Five women artists living in Brussels; all raised in several languages; each one from a different cultural background. They tell, in their mother tongue, a vital moment, an intense sensorial experience, that left a physical imprint. One of them is not telling the truth though.

How to transmit this experience only through language when their words are translated, albeit ‘properly’ by another woman?

Qualia questions the body/mind problem, the impossibility of sharing with others the exact perception of a color, of the temperature of a hand or the taste of wine. Qualia profits of the infinite powers of sound in storytelling, it’s power to reach the subconscious, it’s power to provoke physical reactions and to trigger mental images. Do you see what I mean?
KITTY’S voice is first heard filtered, not clear. She alternates later phrases in English and French.

KITTY: (over her filtered voice) I don’t hear very clearly since I am born. I was six when I started to wear hearing aids.

KITTY: Like all machines, it does not get along with water. Better to not have them on the boat.

KITTY: (in French) Ma mère sans aucun doute veille à ce que mes appareils restent à terre.

KITTY: I had seven years of speech therapy, it took me a while to get all the world straight. I watch lips, like a ballet dance.

KITTY: We had a holiday house near the Dutch sea and, we often went sailing. How old was I?

It is a sailing boat all white, with eight seats. It is made of heavy plastic, glue and I don’t know what else.

I am wearing and orange life jacket. I am sucking the tight woven night blue strap.

A lovely taste of salt and tears. An echo of sobbing. A backwards comfort.

Under my obligatory life jacket I am wearing another jacket, but this one is made of wool.

Each line in this jacket has a different color. It was kindly knitted by my Swedish aunt Gunilla, whom I have seen only a few times.

The cardigan now hangs in my studio. It has remained intact, even after my two sons have grown up.

KITTY ET LES QUALIA

Réalisation, composition, edition et mix: Charo Calvo
Episode 1 des 5 de ‘Qualia’
Texte et voix française/anglaise: Kitty Crowther,
extra voix française: Laurence Vielle
Mastering: Bastien Hidalgo Ruiz
Durée: 10:21 min
Producteur: ABC SoundProof, avec le support du ACSR et FACR Wallonie-Bruxelles

*KITTY avec sa voix filtrée, incompréhensible, commence le récit. La TRADUCTRICE essaie de prendre la parole en français mais, par la suite KITTY reprends le récit en français et anglais.

TRADUCTRICE: (sur la voix filtrée de Kitty) Elle dit : je n’entends pas clairement depuis que je suis née.

TRADUCTRICE: J’avais six ans quand j’ai commencé à porter un appareil.

TRADUCTRICE: Elle dit: comme toutes les machines, l’appareil ne s’entend pas bien avec l’eau. Mieux vaut ne pas le porter dans... (Kitty interrompe la traductrice en français...) ……Mieux vaut ne pas le porter dans le voilier.

TRADUCTRICE: J’ai fait sept ans d’orthophonie. Ça m’a pris un petit temps de mettre en place le monde. J’observe les lèvres comme une danse.

KITTY: Nous avions une maison près de la mer, en Hollande. Nous faisions souvent de la voile. Quell age avait-je?.

C’est un bateau blanc, à huit places, fait d’une agglomération de plastique, de colle et, de je ne sais quoi.

Je porte un gilet de sauvetage orange et, je suce les lanières tressées serrées bleu outre-mer.

Un délicieux goût de sel. En écho de sanglot? Une consolation à l’envers.

Je porte sous le gilet de sauvetage obligatoire un autre gilet, celui ci non obligatoire, en laine.

Chaque ligne porte une couleur. Tricoté par le bon soin… …par le bon soin de ma tante suédoise Gunella que n’ai vu que quelques fois.

Le gilet pend dans l’atelier à présent, résistant, même après le passage de mes deux fils.
In the studio i draw knitted colours with pencils.

Each colour becomes a sound, a frequency, a tune.

Playing with the low and the high notes.
Subtle light which reacts to the tunes,
just like a drum.
It Vibrates in return.

———

I curl up right in the front of the boat, on his nose, under the jib; a small triangular sail who bravely searches for the wind. The sun shines.

My mother surely makes certain that my hearing aids stays on land.

I don’t hear very clearly since i am born. I was six when i started to wear hearing aids. Like all machines, it does not get along with water. Better to not have them on the boat.

There is maybe eight place on the white boat, but where is my place?

In a fetal position. My ear is right against the surface. I hear a constant lapping. The sound rumbles through the drum-boat. Water acts as a healing balm for me.

I fall fast asleep. The boat rocks me.

And then, i drift off the boat and fall into the water.

———

A world almost without a sound. Huge arms takes me, surround me with the green. Everything is pure.

Everything is so quite, so still. Inside outside. Eyes wide open.

I am aware and i am unaware. I am and i am not. I know everything and i know nothing.

———

My life jacket and my mother bring me back on board, dropping me like a dripping package. A new born.

My mother’s face is tense with fear and, her eyes are cold, reflecting intense concentration.
I look back to the water… and miss her green arms already.

Ocean sea who loves and accepts all in silence.

Je jette un œil vers l’eau et, je regrette déjà ses bras.

Mer qui aime et accepte tout en silence.
ZAHA V A is chanting. She begins her story in French, but later changes to Hebrew.

ZAHA V A: (in French) Well i am in the bus and all those people talking… they think they have to know everything about me, that they can ask whatever they want; are you jewish, or not, languages you are able to speak, are you married, divorced, how many kids?…

TRANSLATOR:
Where do come from?

TRANSLATOR:
She says: from Belgium, but I lived in Sfat long time ago when I was a child.

TRANSLATOR:
She says: the woman in the bus asks me: do you feel GAAGOUIM for Sfat?.

TRANSLATOR:
She sais: I did not know the word but, at that moment i understood it. It expresses what i feel. …GAAGOUIM…

TRANSLATOR:
They take me to the hairdresser, one for men, a barber, rudimentary. My hair falls swiftly, without hesitation, ruthless.

My hair falls swiftly, without hesitation, ruthless.

It is done.
No way of going back now.
Time has stopped.
She says: they put a cap on my head. A white cotton simpleton cap. 

Burning shame

I step out into the street, i hesitate.

They say: go home.

She says: the sun beats down on my cap. It's midday.

The little boy who lives next door is in his front garden. He wants to play, i want to hide. He he scares me.

I feel something strike my forehead. Hard and violent.

A small sharp stone. 
A few drops of blood fall.

I see red spots on my summer dress.

Can you see?, i still have the scar here.

*Zahava is chanting

I sing…

She asks: why do you sing?

GAAGOUIM...

That word that i did not know. 
To sing is a little like that. 
It is a bright light, a pain.

Heat and loneliness. 
To fill a void. An expecting void. Expecting presence.

Hmm, do you understand what i am saying?

…. do you understand what i am saying?

She says: well, i have to leave, my train is coming. 
See you soon, bye!.

*Strange train passes by
SONIA:
Avevo una cagnolina bianca, un miscuglio di razza, era molto speciale.
Si chiamava Lira

Aveva la stessa altezza di una gatta, molto fine

Glia avevo comprato un collare rosa con delle gemme false no, per carità…
era per i gatti ma gli stava così bene…

Et sai, non aveva bisogno del guinzaglio, mi seguiva da pertutto et capivo tutto quello
che dicevo!.
Cantavamo insieme e ballave dritta dritta sulle su due zampette

Il fantastico è que mi accompagnava tutti i giorni a scuola e se ne tornava a casa da
sola.

Un giorno, ci stavamo avviando per la scuola come tutti giorni e a un certo punto…a
cominciato a correre abbaiando abbaiando…

la chiamai perché non sembrava accorgersi delle tante auto che andranno veloce…

Un furgone bianco la stravolta ed la tagliata in due, così proprio sotto ai miei occhi.

Sono rimasta paralizzata, e poi era lontano, gridavo, singhiozzavo senza poter respirare

Ho corso, ho corso fino alla scuola senza girarì più, piangendo. E piangevo, piangevo.
Ho pianto per giorni et giorni.

* donna canta

SONIA: is barking like a dog. She is italian; she translates herself in french and english, mixing both languages.

TRANSLATOR:
She says: I had a little white dog, a mangold, all white. Very special to me.

She was called Lira.

She was as big as a cat, very elegant.

I had bought her a pink necklace with fake gems… well it was a cat's necklace, but it was perfect for her.

She did not need a leash. She followed me everywhere and she understood everything i said!.

We used to sing together and she danced on her two tiny hind legs.

Every morning she came with me to school and returned alone home, amazingly enough.

One morning as we were on our way to school, she suddenly took off running and barking. She was getting dangerously close to the road… maybe she spotted a dog or something… i don’t know. I yelled her name, and i saw that she did not noticed the cars driving very fast and very close to her.

A white van knocked her down and drove over her, splitting her in two.

She says: I was stunned. I did not move. I shouted, i cried, i wept… i could not stop weeping.

Then I run all the way to school without looking back once.

And i cried for days and days.

*woman sings in italian
La mamma, stufata dei miei pianti, un giorno m’ha detto: ma che piangi così! e solo un cane… e sono sicura che non piangerai così alla mia morte!.

Il tempo ha passato e ho lasciato l’Italia per fare l’actrice. E non ci sono tornata più.

Un giorno mi hanno chiamato per dirmi che la mamma era morta e, che l’avrebbero cremata il giorno dopo.

J’ai pensé (en français), mais ainsi tôt?

Ho preso un treno di notte, un train de nuit, e la mattina sono direttamente arrivata al crematorio.

Era in una capilla, le cercueil… le cercueil était fermé… et une inconnue, certainement engagée par l’entreprise funéraire, a comminciat un discorso su Dio, il paradiso… Et ils passaient une musique mélodisement édulcorée.

Tout d’un coup,… proprio di un colpo, una de le miei zie, une des mes tantes c’est levée et s’èou dirige vers l’autel. Puis ell a ouvert la bara, le cercueil.

La tette de mamma est apparue, palida, frêle, silencieuse… Ses cheveux étaient tout blanc… comme les poils de Lira.

J’ai crié, hurlé, sangloté sans retenue devant son corps, comme devant le corps de Lira.

Mais elle ne m’entendait pas…

*Sonia piange comme un cane

My mother, tired of hearing me weeping, said to me one day: ‘stop crying like that, it was only a dog! i am sure you won’t cry like that for me when i die.’

She says: Time passed and i left Italy to become an actor.

And i never went back.

One day, i received a phone call announcing my mother’s death and that she was to be cremated next day.

So soon!

I took a night train, the next morning i went directly to the crematorium.

Inside a chapel, the coffin was closed… and a woman a, stranger, obviously hired by the funeral company, started a speech about God and heaven…

A disgusting sweet melody played in the background.

Suddenly, one of my aunts stepped up to the altar and opened the coffin.

My mother’s head appeared, palid, frail, silent… her hair was all white like …

Lira’s fur….

I cried, yelled, wept without restrain before her dead body, the same way i wept before Lira’s.

But she could not hear me…

*Sonia weeps like a dog
MERYEM:
Yani, havaya bir taş atar ve yerden iki taş alıp havadaki taş avucunda yakalar.
Yani, havaya bir taş atar ve yerden üç taş alıp havadaki taş avucunda yakalar…

MERYEM:
Yani, havaya bir taş atar ve yerden iki taş alıp havadaki taş avucunda yakalar.

MERYEM:
Eğer havaya attığı taşı yakalayamazsa; şeyi yerden fazla taş almasa oynama hakkı diğer arkadaşına geçer.

MERYEM:
Türkiye’ye tatile gitmiş gibi her yaz olduğu gibi. Benden bir kaç yaş küçüksü, bir çocukla tanıştım.

MERYEM:
TIK taki kaki tak tak…

MERYEM:
Büyük bir çekim gücüyle sessizliğin parçası olabilecek 5 taş oynamaları diye teklif ettim.

MERYEM:
O Sadece bakışordu bana.

TRANSLATOR:
She says: I mean, you throw one stone in the air, collect one stone from the ground and catch the falling stone in your hand. I mean, you throw two stones in the air, collect one stone from the ground and catch the falling stones in your hand. I mean, you throw three stones in the air, collect one stone from the ground and catch the falling stone in your hand.

*MERYEM sings same text

TRANSLATOR:
She says: We went to Turkey for holidays as usual. There I met a little boy who was a bit younger than me.

TRANSLATOR:
She says: I wanted to be a part of his silence so I invited him to play the 5 stones game.

O Sadece bakışordu bana.

TRANSLATOR:
He just stood there looking at me.

O Sadece bakışordu bana.

TRANSLATOR:
I began searching for good stones. I had many choices, in small villages you can easily find stones everywhere.

*stones and drum percussion

*gunshot

*insects and car

*gunshot

*MERYEM WHISPERS…NOT TRANSLATED NOW

*MERYEM SINGS

*MERYEM SINGS

*MERYEM SINGS

*stones noises

*stones noises

*kids

*kids
She says: If the The player does not catch the stone in the air, he gives the turn to the next player. If the player touches any stones that he is not supposed to touch or IF the player does not catch all the stones in the air, he gives the turn to the next player.

I asked him to paint one stone. He painted it in red.

The red painted stone marks the rotation of the game, I said. And I began.

After playing a while, I offered him the stones: he then slid all the stones back into my palm.

Later I put the stones in his hand as I did before.

His palm, at the touch felt like soft dried leaves.

He threw one stone in the air and caught it in his palm.

At that moment I saw it: the birth mark, a perfect circle in the palm of his hand. Everything around me was moving in slow motion.

From between the ground until the sky, a fine line was composing in a rhythmic flow. His hand moved between the ground and the air and cut horizontally, as it turned, like a dynamo.

As his palm flipped, back and forth, the birth mark appeared each time like a shadow of the falling stone.

I was seeing geometric shapes traced on the air by the stone and the birth mark.

I could feel the effective power of geometry and figurative sense.

Then, the holiday was over.

The time came to say goodbye. I gave him the stones and a notebook.

In the notebook he could find: where we found each stone, where we played, how we made the stones our own by painting them…

…how we made a “mind map” and how we made our archive together.

He gave me back the red stone.

Somehow, I lost the red stone.
Voces lejanas gritan el nombre Charo.

CHARO:
Si sí, claro que les oía. Me estaban buscando. Pero yo no me iba a mover de allí.

CHARO:
Seguid llamándome niñas, tu también mi querida Pepa, no me voy a mover de aquí.

CHARO:
Sentada al borde del acantilado,
enfrente de este horizonte curvo que nunca antes había visto.

CHARO:
De vez en cuando unas gotas muy frías me mojan las piernas.
Respiro el olor de las algas, las medusas…
de las sardinas, las caracolas…
de las rocas pulverizadas por estas olas enormes que nunca cesan.

Solo ahora entiendo que la tierra es redonda, que gira,
que viaja como una nave…
arrastrando toda esta cantidad de agua verde temblorosa…

con las nubes enganchadas
y el viento alborotado como un cachorro,
las avispas nerviosas
aquel velero pequeño…
y a mi con ellos
muy quieta…a toda velocidad por el gran espacio.

Seguid llamándome niñas, monitoras gritonas y enrubias… No me voy a mover de aquí.

*Las voces siguen llamando

Voices are calling Charo in the distance.

TRANSLATOR:
Yes yes, she says, yes i heard them, they were looking for me. But i was not going to move.

TRANSLATOR:
keep on calling my name girls, you as well my dear Pepa, i am not moving.

TRANSLATOR:
Sitting here at the edge of the cliffs,
facing this curved horizon that i have never seen before.

Occasionally, very cold drops wet my legs.
I breath in the smell of seaweed, jelly fish…
sardines, shells…
the smell of old rocks smashed to dust by these huge waves never ceasing.

Only now, she says, i realise the earth is round…
that it spins, travels like a space ship…
pulling along this huge amount of green trembling water…
with the clinging clouds
the noisy wind, noisy as a puppy,
dangerous jittering wasps
that small sail boat
and me with them
sitting… very still, travelling at high speed through space.

Keep on calling me girls, you screaming and enraged instructors. I am not going to move from here.

*Voices keep on calling Charo
Voices and stories:

Kitty Crowther, author and illustrator. Born in Belgium from British father and Swedish mother. Raised in English and French.
Zahava Seewald, singer and curator. Born in Belgium from a Jewish family, Polish and Moroccan. Raised in French, Hebreu, Flemish, Yiddish...
Sonia Pastechcia, actress and film director. Born in Belgium from Italian parents. Raised in Italian and French.
Meryem Bayram, audiovisual artist and scenographer. Born in Belgium from Turkish parents. Raised in Turkish and Flemish.

Translator voices:
Caroline Daish, performer, dancer and director. Born in Australia. Lives in Belgium since twenty years.
Laurence Vielle, poet and performer. Born in Belgium from a Flemish mother and a French father.