

THE 'OTHER' IN DESIGN PROJECTS: FASHION REPORTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

There is a demand for social responsibility from design professionals. In developing a product, service or platform, one must predict how different social groups will receive them. This consciousness will allow for projects which contemplate specific demands while respecting other multiple singularities. For that to happen, a designer's formation must be directed by a notion of respect, and the duration of a graduation course should be a moment for the student to assimilate and learn how to deal with diversity.

The present article seeks to reflect upon how participatory methodologies in project-based disciplines may bring forth a diverse and productive environment for students, adding other bodies to enrich their formation, multiply their vision and generate social commitment. To this end, it reports practices and project experiences of two subjects I taught at Veiga de Almeida University, Rio de Janeiro: Fashion Innovation Project (2018.1); and Fashion, Culture and Ethnicity Project (2019.1), both part of the Design BA course. What connects both subjects is a notion of design that emerges from contact, from exchange and from the participation of individuals other than those directly responsible for each project.

As theoretical background for the practices informing each discipline, the present article will touch upon different participatory-based design methodologies. Among them are participatory design (BONACIN, 2004), design thinking (BROWN, 2010) and collaborative design (COUTINHO et al., 2010).

Professor Ana Branco's Tent methodology (2020) developed at PUC-Rio is another influence guiding those subjects. This practice focuses on partnerships and brings students into a dimension of "otherness", not limiting itself to the formation of designers, but of individuals.

After reporting on the methodologies and experiences in the development of said disciplines, the article is concluded with the presentation of results obtained by students and possible future prospects.

2 FASHION INNOVATION PROJECT

The Fashion Innovation Project subject begins by looking at the term "innovation". One must understand innovation as a marketing concept, relating to a companies' differential. Competitiveness makes innovation the driver behind value generation, leading one company to stand out amongst others. Innovation is then measurable, collected through its implementation in a product, service, method or marketing strategy which will result in an impact in its field.

To work with innovation in a manner accessible to a student, two approaches are suggested. First, the approximation between innovation and creativity. Innovation begins with a creative process, whose driving force is divergent thinking, widening perception to take in new opportunities and solutions. The emphasis on creativity motivates students, since they are more familiarized with creative practices.

Secondly, the concept of social innovation is introduced. This term is similar to social design, focusing on the improvement of a community. That brings validation to projects which are not yet innovative from a market-based perspective, but can act in specific manners, responding to local needs.

The subject relies on these concepts of innovation to allow students to act in a way that may generate interference and resonate with those involved in the project. First, the student picks out a subject for their project. The idea is to accompany said person in their job, or another place of action. The project phases develop from the exchange between the student and their subject, collaboratively. The goal is that students understand the process and its variables, managing the issues that arise during the project's development along with their subject.

3 FASHION, CULTURE AND ETHNICITY PROJECT

The Fashion, Culture and Ethnicity Project approaches an already complex issue since, from the beginning of the 20th Century up to the last decade, it was considered normal for European luxury brands, as well as South American designers, to produce entire collections based on certain cultural and ethnic groups. This practice was based on a superiority complex as well as the objectification of the other, supported by a colonial mindset (MIGNOLO, 2017). These groups, which represent minorities in a contemporary globalized world, were not taken into consideration when their aesthetics were copied. Designers would take the entire aesthetic repertoire of a community, plagiarizing its main motifs, textures and patterns and replicate them in their clothing. In many situations, designers would reveal their references and could even be congratulated for "promoting" said groups, without ever having spoken to their representatives or paid for utilizing their cultural creations. Fortunately, present-day movements for black and indigenous people's rights, among others, (WILLIAM, 2019), are bringing awareness to the fact that these attitudes are wrong and reinforce white cultural dominance in contemporary society, helping to maintain the status quo and accentuating social and economic injustices worldwide. Reflecting upon their own mistakes and searching for culturally sustainable relationships, design and fashion have become more aware on how to develop contact that is favorable for both sides.

In light of all this, once again the relationship with the other became imperative to the project. Now it's no longer the user, but one of the parts integrating the aesthetic concept. To introduce the subject, we discuss the concepts and reverberations of ethnicity and culture, instigating students to think about the relationship between designers and cultural groups.

As Mignolo (2017) observed, unlike what occurred in 1500 when the world was polycentric, today we are ruled by capitalist logic. Therefore, when there is mutual interest, a commercial contract among both parties has become a viable and beneficial way of attaining mutual satisfaction. The company pays the community for the use of their visual references and the way it will be shown in media. Among the possible ways of contact between the designer and

a cultural group, what should reign is social and cultural responsibility, so that present and future generations also gain from this transaction.

When enrolled in this subject, the student will elaborate a fashion collection in response to their contact with a cultural collective. The project must rectify the collaborative relationship by means of creations that are aligned with said group's guidelines. In return, the student contributes to the collective, according to their demands and his / her abilities.

4 CONCLUSION

The participatory methodologies in the project subjects presented in this article are based on the notion that the graduate years are fundamental in building a student's awareness and comprehension of his / her social responsibility. By demanding that the projects be developed in collaboration with people outside of the field of design, students are compelled to share their creative processes. Students usually have a false belief that creation is an isolated, individual act, based solely on their genius. These projects are tools which bring about the understanding of the role other in their creation, allowing students to respect and take into consideration needs other than their own and to reflect upon their actions in the world.

In revising participatory methodologies in design, one can notice the rise of these dynamics in the professional market, further emphasizing the relevance of working this way at university level. The designer is viewed as a task manager, for whom listening and partnership are key assets in order to compose new social arrangements.

Project-based disciplines are in constant reformulation in keeping up with recent demands, and considering the other as a proposer is an imperative of contemporaneity.

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