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in the Amazon,
Designers and Art Educators**

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Traditional Crafts Communities in the Amazon, Designers and Art Educators

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Abstract

The group of Designers Piracema Lab works with traditional Craftspeople without any imposition and any directiveness, looking towards the development of the creative process. The process initiates by workshops to make Craftspeople aware of their personal history, of each other's experiences and local history. A local historian is always invited to talk about the town. The education process is based on research of the materials from the region for economic reasons and on the development of visual perception. The Designers stimulate the participants to look around at local things like patterns and forms in the architecture in the surroundings to be used as visual motives of the products to be created. I'll refer to three experiences, two on the Amazon region and one in Africa.

The first one will be on the cooperative work among Designers, art educators and Craftswomen from Benevides, a place where survival is at risk.

The second group that I'll analyze closer is from Marajó Island, Pará State. It includes men who are mostly unemployed or under-employed and some are the husbands of Craftswomen. Observing that the work of their wife was getting recognition and making good money, some men decided to learn to make lace, embroidery, ceramics and basketry. I interviewed the Designers Mary Maués and the art educator Ida Hamoy about the process of work and several Craftswomen and men who participated in the workshops. Most of them talked about the freedom they had and all of them recognized the higher quality of the products made by them after the workshops, besides the fact that they are getting more money for their products.

Finally I will refer to the work, in Mozambique, Africa, of Imbroise, a Designer who belonged to Piracema Lab.

Keywords: Design, Crafts, Amazon, Art Educators.

Acknowledgments:

This research was stimulated by the constant readings of Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987) the direct work with Paulo Freire (1921/1997) as well as by the convivial with Aloisio Magalhães (1927/1982) and his only book *E Triunfo?* (1985) published by friends after his death.

Gilberto Freyre, who was student of Franz Boas at the Columbia University, studied Brazilian culture through images, cake recipes and newspaper advertisements. He can be considered a precursor of the Cultural Studies (Hall 1996: 336).

Freyre Paulo Freire influenced education in a way to get social consciousness into direction to social justice.

Another intellectual who shaped Brazilian culture was Aloisio Magalhães, a Designer with ambitions to transform Brazilian society, paying attention to History, to ecology, to mixed cultures, to modernization in dialogue with traditional culture and solving problems of the real people. He transformed the visual industry into Art and Art into necessity. It is not by chance that today the best social projects in Brazil are those that connect Design, Ecology and Art/Education.

This paper presents a view about the reciprocal effort of Designers, Art Educators and Craftspeople looking for matrixes of production and consume not harmful to the environment but that could upgrade the income of poor communities.

It shows that the perspective of sustainability requires a redesign of attitudes and objectives of the actors involved, as well of the capitalist model of development.

I followed Alexandre Wollner's (2003) proposal for research in Design as research procedures. For Wollner, "process consists of four stages: gathering information, analyzing relevant facts, hypotheses based on analysis of the facts, verify hypotheses (Wollner 2003, p. 87)". My information came chiefly from images, photography, books, interviews,

For the evaluation of the results I followed the Triangular Approach (1991, 2010) that considers any art education action:

- 1- The reading of Art and Design works very important to develop perception and capacity to analyze of what is perceived.
- 2- The making of visual activities to develop creation, ideation, capacity to plan how to materialize ideas.
- 3- The contextualization of what is read and what is made as a process of "conscientization" or awareness that can be personal, social, historical, political, anthropological, and sociological or everything together.

My first research on Designers intervention with Craftspeople was in 1994 in Minas Gerais. My question was: In which way Designers could develop the work of Craftspeople without blocking their creative process? I had observed that Designers used to give new models to the Crafts group but as soon as the Designers left the community, Craftspeople went back to the old models.

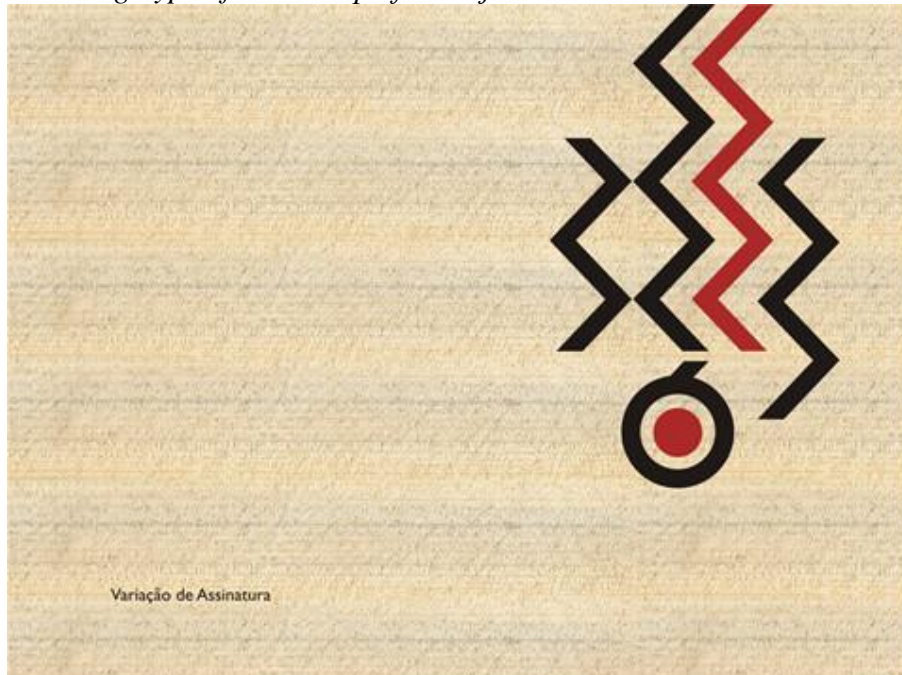
During the 90's the Designer Heloisa Croco began to work together with Craftspeople in the winter festival of Ouro Preto, promoted by the University of Minas Gerais. She was invited by the festival director, the artist José Nemer, to organize a workshop of several days with Craftspeople. I was invited as an observer. I discussed the result of this work with soap stone (abundant material at the region) in the Art Education Congress in Taiwan, in 1995. The works of those workshops in Minas Gerais got so highly recognition that the store Tok Stock (similar to IKEA) began to sell their products. If before that, the Craftspeople were making pyramids and images of Buddha to sell for tourists, after the workshop they began to explore the possibilities of the materials and got a place in the national market. Croco and Nemer amplified their work, organizing a private group of Designers for communities called Piracema Laboratory.

My current research on the work of Piracema Lab took place in Pará State, Amazon Region. First, my focus was on problems of gender and heritage of Craftswomen, who survive through their work, who are poor and live far away in hidden regions of the country. How can Design improve the production of those artisans? What can art educators as mediators do in favor of them?

The method of Piracema Lab is:

- 1- No imposition and no directiveness towards the development of the creativity process. Intervention exists because the presence of the Designers is already an intervention but it is based on dialog.
- 2- The Piracema Lab works first the creation of a logo (Fig. 1), that should be the identification of the group, of the labels, of the products and of the stores to be created.

Figure 1. *Logotype of the Group of Marajó Island*



- 3- The development of visual perception is another educational tool. They stimulate the participants to localize around them visual motives that generate the logo, the patterns and the forms of the objects and of the architecture (Fig. 2) of where they live and work

Figure 2. *House in Marajó*



Along several workshops they make Craftspeople aware of their personal history, local history, and of each other experiences, everything enveloped by the visual imagination. A local historian (not necessarily academic) is always invited to talk about the city, its history and its architecture, its context They reinforce the reading of the natural and the built environment and of their own production.

- 4- The education process is based on the research of the materials of the region for economic reasons
- 5- The “making” is another phases where they reinforce planning, reorganization and reinvention, creativity, fluency and flexibility.

The first group with whom the Piracema Lab worked in Pará State, coordinated by Ida Hamoy, was a group of woman from Benevides, a decadent town, very rich on the time of the rubber commerce but today a place where the survival is at risk. A private group of religious women promoted with a group of woman’s Designers and art educators workshops to develop, to plan, to update Craftswoman production. This complicity of gender called my attention and I was completely captured by the quality of the results, which I intend to show through images.

My central focus will be the second group, with whom the Piracema Lab worked in Marajó Island, Pará State. This group included men, some of them husbands of craftswoman. The unemployed or bad employed husbands observing that the desconsidered work of their woman was getting recognition and making good money, decided to learn to make lace, embroidery, ceramics, basketry and different ornaments. Other husbands help to sell the manufactures and to buy material.

Figure 3



To administrate the work of the woman helps them to maintain the power on the family. The SEBRAE, federal institution in charge of creative economics, Crafts and Design policy collaborated with this project but never became Piracema Lab's Methodological approach official policy. Sometimes they are called by SEBRAE for consultation or a specific project.

I observed that the work among Designers and Craftspeople is more fluent and flexible when an art educator works as mediator between them. Several other researches arrived to similar conclusion, for example the workshops of the Projeto Axé in Bahia and the projects of Artists in Residence studied by Rachel Mason in the book *Por uma Arte-Educação Multicultural* (2000).

The art teacher knows about the process of teaching and learning and the way to communicate with students, becoming a good mediator in the process of reviewing each one making process in direction to the creation of new forms of visual thinking. The art educator studies chiefly to be mediator, the Designers and the artists studied chiefly to be creators. They need each other abilities. I interviewed the Designer Mary Maués and the art educator Ida Hamoy about the process of work in Pará State (Benevides and Muaná, Marajó Island) and several Craftswoman and Craftsman who participated of the workshops. Many of them talked about the freedom they had and all of them recognized the better quality of the products made by them after the

workshops. Only two of them are making the same thing that they used to do before (one that I interviewed, who mention another one) but with better colors, better finishing and better Design Besides they are selling more and more expensively theirs products. Most of them diversified their products. In Pará State, Benevides and Marajó Island, the population is descendent of indigenous population and maintains the same costumes of their ancestral. The values cultivated by the Indian population are different of the values of capitalism. Those differences go back to the colonial times.

The Portuguese people, when colonized Brazil tried to transform the Indians in slaves but gave up because considered them lazy and unproductive. However what they considered laziness is a kind of conception of life. They work to live; they don't work to accumulate money. The Designers had great difficult to understand this difference. For example, if I buy six necklaces they charge 8 dollars for each, but when someone orders 100 of the same necklaces they will charge 10 dollars for each piece because they are going to spend a lot of time working, without playing with the kids, without talking with the friends.

The Piracema Lab stimulates Craftspeople to work with the waste of the Amazon , the skin of animals they eat, including fish skin, fibers of the forest, wood brought by the river. A student of mine, Tatiana Azzi, studied the work of the Piracema Lab in the State of Ceará. She engaged in another group of Designers working with artisans in Minas Gerais in order to analyses the differences. We arrived to the same conclusion: without empowering Craftspeople they resist to experimentation. To evaluate the production of the artisans of Marajó Island I prepared a visual narrative based on the Triangular Approach. We cannot evaluate visual products without showing them.

The Brazilian Designer Renato Imbroise is working with the same methodology in Mozambique, Africa. We are exporting methodology. The organizers of the project with the Brazilian Designers in Mozambique did very good evaluation of the results, according the bulletin of the Museum CASA in Brazil, which I translate here. This Museum is at the same time gallery, therefore can sell the exhibit products. The exhibition of Crafts from Mozambique had been a big success of critique and of sales. Mozambique was a Portuguese colony up to 1975.

With 801.590 km² of area is inhabited for little more than 20 million of people. The official language is the Portuguese, although to have a great number of native languages. In the context of similar history, two projects that promote the dialogue between Brazil and Mozambique, uniting the innovation and surprising of the Brazilian Design with the technician of the Mozambican's Crafts, are acting in the direction to help to change reality. One in the north, and another one in the south of Mozambique, the projects begun when Eduarda Cipriano, Foundation for the Development of Comunidade (FDC) directress, visited Brazil and she knew the Renato Imbroisi's work. The Designer was invited to visit Mozambique and to evaluate the possibility to make a project in African lands.

With the objective to rescue local techniques and traditions, to delineate cultural and local Mozambican's identity, to foment the development of new products and to select the final product, generating income for the communities, had appeared the Maciene Project, and the Ujamaa Project, carried through for the Aga Khan Foundation. Both the projects had been coordinated by Renato Imbroisi and promoted the cultural interchange by means of workshops carried through periodic visit of Brazilian Designers to Mozambique.

Dulce Mudhlovo, local manager of the Maciene Project, said “[...] *in Mozambique we had everything: structure, space, adjusted machines, but not good products. We call Brazilian because we wanted products with international quality. Today it has a strong impact in who looks at the objects*” (A Casa 2010: np). Mozambican Craftsman Rachid Jonas Conjo, who was in Brazil for launching the exposition *Brazil in Africa: Artesanato Moçambicano + Brazilian Design*, points out: “*the Brazilians give-in formation... We are changing behavior, having other ideas different from Brazilians' ideas. We are creating new products. This is good*” (A Casa 2010: np).

Still according to Conjo, Brazilian Designers emphasized the idea that the artisan production and the manual ability are patrimonies of the Mozambicans. Rachid Conjo also reminds us that many abundant materials in Mozambique are discarded; they had started to be used like: “*the banana tree of Maciene. Before was being wasted, now has a use, as well as tires and plastics... We did not make this type of product with these raw materials, but now we are making*”. Dulce Mudhlovo detaches that “*it is not to bring something from outside but to search what we have and to improve*”. She affirms that the benefits brought for the projects are clear. “*The life of the people improved very much. All the process since to find raw material until the commercialization of the products are made by the community*” (A Casa 2010: np). The projects disclose that, beyond the language and although at the distance, Brazil and Mozambique has very much in common.

The best of this production was exhibited in the A Casa (2010) museum.

Elizabete Garber in the text “*Global and Local: Rethinking citizenship in art and visual culture education*”, elects five principles to be developed in the students by art and visual culture teaching practice: identity, understanding beyond oneself, race/class/gender awareness, becoming political subjects, transgression and play.

The Piracema Lab is developing the key principles that Elizabete Garber argues as the most important for Arts and Visual Cultures along with excellence in Design.

"Brazilian artisan is basically a potential Designer, much more than a true Craftsman in the classical sense". *Aloisio Magalhães*

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