

Four perspectives on Cia de Foto

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Abstract: Throughout its ten years of activity, the collective *Cia de Foto* developed works in visual arts, journalism and advertising. Their insistence on always crediting their works to the group as a whole, without specifying which members had been directly involved in their production, places *Cia de Foto* at the heart of debates on authorship and forms of photography production in today's world. Between 2003 and late 2013, when they announced the end of their activities, the collective gradually expanded and changed their way of working as well as their members and organizational system. The following interview takes stock of the group's trajectory from the point of view of the four members who were in its last makeup: Carol Lopes, João Kehl, Rafael Jacinto and Pio Figueiroa.

Keywords: Collectives. Photography. Contemporary art. Authorship.

INTERVIEW WITH JOÃO KEHL AND RAFAEL JACINTO

Camila Schenkel:

Why did you decide to start working together with photography?

Rafael Jacinto:

I met Pio in 2000, when we were part of the team that started newspaper *Valor Econômico*. I worked there from 2000 to late 2003 – almost four years. I had worked for other newspapers and was pursuing a career as a photojournalist, but *Valor Econômico* had a very different profile: the work was focused on portraits. In newspapers we used to work in teams but there was no team spirit to discuss larger projects as a group and the like. Pio and I shared this will to study. He left before me and I stayed as *Valor Econômico*'s head of photography. I'd give the team their assignments and I used to give him several tasks because he was a good photographer. Then we started to take jobs as freelance

photographers and cover for each other's schedules so we could do other things without losing money. Sometimes I would take his assignments or he would take mine. It started to work out pretty well. In 2003 there was this very ugly crisis in journalism. Pio was already out, freelancing, and I was tired of the newspaper and asked to be fired so we could found *Cia de Foto* together. Because we had worked for *Valor Econômico*, we were hired to do several jobs for companies, to photograph executives, things like that. When they called us asking for freelance work, we didn't say names, we just said that we'd do it, but we didn't know if Pio or I would go.

CS:

So it would be a more like an agency format?

RJ:

It was really a double thing: whoever was available would go. We set up that team in late 2003. In early 2004, João came to work with us. He was an assistant to a friend of ours. The idea was setting up a group so we could make a living out of photography. When someone hired us, we made it clear that the work could be done by either Pio or me, and later by João or the other people who worked at *Cia de Foto*. We didn't take clients for one or another person; we did the job.

João Kehl:

This was very difficult, people did not take it well; they'd call to talk directly to Pio or Rafael. It took a long time until it actually became natural. The market didn't understand it; I think it never understood it well. [...]

CS:

Do you think your stance was provocative? Was it a statement at the time?

RJ:

Back in 2003, 2004, we really wanted to be able to study, to develop our language or something, and to work, to make a living out of that without having such a crazy schedule.

CS:

When you speak of developing some language, is it in the sense of developing authorial work?

RJ:

Yes. I particularly wanted to take part in exhibitions, to do art work, to have a gallery – which we achieved after several arrangements and negotiations and a lot of time dedicated to it. I couldn't have done it by myself because I worked a lot. We were working for the publishing market at the time and the money coming in was much lower. Then we moved into the advertising market and started to have more time.

CS:

I wonder if this option for working together was also related to that crisis in photojournalism...

RJ:

No. We wanted to have that freedom to take large, good jobs and to know that the team would handle them whatever they were. We got together to be able to build a structure and create an environment with room for research, with time to develop more authorial, artistic works.

JK:

But I think it was a bit like trial and error, you know? You asked us if there was an idea of provocation behind that, but there wasn't; it was a natural thing. We tried to work in different ways. There were times when we hired photographers, we trained assistants who later became photographers... But then we began to see that it wasn't working. I think we started to see it more clearly when had to defend ourselves. Pressure increased, we had to understand what the collective actually was and turn it into something more conceptual. We changed a lot over time and gradually matured that idea.

RJ:

I think Edu Brandão helped us a lot to understand it. I already knew him from college and from [newspaper] *Folha de São Paulo*. He opened the *Vermelho* gallery one year before *Cia de Foto*.

CS:

When did *Cia de Foto* start being represented by *Vermelho*?

RJ:

Officially in 2008. In 2004, when João joined us, we were still trying to understand what *Cia de Foto* would be like. We had a team, we hired photographers, but it didn't work out. Júlio Bittencourt joined us in late 2004. In 2005, *Cia de Foto* rented a house in the same block as *Fotosite*, which was an agency and a photography website. They really rocked; they had an exhibition space and organized meetings. That was a very important year for us. When Júlio joined and then left, there were many fights among us and we also did our first essay, called *911*. Júlio left in the middle of the process and did a work on the same subject at about the same time. It's about a building occupied by the Homeless People Movement at 911 Prestes Maia Avenue. It was our first authorial work signed as *Cia de Foto*. Back in 2005, it was a multimedia work combining photography, video and music.

In 2006, *Fotosite* nominated us to the Arles Festival with that work. We were selected for the *Night of the Year*, which is a night of projections. Edu Brandão was representing the *Vermelho* gallery. We did lots of traveling together, Pio, Edu and I, and it was really cool. He encouraged us a lot. Edu and the art market had no problem working as a collective. He liked that questioning and would tease us; he helped us understand what we wanted to do. We became very close; he was the curator of our first solo exhibition at Itaú Cultural in 2007. That was when we began to appear more and we needed to take stances. After Arles we started to be called to take part in several festivals. We had our first solo exhibition in 2007 and in 2008 there was the first Collectives' Meeting here in São Paulo, organized by Claudi Carreras. At the same time we faced resistance from people in the field, from those older folks – Simonetta Persichetti used to fight a lot with us, Milton Guran... They really put up a fight; they'd go to our talks and start shouting that what we were doing was irresponsible.

JK:

It was like "we've fought hard to have the right to sign our photographs and now you guys are bringing everything down".

CS:

But you were signing them, weren't you? Looking back at *Cia*'s work, it seems to me that you gradually created a brand. It was not about lack of authorship – it was about lack of individual authorship.

RJ:

It did have lots of authorship, right? Visually, it was very identifiable. And that ended up becoming a recipe for us, which eventually started to bother me.

CS:

Was that format something planned or built as the work developed?

RJ:

It was built along the way. Carol joined us in 2007 and that helped a lot to understand it. Until then there were three photographers: Pio, João and myself. All three of them would take photographs, treat them, create the concept, always helped by outsiders, such as Edu Brandão, Claudi Carreras, that Spanish curator who took us to the whole world, Eder Chiodetto [...].

JK:

Claudi was traveling and began to realize that there was this phenomenon of collectives and it wouldn't be happening for no reason. He spent two years traveling and then he made an exhibition called *Laberinto de Miradas* (A Labyrinth of Looks). Claudi helped us get to in touch with photography collectives because we didn't really know them, right? But few collectives had formats similar to ours – none of them signed collectively.

CS:

In addition to signing as a group, your work has drawn my attention for really being done collectively.

RJ:

Carol's arrival had a lot to do with it. [...] When she came in it was a way of saying that there was a new member in the collective who was not a photographer, at least in the

traditional sense of the term. She came to work in post-production, to take our pictures and treat them, edit them, relate them to each other, together with us or by herself. It was easier to understand that there was group authorship with several stages before or after the click and that there was even a person who didn't click, but who was a *Cia de Foto* photographer.

CS:

And then that post-production work gained more importance, right?

RJ:

Totally. What you said you could identify as *Cia de Foto* came from post-production. *Guerra* (War) – a work exhibited at the Collectives' Meeting and at Eder's exhibition *Geração 00* (Generation 00) – was created entirely by revisiting our collection and transforming those images into black and white to create new meaning. Post-production was very important at *Cia de Foto* and Carol was leading it. It was really nice, we would be here together and sometimes things would come out. We were not very good at some stages of post-production and we'd take advantage of someone who was not a member – Eder, Claudi, Edu... There were times when we couldn't solve it internally. We like to say it because *Cia de Foto* was more than just us, you know?

CS:

What was the work process like? Did you discuss things a lot?

RJ:

Yes, a lot; it could get tense sometimes.

CS:

Did you guys keep discussing all along those ten years?

RJ:

Yes. And one of the reasons *Cia de Foto* ended was that no one had any patience to discuss. Things began to happen that were not pleasing everyone internally, there were different wishes...

CS:

Did everything you did during the *Cia de Foto* time belonged to *Cia de Foto*?

JK and RJ:

Yes.

CS:

Is there any work that you see as the most representative of the way *Cia de Foto* worked?

RJ:

Caixa de Sapato (The Shoebox) was very important because it combined each member's production...

JK:

911, for instance, was a strictly documentary essay, much above the repertoire we had at the time [...] There was this idea that photographers had to go somewhere to document something, to leave their world for their work to have some value. And then, at some point, we started looking at ourselves. Then Edu said something about us having to start looking at our own lives. And that was something that I had always done, I photographed several friends of mine, in college, still using film. And at *Cia de Foto* we started photographing our own lives, looking inside instead of looking out. Rafael would photograph his son, I'd photograph my girlfriend and my friends, Pio would photograph his children...

RJ:

There was this Nan Goldin thing going on; we liked her a lot, those were things that made us tick too, you know?

JK:

One day we looked at all that and we said: "OK, and how does it become collective work?" The idea of the shoebox solved that. A shoebox was that place where you'd stuff the family photos and you'd never knew who took them. The object and the affective relationship people had with the images was more important than knowing whether the photo had been take by one's uncle, grandmother, or nephew. Our shoebox

at the time turned out to be Flickr. We created an account and started throwing things in there and we didn't bother to say who took them. It was becoming a mess. When we released the video, a lot of people thought we all lived together, to give you an idea [laughs]. For me, it proved that the work had gone well, that it had all turned out to be one thing, a family idea.

RJ:

It's hard to explain one thing because it's all very interconnected. Edu Brandão had a lot to do with the *Caixa de Sapato* provocation. We'd show him things and he'd say: "Guys, the photos are very beautiful and all, but I don't see you in them". This referred mainly to portraits, which was how we made money. For me, documentary photography was an extreme thing, I had already gone to Ceará to photograph *jangadeiros* [people who use fishing vessels known as *jangadas*, common in Northern Brazil]; Pio had gone to the hinterland. *Caixa de Sapato* was our way of looking at ourselves and portraying the middle class. The discussion was very present at the time, around 2005 and 2006. There was no document on the middle-class, no one used to photograph them [...]. And it became a certain exercise, too.

CS:

There was also a fictional issue.

JK:

Yes, I was very restricted to that. And it's crazy to think that all those great documentary photographers also photographed their lives, but they didn't show it. There must be incredible gems!

RJ:

I think it was our most important job in every respect. Looking back, it is sort of conservative. Not the video, but the photos. The video had a structure that was a bit new in 2008 – it merged video and photo, it had a rhythm... It was almost a short film.

CS:

What do you mean by "conservative"?

RJ:

There were only photos of people, you know? The format was conservative, it was all the same!

JK:

Oh, no way it was conservative! Maybe what you're calling conservative was our mentality regarding what to show. The photos themselves were not conservative...

CS:

Everyday photos that are more common in the art field are not usually as beautiful as *Cia de Foto's*.

RJ:

This discussion in the art field also happened when we launched *Caixa de Sapato*.

JK:

Oh, but there is this boring talk in the art field – nothing can be beautiful, you know? Many people think that an artist's work has to be ill-finished, it cannot be beautiful, or it will be something else [...].

RJ:

People were bothered by our mastery of technique; they said our photos looked too much like advertising. But they didn't look like advertising; we do advertising and those works have nothing to do with it. So much so that we never got to use *Caixa de Sapato* in advertising.

CS:

But some *Cia de Foto's* works transited between the fields of photojournalism, advertising and art, right?

RJ:

Some photojournalism work did, but not advertising. Advertising is very difficult, because you have a customer. In photojournalism there was *Políticos* (Politicians), a work made for and published by newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, but that had this whole artistic concept, so much so that it was exhibited

that way in the newspaper itself. For me, it's one of our best works. There was also research we did at the time, which is also in *Caixa de Sapato* – the issue of times, the synchrony in the moments photos were taken. Digital cameras have metadata that record the times when photos are taken. We would have all cameras with the same time. When we were called in to make the campaign, we said we had this idea of synchronizing the three cameras and shooting each of the candidates on the same campaign day – selecting a time when all three cameras were synchronized – to show the effect of the political campaign, how photographers determine what is shown when they frame it, that there is no impartiality. [...]

CS:

You also had several works between photography and video. *Longa Exposição* (Long Exposure), for instance...

RJ:

About that, I think I've contaminated *Cia de Foto* a little. I liked making videos, but it was not very common at the time. For 911, we had to call a friend who had a video camera. The videos of *Caixa de Sapato* were made with a tiny Canon – there were no cameras that did both yet. Then, when they released Mark II, we started making filmed photographs, but nobody knew that cameras could make videos yet. We went back to work for magazines just to do that job. We'd call the magazines and say we wanted to make portraits of cool people, even for little money. So we would go, define the subject and in the end we'd ask for another photo on a white background. Then we'd set the camera on a tripod and stay until the limit. Conceptually it was a really nice work, but nowadays no one else falls for it anymore. [...]

JK:

There was always a nerdy side of experimenting with technology, understanding how the camera worked.

RJ:

We would experiment a lot, and technology was something that naturally appealed to us. When we made *Caixa de Sapato*, we were invited by [Brazilian film director and

producer] Heitor Dhalia to direct advertising films. He started an advertising film production company called *Paranoid*, and his wife was a friend of João's wife back then. The whole thing started with the art work, and when it came to applying it, it went into the advertising field. We used things from both sides. [...]

CS:

What about image appropriation? How did it appear in *Cia de Foto's* work?

RJ:

It was very conversant with Rosângela Rennó's work. She was an artist that we admired a lot and we ended up being close because of *Vermelho*. Her work is completely based on appropriations. In our case it was more about appropriating our own collection. That's what *Guerra* is about. Glauber's work, which ended up called *País Interior* (The Inner Country), came at a time when we were doing a research on cinema and wanted to do a work without photographing, but not from our collection.

CS:

Was it the first work with images that were not yours?

RJ:

Yes, it was. There is a collage work by João Stezaker in which he takes two film negatives and creates a new one. I brought his book over and said: "Hey guys, look at this, we have to do something with it". The form is completely different, but it was something that interested us a lot. Pio got excited, Carol saw it and we decided to extract Glauber's frames. So we thought about *Cia's* process, which was post-production, and it became a work of coloring a black-and-white film. Giselle Beiguelman was doing an exhibition based on Glauber Rocha at Tomie Ohtake Institute. She heard about our work and wanted to exhibit it. But there was a text part that was not well defined, there was also a sound research by Guab that was very poorly exhibited. Guab would take the dialogues from the film and transform each syllable into a tone, creating a melody from the phonemes,

based on a rule he created [...]. The work was exhibited while it was still in process; I think it was not well resolved. But that's okay because, when it was exhibited it had this experimental character.

JK:

There was some anxiety at *Cia de Foto*, right?

RJ:

Yes, not waiting until the works were finished... And that anxiety was not ours.

JK:

Pio is a very anxious guy. We were often in the middle of the process and he wanted to put it out already. I think the work deserved to ripen a bit, but it ended up coming out a little under pressure. Working collectively is not easy. It's very cool and we have been able to hold on to it for ten years, but there are many times when...

CS:

What was the role played by individualities within the group? Many people speak of individualities being erased within collectives.

JK:

Collectives only work when individualities are very strong, because each person contributes different things. [...] I think there are two possibilities: healthy collectives, when individual forces join, and those that begin to fail, which is precisely when individualities begin to die and the collective begins to become weak.

CS:

Did you have defined roles? Did anyone work more on certain things?

RJ:

Yes, but that happened at the end, when we were already trying to solve that crisis of the individuals in there. I handled

Paranoid and advertising films too. Pio took care of the workshops, which he wanted to [...]. Carol was in charge of the gallery and the exhibitions, and João would manage photography works, especially for articles and magazines. And there was Flávia, who is still with us; she coordinated the whole company. She was the one who sounded the alarm; she called us and told us that money was over. And then we decided to shut *Cia de Foto* down. It was not only because of the money, but when there is no money, problems appear. We had these roles, but they changed a lot over the years.

CS:

So in the beginning was more like everyone did everything?

RJ:

Exactly. But things used to be simpler in the beginning; we worked only in the publishing market and we wanted to be artists. As we began to travel to festivals, workshops, and had to deal with galleries, film production companies, photography clients, agencies, there was no way to avoid that division.

CS:

And how are the art works today?

RJ:

João and I got very tired of the photography world, it was very exhausting. When it was over, João, Carol and I said: "It's enough, we don't want that anymore".

JK:

Always the same people, the same talks, it's a very repetitive environment, we needed vacations [laughs].

RJ:

All that is printed on this wall are projects. We are coming back slowly, calmly, not wanting to have a gallery, applying for state grants. Next year, we will start a partnership with a cultural producer company to try to make books, which is a support we like very much.

INTERVIEW WITH PIO FIGUEIROA

Camila Schenkel:

Pio, could you start by telling us a little about your own story with photography and about the beginning of *Cia de Foto*?

Pio Figueiroa:

I started in photojournalism. I didn't go to college, I had an agreement with my dad, who told me to forget college at that time and he would give me some money every month to set up a photography structure. I had equipment, a black-and-white lab, I used to buy photo books, to go to festivals, I knew people... Less than two years later, I was already in the newspaper. At the age of twenty I had a formal contract and a senior salary. A year later, that newspaper dynamics already seemed too little and I decided to come to São Paulo. When that ended – and it ended early – I had been in the market for almost ten years and I didn't have anywhere to go to journalism. This happened in a period with two interesting characteristics: one was the Internet boom, with high salaries and three invitations a year to work on things; the other was digital technology, with a lot of people leaving, the market crashing. In the middle of that story, at *Valor Econômico*, for the first time in my life I had the experience of doing a newspaper that was not going to the streets. In the six months before it began to be published, I realized something crucial – I was experimenting with a type of photography whose use was not objectively justifiable. I was not going to photograph you here to apply it to anything tomorrow. It was some sort of branding, an inner lab, to discover the newspaper's language [...]. When it started to hit the streets, it was really disappointing. I took a leave and spent a year out, and when I came back I quit, thinking about our idea of setting up a photography collective. I tried with Kiko Ferrite and Renata Ursaia. They didn't believe in the idea of collective; Rafael was the one who believed it.

CS:

And he also worked for *Valor Econômico*, right?

PF:

Exactly. We had been in the market for a little longer; he came

later. When I was leaving Kiko's studio, already with this idea of building a collective, he fired João, who used to be his assistant [...]. It was only when João was leaving that he left an envelope with photographs on my desk. When I saw the photos, I fell in love with them and I kept trying to bring him to the structure we were putting together. It didn't work out in the first and second times, but then it did. And when he came, a dynamics of not doing anything separated came along. Then I started to look at the result and realize that I could no longer consider it as one person's, as Pio's. I think grew a lot photographically with *Cia de Foto*. It gained its dynamics because we were three eager people processing information with an enormous ability for self-criticism and little concern for money. By doing three portraits a month I'd make good money for someone in my twenties in the city of São Paulo. The rest was free time that we could turn into research. And that's when this story of improving our time began. The moment we started not wanting to sign it individually anymore, a very curious figure came in the market: Simonetta Persichetti...

CS:

But when was that?

PF:

I stayed at *Valor Econômico* from 1999 to 2000. In 2001 I was out; in 2002 I went back and then I quit. Between 2000 and 2003, I tried to create the collective and, in 2003, the company was created. João came in 2004.

CS:

Did you already used to sign the works collectively in 2003?

PF:

No, to be safe I'd say it was 2005, because João was already with us. In 2004 there was still certain separation of agendas, mainly due to culture shock. Rafael was this typical guy from São Paulo, something like "this is mine, this is yours". I was more anarchic. For me, there was a landmark: Pisco del Gaiso was doing the FNAC Photography Week, he saw 911 and called us to give a lecture. It was the first time I gave a lecture about my work. [...] I left that lecture thinking more

about my production, seeing myself from the outside, thinking about the blows I took already in that first exhibition. I guess the seed was planted there. A silent buzz began in 2005: we started having jobs refused, people stopped calling. Or they'd call to know who was going to shoot. We began to have that strange feeling. Then came Simonetta's text in *O Estado de S. Paulo*; actually it would be interesting to analyze its real content today. It was very strong at the time because it came out of nothing. She had never talked to any of us, we kind of liked her and there she was saying that what we were doing was absurd.

CS:

Was it absurd to work collectively with photography?

PF:

Exactly! And I think she criticized the photographic result as well. But we were already reaping some things, you know? We had already managed to get João to win the World Press Photo, which was something designed by the group, beautiful. Since the market was resisting João's name, we felt we needed to find a way to get that guy to project himself. He passed [publishing house] April's course, entered *Folha de S. Paulo* as a trainee and won the World Press Photo with an essay on a boxing academy located under a bridge. [...] On the day the result came out I was in Olinda. I saw it, I called everybody and we were still celebrating when the market tried to ruin the party by saying that the winner had been one person and this collective thing did not exist after all. [...]

When the award came, there also all that fuss, that absurd flow of animosity towards us. Some people controlled the media. It's still like that today. The only newspaper that used to write about photography was *O Estado de S. Paulo*. So, in order to be recognized, your work had to be well regarded by Simonetta. But when she raised that story and the market came all over us I was sure I couldn't turn back. Since there was no money coming from journalism anymore, it was time to go after other sources. In 2006, we ran out of money. It was very serious, the market boycotted us. [...] So we went to look for other places to photograph and we decided not to refuse festival invitations. The first one was Arles – a major one. We went to southern France with

911, a work that I was already seeing in a more light when I traveled.

911 began with this idea of photographing a *favela*, a Brazilian shantytown. That was alright. Only that, first, it was done in chapters. Then I called a friend, Alex [Carvalho], a guy based in London who I think was the one who ended up leading us towards video. I told him I wanted to make a movie out of that piece and that the idea was to do something like a slideshow, then a woman hanging her clothes on the clothesline would suddenly move, a person would start walking. That made an impact in 2006, prior to this 5D-camera idea of mixing video and photography in the same device. People wanted to know who we were. Nowadays I find the video conservative, but I know it was important then. This exchange with Alex was also very important. So at the outset, while the whole market was saying we could not be a collective, internally the collective was no longer enough. My role inside was to import people. This never stopped. It started with Pisco and Alex to get to Ronaldo [Entler] and Livia [Aquino]. Ronaldo was a guy who was plugged into *Cia de Foto* for a long time. Guab was a core guy for *Carnaval* [Carnival]; he broke the codes of photography and threw them into an interface to turn them into music. He came to do this research.

There was Edu Brandão, who used to tell us to ignore that discussion, that we would have to get rid of the ties that conditioned us to those photography dogmas. Breaking up the rigidity, subverting the support, subverting the anxiety of seeing a large photograph you took on the wall – all that came mostly from Edu. Our first exhibition in Brazil was at Itaú Cultural in 2006, with Edu in editing, and there was no fixed photo. Several screen passing pictures, a large bank of images. He took the whole image bank from *Cia de Foto*, took it to Itaú and threw it in there.

When Simonetta started beating us, the people we saw as partners began to give us more support [...]. There were horrible episodes, lectures interrupted, a million stories. [...]. But this ended up giving me strength, we acquired a voice and we were starting to like that game. Then, in 2006, MASP Pirelli called us, which until then was a collection everyone wanted to get in. And when we sent the work and they asked who the author was. We replied that it was *Cia de Foto*, but

they insisted we had to tell them who took it. We sent the three names, but they wouldn't accept it: we had to say exactly who took the picture was or we wouldn't get into the collection.

CS:

And what was the photograph?

PF:

It was three photos of 911. At the time, the collective discussed whether we would hold on to that or not. I was among those who thought that it would be a retrocession, that it was better not to be in the collection. We ended up refusing it and they included the work of a boy who had been our trainee. At a festival in Porto Alegre, which honored Claudia Andujar, Rubens Fernandes Júnior – who was in the collection – they decided to open that story to the public. Everyone was at the lecture and he talked about the work of *Cia de Foto* and what had happened that year. Then the community went boom! The discussion started to get interesting, it picked up some rhythm, we were getting recognition, we were invited to exhibitions abroad, we gained space for texts, we were selected to receive state funding... [...]

CS:

And how has *Cia de Foto*'s work changed over time? You spoke about 911, which you think is more in the area of photojournalism, and *Cia de Foto* began to work between fields, between journalism, advertising and art.

PF:

As for breaking away from the school of photojournalism, the solution was to begin to photograph ourselves. It was not really about saying it, it just happened. I was married to Ju, so I photographed her; João was in college, so he photographed college stories. Then Rafael started photographing his life as well. There was something about arriving at *Cia* and unloading a card, and then unwillingly applying what we were doing, it just happened. [...] Then one night I was home, going to bed furious because of an interrupted lecture and, talking to Ju, we had the idea of *Caixa de Sapato*.

CS:

Had Carol already joined you at that point?

PF:

No, she wasn't with us yet. That night we had the idea of the vehicle that is the shoebox. I arrived at *Cia de Foto* the next day and I remembered that a shoebox was a popular vehicle in photography, it was inclusive, universal; and it doesn't matter who took the photograph that is in a shoebox. If you arrive at your grandmother's home and look at her shoebox with photos, you'll not say that Uncle Robert is an incredible photographer. What matters is the stories they tell. And from the moment you break away from the attention given to authorship you start playing with other stimuli. For example, looking at that picture of seven-year-old Uncle Robert in red shorts when you are eight and looking at it now are different things. It's amazing how this photograph walks, how it works out inside, and then when you open that box again it tells you new stories. It does not only recover what it has been telling all its life; it also updates it from the viewer's perspective. Then it was settled: were going to throw all photographs we took of our lives in a shoebox. [...] The shoebox began to be a kind of little chest that was fostering *Cia de Foto's* work, you know? It was becoming a sort of strategic collection. Guerra came from *Caixa de Sapato*... [...]

In 2006 we realized that there was nothing in journalism anymore, and after working for Real Bank we realized that advertising was pointing at something for us. They wanted to pay for the kind of photography we knew how to do. After the work for the bank, they hired us to make a lot of things for [pulp and paper company] Suzano. In the middle of that came the idea that we needed someone just to work on Photoshop. Our language was evolving artistically at the time, there were signs that it was working and the commercial department was telling us we would have some money. Calling this person to do Photoshop work created an internal quarrel. First came a girl named Flávia, but she didn't stay and she referred Carol to us. A year and a half later, Carol's Photoshop work was very close to what we expected and two or three years later she was already better than us. And Carol came up with this idea of not wanting to be a photographer, of wanting to work in post-production anyway. Then we had the idea of having a fourth person in the collective, which also generated an internal fight.

I didn't think we could hire employees, I didn't want to be a boss, I wanted those people to be owners too. And I wanted to create entropy in there so they would become owners as quickly as possible. Obviously I didn't have the competence to do that, so much so that I fucked up. In theory it would have been better to be an owner. Or maybe not... Anyway, there is a completely different timing there.

In October 2006, we moved to the Pinheiros district and Carol came right after that. From 2009 on, this became a huge production, because we were doing a lot of photography and a market emerged for *Cia de Foto*, a hybrid market with little journalism but lots of institutional work and lots of advertising. When the *Caixa de Sapato* video came out in 2008, *Paranoid*, a new producer on the market, called us to be scene directors. Then it started to get very complex, we had our roots in photojournalism, our conceptual drive closely linked to contemporary art, an idea of being involved in that environment, the money coming from advertising and an invitation to become directors of advertising films.

CS:

A lot of work to do, right?

PF:

Yes, work was quite hectic; there was a change of key in those paths... What happened to me was that I gradually left the commercial market and focused on the conceptual side. I got more involved with studying, reading...

CS:

Were there roles played in there? How did you divide the work? What was the dynamic like?

PF:

Yes, there was. João focused on the commercial part; he was the guy who always went to the street, he and someone else. I was gradually coming out of it and Carol was on Photoshop. We created a dynamic of looking at *Cia de Foto's* collection – this began with *Guerra*. In 2010, it became a powerhouse, *Cia de Foto* would build an essay in three months and one essay would converse with the other in a huge continuous

production. So I think that by 2011, 2012 we started to have many exhibitions, one after another, even simultaneous ones.

In 2012, I entered college at USP. There I met the boys from the *Movimento Passe Livre* [student's movement for free bus tickets], they were my colleagues [...]. When they went to make that demonstration we were there with them. When the whole thing exploded, I was watching the guys getting beat up. One of them, Leo, a great boy, saw a work we exhibited at MASP called *Marcha* (March), which had a strategy of exporting the frames of a video, changing them back into photography and highlighting a face in the crowd. Leo said that when we did that it was as though the city was somehow lighting up those people. His reading seemed beautiful to me, but it still didn't hold. When the march came, we headed for the demonstration. The first photo of that work was taken by my wife Ju, in the march. After the first night, I sat down with Carol, we turned it into black and white and I said: "Carol, light up one person". The city is lighting a person. Then the essay came out. Thyago Nogueira saw it, came to talk and invited us to publish it on *ZUM* magazine. I said: "If you publish this as a poster we don't need anything else, it's already a work". Then it became a poster on *ZUM* with a text by Eugenio Bucci. Soon after that we were invited to a festival in Chile. Carol and I went to the Internet, took all the photos of the 2010 Chilean student movement and applied the same treatment. We took our students and the Chilean students with the same treatment to the festival. Carol was fantastic; she treated the photos in a way that, to me, is the most beautiful thing in the world. And the fact that the photos were retrieved from Google... When I was in Chile doing that exhibition, I learned of the end of *Cia de Foto*. In fact, they started to meet a week earlier and they told me on November 5 on an email: November 5, 2013. [...]

Today I think the idea that *Cia de Foto's* whole commercial work was supposed to support something with conceptual relevance was an illusion, an idea I had; it was romantic. [...] When the collective ended, it was nice to find out that Pio was there. In all honesty, I knew I had a voice, I knew people were looking at *Cia de Foto* and my accent stood out, I wrote the texts, I had a future background, I was the provocateur in there. There was certain opacity at *Cia de Foto*. You could see the result, but you also individualized it. I was very involved in there, so I didn't realize it.

INTERVIEW WITH CAROL LOPES

Camila Schenkel:

Can we begin by talking about your start at *Cia de Foto*? How did it happen?

Carol Lopes:

I joined *Cia de Foto* when the group was already formed, between late 2006 and early 2007, when they already needed someone to do part of their work. They were working like hell, spending a lot of time processing images on the computer, and they were trying to have some spare time. Not in the sense of doing nothing – they wanted some spare time to think about photography a little. In order to do that, they realized that they needed a fourth person in the group, with a different profile. They photographed all day and treated the photos overnight to be able to deliver them to the client, since they had another job in the next day. It was very busy. Then a teacher of mine referred me to them and I went to talk to them. I was also studying with a girl who was a trainee there at the time. Before that, I had worked on Nair Benedict's collection, digitizing chromes and doing other stuff. I've never wanted to be a photographer; I always liked to work with collections or even with Photoshop, but with the right proportions. Before I joined the collective I didn't have the vision about the tool I have today. I did an interview, it went well, and I ended up joining the group. But I joined it as a person in training; they didn't hire me as a ready pro to whom you just pass everything and she'll go on by herself. A cool thing about *Cia de Foto* was that there was always that view that people were in training, we'd invest a lot on building up over time and working together.

CS:

What was your view of that process, that idea of doing photography as a group?

CL:

It was never a big problem for me. I'm from Recife and I went to the Federal University of Campina Grande. My major was in something like Multimedia; it was called Art and Media. So my training was already quite holistic, there was no individual

authorship. I still don't care much about that, I continue to treat photos for other photographers and I don't care if they will give me credits or not. But this is a very personal thing, it's not a statement. I just didn't understand why it should be a problem. At the same time I used to work with Nair. I know photographers had to struggle to get credits for their photographs. But at no time did we deny the credits; on the contrary, it was a struggle on their behalf. It was a struggle to give credits to everyone who worked on the project. It is arguable, very complicated. But it took me about two years, which was the training period, until I got to the point where I found myself contributing directly to the group. It is hard to know the exact date, but it must have been 2009, 2010, something like that. In the end we had very good synergy, something that is not easy to find. You've spoken to everyone and they probably said similar things – apart from the ending, about which each one must have described from their perspective.

The work process was very impressive. If you talked to me now and within two minutes, and if you talked to Rafael about the same work, we'd say similar things because everything, absolutely everything was discussed internally. Someone would read a text and show it to the group, raising an issue. Someone was going on holiday and the other would provoke them to photograph something. We'd exchange those ideas and things would be born. But if you ask me what I was doing, my position was basically to process files and take care of the collection; it was much more towards that side. Although I headed the post-production area, the boys were also very good at Photoshop, especially João. To pass it on to someone was a choice. Since I was doing that all day, I developed other ways, but the boys understood it well, so they could give lots of opinions. I'd propose a treatment option and we'd discuss it, exchange ideas and I'd go back to work. They'd often come with a better aesthetic idea, give it to me, and I'd make the whole thing uniform.

CS:

How long did the post-production process use to take?

CL:

Ah, it's actually endless; we finished it because we needed

to take it to the exhibition. In many essays, we'd do different treatments later. That's my view and the group's also: I never consider a work finished, finalized, I think we are forever in process. When you assume this procedural side, it's hard to say when it's "ready, finished". You want to go back to it. We went back to several of our works and interfere. They were not finished images; they were there and they could be used for other stories.

CS:

And how about that moment when you started contributing more effectively with the group? Is there any work you relate to that change in position?

CL:

Well, it's hard to think of a personal contribution... But there is one work I consider important for the group, which is *Carnaval*. That's when we actually radicalized our research of the dark, of valuing light. We took elements from the images, not by using tricks, but by reducing their light while valuing other elements. *Carnaval* took a post-production direction that changed our way of working a bit, but not on my merit, I didn't come to that by myself. I remember that João treated some images, making them much darker with some clearer elements, and he took it to the group, and we brainstormed on it. We started working on that. Photoshop was always an experiment at *Cia de Foto*, but I think it started to become more conscious with *Carnaval*, when we put experimentation aside for a while to think about why we were doing that. Previous projects had included some aesthetic research; they explored the possibilities of the tool by testing saturation, color, density, etc. *Carnaval* started to have a purposeful point, like *Guerra* a little before that. These are images of the collection that we put together to create an essay as if we were in a war in São Paulo. We worked on them based on research on the kind of treatment that war photographs usually have – black and white, grainy. We build that fiction on the kind of post-production applied to the images. That was when people started thinking about post-production. I think it is like that in any process: there is an experimentation stage and then it's possible to create awareness based on that.

CS:

Cia de Foto had a very strong dialogue with the field of photojournalism, especially in the beginning. I guess it was a result of its members' training.

CL:

Yes, Rafael and Pio were trained in photojournalism. João and I were not, João didn't experience that field thing. He also learned at *Cia*, he started as a trainee. There were two waves there – Rafael and Pio, who came from the market, and João and I, who learned in there. Because they came from the market, the boys had some bad habits, they used to do things that the market demanded sometimes, to fall into some formulas. João broke that up a little because he was coming from college with that experimental thing. Those blends contributed in the process.

CS:

And then the advertising work gained more space over time?

CL:

Yes. How many people were we? Six, seven? Such a structure is expensive. Living as an artist or as a newspaper photographer doesn't pay enough to have someone like me just treating photos. We were a group, but we were paid as if we were only one, not as four. Payment was already low, and it was divided by four. The calculation was not exactly that, but that was the idea. Advertising came as a way to make projects viable. At the time, we hired a coordination person to represent us in the advertising market – Flávia. And it was a gradual construction; we didn't get works immediately. In 2010, we were already working a lot on advertising. That choice was intended to make the project viable at the time; I don't think it was anyone's dream to work with advertising. Now the boys are better in advertising; I don't like it – no way I'll work in advertising [laughs].

CS:

And how about working in the field of art: was that always *Cia de Foto's* desire? What was your relationship with that universe?

CL:

Yeah, my relationship to that area was a little stronger. At the peak of *Cia de Foto's* history we had a space, we worked with advertising and we also produced for the art market. It worked relatively well, one thing supporting the other. The art market fed us creatively to provide smart solutions to advertising. We didn't believe in division; one thing would influence the other. But we weren't welcome in the art scene because we did advertising; people didn't understand it well. And advertising clients sometimes thought that because we were always in galleries, we were artists and we had a lot of money. But we definitely didn't [laughs]. I always talked to people in the galleries; I was the one who sent the files, that sort of thing. So we ended up having a closer relationship. But I'm not really fascinated – art or advertising are the same for me. I don't like working with advertising because my role in it is not seen in a way alike to work. They are very heavy Photoshop effects, cropping etc. If I have an option, I'd rather not do it.

CS:

Were there works that transited between photojournalism and art?

CL:

Yes, there were. Since we had many works commissioned, we always took advantage of having access to something we wouldn't normally have to try to produce a story for *Cia de Foto*. *Políticos* was not really like that: we asked for it. Carla Romero, who was *Folha de S. Paulo's* photography editor then, wanted us to produce a story for the newspaper's *DNA Supplement*, which covered the elections. We said we wanted to cover an ordinary election day, but we wanted the three photographers on the field. Then the work happened; it was a candidate every day and the three of them photographing. *Carnaval* was different. [Brazilian singer] Ivete Sangalo – I don't know how she came to us – hired us to cover her carnival: backstage, stage, every moment. In that case, João went to photograph. Since we could take up to two people, we put his wife as an assistant and they went to the carnival. Before the trip, there was a conversation about those people who stay under the "Electric Trio" and we asked João to try to

make some images of them. João returned with the photos and, from there, we started a discussion. We had work to do and we took advantage of that to make our story.

Longa Exposição also came from that. It was the time when 5D cameras were released and we used to do lots of portraits for editorials. One day a magazine asked us to make a portrait of [Brazilian singer] Elza Soares. We went there and did the portraits. Then at the end of the session we asked her to stand on a white background and we shot the video. The same thing happened with [Brazilian singer] Pitty, with [film director] Hector [Babenco]. Sometimes they paid little, but if it was a celebrity who could dialogue with the work, we would accept it only because of the project. This was something very nice about *Cia de Foto*: the group didn't stick to the market, but we used the resources, we took advantage of the access. [...] Whatever the work was, the person always came back with some experiment. It could end in nothing, but sometimes it would result in something.

País Interior – that work based on Glauber Rocha's film – resulted from a provocation. It was a year when I didn't have much work and we started thinking about what it would be like to color the frames of an old movie. I took a video, did some tests and everyone went nuts, so we started thinking about it. Sometimes the concept came first, sometimes the experimentation came first and then we'd work on the concept. The process could change a little, but it was always based on provocations, whether from text or from some aesthetic form. Sometimes we would invite someone who was not a member of the collective to help thinking about and building the work – critics, people who worked with us... It was a collective that branched out, it was not self-contained.

CS:

Do you have any work that is more representative of that mode of operation?

CL:

I don't know, I can't think of a single work, there were stages, you know? I always say in class that an artist's research is a whole: you see its development in several works, one thing leads to another... I see a lot of that in the case of *Cia de Foto*.

There was something about the early works that unfolded in different aesthetic forms. Looking from the outside you can see that we worked on some issues a lot – what the photographic image is, what the still image is, or the moving image, light, shadow, or dark. There are works that I like better, works that I've gotten more involved with. I love *País Interior*, I love *Retiro*, because I had a lot of contact with them, I got more involved. [...]

CS:

Did *Cia de Foto's* way of working change a lot over time?

CL:

I think so, maybe that's why it ended... But it's hard to do this self-evaluation. I think more about my trajectory: I started training, then I grew, and I started to have a stronger position, an equal opinion. The way of working may not have changed so much because there were several strands of work. We were driven by experimentation and provocation. I can't say if it changed a lot, but I'm sure of one thing: I left it and couldn't find a work system like the one we had at *Cia de Foto*. There was very good synergy; one understood what the other was talking about. It was not perfect, on the contrary, we used to fight a lot [laughs], but things were smooth, you know? It was a healthy working environment and those who couldn't get into our system would leave soon. There are stories of partners who came in, stayed little, left, and caused losses. Not everyone could stay, and those who did were in synergy.

Pio and Rafael can speak best about whether or not the way of working changed, they were there from the beginning. I started very young; sometimes you're not very aware of what's going on. When the boys started there they already understood the financial operation, they knew everything. I didn't know it, these things didn't include me. They started to pass it to me in the last year, which was the year we didn't work and the money was gone. We worked little, savings were going away and we couldn't maintain our system there. I had no idea of the importance of *Cia de Foto* until the collective ended. There was this impact, people were very impressed. I know that we played a major role in Latin American photography by starting this collective process that radicalized authorship. It's not a model for all collectives, but it worked for us, we

felt the need to create something unique, to put everyone's contribution together and see the result.

We participated in several photography group meetings and came in contact with various models, but few had this group authorship thing. The first meeting took place here in São Paulo, and it was funny because we were the only ones who actually signed their works as a collective. We put a flea behind the ears of all the groups that came. And people were very moved when we said that *Cia de Foto* was over. But maybe that's why it ended: it was all done as a group. You build affinities over time, you lose the patience to do a little of everything. And in our case, it was all shared, the earnings, everything was divided, even in the advertising works. If someone worked more on a project, they would earn more. I had no children, so my expenses were lower and I earned less. Rafael and Pio had children, they had a slightly higher cost of living, so they earned more. The divisions were like that. But at the same time it ends up causing accommodation, it doesn't encourage you to go after things, since money is guaranteed. Maybe that idea of trying to apply our conceptual format to money was a mistake. There was a time when it didn't hold.

CS:

You spoke about different people together doing a work that ends up taking on a collective identity. What was the role of those individuals within the collective? I'd like you to comment a little on the creation of this collective identity as well, which can sometimes become stronger than an individual signature. One could often know that certain work was *Cia de Foto's* just for the images.

CL:

They all had very strong and very different personalities. There were fights all the time. We would talk, talk, and each person would give something up. Everyone had a very strong opinion about what we were doing. And that's why I think it worked, because the whole thing was discussed so much internally that when it went to the street it was already completely resolved. We thought a lot when we were doing some work. When a third person came, we were already passed the stage of agreeing or not with that, and a consensus had already been reached on what the work was.

CS:

Was this consensus discussed each time?

CL:

Each time, each work was different. We would do it, print it, put it on the table, and discuss it. There were very different profiles. Pio turned very much to research in the last years, he started Philosophy school, he did readings, he wrote. Rafael is more of an action guy who says "let's go, let's do it!", and João is the autistic-genius kind of person who kept quiet and suddenly came up with something brilliant and scared everybody. Then all this was put together and I stood there, intermediating. But it can also be maddening, one needs to be very patient, to wait to capture each one's moment... Sometimes a work needed Pio's heavier hand; sometimes it was a scheme for Rafael, who could simplify difficult things. And João would come out with creative solutions very fast – when he wanted to, because sometimes he just kept quiet. But you had to respect others' timing.

What somehow made the story uniform besides editing and post-production, was the fact that the work was discussed internally a lot. [...] And, while the boys had very strong personalities, they also had a great deal of detachment regarding the photographs. Not every photographer has that. They'd throw it on the table and we'd see the photos that worked out. We would put everything together in a folder and edit it, clean it up, without any need to know whose photograph it was. Of course, in my file organization I had my way of entering the information about who had photographed it. This helped a lot in the end [laughs]. When I was treating a photo, I needed to know who had taken it so I could clear some doubt about each work.

CS:

It is interesting that for practical purposes it was necessary to identify who took each photo. There is this quick discourse saying that identities are cancelled in collectives, that there is no authorship...

CL:

No, on the contrary, individualities were present in there all the time, they weren't canceled at all. It's because of them that

there was unity. Things were discussed and reflected upon so much that we would come to a common agreement.

CS:

Ten years seems like long enough for this kind of process, it's very hard, exhausting...

CL:

Right... Rafael and Pio already knew each other before they started *Cia de Foto*, they have this long history together. And it all really came from the need they had to try to think of another way to work. In the end, it didn't work out so well, but I think that the time it lasted should be celebrated – it yielded nice fruits.

All interviews took place in São Paulo in December 2015. They are presented in the order in which they occurred. Since the texts needed to be reduced in some sections, information about the collective's constitution, ways of working and more representative works were favored. The material was collected for my PhD research at the Graduate Program in Visual Arts of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (PPGAV-UFRGS), under a CAPES grant, which resulted in the thesis *Manter os olhos abertos diante do abismo: a produção compartilhada de imagens em coletivos de arte contemporânea* (Keeping one's eyes open before the abyss: shared production of images in today's art collectives), defended in October 2016.

Carolina Lopes: was born in Recife, 1974. She holds a degree in Art and Media from the Federal University of Campina Grande and she did Graduate Studies in Photography at Senac-SP. She has worked with the digitization, edition and treatment of images from photographer Nair Benedicto's collection as well as a teacher in digital photography courses.

João Kehl: was born in São Paulo, 1982. He holds a degree in Photography from São Paulo's Senac University Center (2005) and began his work as an assistant to photographers. He currently works with Rafael Jacinto as a photographer and stage director for the advertising and publishing markets.

Pio Figueiroa: was born in Recife in 1974. He began his career in photojournalism at Recife's *Jornal do Comércio* in 1995. Two years later, he moved to São Paulo, where he worked for Editora Abril, Editora 3 and the newspaper *Valor Econômico*. He currently works as a photographer and scene director. He is the editor of the Latin American photography magazine *Sueño de la Razón* and the blog *Ícônica*.

Rafael Jacinto: was born in São Paulo in 1975. He holds a degree in Social Communication from Armando Álvares Penteado Foundation (1998), focused on radio and television. While still in college, he began working as a freelance photographer for skateboarding and surfing magazines. He was a photo reporter for the newspaper *Notícias Populares* and was part of the *Valor Econômico* pilot team.

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(*)This text was submitted in September 2017.