exhibiting artists themselves to invite other artists and writers, as in a reaction chain, to contribute to the publication. The outcome of this polyphonic dialogue is layered, multifaceted, and complex. Nevertheless, it remains structured and coherent. It is the result of a process which was simultaneously fluid and methodical. The

symbol of this dialogic process is a two-dimensional diagram which is fixed and mute only in appearance, since it is, in fact, animated by the movement of its multiple bodies and the sound of its many voices. Several artistic, theoretical, and critical languages got into conversation through the exhibition, the publication, and in between the two sites. The exhibition takes place not only in the exhibiting space but also within the publication, and vice-versa. One of the curators has become an artist through collaboration with one of the participating artists as well as with this artist's invited collaborator. Artist and writers have contributed with installation works, sound pieces, essays, poems, and translations, using a wide range of visual and linguistic media to address issues instigated by the four fragments of the 'Syrinx'. Utopia, mathematical and lyrical structures, archival deconstruction, the failures of

communication and translation, whether of lovers or of Stanislaw Lem's 'Solaris', cosmology, collectivity, press releases meta-linguistically speaking about their own roles in relation to exhibitions and exhibiting spaces, the in-betweenness of the trickster, the real story of two artists who met each other because of their shared artistic idea for a set of uncut keys. One cannot but hope for further chain reactions. 'Expect continuation'. These are open syllabi.

