

Título	The inflection of reality in the bodies of Janaina Tschäpe	Autor	Vitoria Daniela Bousso
Data	2006	Artista	Janaina Tschäpe
Publicação	BOUSSO, Vitoria Daniela. <i>Janaina Tschäpe</i> . São Paulo: Paço das Artes, 2006.		

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Janaina Tschäpe was born in Munich, Germany, in 1973. She has carried out a series of exhibitions in institutions in Europe, Asia, the USA and Brazil. Her work explores the full multiplicity of the means available in contemporaneity: according to the artist herself, the drawings are fragments of thought; the video brings us the world of the moving image, time and sound; photography, which unveils a fraction of time, is an invitation for the observer to imagine the story beyond this fraction; and painting, which has made a recent comeback in the artist's oeuvre, is the continuation of this work.

The possibility of transforming everything into fiction seems to be Janaina's reason to create. In a certain way, she incorporates life as raw material for her work. Her imaginary is made out of stagings where the artist herself is inserted. She often photographs herself or participates in the performances she carries out, and then records them in film. At other times, she invites friends to "play": "I want to extend this experience to others and invite them to play with me. When we were children, we enjoyed direct access to the universe of "play". I still play of being in all places at the same time."

This idea of multiplicity and unfolding, present in Janaina's thought and work, explains her fluid and pliable universe: as well formulated by Clair Cemin (2003: 63-5), she creates "beings that live between the jungle and heaven". In search of a constant "being wet", there is integration between herself and environments. Celebrating nature, she fuses things and beings: women, birds, air, wind, water, landscapes, castles, everything exhales self-reference and ambiguity of the senses. The extensions and fusions generally refer to the body. In water, in the landscape, using balloons, inflated condoms, wings, pneumatic forms, the aquatic body and the aerial body live together with the extended body spread out on the ground.

The desire for fusion, of blurring limits and outlines, of widening the dimension of the bodily, was already present in Janaina's initial artistic experiments when she worked with modelling putty, children's putty, with which she has conceived the piece *Waiting Room*. In it, the artist presented herself with her back turned to the spectator, contemplating a landscape, and, with the putty, she has built a pair of wings that she attached to her back. The idyllic landscape, the melancholy atmosphere and the diffusion of luminosity that she imprints the narrative reminds us to the idea of the tragic, fit for work of Romantic conception. The language of dreams, the link between the sacred and the profane, the metaphor and the symbolic, the sublime and the formless - elements that build Romanticism's aesthetics - are recurring presences in Tschäpe's work.

The assemblage between the wings and the body had already enunciated a desire for the inflection of reality in her oeuvre, and, before nature, it constitutes an organic and lonely totality, where one can clearly notice the presence of free thought associations in her artistic action, which are characteristics that have constituted the conceptual basis of Surrealism and Dadaism. Janaina has recently revealed to me that the film *Un Chien Andalou*, by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, has deeply touched her, strongly influencing her repertoire. The film's first scene - in which a woman's eye in close-up is slit open with a blade - and the image of the ants walking on the hands of the protagonist, has led

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her to question reality and the form of things: “Why are the wall and floor not joined?” Putties became her material for experimentation, because they could join a face to the wall, cancelling the face’s identity. To break daily routine and its expansion at a single stroke, to live another person, to be in two places at the same time, this all indexes a “surreal world that causes things to gain a new dimension”, states the artist. If the Surrealists have made use of fragmentation – presenting scenes or images featuring amputated arms and organs torn from the human body, and, at times, have constituted a kind of imaginary of violence and horror – the surreal in Janaina occurs in a different way, much closer to the idea of a shared, really relational aesthetics; humour verges on the construction of a domestic universe: to wear condoms on one’s hands and feet may seem a sweet prank, a gateway into a universe simultaneously playful and allusive to the world of prosthesis, to a prosthetic body proper. Or, as in the experience of the Camaleões, when she worked with four shantytown women who became executives, robots, the sun and a root through the manipulated use of everyday materials such as pans. Furthermore, in the work *Lacrima Corpus*, a video in which a woman dances to exhaustion with balloons attached to her back, when her body finally hits the ground. In this work, the body is a conduit for imagination, a source of play featuring the presence of Jenny, her friend since she was 13 years-old. There is no previous script. The incorporation of the random is what defines the filming while the work (the play/game) is carried out.

But it would be a mistake to think that Janaina’s work is only a game. In fact, it also emanates from a certain tension between character, nature, vulnerability and formation, cognitive processes and formalism. She has graduated in Germany with the group Fluxus’ and Joseph Beuys’ disciples. At the very beginning of her work she saw herself in the midst of a struggle typical of the 1980’s: her desire to paint was immediately curtailed by an environment that demanded from the student a strong conceptual development. There was no space for the emotional. Regarding painting, her teachers stated: “This is a woman’s thing”. In this way, Janaina finished university with a dissertation that was a “love poem”.

It was also for the same reason that her painting has become an object that, in its turn, was converted into sculpture. Thus, after returning to Brazil and settling down in Salvador, she began to develop work around the subject of the body, its fusion and disintegration. The incorporation of organic material – such as tripe and lard – changed the character of her work, giving it increased organicity. But Salvador’s humid climate turned everything mouldy. Janaina lost the artwork and decided to hold neither a studio nor materials anymore, and began to work with the photographic medium. She had two suitcases: one contained latex sculptures – being inflatable, they could be easily transported – and in the other, personal belongings. Thus, Janaina exchanged the house and the studio for two tickets. Now, the artist was the studio.

Appropriating photography as a medium, Janaina has transmuted her work into performance, her head into a studio and her own self into material, becoming a character. From the first masks she evolved into the piece *100 Little Deaths*. She photographed herself with an automatic 35mm camera as she triggered the shutter posing with her body spread out on the ground. Again, we notice the prolongation of the body on the ground: the artist with her back turned to the viewer, as if intending to fuse with nature’s or a landscape’s ground – be it an endless staircase, a parlour decorated in classical style, a neoclassical veranda, a mansion, a bridge over the sea, a river or stones. There are 100

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small deaths in which the body remains in evidence despite finding itself in the midst of the immense and within the infinitude of landscapes. She breaks the silence of the landscape or place chosen for her wanderings around the world and provokes a muted noise that echoes under our gazes, in constant reference to Romantic painting; Turner, Constable, Friedrich re-emerge from our unconscious memory.

In the *After the rain*, *The Moat and the Moon* and *Jellyfish [Água-viva]* series, beings appear both on the ground and in the water with their bodies extended by balloons, condoms and globules. The embryonic forms appear wishing to promote the biological extension of the body in order to create an imaginary world that disseminates the idea of a formless and mutant body. The body-sculpture hybridisation, guided towards the fictitious, causes Janaina's beings to move with such sovereignty through the spaces and environments that it is as if they already belonged there.

Tentacular and in their Sunday best, they wear garments that do not even succumb to the scars and wrappings apparent in the visible seams holding the "skins" that involve them. Even in the face of such "anomalies", these beings appropriate the places and the situations unpretentiously, and there is a visible normality between them and their contexts. By means of disguises or travesties, Tschäpe shatters the idea of identity.

As Tschäpe alludes to the chemical composition of the sea as analogous to the blood and as she operates in a field where she investigates the possibilities of a metaphor for evolution, the artist, in the video *Blood, Sea*, approaches a symbology that remits us to questionings about the origin of the world, of life itself. The art critic Lisette Lagnado, in a text about this piece, brings our attention to the vast symbology that water bears: "the unconscious and the erotic, both shuffling and uncapturable..." and, she completes reflecting on blood:

"... because it is an internal fluid, a uncontrolled spilling of this viscous liquid conspires in favour of danger. Lack of blood, loss of senses. Rituals and mutilations usually attract artists who use the body as support, taking aesthetic practices to the limits of the tolerable. It took place after the War years. But the molluscs that inhabit Janaina's images feature white blood, and are able to move between exteriority and interiority without suffering. It is the fiction that comforts us in the face of bloodbaths, the laws of man." (Lagnado: 2005)

It is not because of water that eroticism emerges in Janaina's oeuvre: it is also manifested in the plants, fruits, ovaries and bubbles of her watercolours, as in the *Botanica* series, in which each plant evokes a part of the human reproductive system. Everything is phallic and breathes with life. The allusion to sexuality is carried out by means of the beautiful and of a sinister wit. There are more than a few references to Tschäpe's oeuvre as being feminist and performative – redeemed from the 1960's and 1970's performances – or comparisons with artists such as Matthew Barney, Bellmer, Ligia Clark and to Yemanjá, the Afro-Brazilian sea goddess, because of her name – Janaina – and her aquatic universe, above all in the *Jellyfish [Água-viva]* series. This is how the artist responds to the propositions regarding the feminine and the feminist: I work above all with the human being, revealing my experiences and views of life (...) I am a woman, and of course this would be my starting point. I do not see art by means of gender issues or its cultural aspects, nor by means of a point of view that can be understood as being male or female. (Janaina Tschäpe Catalogue: 2003)

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In the same way, the relationship between Janaina's oeuvre and the Surrealist Hans Bellmer's dolls seem a bit forced and obvious. If, on the one side, Bellmer's work features the eroticisation of the body as a central idea, it exists as a function of Surrealism's basic premises, that is, a basic sexual pattern. His beings are also hybrids, but Bellmer's hybridism is limited to the perverse aspect of the inversion of the doll's organs. For Janaina, the hybrid neither characterizes perversion nor is frightening; it is present in order to affirm the idea of a fiction. If Bellmer's dolls recall the terrifying idea of a nightmare, for Janaina the dreamlike serves to transport us into the virtuality of tales.

On the other hand, the analogies with the work of Lygia Clark and Matthew Barney widen the meaning of her work. With Barney, Janaina constitutes a collection of contemporary archetypes that emanates from her links with Surrealism, from the presence of symbolism, from the plethora of characters, from the hybridism of beings; the common universe and repertoire, geared towards the biological extension of the body perspective, bring in a sinister wit and irony. Regarding Lygia Clark, it is as if Tschäpe gave continuity to the bodily 'sensibilisation' and relational aesthetics experiences, started off by Clark, in the prolongations of the body by means of plastic bags full of water, in the "playing games", in the projection of desire into the artwork, in the constant development of tactility. Regarding the relationship with the body art manifestations and of the 1960's and 1970's performances, it should be clarified that, at that moment, what mattered was the focus on the artist's living body. Today, it has been displaced to the staged installations, which seems to me more precisely to be the case with Janaina's production.

For the artist, "desire is the place for the transformation of our beings, even if it is only for a second, in order to open a universe that unifies the future and the past, when we can create an intermediate zone (timeless), when we can be all that we desire..." (Tschäpe: 2006)

Based on this statement, I suggest that desire, in the last instance, is allocated on the body. The body, therefore, becomes the locus of desire and producer of meanings; it becomes potency "in itself": a vibrating body, never apolitical, without necessarily being violent, which does not make itself available for subjection or domestication, escaping the domination and control mechanisms. In this case, one relevant question can be put forward: do the allusions to an exotic universe by excellence – such as possible references regarding Afro-Brazilian or Latin American culture – as, for instance, the analogies with Iemanjá, the "primitive" and her own name, Janaina (the sea goddess in the Candomblé culture) not result, perhaps, in an eurocentric view of Brazilian art?

With her performatic actions that waive the presence of the audience and that explore the relationship between the body and objects, environment and body, Janaina simultaneously becomes actress and director of the scene, and, later, also the spectator. With her bodies, the artist promotes the systemic disorganization of the organs, as if she wanted to displace several orders: that of the organism, the religious and of the supposedly inviolable body. Even in the absence of obscenity or of direct aggression, as it happens in the work of Cindy Sherman and on the imaginary of George Bataille, the violation is exposed by means of her characters' childlike and playful aspects, which propagate the unsettling of an aprioristic order. Thus, these bodies are not referents anymore, but signifiers: signs of a counter-order and of transversality, due to its complex and subversive action. By means of the evocation of laughter and illusion, the body, in Janaina Tschäpe, is the privileged place for the inflection of reality.