

Janaina Tschäpe and the Pirlimpimpim dust  
by RICARDO SARDENBERG

When Janaina left the scene and let other bodies act out her performance, she inverted the game of the project that she had been carrying out until then. In the beginning, her body was the subject of the action; it transformed the landscape or transformed itself by means of make-up, devices and improvisations. The photographic camera was an extension of her own body, when, for instance, Janaina, made up as a clown, drowned in a bathtub and stole a self-portrait by stretching her arm out of the water. Photographer that she was, she became a suicide and object of her own photograph, as an inverted Narcissus.

They were personal performances, solitary, as if exorcising a whole past by means of private rites. Slowly, the body gained representativeness. Artificial characters have emerged out of the artists' transformations, until they ripped through the body's wrapping and became autonomous. New rules were dictated for new games. I like to imagine that in this moment the Kingdom of Clear Waters<sup>1</sup> emerged, and, as in the story of the talking pill – when the doll Emilia, after swallowing Dr. Snail's magic pill, learns to talk and never stops – the characters tell the tale, take over, and become the tale. The universe of the fable, of the fairytale, of the fantastic stories in the style of E.T.A. Hoffman, is retold as if one is participating in it and modifying it at will. This universe is the margin.

The Other enters the stage, and what was private before, now is collective. All have to believe in the existence of monsters, heroes, fairies and witches in a dreamlike universe of myths, fiction, and play. The participants, seduced by the artist's mermaid songs, develop a constant state of imagination, a state of hypersensitivity typical of children tale, in a kind of melancholic epiphany. Melancholy can be found in its ancient state in the way it influences the bodies of Janaina's artificers. It was believed that, under the influence of the melancholic humour, the body could be undone into pure imagination. Maybe this is what takes place with the tale's characters: they are bodies that dematerialise into fiction.

Everything takes place from the starting point of the game.<sup>2</sup> The game is a space where relationships are built by clear rules separate from daily life. It also contains a relationship of tension and pleasure: the tension of doubt (is it going to work out?) and the obvious pleasure of playing a game. Still, the game is prior to culture. If we look at animals, we see that they know how to play games between them, establishing rules of how and when to bite, or faking feelings etc. In this sense, the game holds meaning within itself. Culture has emerged and reified the game, separating it from the flux of life.

The game is key to understanding Janaina's work, for the artist's creativity is above all linked to life and not to established concepts. Here, the game is prior to culture, and, consequently, before being impregnated by it and becoming an object constitutive of the relationships between beings, before it was reified. When the game crystallizes, it disappears within culture as if in a sleight-of-hand, ceasing to hold its own meaning and

featuring physiological and psychological aspects. We are used to see in daily life the concealed forms of the game as social staging through culture, but never prior to it.

Creativity, for Janaina, enters as an instrument of reintroduction, or better, the gushing of the game as life flux, where all participants entertain the hope of working with a meaning prior to culture. The artwork production process, when collective, finds itself in the margin between being signifiers (holding its own meaning), like the game, and being culture's structures (with their physiological and psychological meanings). Her friends are asked to participate with their bodies under more or less established rules, which aim at elaborating a new fantastic reality. There is a half-narrative and there are characters that need to be incorporated therein. But, before that, all need to make the trip between daily life and fantasy.

In the Brazilian children's book *Reinações de Narizinho*, by Monteiro Lobato, the invisible character called Peninha gives the children in the book his famous Pirlimpimpim dust, which transports the children from the structured world into the fables of La Fontaine and Aesop. More precisely, the Sítio do Pica-pau Amarelo gang and the great fabulists meet in the jungle. La Fontaine and Aesop do not invent their fables, but, instead, they live in the jungle observing the animals. For instance, the ant and the cricket act out their own destinies in the course of the centuries, and, consequently, they also act out the very moral of the tale. However, the doll Emília intervenes in the fable and changes its conclusion: a kind of half-way between the universe of established culture and that of fantasy. Emília is the transforming agent of the institutions. Further on, the Sítio do Pica-Pau Amarelo gang live their adventures by re-enacting the famous French and Greek fables, but which inevitably end up being modified by the presence of the new characters. And the moral of the tale becomes a new one.

The rules of this Tschäpian game constitute an old Aristotelian conception of melancholic humour<sup>95</sup> where the soul detaches from the body and, with the help of an energizing and inspiring force, enables future events to be foreseen.<sup>3</sup> Melancholy here is shown as a positive vector, one of hypersensitivity, ecstasies and fantastic visions. What before were established relationships within patterns, are now transformed into fantasy, and the "process" becomes the celebration of creation and of the creational game that is crystallized in Janaina's work.

(Footnotes)

1 This title refers to *Reinações de Narizinho* (1931), a Brazilian tale written by Monteiro Lobato (1882- 1948), the greatest and most renowned author in children's literature in the country. His work can be compared to Lewis Carroll's in terms of the rich and symbolic imaginary that involves objects, characters and their actions in recounting a myth-like story. Most of Lobato's books were set in the Sítio do Pica Pau Amarelo (Ranch of the Yellow Woodpecker), where the "pirlimpimpim dust", contained in the title

of this article, was fabricated by corn-scientist Visconde de Sabugosa and sniffed by the books' children characters, who were then taken to the magical world La Fontaine And Aesop's tales in order to lived the most incredible adventures. [editor's note].

2 The central thesis of the Game was taken from the book "Homo Ludens", by Johan Huizinga (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1980)

3 Moacyr Scliar Saturno nos Trópicos – a melancolia européia chega ao Brasil (SP: Editora Companhia das Letras. Primeira edição, 2003); p. 79