



"A trick, an imperceptible lens change or some such small mechanic miracle, and the pastel beach where Florinda Bolkan stands is transformed, before our very eyes, into the surface of the moon. Suddenly, two astronauts appear at the far end of the beach. Horrified, Florinda makes a break for it – but the moment she begins to run, the movie itself loses speed, representing her character's desperate and ultimately vain attempt at escaping in unsettling slow motion.

This sequence, the last of a regrettably obscure Italian movie from the 1970s known to English speaking audiences as "Footprints on the Moon", is the first buoy that comes to me as I rack my brain after possible visual analogies for "Praia", Mariano Marovatto's latest album. What this succinct and impressive outing offers us is a somber revision of the beach so sweetly evoked in his first offering, "Aquele Amor Nem Me Fale". In this first and charming effort, we see Mariano working with motifs, both melodic and lyrical, commonly identified with bossa nova – this beach that is only hinted at and never actually named throughout his first songs is a beach tailor made for romantic strolls, serene panoramas, loves of young people. In "Praia", this panorama comes to, or better still, at us, in a lunar guise – emptied out, black and white – the sweetness that sometimes manages to trickle down from the songs has a vague, but undeniably morbid aftertaste. The beach, here, is claustrophobic. Even if it were immense, even if it stretched out as far as the eye can see – it would still be entirely confined to Mariano's marbles. An island beach, a castaway's beach – a loneliness populated by spectral voices, ghostly squeaks, dissonances, sounds whose origins we cannot quite place.

The boat sinks and Mariano is unable to rescue his treasured guitar.

**"It sounds out of place, it sounds out of our time,
and for that reason it sounds new. Astonishing."
Objeto Sim, Objeto Não**

"A new tactic for handling experience makes itself necessary – and even if this newfound way of singing, writing and recording songs occasionally allows for tenderness, that is certainly not its strongest asset. The electronic flourishes that sparingly decorated the tight organic whole of "Aquele Amor Nem Me Fale" are now the principal players – they have become something like the very structure of his songs, which we can't really categorize any longer as songs – the many segues and vignettes often play like a castaway's musical remembrances, calling into question our own preconceptions of what a "song" (especially a pop song) should be. The brevity and heterogeneous quality which characterize "Praia" serve a clear purpose. They stand for the fulmination of Crusoe when, after many years living on an island by himself, he is confronted by a sole human footprint on the sand. They are the equivalent of Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade's brief and devastating statement that "Islands lose men", featured in his poem "Mundo Grande". It is both experience and commentary on the islands (apartment, office, studio) into which we are continuously cornered and only infrequently capable of communication. Those who had the opportunity of listening to Mariano's take on "Incapacidade de Amar", a little-known song written by Cazuza and Leoni, more or less knew what to expect of his sophomore outing. In his revamping of the song, Mariano's voice already suggests an iffy intimacy, a nakedness "laminated" by the many layers of strident, unpredictable noises "on top of" which he sings – it is as though someone had tapped the room of a man who lives alone and is in the habit of singing to himself – so as to pass the time, so as not to despair. Mariano's vocals on his arrangement of "Incapacidade de Amar" are as touching as they are disturbing – and when his voice does appear in "Praia", in songs such as "A Mutante", "Vidraça" and "If", one has the same impression of uncomfortable nearness. It is curious to note that Mariano's voice, drenched as it is in this sci-fi ambiance, should sound so much more intimate and organic now than it did on his first album.

However, in "Praia", we frequently lose Mariano's voice, which is then replaced by a range of robotic voices pared down to the very "process" of singing, or by the sweet voice of Alice Sant'Anna, who was already a guest vocalist in "Aquele Amor Nem Me Fale". In the narrative arc we may attribute to the album, Alice's voice is a protagonist in two decisive moments. In the song "Praia", she sounds distant, very obviously recorded, without musical accompaniment. It's the very footprint Crusoe is faced with – or maybe the intrusion of a painful memory (a bitter hope) on the unbearable day-to-day life one is forced to lead in the island. In "Botões", Alice resurfaces, musicalized, singing with the delicateness of a Claudine Longet a song whose lyrics seem to point to a total resignation to the island – they can take everything away from me but the self, thinking, "my thinking". The fact that her voice has a crystalline sweetness takes us back to the idylls of childhood – and this is where the morbid aftertaste I talked about makes itself known. Is childhood the only exit out of the island? How can we go about leaving it without, so to speak, going mad? Yes, there are many voices – however, it is important to highlight that these are all voices inside one head – scraps of melodies, shattered discourse, lullabies that were not sung to us when we needed them the most. The pretty indigenous lullaby that follows "Botões" and closes "Praia", for instance, would probably sound silky and affirmative – were it not for the way Mariano chose to present it, making it sound like a Midi and thus evoking the slightly unsettling sound of the "electronic" key chains that are sold in Rio's downtown open-markets, or the melodies that seem to waft from ice-cream trucks. There is much more to say about this strange and fantastic offering from Mariano – I can only hope others with a more refined musical vocabulary will do it soon. On my part, I can only say that "Praia", which started off as a kind of songs-from-a-room project – Mariano's original plan was to compose, execute and record a whole album in one month – inspired by the works of Broadcast, David Sylvian, Laurel Halo and many others, ended up gaining entirely specific local dimensions, weaving into its glitches and loops the sense of entrapment, tension and disquiet that we all started to live with, in varying degrees of intensity, in recent times.

Maybe the Rio de Janeiro featured in "Aquele Amor Nem Me Fale" is no longer possible. Nowadays, it seems that we are invited to at least one farewell party every weekend. Those who remain, lock themselves in the bathroom and sing – they sing anything that comes to their mind – they sing so as not to despair.