

The textile materiality in the graduation of the fashion designer

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ABSTRACT

The text presents a methodological experience lived in a Fashion Design course in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, made with students from the last semester during the development of their conclusion projects. It presents the study of a tool for the creative process and some results obtained. The text also reflects on the importance of textile material as a creative element and not just as a means for clothing.

Keywords: Creative process. Methods. Textile.

A Materialidade têxtil na criação do designer de moda

RESUMO

O texto apresenta uma experiência metodológica vivenciada em um curso de Design de Moda na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, feita com alunos do último semestre durante o desenvolvimento de seus projetos de conclusão. Apresenta o estudo de uma ferramenta para o processo criativo e alguns resultados obtidos. O texto reflete também sobre a importância do material têxtil como elemento criativo e não apenas como meio para a roupa.

Palavras-chave: *Processo criativo. Método. Materiais.*

La materialidad textil en la formación del diseñador de moda.

RESUMEN

El texto presenta una experiencia metodológica vivida en un curso de Diseño de Moda en la ciudad de Río de Janeiro, Brasil, realizada con estudiantes del último semestre durante el desarrollo de sus proyectos de conclusión. Presenta el estudio de una herramienta para el proceso creativo y algunos resultados obtenidos. El texto también reflexiona sobre la importancia del material textil como elemento creativo y no solo como medio de confección.

Palabras clave: *Proceso creativo. Métodos. Textil.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Regarding the undergraduate course in fashion in Brazil, it is commonly possible to observe an evolving path of teaching in which techniques are presented for the development of students skills, whereas critical thinking with regards to their field of work matures and expands. However, this path presents itself as fragile when the topic is the mastery of the fabrics to be used in the building of the artifacts and clothing, or even, when it comes to the role of the textiles as an element of the creative process. This lack of definition regarding the role or relevance of the textile material in the shaping of a Fashion designer, does not seem to be solely one that pertains to the Brazilian undergraduate courses. The editor and trends researcher Lidewij Edelkoort states on the project website which she carries out in partnership com Parsons School of Design/USA named 'New York Textile Month' that:

Nowadays the world of arts and design faces a debilitating lack of knowledge about textiles. Architects, artists and industrial designers, as well as fashion designers no longer have the knowledge regarding the materials which they work with every single day of their careers. (EDELKOORT, L. 2020)

Edelkoort closes her statement reinforcing the urgency to talk about and discuss textiles and their preservation, and to achieve this goal, education is one of the best paths. In this sense, the need to have a greater prominence to textile material in the fashion course undergraduate syllabus becomes crucial, not only in external improvement courses such as post graduate and extension courses, but also in the syllabus, acknowledging that this skill can enable students to

master their base material and create stimuli for procedural and incremental innovation.

2. STARTING OVER

Taking this scenario into account, in 2016 a teamwork was initiated focusing on the usage of fabric as a tool for creative stimuli for final project classes (completion of the course), and it is in this experiment which this text focuses on.

In the year of 2012, one of the most traditional and important undergraduate courses in Fashion Design in the city of Rio de Janeiro underwent a major redesign of its pedagogical project and in its syllabus. The course consisted of a comprehensive final paper Project supported by different academic advisors from various areas, with no simultaneous classes though. In this model, some hindrances took place, mainly in the absence of clear definitions with regards to the contributions of each advisor, causing students and professors alike to grope. This lack of definition favored a constant change of methods, the presence of alternative non convergent, and at times conflicting methods. On the other hand, the scenario offered a breach of opportunity. In the search for a new format, some adjustments had to be made. The 18 hours of orientation were kept, they were divided into five disciplines, though, which were interrelated. The expected resulting products were defined, where the main starting point was the theoretical research, developed and approved in the previous semester, in The Final Project 1 class. All the concepts, clippings, and initial abstractions departed from this textual element. The text, as the basis of practical construction, as a source of imagery and creative weaving.

This centrality of textual production occurred not only in the

project of completion of the course, but also in different disciplines in curricular structure. The idea was to develop a critical and broad repertoire in the student, rectifying, in a focused way, some lack of content and allowing a greater theoretical mastery of their work in the final stages. Technical and practical skills also needed to be developed and therefore, disciplines such as textile design, textile processing, digital printing, sewing, in which the execution of elements is relevant to each content was assessed. It was thought that with those changes we could achieve some goals in the short term, such as:

- Aligning aesthetically the resulting products executed in the four disciplines of the Final Project 2;
- Approximating the conceptual theoretical thought to the final paper;
- Providing greater mastery and resourcefulness to the student regarding the techniques and executions of practical and constructive clothing demands;
- Highlighting other possibilities of creation to the students besides the common media references (fashion magazines, trending sites, big brands...);
- Making sure the students achieve autonomy in the mastery and execution of the project to meet the market requirements.
- Stressing that different references and visual repertoires are likely to feed the creative process by strengthening the student's authorial identity.

However, these changes were not fully efficient; a new effort was needed. So, in 2016 a solution was devised that could be applied only in the Final Project 2 module (last semester) and that could involve both discipline and professors in complementary parallel actions and in full harmony, which we still lacked by then. All effort was,

therefore, focused on defining a guided and shared creative process.

2.1 Text and Fabric

The idea of the creator as someone who was born with the gift, or even, that creativity is only a skill some people have, has already fallen into disuse in the face of research in various fields of knowledge. This research poses the creative process originating from a problem, a demand, or a need, "a combination of an imaginary stimulus with the limitations of a problem, and its purpose is to find an 'intersection' between them, what we call an idea" (AZNAR, 2011). There are the so-called creative processes in fashion, closely linked to fashion cycles, a system that has constitutive elements based on ephemerality (TREPTOW, 2003), which heavily impacts the creation process. Similarly, a thesis project is confined in an equally limited time, around a semester long and the projects associated with seasons or temporary issues.

It is worth mentioning that designing a wearable product is different from creating a fashion collection. This reflection is committed to the creative process in fashion, in the sense of cultural capital, not just in the design of a product. Therefore, it is up to us to think of fashion as an intangible product, which according to Keller (2007), is "a mood or habit that prevails in a given period" and symbolic capital "reflects the values and customs of a society in a period of time". Thus, the designer would not be able to confine such concepts in a single product, but can promote a process of social diffusion through them, in a broader discourse as a fashion collection (set of products). It is necessary that the fashion designer is extremely well-informed about the different aspects that configure the present moment. It can be said that this

information is closely linked to the designer's lifestyle. This way of living unfolds itself in their views, their research, its conceptual cutout of the world and the market that they are inserted into.

No one is creative out of nothing. [...] an individual is only creative when he can, from his experiences 'associate known facts that, however, were seen as alien to each other' (FORNASIER, MARTINS and DEMARCHI, 2008, p. 138).

It is then necessary to absorb, "digest" and interpret all this collected information in order to be able to make seemingly unlikely connections to most people. That is, the greater the maturation of the knowledge obtained through the information received, the greater the generation of cognitive correlations by the designer. We realize, then, a gap in the handling of materiality, where some projects, although well founded and with good aesthetic and formal solutions, seem disconnected from their original concepts presented in the text of the thesis, lacking an authorial identity and harmony among concept, object, text and matter. And we decided that this would be the way to be "accelerated". It was necessary to break with the linear system and connect text and matter through the experience of materials as conceptual elements of the project.

2.2 Materialization of Ideas

The first distinction needed to be made is in the differentiation between the terms material and materiality. In this proposal, where the word material is related to the concrete part of the matter that will be used for the designing of wearables, be this material, fabric, yarn, plastic, leather,

acrylic, etc. The term materiality, condenses in itself what we can perceive, see, and do so that the idea can exist in a visible context. In materiality, the material bandons its rawness of matter and transitions into the symbolic by combining various materials; tools, which are techniques that enable the creation; and its support, in the case of fashion, the body. "Matter is a mechanical concern with material support, while materiality encompasses the expressive potential" (LAURENTIZ, 1991:102).

Separating material from materiality is impossible, as well as, it is to exist a materiality without material, but this distinction makes us understand the processes that materials go through to achieve materiality status in the fashion collection, according to Paulo Laurentiz, "This entails important changes", because "operating on matter and materiality determine different ways of behaving" (idem:103). What tools would be used? How to provide a nonlinear structure? How to promote the global view of the process?

The first step was a collective work in which each teacher brought in his expertise and disciplinary area so that this possibility of materialization could be integrated into all stages of the creation processes. Thus, the theoretical part remained as the main source for all practical activities and it was adopted as a new tool called Visual Storytelling Map. This map was formed from the merger of the storyboard, a graphic tool that allows a path of creative narratives (HART, 1999) used by film and animation design courses and the storytelling, a common resource in advertising to create engaging narratives linked to consumption (CARRILHO, MARKUS, 2014). The student is encouraged to build a graphic/visual reference capable of narrating the content of the monograph by itself, following the same textual sequence of its chapters and

emphasizing the values and concepts selected by him as fundamental and guiding. The activity enables the student to understand his proposal not only as a "theme", but as something greater in which he can have a global view of his Project (from concept to materiality).

In this stage, the student is given autonomy in defining what the essence of his project is, the only interference of the advisors is to question the student about their choices so that he justifies them and can contextualize their choices. From the selection made, the terms are arranged in a table and are analyzed in a conceptual project matrix. The choice for the use of the conceptual matrix is made for "transforming complex concepts and realities into new product possibilities, full of meanings, a kind of table that helps them to organize, in a practical way, the concepts to their ideas regarding colors, raw materials and shapes" (NEDER, MONTEIRO, 2013). This is the first task of materialization, where students need to fill out the blanks establishing free associations between the various columns, starting from elements called "intangibles" – sensations, feelings, impressions, values, concepts, etc. – and reaching "tangible" elements – fabrics, colors, shapes, textures, etc. This activity contributes to the organization of the practical stage of the research and assists the student in making important decisions for the project, in other words, it is a tool that allows them to formally realize an abstract scenario.

2.3 Matter as creative nourishment

After filling out the other columns of the matrix, the student is led to perform 2 parallel actions: the visual experience and the material experience of the selected concepts and values. In the first one, the visual experience

takes place with the selection of three images that the student believes to correspond to a particular concept presented in the left column of the table, the images can not be of fashion products, brands or simply clothes. Assuming that the creative process is fed by diverse references, the larger and more varied this "nourishment" is, the better the fruits will be. Here the prohibition of the use of fashion images is justified as a way to avoid the endogenous process and provide greater diversity in the student's visual repertoire, as well as greater mastery in authorship, since the images are visual interpretations of the student. These images are presented to the advisor who makes a pre-selection considering the greater adequacy and scope of the image to the selected concept.

The second, the material experience occurs in parallel, while selecting the images the student starts exercising the exploration of different textile and non-textile materials in order to provoke a tactile (besides visual) sense consistent with the images collected in the perception of fundamental and guiding concepts. This activity occurs until the visual storytelling map is constructed. Although parallel, the activities are intrinsic in a dynamic and nonlinear process, in which the concept words generate reflections when placed in front of the images chosen to represent them and generate perceptions that are translated into materials that will later build the materiality of the collection. From this perception of words and images arise the translations, by the student, into materials, techniques and / or benefiting processes. These experiments, still too exploratory, cannot be part of garments or full outfits.

With each experiment presented, new questions are made and the experiments are then improved, with an exchange, addition of materials or modification in the technique to better suit the future support, the body. Students are encouraged to

weave, manipulate, construct textures or interfere with fabrics so that they can somehow create a tactile representation of what is seen as a concept.

It is only from the definition of this first stage on, with images and experiments in materials that the filling out of the other columns of the conceptual matrix follows, always relating the other cells with the concept/value of the referent line. As the matrix is filled out, new images for the other blanks are collected and students are encouraged to build the visual map of storytelling that is, while presenting itself as a challenge, this visual composition that enables the integration and maturation of the student's aesthetic discourse. The images are arranged according to their assigned meanings (the fundamental or guiding concepts) and in the same sequence of the undergraduate thesis, thus constituting a narrative. This narrative can be arranged from left to right, from top to bottom, from center to edge, as long as the Reading and the comprehension are not impaired. When Storytelling is finished, experiments are revisited and new suitability demands are made so that the materiality of the collection can be constructed in a balanced way, that is, concepts, images, materials, techniques, and representations gain unity. The processes are resumed or go forward according to the need for materialization of each project, constituting a visual and tactile reading. The following images exemplify the experiments dialoguing with the storytelling.

Also in parallel, students are accompanied in the formulation of a color chart that will respect the selections of images and experiments developed by the student, and also a chart of materials that, together with the experiments, can start the visualization of shapes and silhouettes that express a harmonic act between matter, color and volume.

In this third phase, in which color, material and experiment

already seem to speak for themselves, expressing the visual narrative built, students are now encouraged to carry out studies of forms and volumetry from the communion between the visual map, the experiments and their aesthetic propositions. This study of shape and volumetry at some moments also occurs through free collages on a naked base body, which proved equally fruitful either by difficulty in the mastery of representation or by resistance to a free study of shapes derived from the images. A key point to be highlighted here is that the material and experimentations are as well as the texts, principles of creation, constituting a creative repertoire of their own, generated by the student throughout the process in his project. The object is source, action, and result.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As rewarding or even surprising as this experience is, it is not accepted by all the students; each student brings a repertoire and personal resistance according to their beliefs and baggage acquired in their individual formative course. Dealing with these insecurities and different reactions is a learning stage for professors and it contributes to any adjustments in the work method. After all, the development of these activities, the parallel orientations and the creation without the use of clear fashion references (photos of fashion shows, brands, advertising campaigns etc.) is not an easy job, on the contrary, over these years it has also proved to be a challenge for the team. However, it has been a rewarding experience, which has had a considerable impact in the professional life of graduate students, who with greater autonomy and identity established themselves in the Market².

We hope that the fashion designer when entering the

market will be able to master the creative process that will allow him to transform imaginary objects (ideas, drawings, collages, images) into concrete objects (material, three-dimensional, wearable and marketable), but often what this newly arrived professional finds is a uniform culture, which seeks solutions that meet a homogeneous collective mindset, making the creative process simply a copying process, limiting a long-term perspective (JOHANSSON, 2010). In the quest to break this cycle that only renews what already exists, we think of this process of creation as a means of interaction between different contexts, ideas and materialities.

It is important to emphasize that there is not only a creative process template. The processes are multiple, non-linear and with varied methodologies, it is understood by method in this text as "a series of necessary operations, arranged in logical order, dictated by experience" (MUNARI, 1998). Morais (2006) contributes by claiming that to stay out of a copying context it is necessary to adapt the chosen methodology to the development of products that achieve the expected goal and not to rely on copying references that are already circulating in the market.

It is up to the institutions to constantly think about the methods offered and experienced by the student. In the experience described, still in progress, the identified gap made it possible to give greater centrality to the material, placing it as a central creative element that collaborates in an aesthetic narrative and not only represents or supports it. As Saltzman (2004) points out, clothing corresponds to textile forms creating and interfering in spaces, for the author we must be attentive to the elements that relate and compose a garment, particularly the fabric and the body. The body, for Saltzman, is the support where the fabric rests and where the meanings originate. In this perspective, the relation between

body and fabric, body and textures, constitutes a dynamic of its own beyond clothing and also generates multiple meanings. The process of creation is complex and requires more than talent from designers, requires experimenting, without fear, new means of signifying. As teachers, we must guide the student's perception to what is around him and see it in another way, interpreting it so that he can establish a personal identification with all the resources available, including the materials. Whatever the chosen methodology is. When the creation process is rich, it encompasses more than the act of creating a fashion collection, and makes us reflect.

TEXT ENDNOTES

The products are: a collection of clothing products containing at least 15 complete looks, complementary accessories (minimum of 4 items), a monograph containing descriptive project memorabilia, a printed book containing the entire collection (in the pandemic in virtual format), packaging and a fashion film. Among these clothing items, 2 complete looks with respective accessories, were made and presented to a board, presentially or virtually.

² Brands like LI (https://www.instagram.com/lfeitoamao.br/), 1985dd (https://www.instagram.com/loja1985dd/), Patrick Langkammer (https://www.instagram.com/patricklangkammer/) , and others.

³ Process images can be seen in: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ki94vdHY7TbbWqshFWGA4J8H_ZGcfazM/view?usp=sharing

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