

Sleepwalking: Smoking a Good Dream

*Because I, the world, and language
are one single
misunderstanding
—Herberto Helder*

A few drops of water vapor cling to the windowpane. When observed from the outside, from the garden, they're called **Miragem [Mirage]** — already suggesting the possibility of some misunderstanding. The windowpane covered with droplets, however, when seen from the inside, is called **Suadinha [Sweaty]**, which lends – to ourselves, or to the house? – a certain erotic character. But stay a bit longer: the droplets don't slide — they're perhaps asleep.

It was on a sleepless night that I wrote: "Things are made of things that aren't really things." The works presented in **Sleepwalking** reveal Flora Leite's keen interest in the boundaries between what constitutes matter, subject, object, thing, and what remains unknown, untouched. This attention to boundaries is especially evident in the poetic operations through which the artist names her works. **Chaminé [Chimney]**, a tower made of countless stacked Marlboros occupying the house's roof, is also a reiteration of the hyperbolic expression "to smoke like a chimney." The cigarettes, however, are unlit, and there is no smoke.

A sleepwalker, in the dead of night, in a gesture of parallelism between day and night, repeats what they have done many times while awake: smokes an unlit cigarette. Sweeps the floor. Goes up and down the stairs. Eats the dinner leftovers. Cuts the loaf of bread. In spasms, without reason, purpose, or efficiency, the sleepwalker repeats: in their actions, there's something of the day that continues leaking, dripping blindly into the night.

"Metaphor is defined in terms of movement,"¹ said Paul Ricoeur. This is because, in metaphor, there is a transference of meanings, as its etymology suggests (from Greek, *metaphorá*: change, transposition). By naming the droplet of water sliding down the house's wall as **Remela [Sleep]**, Flora Leite propels her work into the realm of poetry,

¹ Paul Ricoeur. *A metáfora viva*. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2000. Trad. Dion Davi Macedo. (p. 30)

where the correspondence between elements that, though similar, will always be somewhat disparate, producing a kind of mutual mobilization: one term animates the other without needing to eliminate the asymmetry between them. The droplet of water is and is not **Remela [Sleep]**, and **Remela [Sleep]** is and is not the droplet of water, but it is this space in between the two terms, this kind of motivated misunderstanding, this almost embarrassing correspondence, that seems to interest the artist — and it is in this space that poetic imagination operates, making the passage from one element to the other, turning “this” into “that” without undoing the perplexity that this transposition implies.

In **Alguma coisa, coisa nenhuma [Something, Nothing at All]**, the dust collected by the artist during the exhibition’s setup forms a Milky Way on the house’s floor. Here, too, a displacement occurs: as if inverting the famous phrase “We are all stardust,” the artist composes, on the ground, a galaxy made of our remnants.

This movement of bringing down that which is up repeats itself in **Celeste**, a work composed of an optical device in the form of a tube that captures atmospheric light and projects it onto the house’s gray floor. “Como é possível ver o céu/ se o céu não tem superfície?” [“How can one see the sky/ if the sky has no surface?”] wrote the poet Laura Liuzzi in *Poema do desaparecimento* [Disappearance Poem]². Flora Leite constructs, making us look up and down simultaneously, this mechanism for funneling the sky, offering it a landing place, a spot where its blue can rest. To look up and down at the same time. Making metaphors is also seeing two things in one. But in **Celeste**, we deal with another figure of speech: the paradox of finding, in this small circle of blue light projected at our feet, a kind of synthesis of the sky.

But let’s return to somnambulism, as it also condenses two states into one term: movement and rest. **Núcleo, magma, crosta [Core, Magma, Crust]** does it too, where the bread inhabits both the house’s entrails and its elevator, which rises and falls. It rests, but it is also in motion. Flora Leite’s loaf is a rocky planet wandering like a sleepwalker in a linear and aimless orbit, but it is also stale bread, ventilating with its bubbles the structure of the house, bringing the outside in.

The meaning of things is never stagnant — and neither are the things themselves. As Galileo said, “in nature, perhaps nothing is older than motion.”³ Flora Leite’s attention lies in the sliding itself, between what is almost nothing and what is something. Dust, a

² Laura Liuzzi. *Poema do desaparecimento*. São Paulo: Círculo de poemas, 2024. (p. 67)

³ Galileu Galilei. “Quatro textos de Galileu”. In: *Trans/Form/Ação*. São Paulo: UNESP, 1980. Trad. Carlos Arthur Ribeiro do Nascimento.

piece of bread, vapor, a droplet, light: in ***Sonâmbula* [Sleepwalking]**, these elemental particles are captured by the artist and applied to poetic formulations that produce a *reiterative difference*. The vapor droplets are not just a misunderstanding provoked by the poetic hesitation of their dual name — ***Suadinha, Miragem* [Sweaty, Mirage]**: they are also the matter that sticks to the solid surface and takes shape before disappearing.

Despite the appearance of absolute subtlety, everything here happens in a very seductive way, as these elemental particles (or these things that are not really things) seem to whisper in unison: I am what I am, but I am also what language makes of me. The sleepwalker in its residual gestures, is the very structure of language that, through this automaton body, continues to reflect itself uncontrollably.

Something drips between the realms of sleep and wakefulness, and from this dripping may emerge what Anne Carson called the “beautiful sentences of sleep.” Today, when I woke up, I remembered falling asleep with Flora Leite’s ***Chaminé* [Chimney]**. While drinking my coffee, still a bit groggy – translating literally from the term *pão dormido* in Portuguese, it would be like being a stale loaf of bread –, this phrase came to me, this misunderstanding: “I smoked a good sleep.”