

**Sara Antónia Matos, 2008**

**FOUNDATIONS**

"[...] If we now go back again to Heidegger to state that "we build {...} because we are dwellers", and with him back to the ancient Greeks, who first conceived the notion of space and house - of the heroes, of the humans and of the gods - we come to the paradoxical conclusion that Ana Vieira's houses are always empty, that people never dwell in them.

Indeed, it can be said that a *being* is in a given place and occupies a given space, and that what is not in some place does not exist. Space is, thus, transparent and all that can be seen in it are its dwellers: things, objects, drawings, people. No; in Ana Vieira's spaces there are no people to be seen. According to João Fernandes, in Ana Vieira's environments, "Visitors never arrive, nor do they leave. They keep walking through a corridor, through walls, objects and figures, sometimes wavering between opaqueness and transparency, always walking. Through.<sup>1</sup> Thus we feel a trace of the presence people might have, by projecting onto these environments any movements they might eventually make. Her constructions are a kind of cut into, or eruption from the abstract substratum of space, which we understand as the empty receptacle that receives materially and visually whatever occupies it. Thus the abstract space is given form and figure, and with them an order and measure that make it progressively visible. Briefly, the abstract is given an image<sup>2</sup> - that fundamental notion that suffuses Ana Vieira's oeuvre (into which we will not go here), and which is analysed by Liliana Coutinho, author of an anthological book on the artist. Consequently, it does not strike us as strange that her environments are created with semi-transparent materials which establish various levels of visibility (and thus penetration possibilities) in space at large - that same one that is not tangible until something material and visible occupies it. All these translucent cloths, curtains that rise, covering and uncovering, concealing as they reveal, are consequently more than just ways of establishing an image. They are forms of penetrating space: of building it as and *with* a body. But how can we talk of a "body of space", when for Ana Vieira space is intrinsically connected to memory, which is nothing but *virtual*<sup>3</sup> images and recollections of multisensorial experiences associated with it?

Before answering that question, let us quote a brief *tanka* poem by Ono no Komachi, which dates from the middle of 10th century. According to Luísa Freire, this was the Golden Age in Japanese literary and artistic history, during which women writers played a decisive role in developing Japanese as a poetical language and in the spreading of a mostly female poetic form - the *tanka* - which would eventually be replaced by the originally male *haiku*<sup>4</sup>.

*Is this love / real or just a dream? / How shall I know it, / if reality and dream / exist without truly existing?*<sup>5</sup>

To the poem we add the footnote written by the author of the anthology in which it is included:

*This composition is deeply Buddhist (and Platonic, in the West) in its questioning of the "middle world". In the human world, particularly in the world of love, how real are dream and reality? What can we call real?*

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We will then state, also as an answer to the question we formulated previously, that this body present in the “middle world”, in the memory and its associated experiences, corresponds to a density inscribed in space and time, which makes them both exist in an eternally present temporality, be it material or physically impalpable.

This simply means that Ana Vieira’s pieces, and thus too the memories from which they emerge, contain a kind of absolute present, independent from chronology. As if there were no past, or as if the past were a continuous present, constantly imprinting the consequences of its subterranean (and reverseless) work on a permanent here and now, in a “backward and forward” movement from which it could never free itself.

The piece would be, then, a re-elaboration of submerged reminiscences which, more than simply carry in itself “the past”, would turn it into an eternal becoming, a different eternity a place of freedom - to be physically occupied or integrated. In this sense, the work of art never implies bereavement or resignation. And, even if it contains melancholy, it is of the light-bearing kind. The piece is not a limit; it is a possibility, a construction of the body and place. {...}”

**Catalogue *Moradas*. Ana Vieira, Catarina Câmara Pereira, Fernanda Fragateiro, Fernando Brízio. Lisbon: Fundação Carmona e Costa / Assírio & Alvim, 2008, pp. 43-54 (excerpt)**

**Catalogue *Ana Vieira: Muros de Abrigo / Shelter Walls*; Ponta Delgada [Azores], Museu Carlos Machado, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2010, pp. 242-243 (org. Paulo Pires do Vale)**

### FOOTNOTES

**1** FERNANDES; João, “Através de... transparência e opacidade na obra de Ana Vieira”, Catalogue of Ana Vieira’s exhibition at Museu de Serralves, 1999.

**2** To further develop the notion of image in Ana Viera’s work, consult COUTINHO, Liliana, *Ana Vieira*, Editorial Caminho, 2007.

**3** We use here “virtual” as abstract space - the condition of becoming.

**4** On poetry by Japanese women from the 9th-11th and 17th-20th centuries: *Japão no Feminino I, Tanka*, org. and transl. Luísa Freire, Assírio & Alvim, 2007 and *Japão no Feminino II, Haiku*, org. and transl. Luísa Freire, Assírio & Alvim, 2007.

**5** *Japão no Feminino, Tanka*, org. and transl. Luísa Freire, Assírio & Alvim, 2007, p. 25.