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The contemporary challenge of curating Brazilian design

FREDERICO DUARTE

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
in Iberian and Latin American Studies
Birkbeck College, University of London

November 2021

Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Frederico Duarte, 29.11.2021

Abstract

This thesis addresses the exhibition and collection of design artefacts developed in Brazil between 2004 and 2014. During this exceptional decade of economic growth, social mobility and ideological struggles, Brazil challenged its traditional role as a peripheral, underdeveloped nation to become a key player in a multipolar, but increasingly fragmented and unequal world. Throughout this period, Brazilian designers were faced with a historical opportunity to claim a local, critical autonomy in their practice. Such practice integrates the quest for a more critical, self-reflexive positioning with a commitment to the reduction of dependence, the promotion of social equality and the consolidation of democracy. Although not contradictory or self-excluding, these two readings of design and autonomy tend to generate significantly different practices and results in their intent, process and effects.

An introduction to the research parameters and institutional framework of this collaborative doctoral research project, developed at the V&A and Birkbeck College, and the exhibition 'How to Pronounce Design in Portuguese: Brazil Today', is followed by a discussion on design definitions and the contemporary public sphere of design curation and criticism. Chapter 2 addresses theoretical positions regarding shifts in dominant design discourses and quests for autonomy in design practice. Chapter 3 observes the key facts, events, issues and global ambitions that shaped Brazil's 2004-14 'golden decade', as well as curatorial approaches to Brazilian design that occurred during that period. Chapter 4 presents the curatorial discourse, display strategies, communication initiatives and critical reception of the exhibition on which this thesis is centred. Chapter 5 analyses a selection of local, critically relevant design artefacts according to the exhibition's thematic challenges and suggests a collection approach aligned with the V&A's collecting policy.

Arguing for the collection and exhibition of contemporary Brazilian design as a transnational activity that reflects local contexts and global forces, this thesis contributes to a global debate on how design is practiced on a national level but especially how it is interpreted by museum curators within a broader public sphere of design.

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Introduction

The concept of identity is a theme that constantly appears in debates on design in Latin America. One asks: What is the Mexicanness or Brazilianness of design? In general, identity is interpreted in terms of a certain formal and chromatic configuration of a product or graphic design. But identity should not be limited to aesthetic-formal aspects, since identity also manifests itself, and above all, in the type of problems that arise in a given context (Bonsiepe 2011, 7).¹

The designer and theoretician Gui Bonsiepe presented the lecture ‘Diseño y Crisis’ [Design and Crisis] at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UNAM) in Mexico City on September 21st, 2011.² I read it only a few days later and found this paragraph represented an accurate synthesis of my own approach to design practice as a journalist, critic, curator and researcher.³ Especially after I chose design from and in Brazil as the subject of my masters dissertation in design criticism in 2009, I have been critically aware of the intentions and implications of a design discourse expressed by such an exacerbated attention to expressions of identity.⁴ This PhD thesis, dedicated to the challenges of curating contemporary Brazilian design, is grounded on a critical confrontation with such expressions but chiefly on a commitment to the context of design practice. As I address in this thesis, by looking for national characteristics in the personal expressions of designers many editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to design in peripheral nations such as Brazil often convey simplistic, uninformed and stereotypical views of both activity and

1. All Portuguese and Spanish language quotations are the author’s own translation unless otherwise noted. Original quote: “El concepto de identidad es un tema que aparece, constantemente, en los debates sobre el diseño en América Latina. Se pregunta: ¿Qué es la Mexicanidad o Brasilianidad del diseño? En general se interpreta la identidad en términos de una determinada configuración formal y cromática de un producto o de un diseño gráfico. Pero no habría que limitar la identidad a los aspectos estético-formales, pues la identidad se manifiesta también y, sobre todo, en el tipo de problemas que surgen en determinado contexto” (Bonsiepe 2011, 7).

2. Born in Germany in 1934, Gui Bonsiepe lived for over 50 years working as a designer, educator and policy advisor in Chile, Argentina and Brazil. Bonsiepe has long been considered among his peers – especially but not exclusively in German-speaking and Latin-American countries – one the most lucid voices on design of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. My research has been highly influenced by his thoughtful observations and critical reflections on design practice and discourse in Latin American countries, particularly in Brazil.

3. Having been trained as a communication designer, I have been writing professionally on design since 2006.

4. My thesis research project at the School of Visual Arts’ Design Criticism MFA resulted mainly in the dissertation ‘Alvorada: How social change is shaping Brazilian design and creating Brazil’s own design model’ (Duarte 2010a).

country. Such views have conditioned the scholarly treatment, institutional discourse and public recognition of design. They have also shaped the expectations of practitioners, students and other citizens partaking in a global design system and a public sphere that extends beyond it.⁵ In my own work, and in this thesis, I have instead been committed to understanding and interpreting the contexts that determine the conditions, but also the consequences of design practice as professional discipline, cultural expression and political action.

This thesis is the outcome of the collaborative doctoral research project “Our poor, beautiful and culturally rich country’: the contemporary challenge of Brazilian design’, developed at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) and Birkbeck College, University of London. It addresses the practice of design in Brazil, as well as editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to that practice. It places an emphasis on my own approach, the exhibition ‘How to Pronounce Design in Portuguese: Brazil Today’, which I curated in 2017 for MUDE, Lisbon’s design and fashion museum, henceforth mentioned as Brazil Today.⁶ More specifically, my thesis addresses the practice of design in Brazil from 2004 to 2014, an exceptional decade of economic growth, social mobility and class struggle, when Brazil challenged its traditional role as a peripheral, underdeveloped nation and aspired to become a key player in a multipolar, but also increasingly fragmented world. This period informed Brazil Today’s curatorial process: my selection of results from design practice shown in this exhibition underscored the contribution of Brazilian designers – as well as of their clients, consumers or end users – to their society. But also to a global system of value and meaning creation. By emphasising context over identity, this exhibition aimed to challenge art-historical, modernist and post-modern discourses, narratives and, ultimately, design canons. Instead, it aimed to reveal and communicate the notion of critical autonomy in the work of Brazilian designers. Through a discussion of how a notion of autonomy has been claimed by designers and identified by editors, historians and curators in the last thirty years, but also through the presentation of Brazil Today’s goals, institutional settings,

5. Design system is an expression used interchangeably by several authors with other terms such as ‘design culture’, ‘design world’ and ‘design industry,’ to generally describe a set of relations between agents and institutions involved in the practice and discourse of design (Adamson, Riello and Teasley 2011, Twemlow 2013, Julier 2014, Murphy 2015). Such institutions include publications, museums, schools, organisations, companies and the promoters of design-related festivals and events.

6. MUDE, Lisbon’s Fashion and Design Museum – Francisco Capelo Collection, was founded in 2007 by the municipality of Lisbon and has since been directed by the art historian Bárbara Coutinho.

artefact selection, display strategies, communication initiatives and critical reception, this thesis aims to inform curatorial practice on contemporary design in Brazil. Its findings apply mainly to the exhibiting and collecting of design at museums with international, multidisciplinary design collections, such as this research project's institutional partner, the V&A and MUDE, where Brazil Today took place.

Following an introduction to the institutional framework of this thesis and the exhibition it is centred on, I elaborate on their shared research questions, methods and sources, as well as my own positionality as a curator and researcher. I also introduce key definitions of design and discuss the role of the design curator and critic in a contemporary public sphere of design. In chapter 2 I address how shifts in a dominant design discourse have influenced a quest for autonomy in design practice and how editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to that practice particularly affected an international recognition of design from and in peripheral nations such as Brazil. In chapter 3 I discuss the 2004-14 decade as an exceptional period in Brazil's history, highlighting key events, facts and issues that affected its society and analysing relevant curatorial approaches to design practice and its results in Brazil. In chapter 4 I address Brazil Today's curatorial discourse, present a walk-through of the exhibition and analyse its display strategies, communication initiatives and critical reception. Chapter 5 is dedicated to a more detailed analysis of a selection of design artefacts shown in Brazil Today, according to the exhibition's four thematic challenges, which incorporates a reflection on the challenges pertaining to their collection by a design museum such as the V&A.

Although in this thesis I approach design practice within a national focus, I do not argue for the establishment of a national collection of design. Instead, I uphold the collection and exhibition of Brazilian design artefacts as culturally relevant manifestations of local contexts, global forces and contemporary concerns that affect what is an inherently transnational activity. My emphasis on thematic challenges, instead of design disciplines, object typologies or design careers, aims to encourage this interpretation. My thesis thus contributes to an international debate on how design is practiced and consumed on a national level, but especially how it is shown and interpreted at design museums. As such, its findings and discussion should also interest design critics, publication editors, historians and other agents engaged in design discourse within a public sphere that extends beyond the design system.

1.1. Research sources, methods and positionality

When I first began researching Brazil's design system at the School of Visual Arts in New York in 2009, the country was making world headlines for the best of reasons, such as record economic growth, increased social mobility and the organisation of world events. I therefore wanted to know what it was like to be a designer in a nation undergoing such remarkable transformation. I had not yet been to Brazil and had limited knowledge of Brazilian design apart from a few of its protagonists, such as product designers Fernando and Humberto Campana, the graphic designer Rogério Duarte and the architect Oscar Niemeyer, as well as the design journalist and curator Adélia Borges.⁷ As a graduate student in New York, I struggled to find relevant sources related to my research. I also realised editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to design in Brazil, published in design magazines, designer monographs and exhibition catalogues, tended to focus either on the country's past modern pioneers or the present Brazilian stars of the international design system. I found scant information, not to mention analysis, of contemporary design practice that revealed or responded to the broader social, economic and cultural changes that were occurring in the country.

I then decided to apply my approach and experience as a design journalist to learn more about this country directly from its designers. So in July 2009 I took my first, one-month research trip to Brazil. During this trip I kept an English-language blog – alvorada.org, since deactivated – where I posted short profiles of the designers, journalists, curators and scholars I interviewed in the seven cities I visited.⁸ This trip allowed me to accomplish something which, to the best of my knowledge, no other foreign design journalist, critic or curator had done before: reach and interview an expressive and diversified number of interlocutors in a very short period. By being a foreigner willing and able to travel and meet them in their context of practice, I could ask questions to

7. My first significant contact with the work of Fernando and Humberto Campana occurred in 2003, when Experimentadesign, Lisbon's design biennial, organised the first retrospective exhibition of their work in Portugal. Having worked from 2003 to 2006 at the cultural association that promotes Experimentadesign, I also got acquainted with other Brazilian agents of the design system such as Adélia Borges. The dearth of information on design from Brazil in Portugal partly reflects both a lack of academic interest and the virtual non-existence of a shared editorial market between the two countries. This situation has since improved thanks to the intensification of transatlantic migratory flows, as well as academic exchanges and an increase in research projects, in design and other areas of the arts and humanities.

8. São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Curitiba, Porto Alegre and Bento Gonçalves.

the subjects of my research that might not occur to a Brazilian counterpart of mine, in our shared mother tongue. My blog gathered a significant international following during and after this trip, which gave a notable degree of notoriety to my work, in Brazil and elsewhere. After submitting my master's thesis in 2010 and until 2018 I returned to Brazil other nine times, as a journalist, curator and researcher. I have since commented on and critically contributed to an expanded body of knowledge on contemporary Brazilian design. I authored several newspaper and magazine articles, essays and book chapters, having also participated in conferences, seminars, workshops and other academic and non-academic events related to Brazil.

This PhD thesis is therefore informed by an interweaving of information gathered from primary and secondary sources over an eleven year-long research journey. My research is informed mainly by four sets of secondary sources, published in several languages.⁹ The first set of such sources consisted of contributions to design theory and history, particularly history and theory on and from Brazil and Latin America. In my close reading and analysis of these sources, namely the writings of design curators, historians, journalists, magazine editors and design practitioners, presented in a range of publications, I borrowed methodologies from design history, design studies and other areas of the humanities, such as art curation, art history, sociology and anthropology. I complemented these more design-specific sources with a second set of theoretical contributions from areas such as international relations, economics and political science. The third set of sources dealt with approaches to curating and collecting contemporary Brazilian design, namely of exhibitions where design was framed in both national and multidisciplinary terms. A fourth set of sources relates to the media outlets through which I have followed Brazil's news cycles, political discussions and cultural expressions, as well as countless debates across a wide range of topics, issues, communities and subjectivities for over a decade.¹⁰

These secondary sources complemented a set of primary sources that over time became the cornerstone of my research. I began gathering primary-source

9. As a native Portuguese speaker and fluent in English and Spanish, as well as French and Italian, I have been able to access works published beyond the Anglosphere and address most of my interlocutors in their own language.

10. With an emphasis on the media outlets to which I subscribe since 2016: the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper, the online newspaper *Nexo* and the monthly news-magazine *piuí*. I also follow news- and discussion-related podcasts and relevant scholars and opinion-makers on Twitter, which have been crucial for an understanding of contemporary Brazil.

information on my aforementioned first trip to Brazil in 2009, but also in subsequent trips and contacts with Brazilian design system agents. This set of primary sources was highly broadened in 2016 during my second, 92-day research trip to Brazil, which I made in the double capacity of PhD researcher and curator.¹¹ On this trip I conducted a total of 48 recorded oral history interviews, 48 other interviews where I took only handwritten notes and 35 additional informal conversations.¹² Table 1 (pp. 20-21) lists the most relevant interlocutors I met on this trip; Table 2 (p. 22) lists those I met on my last trip to Brazil in 2018, which was centred on attending the MICBR event in São Paulo.¹³ As such, my research was informed by personal conversations with the essential social actors of the design process, but also other relevant agents. As these tables show, I interviewed designers but also urban activists, marketing experts and brand managers, museum directors and curators, design researchers, lecturers and students. These interviews and conversations were supplemented by both brief encounters and personal and professional connections developed over time.

They were also, crucially, informed by personal observation on my travels to over 10 Brazilian cities during my 2016 trip to Brazil, in which I embarked on 33 flights and took countless public transportation rides (I made a point of taking the bus). I witnessed human interactions in public spaces such as airports, bus stations, museums and shopping centres, high-end furniture stores and street markets. But also in domestic environments, such as the residences of interviewees I visited briefly or the homes of friends where I spent the night. I spoke in design schools, such as ESDI in Rio de Janeiro, Belas Artes in São Paulo and the Faculty of Architecture and Design of the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte, as well as Adélia Borges 'Design e Brasilidade' [Design and Brazilianness] course at SESC's Research and Training Centre in São Paulo. I sat in Marcos de Sousa Braga and Priscila Farias' class at the University of São Paulo's graduate programme. I attended the opening of the São Paulo Art Biennial and of the São Paulo Design Weekend, as well as several seminars, product and book launches. I joined a large protest against Dilma

11. I gathered the resources for this trip from my exhibition curator's fee and from funding awarded by the V&A to CDP students for travel expenses.

12. Upon my return to Lisbon I also conducted several online conversations and exchanged emails/messages with designers I did not have a chance to meet in person in Brazil, but whose work I selected for Brazil Today.

13. MICBR or Creative Industries Market was promoted by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture and Apex Brasil, Brazil's export agency, from 6-10 November, 2018. It gathered cultural agents from eight South American nations in São Paulo. I was invited to attend it as a curator, following a recommendation from the Centro Brasil Design.

Rousseff's impeachment in São Paulo and interviewed the designer Amanda Santana during a protest against the defunding of the Fundação Nacional do Índio (National Indian Foundation, FUNAI) In Rio de Janeiro. I attended a showing of 'Futuro Junho', which was followed by an affecting conversation between director Maria Augusta Ramos and the essayist João Moreira Salles on this documentary about the social context of the June 2013 demonstrations. I spent nine days in João Pessoa at NDesign, the national design student convention. In Campina Grande, also in the north-eastern state of Paraíba, I interviewed the designer Sérgio Mattos and in Farroupilha, in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, I met the Grendene design team at the headquarters of Brazil's largest shoe manufacturer. I visited the town of Bento Gonçalves for the third time in eight years to attend Salão Casa Brasil, the country's largest furniture fair (where I tried, and failed, to interview the magazine editor and curator Maria Helena Estrada). I went to Florianópolis, twice, to interview Gui Bonsiepe (I missed him the first time). My busy interview schedule allowed for chance encounters, such as the one with the designer Aguilar Selhorst in Curitiba, which I interviewed right after I learned about the ankle bracelet designed at his firm during my conversation with the managers of the Centro Brasil Design. In Belo Horizonte I interviewed the editors of *Piseagrama* magazine, whose 'Non-Electoral Campaign' I had first seen on the website of 'Cidade Gráfica' – an exhibition curated in 2015 by designers Elaine Ramos, Celso Longo and Daniel Trench, which was vital to my research and curatorial selection. In Recife I paid my third visit since 2009 to the researchers of O Imaginário and the potters of Cabo Santo Agostinho, a community on the outskirts of Recife they have worked with since 2003. I visited the handicrafts market of Caruaru, once Brazil's largest, only to be confronted with its utter contemporary irrelevance. In the 24 hours I spent in Belém, I interviewed the designer, film director and champion of Brazilian design institutionalisation, Fernanda Martins. In Porto Alegre I attended Tereza Bettinardi's talk at the DiaTipo RS typography conference and interviewed José Antônio Verdi about his work for Belo Horizonte's MOVE bus system, which I first saw in the 2015 Brazilian Design Biennial catalogue. Our conversation, as so many of my interactions with agents of a community I created through my research, strengthened my commitment to understanding and interpreting the context and conditions of design practice in Brazil. The references to such personal conversations and observations I make throughout this thesis emphasise their key contributions.

TABLE 1

Research trip to Brazil, June 28 - September 28, 2016. Main locations and interlocutors

—	SÃO PAULO	19/7	[R] Mauricio Noronha, Rodrigo Brenner Product designers, Furf design	—	BELÉM
28/6	[C] Marcelo Rosenbaum Designer		[R] Bruno Faucz Product designer	29/7	[R] Fernanda Martins Designer, researcher
29/6	[I] Andrea Bandoni Designer		[C] Fabio Lopez Type and graphic designer	—	NOVA COLÔMBIA
1/7	[R] José Luiz Ripper Product designer, PUC Rio professor		[C] Paulo Biacchi Product designer	2/8	[I] Marcelo Rosenbaum Product designer
	[R] João Victor Azevedo Product designer		[R] Tassio Costa Design student, UFPE (Recife)	3/8	[I] João Castanho Neto Brand strategist
—	RIO DE JANEIRO		[R] Renato Mesquita Design student, UFG (Goiânia)	4/8	[I] Mônica Barroso Instituto AGT manager
5/7	[R] Zoy Anastassakis Designer/Anthropologist, ESDI director		[R] Germano Portela Design student, UFPI (Teresina)	5/8	[I] Simone Bauch Environmental economist
6/7	[R] João de Souza Leite Design historian	20/7	[R] Mariana Barbosa, Filipe Lima Design students, UFBA (Salvador)	—	SÃO PAULO
	[R] Paula de Oliveira Camargo Designer, Rio Design Centre director		[R] Auresnede Pires Stephan Designer, professor and curator	17/8	[I] Adélia Borges Design curator
	[I] Ana Luiza Nobre Architect and scholar		[C] Futuro do NDesign N Design Plenary session	18/8	[I] Paula Dib Product designer
7/7	[R] Bel Lobo, Bob Neri, Mari Travassos Architects, m.o.o.c	22/7	[R] Valêssa Cruz Design student, UFCG (C. Grande)		[I] Rodrigo Calixto Furniture designer
8/7	[R] Ângela Carvalho, Nuno F. Sousa Product designers		[R] Mario Castello Design student, UFPR (Curitiba)		[C] Regina Galvão Design journalist and editor
	[I] Clara Meliande Graphic designer, critic		[R] Carlos Haide Design student, UFMA (São Luís)	22/8	[R] Leonardo Massarelli Designer, Questto Nó
11/7	[R] João de Souza Leite Design historian		[R] Gabriela Machado Design student, UFPE (Recife)	23/8	[R] André Torretta Marketing specialist
12/7	[R] Bernardo Senna Product designer		[R] Lucas Mendes Pinheiro Design student, UFBA (Salvador)	23/8	[C] Guilherme Falcão, Tereza Bettinardi Graphic designers, Escola Livre
13/7	[R] Jonathan Nunes Graphic designer		[I] Romero Sousa Fashion designer		[R] Gerson Oliveira, Luciana Martins Product designers, ,Ovo
	[I] Amanda Santana Designer and activist, Tucum	—	CAMPINA GRANDE	—	BELO HORIZONTE
	[R] Zoy Anastassakis Designer/Anthropologist, ESDI director	25/7	[R] Sérgio Mattos Product designer		[I] Roberto Andrés, Fernanda Regaldo Editors, <i>Piseagrama</i> magazine
14/7	[R] André Villas Boas Communication scholar	—	RECIFE		[I] Wellington Cançado, Renata Marquez Editors, <i>Piseagrama</i> magazine
	[I] Ricardo Ferreira Packaging designer	26/7	[I] Tibério Tabosa Design researcher, O Imaginário		[I] José Alberto Nemer Researcher and curator
15/7	[R] Jessé Souza Sociologist	27/7	[C] Marina Siritto Designer and researcher		[R] Alexandre Mancini Artist
16/7	[R] Gabriel Patrocínio Designer and scholar	25/7	[C] Renata Gamelo Design manager	27/8	[I] Fernando Maculan Architect
—	JOÃO PESSOA		[I] Guilherme Luigi Graphic designer		[C] Nydia Negromonte Artist
18/7	[R] Aline Alencar Design student, UFSC (Florianópolis)		[C] Diego Beja Inglês Architect		[I] Marcelo Drummond Designer, curator

Abbreviations: [R] Recorded Interview [I] Interview with notes [C] Conversation

—	SÃO PAULO	12/9	[C] Renato Imbroisi Textile designer	—	[C] Heloísa Crocco Designer and artist
	[R] Ethel Leon Design historian		[C] Cristiana Pereira Barreto Cultural manager	22/9	FARROUPILHA
28/8	[R] Mario Fioretti Product designer		[C] Elaine Ramos Graphic designer, Ubu Editora	23/9	[I] Maurício Fernandes Product designer, Grendene
	[R] Fernando Prado Product designer		[C] Daniel Trench and Celso Longo Graphic designers		[I] Francine Velho Product designer, Grendene
	[R] Gustavo Chelles Product designer, Chelles & Hayashi	13/9	[R] Guilherme Wentz Product designer		[I] Jacira Lorena Product designer, Grendene
	[I] Isadora Candian dos Santos Designer, Design Possível		[I] Guto Requena Architect and designer	—	PORTO ALEGRE
	[I] Fernando Jaeger Product designer		[C] Patrícia Amorim Design historian	24/9	[I] Rodrigo Leme Product designer, Grupo Criativo
	[R] Rodrigo Almeida Product designer	14/9	[I] Denis Burgierman Journalist and editor	25/9	[C] Nicole Tomazi Product designer
	[I] Fabiana Pelicciari Brand manager, Natura	15/9	[I] Maria Paula Fonseca Brand manager, Natura	26/9	[I] Guilherme Parolin Product designer, Cusco Studio
—	RIO DE JANEIRO		[C] Fernanda Feitosa Director, SP Arte Fair		[I] Henrique Dallmeyer Product designer, Cusco Studio
2/9	[C] Marcos Martins Designer and scholar, ESDI director	—	CURITIBA		
3/9	[C] José Mauro Nunes Economist	16/9	[I] Ana Brum Director, Centro Brasil Design (CBD)		
	[C] Izabelle Vieira Consumption researcher		[I] Juliana Buso Pereira Communication director, CBD		
3/9	[I] Marina Kosovski Product designer, ORB		[I] Aguilar Selhorst Product designer, Megabox design		
	[I] Pedro Évora Architect, Rua Arquitetos	18/9	[I] Ericson Straub Editor-in-chief, <i>abc design</i> magazine		
6/9	[R] Alice Freitas Manager, Rede Asta	19/9	[R] Manoel Coelho Product and graphic designer		
7/9	[I] Diego Uribe, Duke Capellão Architects, MUDA Coletivo	—	FLORIANÓPOLIS		
—	SÃO PAULO	20/9	[R] Gui Bonsiepe Designer, design theoretician		
8/9	[R] Jacqueline Terpins Product designer		[C] Silvia Fernández Design historian		
	[C] Marcos Braga Design historian, FAU/USP		[C] Alexandre Maydana Designer, Jaider Almeida Studio		
	[C] Priscila Farias Design historian, FAU/USP	21/9	[C] Simone Bobsin Design journalist		
9/9	[I] José Machado Product designer		PORTO ALEGRE		
	[I] Patrick Kampff Design manager, Havaianas		[I] José Antônio Verdi Graphic designer, Verdi design		
10/9	[I] Hugo Sigaud Product designer		[R] Nelson Ivan Petzold Product designer		

TABLE 2

Research trip to Brazil, November 5-18, 2018. Main locations and interlocutors

—	SÃO PAULO
6/11	[E] MICBR, Creative Industries Market [I] Maíra Fontenele Santana Design manager, SEBRAE [C] Sérgio Mattos, Nicole Tomazi Product designers [C] Dinalva Campos Head, NACIB- Núcleo de Arte e Cultura Indígena de Barcelos, AM
9/11	[C] Marcelo Rosenbaum Product designer [C] Fabiana Zanin Art director [C] Adriana Benguela Architect, executive director Rosenbaum architecture and design [C] Marcilene Barbosa Artisan, head of Artisan Association, Várzea Quemada [C] Taissa Buescu Editor-in-chief, <i>Casa Vogue</i> [I] Miriam Lerner Director, Museu da Casa Brasileira [C] Giancarlo Latorraca Technical director, Museu da Casa Brasileira
10/11	[I] Jerônimo Villas-Boas Agronomist, Founder of Tupyguá
12/11	[I] Pedro Cresti Brand Manager, Natura [I] Carla Fernandes Brand Manager, Natura
—	BELO HORIZONTE
13/11	[C] Roberto Andrés, Fernanda Regaldo, Wellington Cançado, Renata Marquez Editors, <i>Piseagrama</i> magazine
—	RIO DE JANEIRO
16/11	[I] Laura Taves Architect and designer

A significant part of the value and originality of my research and curatorial process is grounded on my ethnographic approach to this community. Not based on a particular anthropological method, this approach reflects my interest, as a designer and journalist, in addressing the subjects of my research directly, in their own context of practice and of living. I did not, however, set out to conduct an ethnography of how designers work in a particular nation, such as the one anthropologist Keith M. Murphy conducted by following the actors, practises and processes involved in producing Swedish design (2015). Instead, my perspective as a researcher aimed to approach design practice as one of a series of social actions that influence its public perception and interpretation. The other two relevant social actions in this process are the editorial and curatorial approaches that interpret and communicate this practice. In between those social actions, which as I will address are much less on opposite ends of a design system than they may at first appear, are myriad other agents, events and processes that shape a fluid, complex, entangled and fragmented public sphere in which design is presented and debated. That public sphere is the context of my work as a design critic, curator and researcher.

The anthropologist Cláudia Fonseca states that “by aiming to correct all possible defects and thus avoid any criticism, trying to ‘account for everything’ or making ‘the definitive study’ of his subject, the researcher fails to take full advantage of the perspective for which he has opted” (2000, 7). Acknowledging the inevitable limits of the method (whether ethnographic or not), Fonseca adds, “has the opposite effect: it frees the researcher to explore to the full the advantages of his or her proposal” (7).¹⁴ Fonseca’s remarks are relevant to address how I grounded my approach on a triangulation between accessing relevant social actors, understanding how their intentions are translated into initiatives and artefacts, and communicating these intentions to audiences. By combining an attention to intention with wider social observation, and allying the communication of such intentions with the presentation of arguments, my perspective aims to interpret design practice as a social action that is more meaningful and consequent than form giving or service provision. Such a perspective is, evidently, far from objective or neutral.

14. Original quote: “Ao almejar corrigir todos os defeitos possíveis e assim evitar qualquer crítica, ao tentar ‘dar conta de tudo’ ou fazer ‘o estudo definitivo’ de seu tema, o pesquisador deixa de tirar pleno proveito da perspectiva pela qual optou. Reconhecer os limites inevitáveis do método (seja ele etnográfico ou não) tem efeito contrário: libera o pesquisador para explorar ao máximo as vantagens de sua proposta” (Fonseca 2000, 7).

As a Portuguese white, able-bodied, cisgendered gay man, raised in a middle-class, urban family in Lisbon, I am aware of how my origins and socio-political context have shaped my identity and access to goods, services, knowledge and other resources necessary for my academic and professional career. Siding with the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos when he considers Portugal as a semiperipheral country (2009), I nevertheless assume my country's subaltern condition to other core European and North-Atlantic nations contributes to my own positionality as a writer, critic, curator and researcher. I have been made particularly aware of this semiperipheral condition when working abroad, where I was confronted with my origins in remarkably different professional and personal contexts.¹⁵ Yet I was acutely aware of this condition when developing my MFA thesis research in New York in 2008-10. Coming from a small country with one of the most open and least developed economies in Western Europe meant that I often encountered a remarkable lack of knowledge about its history, geography and culture. This gave me a sense of humility and empathy towards the people and cultures of other peripheral countries. It also made me aware that because my foreign interlocutors proved largely unaware of Portugal's culture and society, there were somewhat less expectations and thus less room for stereotypes associated to the results of design practice in Portugal than there are, I also found, to those from Brazil, for instance. My research interest in Brazilian design is thus driven by a curiosity regarding what is it like to be a designer in a country that in spite of our shared past and language is remarkably different from mine. Differences in the nature, size and complexity of these two societies and economies, but especially in their internal consumption markets, provide entirely different national contexts for design practice. Throughout my career as a design critic, curator and researcher I have attempted to explore and compare these differences, as well as the tensions they create and the issues they raise. I have also realised that much of journalistic coverage, as well as academic research and curatorial practice conducted in central nations about design in the periphery, is often affected by a disregard or dismissal of local socio-economic context, history and culture. Such approaches therefore rely on the exacerbation of identity and a superficial celebration of alterity, as I elaborate in chapter 2.

15. I worked as a graphic design intern at Leo Burnett Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) in 2003 and as a grant holder at Fabrica, Benetton's communication research centre in Treviso (Italy) in 2004-05.

That said, while developing this thesis I have been keenly aware of how my European origins and status as both the curator of an upcoming exhibition at MUDE in Lisbon and PhD researcher at the V&A and the University of London, but also my domain of the English language and privileged access to international institutions and publications, positively influenced my interactions with Brazilian design system agents. In addition, I acknowledge such interactions, as well as my analysis and findings, may be interpreted as replicating the logic of an outsider from a central nation. But also, in the context of the historical connections between Portugal and Brazil, from a former coloniser drawing conclusions about the contemporary society of a former colony. Due to my national and social origins, but also to my education and professional experience, I have also been able to integrate a restricted circle of professionals that constitute a still mainly Anglo-Eurocentric or Western design system. The social origins, cultural biases and personal connections of the professionals that make up this system are still far from representative of the breadth of design as a global activity and culture. Nevertheless, this collective subject has for decades determined the institutional agenda, academic treatment and conceptual framework through which topics and issues pertaining to design are addressed and presented to audiences both within and beyond its public sphere. This thesis is a product of this circuit. As such, one of my most significant challenges as a researcher working in between nationalities, institutions and cultures is then, in addition to acknowledging the privileges and limitations of my position, to avoid the rather common – even when not explicit or admitted – othering of subjects and objects found outside of and brought to this system. I consider this transcultural challenge has defined my perspective and profession as an interpreter of design.¹⁶

I address such challenge by interpreting design as an activity enmeshed in the everyday. I also acknowledge that its practice is determined by the provision of a service the results of which, as I address in this chapter, are influenced by a wide range of agents beyond designers and their clients. By being committed to its agents and their context of practice, I aim to reveal the achievements,

16. The curator Paola Antonelli defended the role of design interpreter in a conversation that took place at the 'Design 06' conference, organised at the Vienna University of Applied Arts in 2006, which I attended and reviewed for *icon* magazine (Duarte 2006). It was Antonelli's call for interpreters between an "inner circle of design" and a general audience, and her argument that design must boost its public recognition through exhibitions, collections and the media, that in 2006 I decided to end my career as a designer and start a career as a design journalist, critic and curator.

but also the compromises and shortcomings of each instance of this service. I do so by employing my own education and experience as a designer. My understanding of the design process has crucially informed my interactions with design system agents and allowed me to better reveal and interpret the intentions and conditions of design practice beyond the dimensions of personal expression or authorship.¹⁷ My engagement to the context and the protagonists of the design process ultimately allow me to offer more than what the design critic Rick Poyner considers to be the most basic service provided by criticism: championing the new (2006). In the case of design in and from Brazil, such engagement entails gathering knowledge, especially from primary sources, regarding local conditions and subjectivities. This effort demands a transcultural preoccupation with speaking with and listening to a diverse range of individual and collective subjects, in their own language. Through my commitment to understanding and interpreting the complex contexts presented to the community of agents to which this thesis is dedicated, I have aimed to create a space for a more balanced and empathic relationship between researcher and research subjects. But also, as the curator of an exhibition, between the institution of the design museum and its constituencies. In the following sections I introduce the institutional framework of Brazil Today and the co-related research goals and questions this thesis seeks to accomplish and address.

17. Although my undergraduate education in communication design has given me a particular sensibility and specific knowledge that may reflect a personal bias towards this design discipline, in my career as a design journalist, critic, curator and educator I have addressed key contemporary issues and protagonists in a wide range of design disciplines, dimensions and contexts.

1.2. Institutional framework, curatorial criteria and research questions

In 2015 I was invited by Bárbara Coutinho, the director of MUDE, to curate an exhibition dedicated to Brazilian design. This exhibition would follow a survey exhibition of Portuguese furniture, fashion and jewellery design she curated in 2015, titled ‘How do you pronounce design in Portuguese?’.¹⁸ As a journalist, critic and researcher with knowledge of Brazilian design, I was invited to curate the second of a series of exhibitions organised by MUDE dedicated to design in the Portuguese-speaking world.¹⁹ Initially planned for 2018, the exhibition was anticipated to the Autumn of 2017 so to be included in the programme of the ‘Lisbon 2017: Ibero-American Capital of Culture’ festival, in the context of which MUDE organised three exhibitions.²⁰ The chosen venue for these exhibitions was the Calheta Palace, in Lisbon’s western borough of Belém.²¹ Organised outside Brazil by a public museum, what became the largest exhibition of Brazilian design in Portugal did not benefit from any kind of sponsorship from Brazilian state institutions or corporations. It was also a nation-specific exhibition curated by a foreign, freelance curator. As such, in its institutional framework Brazil Today was rather original, especially considering

18. This was the largest survey exhibition of Portuguese contemporary design since ‘(P): Design de Portugal 1990-2014’, an exhibition of Portuguese architecture, product and graphic design commissioned by the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic that opened at the Milan Triennale during a state visit of President Jorge Sampaio to Italy in November 2004. I assisted Guta Moura Guedes in curating and designing the display of the exhibition’s product design section.

19. The first was organised on the occasion of the Year of Brazil in Portugal, celebrated in 2012. ‘Brazilian Design – Modern and Contemporary Furniture’ was a touring exhibition organised and curated by the Brazilian collector Raul Schmidt Felipe Jr. and the designer Zanini de Zanine, which presented 80 furniture and lighting items mainly belonging to Schmidt’s collection. This exhibition was also organised in Berlin, London, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília and Salvador da Bahia between 2012 and 2014.

20. MUDE’s two other exhibitions that took place during this one-year programme of events and exhibitions dedicated to the cultures of the Iberian Peninsula, Central and South America were ‘New World: Visions through the Ibero-American Design Biennial 2008-2016’, a ten-year retrospective of the Madrid-based Ibero-American Biennial, curated by Bárbara Coutinho (22.04-06.08.2017) and ‘So Much Sea: Transatlantic flows through design,’ dedicated to design exchanges between Portugal and Brazil, curated by Bárbara Coutinho and Adélia Borges (10.03-15.07.2018).

21. Built in the seventeenth century as a noble summer residence, from 1906 to the 1990s this palace housed Portugal’s Colonial Agricultural Museum. The museum and surrounding tropical botanical gardens were mainly dedicated to archiving and displaying natural and man-made artefacts collected in scientific expeditions to former Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. Besides the palace’s classified tile panels, the museum’s holdings include significant collections of ethnography, photography and oral history, as well as some of Portugal’s most prized herbarium and xylarium. Mostly inactive since its incorporation in the University of Lisbon’s Museum of Natural History and Science in 2014, the palace was used by MUDE as an exhibition venue after the museum’s own building in downtown Lisbon was closed for renovation in 2016.

most nation-specific curatorial approaches to design tend to be either trade or state exhibitions.

Trade exhibitions are usually promoted by entities dedicated to fostering trade, industry and exports from a given nation or region.²² These exhibitions tend to favour aspects of design such as technological innovation, commercial appeal or market competitiveness. Often taking place in association with sector-driven trade fairs and other business-oriented contexts, they are commonly pragmatic in their presentation of products that are ‘Made in Brazil’ or, as most commonly found in labels of Brazilian manufactured goods, ‘Indústria Brasileira’ [Brazilian Industry]. In turn, state exhibitions usually take place in museums and other cultural institutions, as well as in the context of international design festivals or events.²³ They are often organised as cultural diplomacy efforts, associated with state visits or the celebration of relevant events or national dates.²⁴ If trade exhibitions tend to emphasise design as an economic activity grounded on innovation and originality, state exhibitions emphasise it as an expression grounded on origin, culture and identity and ultimately, ideology.²⁵ In either case, nationality is generally employed as a straightforward organising principle or curatorial criterium by their promoters, which the art curator Adriano Pedrosa’s claims has more frequently to do with “bureaucratic, political, and diplomatic necessities, or limitations in budget or research, than true curatorial investigation or relevance” (2013, 130). That said, while nationality was defined by MUDE’s director as the main curatorial criterium of Brazil Today, I was given full autonomy in its interpretation. As such, the selection of results of contemporary design practice in Brazil shown in this exhibition

22. Such as the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, Apex-Brasil.

23. The two most common institutional configurations defining nation-specific representations of design in such showcases are the national pavilion and the guest country exhibition. The former relates to the nineteenth-century model of the World’s Fair and International Exhibitions and has been adopted most notably by the Venice Architecture Biennale, the Milan Triennale or the London Design Biennale. The latter has been adopted by the Porto Design Biennale, the Saint-Étienne Design Biennale and, as addressed in chapter 3, by the Brazilian Design Biennial.

24. Two examples of such exhibitions are the aforementioned ‘(P): Design de Portugal 1990-2014’ and ‘From the Margin to the Edge: Brazilian art and design in the 21st century,’ organised at Somerset House during the 2012 London Olympics.

25. A notable case of this approach is the aforementioned exhibition ‘How do you pronounce design in Portuguese?’. Following its six-month presentation at MUDE, it travelled overseas as a state-sponsored design showcase, adopting more abridged configurations and even different titles in the following presentations: ‘Formas de una identidad (1950-2015)’, Central de Diseño (DIMAD) Madrid, 2016; ‘Design en Portugais: formes d’une identité’, Ancienne Usine Électrique, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 2017; ‘How do we pronounce design in Portuguese?’, Sol Koffler Gallery, Rhode Island School of Design, 2018.

demonstrate my power and authority as a curator to deliberate, interpret and discuss the contributions of designers to their own local contexts, as well as to the public perception of design. This is an important point, for Brazil Today allowed me to explore my own set of criteria for a nation-specific design exhibition. The first of such goals is the main argument of this thesis: communicating the causes and consequences of contemporary Brazilian design through a concern with the context of its practice over the expression of a national identity.

My other main curatorial criterium and goal has been was aptly introduced by Andrew Blauvelt and Ellen Lupton in the catalogue essay of 'Graphic Design: Now in Production,' the exhibition they curated in 2011 at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. In this essay, the two curators mention several challenges of developing a museum exhibition that encompassed worldwide graphic design production since 2000. These include defining the exhibition's timeframe and the boundaries of a field that encompasses a plethora of disciplines, forms and genres (Lupton and Blauvelt 2011, 9). I find this challenge, in which they disclose the exhibition's selection criteria, particularly pertinent to my thesis:

A third challenge is to address the difference between a curated exhibition and those mounted by professional trade organizations. Such profession-based shows, often coordinated around an open call for entries, typically employ a jury of peers to recognize individual designers' achievements. In contrast, this exhibition is not an attempt to select the best logo or book designs of the decade; rather, we have selected the works on view in relation to a curatorial framework or thesis. Undoubtedly, some of these projects have been honored and awarded by various professional groups over the years. However, because our focus is on ways that contemporary designers are using their talents to create, author, edit, produce, publish, and distribute works, our exhibition is not an exhaustive attempt to showcase the work of 'deserving' designers (a list so long we could not shelter them in one museum, let alone in a couple of galleries). Nor is this exhibition an overview of typical works encountered in daily life. Instead, we have sought out innovative practices that are pushing new discourses of design in new directions, expanding the language of the field by creating new tools, strategies, vocabularies, and content (Lupton and Blauvelt 2011, 10).

I developed this thesis and the exhibition it addresses with similar criteria and goals to Lupton and Blauvelt's, in particular regarding my focus on practices that push new discourses in design. Yet the curatorial framework of Brazil Today, as well as this thesis, included other criteria, goals and research questions. The first upholds the curation of design across disciplines: by

conscientiously opting not to be specific in its disciplinary scope, I take a broader, multidisciplinary view of design as a subject matter. This view allows for a wider analysis of contemporary design as an expanded field, where boundaries between disciplines and categories are often blurred. The second aims to discuss the notion of ‘the local’: by acknowledging the plural, hybrid, dynamic and complex nature of Brazilian society, but also the inherently transnational nature of design practice, I intend to question the existence of a nation-specific design practice that justifies a nation-specific design exhibition and/or collection. My third goal upholds eschewing any idea of neutrality in both design and curatorial practice; through an appreciation of design artefacts that goes beyond their formal or metaphorical qualities, I favour a more critical and inherently political view of design’s social and cultural impact. This means approaching design artefacts not only as commodities or benign indicators of originality, innovation, progress or development, but as critical instances of the social worlds that originated them. My fourth goal regards the role of designers as the protagonists of a curatorial discourse on design, on which I elaborate in the following section.

These key research goals lead me to introduce this thesis main research question, which determines its ultimate application by its host institution, the V&A: *How should local, culturally distinctive artefacts that result from contemporary design practice in Brazil be exhibited, interpreted and collected by an international design museum?* This more general question encompasses the following, more specific questions:

1. What are the challenges and limitations, but also the advantages, of transcultural approaches to contemporary design?
2. How can an ethnography-based research contribute to a more constructive and respectful transcultural curatorial approach to design practice?
3. How did the 2004-14 decade influence contemporary design practice in Brazil and what is the knowledge created and gathered during this period worth exhibiting and collecting by an international design museum?
4. What is the aspirational quality of contemporary design worth expressing and upholding in curatorial approaches?
5. How can a design discourse contribute to shift such aspirational quality from notions of individualism, elitism and short-term, market-oriented goals, towards notions such as interdependence and collective action, as well as long-term, publicly-minded concerns?

6. What is the role of the design curator in an increasingly fragmented public sphere of design?
7. How can design museums contribute to a defence of the public good, on local and global level?
8. Can the context, causes and consequences of design practice be revealed through the exhibition medium?
9. How can a subject-centred curatorial discourse that considers designers as the protagonists of the design process be crafted through a medium that is fundamentally grounded on objects?
10. How can the inherently collective, complex and often compromised nature of the design process be communicated beyond the scope of individual contributions from designers?
11. What is the most appropriate museum model for the display, interpretation and collection of contemporary design artefacts?

In the following chapters I discuss how these questions shaped Brazil Today's curatorial framework by critically engaging with theoretical positions on design, as well as curatorial, editorial and historical approaches to contemporary Brazilian design. To better situate my research in disciplinary terms and clarify key concepts it addresses, in the following sections I present definitions of design that inform this thesis and discuss the contemporary public sphere to which it aims to contribute.

1.3. Understanding contemporary design practice

In this section I introduce definitions of design employed throughout this thesis, which elucidate conceptual and more pragmatic approaches to contemporary design practice. In the essay 'The Social Life of Design' (2013), the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai observes in that even in the simplest of societies, the most important product of design is ordinary life itself. It is, he adds, "the product of unrelenting efforts to make sure that catastrophic change, entropy, disenchantment, and weak attachment did not take the toll they so easily could" (254). Geared towards the production of ordinary life, design is thus "only partly a specialist activity, confined to an artisanal or digital class, and is better seen as a fundamental human capacity and a primary source of social order" (254). Stating that we all engage, on a daily basis, in deploying "our energies, our resources, our ideas, and our bodies as to accomplish results that meet our aspirations" (254), Appadurai echoes the oft-quoted definition of design by the economist and political scientist Herbert Simon: "To design is to devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (1996, 111).

The designer Ezio Manzini presents a variation of Simon's definition that opens up design practice beyond the realm of the design professional, the design expert or indeed the individual. For Manzini, design is "a culture and a practice concerning how things ought to be in order to attain desired functions and meanings" (2015, 53). This description emphasises an approach to design that goes beyond the more immediate and utilitarian concerns of problem-solving or surface-styling that have historically characterised this activity. Manzini's approach aims to express, in a more explicit manner, the agency of an individual or collective subject consciously reacting to a present context through the practice of design. In his emphasis on meaning, Manzini signals an awareness of how language, culture and politics underlie design practice as a collective act. By adding culture to practice, Manzini, much like Appadurai and Simon, claims design to be something larger than the actions, and agency, of its practitioners. He thus describes design to take place "within open-ended co-design processes in which all the involved actors participate in different ways" (53). He thus defines this activity as "a human capability that everyone can cultivate and which for some – the design experts – becomes a profession" (53). The role of design experts is, then, "to trigger and support these open-ended co-design

processes, using their design knowledge to conceive and enhance clear-cut, focused design initiatives” (53).

I borrow Manzini’s term ‘design initiative’ and henceforth employ it in this thesis to describe the main outcome of design practice. Design initiatives are, Manzini adds, “coherent sequences of design actions geared to trigger and support a co-design process”, as well as “single design interventions in design processes by design experts” and “projects that are clearly defined in terms of time and mode, conceived and developed by equally well-defined entities: designing coalitions, design agencies, or individual designers” (51). A more encompassing term than product, service or project, design initiative claims first that the main purpose of design is not to conceive artefacts but establish relationships between human and non-human agents. In this regard, design initiative also echoes Gui Bonsiepe’s approach to design. By focusing on the operational or performative character of material and semiotic artefacts, Bonsiepe argues that an analysis of their function and functionality is thus guided “not in terms of physical efficiency as happens in engineering, but in terms of behaviour inserted in a cultural and social dynamic” (2011, 1).²⁶ Determining behaviour as the effective operational field of design opens up a wide range of possibilities and impacts for its practice, not all of which are benign.²⁷ The notion of design initiative also embodies the negotiations, compromises and contingencies that are inherent to the design process, thus reflecting the updatable, adaptable and ultimately unstable or obsolescent nature of artefacts reproduced in a serial mode of production according to a given design. Finally, this term considers how several design disciplines may be embodied and expressed in the same outcome or result of a particular design effort. But also how this effort may result in several initiatives generated by different design disciplines.

In this thesis I describe the outcomes or results of the design process that leads to design initiatives and to design artefacts. When such an artefact is materialised through this practice, it is but one manifestation of the intricate web of agency, intentions, negotiations and compromises of the individuals

26. Original quote: “El diseño enfoca al carácter operativo o performativo de los artefactos materiales y semióticos, interpretando la función y la funcionalidad no en términos de eficiencia física como pasa en las ingenierías, sino en términos de comportamiento insertado en una dinámica cultural y social” (Bonsiepe 2011, 1).

27. For example, as the social psychologist Shoshana Zuboff observes, corporations such as Google employ sophisticated design processes to influence the actual behaviour of their customers as it occurs in the real spaces of everyday life (2019, 104).

involved in this relationship, not all of whom are, as we've seen, designers. Appadurai mentions the processes that ground the design of social order "are the backdrop and social ground from which professional design, the making of iPods and glassware and houses and book covers and toys and watches, actually takes off" (254). This observation emphasises not the singular role of designers as authors or form givers, but their double role as interpreters of social worlds and participants of design processes that lead to design initiatives and, ultimately, to artefacts. It also indicates a significant and demanding challenge of curating contemporary design: foregrounding the distributed agency of design practice, the conditions of its context and the contingent nature of its results, while highlighting the specific agency and intellectual contribution of designers to its process. As such, I consider designers are, either as collective or individual subjects, the protagonists of a curatorial discourse on design.

This approach may seem paradoxical, even confounding, yet it considers designers the indispensable actors of the design process. As design historian Victor Margolin argues, "because design originates with the individual designer or design team, even if others shape the conditions of work, a world history of design must inevitably be a narrative in which designers as social actors play an important role" (2005, 240). This implies acknowledging the causes and consequences of design actions. Affirming design results from the decisions and choices of human beings, the design scholar John Heskett adds that while the influence of context and circumstance may be considerable, "the human factor is present in decisions taken at all levels of design practice" (2003, 5). With choice, he claims, comes responsibility: "Choice implies alternatives in how ends can be achieved, for what purposes, and for whose advantage" (5). This means, Heskett concludes, that "design is not only about initial decisions or concepts by designers, but also about how these are implemented and by what means we can evaluate their effect and benefit" (5). Appadurai elaborates on this observation in his comparison between what are two design dimensions:

Design has tended to be oriented to objects, to consumers, and to markets. It is built on the triangle between art, engineering, and merchandising. Planning is about collective goals, long-term benefits, and bigger contexts than the individual product, consumer, or household. [...] Where design can be caught up in an immediate need, trend, or material opportunity, planning aspires to be design with a social conscience and to connect the world of goods to the world of politics, justice, and long-term resource constraints (Appadurai 2013, 266).

What at first appears to be a terminological or disciplinary limitation is, in fact, a critical observation of the social perception of design beyond its profession. Associating design with short-term, market-oriented results and planning with socially minded, long-term outcomes, Appadurai suggests that by connecting these two dimensions through an emphasis on sustainability – “a vexed word for which we have no substitute” (266) – we can interrogate and discuss their intentions and uncertainties, costs and results (267). He observes how often a blind belief in the market as a “natural regulator of all human transactions and as somewhat magical source of perfect solutions to most social problems” (267) must be replaced by a critical standpoint regarding the ability of the market to deliver desirable social outcomes, even in the short run (267). Appadurai urges designers (and others) to “think through how planning, sustainability, and design can best work together, both as correctives to market failure and as sources of social policy that do not rely entirely on efficiencies measured by price and consumer demand” (267). For this, he adds, “We need to make better designs for planning and improve the planning contexts for social design, so that these two activities become more fruitfully meshed in developing solutions for the short- and long-terms” (267).

This observation is particularly relevant for my discussion, in the following chapter, of a shift in the dominant design discourse that took place in the 1990s, but also to my curatorial approach to Brazilian contemporary design. Grounded on identifying and interpreting the intervention of design experts in a design process as a kind of knowledge that is not restricted to aesthetic judgment or the making of formal decisions, this approach aims to foster a more meaningful relationship between the designers and the constituencies ultimately they mean to serve. Within and beyond, as we will see, the client-service provider relation that conventionally determines most of design practices. It promotes not just the public recognition of designers as relevant social actors but also provides them a voice in national and global debates, while encouraging the participation of citizens in the design of their communities and their futures. As Appadurai argues, if we recognise that common citizens have significant capacities to plan and design their own futures, “we will find stronger connections between our ideas and the values and motives of those whom we actually claim to serve and to represent” (267). In the following section I discuss how design curators and critics such as myself connect to such common citizens in a public sphere.

1.4. The design curator and critic in the public sphere of design

In this section I elaborate on the role of the design curator and the design critic in a public sphere that extends beyond the design system. Understanding such role and the nature of this public sphere situates my thesis' research goals and questions, as well as the intentions and ambitions of my curatorial approach to Brazilian contemporary design. Even though the professional field of design curation has traditionally been associated with scholars of applied/decorative arts, art history or conservation, since the 2000s an increasing number of curators with academic affiliations and professional backgrounds in design and architecture, journalism and the humanities began working at or with museums specialised in design.²⁸ As these individuals circulate between museums and magazines, they reinforce a symbiotic institutional relationship established over decades, as several of the latter predate the former. This relationship has fostered many productive institutional synergies and collaborations. It has also created a shared public sphere that equates readers and visitors in a global audience for editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to design. This institutional relationship has promoted a restricted circle of agents, which mainly originates from, is educated in or works at institutions found in the Western/Northern hemispheres. The nature of this circle has long had a particularly significant effect in transcultural approaches to design in peripheral nations. In the twenty-first century however, a Western hegemony over the global design system has been called into question by the fragmentation of this public sphere. Such fragmentation began with the demise of the design magazine.

Design publications have for decades been primarily aimed at design system agents, namely design professionals (and students) of design's wide

28. Notable individuals that since 2000 held senior editorial and curatorial positions (in museums and other institutional configurations, such as design biennials) include: Johanna Agerman-Ross (*icon*, *Disegno*/V&A); Stefano Boeri (*domus*/Triennale di Milano); Giovanna Borasi (*Abitare*/Canadian Center for Architecture); Adélia Borges (*Design e Interiores*/Museu da Casa Brasileira); Brendan Cormier (*Volume*/V&A); Ole Bouman (*Archis*, *Volume*/Design Society); Beatrice Galilee (*icon*/Lisbon Triennale, Metropolitan Museum of Art); Joseph Grima (*domus*/Istanbul Design Biennial/Museum of Italian Design); Priya Khanchandani (*icon*, Design Museum); Amelie Klein (*die Presse*/Vitra Design Museum); Kieran Long (*icon*, Architects' Journal/V&A, ArkDes); Justin McGuirk (*icon*, Design Museum); Riya Patel (*icon*, Aram Gallery); Alice Rawsthorn (*International Herald Tribune*/Design Museum); Marco Sammiceli (*Abitare*/Museum of Italian Design); Deyan Sudjic (*Blueprint*, *domus*/Design Museum); James Taylor-Foster (*Archdaily*/ArkDes); Christopher Turner (*icon*, London Design Biennale/V&A), Fleur Watson (*Monument*/Centre for Architecture Victoria).

range of disciplines – from architecture to advertising, fashion to typography. Available in newsstands and by subscription, they address varying audiences depending on their regional, national or linguistic reach.²⁹ Some have long histories and considerable teams of editors and contributors. Other are conceived as short-term experiments with a limited thematic scope or number of issues.³⁰ These magazines have granted several generations of designers access to the design system, both as their readers and protagonists. Design magazines have also informed design system agents about the work of critics and curators, providing readers with details about the creation of museums and collections, the organising of exhibitions and other curatorial initiatives. Most importantly, they have published critical reviews of such initiatives, which aside from offering information foster reflection, analysis and consequential debates on design practice. Being primarily aimed at practitioners, they have played a critical role in driving the discourse and informing the practice of design's many disciplines. Design magazines are therefore essential institutions of the design system. Whether they act as critics, mediators, tastemakers or gatekeepers, the influence of their editors over the agenda and discourse of design is paramount.

The considerable changes in the media landscape of design that occurred since the 1990s have significantly challenged the design magazine as an institution. A first major change took place with the rise in number and influence of magazines dedicated to interior decoration, fashion and lifestyle.³¹ Aimed at professionals but also at more general audiences (i.e. the effective and aspirational clients of these magazines), their coverage of the outcomes and protagonists of design practice usually emphasises dimensions such as style, taste and status, to the detriment of more critical approaches to a context of practice or

29. This applies especially to periodicals published in the English language (and also, to a lesser extent, of bilingual publications with English as second language), for they more easily aspire to a global reach in readership, coverage and influence.

30. Examples of such publications are the graphic magazine *Emigré* – published by Emigré fonts in four editorial cycles: 1984-94, 1995-97, 1997-2001, 2001-02 and 2003-05 – and *Works That Work*, published by the Typotheque Type Foundry in the set number of ten issues from 2013 to 2018.

31. Beyond more traditional titles dedicated to interior design such as *Architectural Digest*, founded in California in 1920 and currently boasting seven editions (France, Germany, Spain, Russia, China, Mexico and Latin America), newer titles aimed at an international readership include magazines such as *Elle Decor*, founded in France in 1987 and currently published in 25 countries, as well as *Wallpaper**, founded in London in 1996 as the first lifestyle magazine with a design focus aiming at a truly global readership.

even a scrutiny of the profession.³² In their pages, as well as in the awards and other initiatives promoted to distinguish designers and their work, these magazines tend to downplay design's economic, cultural or social impact beyond its capacity to positively influence the market – especially the markets served by product, furniture and interior designers. The second significant change to the media landscape of design came with the digital revolution. Many established trade publications were slow to understand the potential of the internet, especially the competition from online publishing platforms – such as blogs or digital-only publications – and social media, both in terms of audience and advertising.³³ Several of these magazines have since closed or underwent significant downsizing. Subscriptions and readership among design professionals and students fell drastically, thanks in large part to the explosion of freely distributed online content. This contributed to a further atomisation in the sources of information, inquiry and criticism around design (Kuang 2009).

The demise of trade publications supporting critical, authoritative writing on design also allowed lifestyle publications to editorially define a dominant design discourse, which had a reductive effect on how design is covered, interpreted and discussed. In addition, lifestyle magazines are often the only remaining publications covering design in several markets or languages, exacerbating their effect and influence on a public sphere of design defined by museums, publications and other institutional agents.³⁴ The demise and atomisation of design media reconfigured the media landscape, but also the professions of design writer, critic and editor. As Rick Poynor commented upon the closing of British graphic design magazine *Grafik* in 2011, such reconfiguration has allowed new publishing platforms to emerge and new voices to challenge incumbents in a media landscape under constant creative destruction:

32. I employ the term general audiences in this instance as a way to distinguish such magazines, which also include so-called Sunday newspaper magazines or supplements, from other aimed at specialist or professional audiences. I thus take into account the varying contents, class sensibility and taste of these publications, as well as the often exclusive and elitist (yet also aspirational) lifestyles they promote.

33. The rise of social media from 2006 – the year Facebook opened access to the general public, Google acquired Youtube and Twitter launched its full version – further drove readers and advertisers away from the printed and digital pages of these publications. The 2008 financial crisis exacerbated a generalised upheaval in the media landscape, which profoundly affected the readership, business, staff and, consequently, the influence of design publications and the authority of their editors.

34. This is currently the case for Brazil and Portugal, which lack authoritative trade publications in both design and architecture. The most influential design publication in Brazil is currently *Casa Vogue*, a magazine dedicated mainly to interior design, published in Brazil as a joint venture of the Condé Nast and Globo publishing groups.

For sure, we need more committed design critics, but we also require experienced and knowledgeable editors, who see editing itself as an act of criticism and are able to create imaginative, sympathetic and flexible platforms for critical writing. I hope that graduates of the new design criticism courses will think seriously about the creative and cultural possibilities of editing and publishing and will find ways to build viable new spaces for design writing. There can be no advance in design writing and no new readership without these outlets. As design publications continue to founder, this is a massive practical, financial and intellectual challenge for the next generation of design writers and critics (Poynor 2011).

The establishment of graduate programmes in decorative arts, design history and design curating, as well as the multidisciplinary design writing and criticism graduate courses created in North America and Western Europe that Poynor refers to, have added critical voices to the design system. However, as trade publications closed and opportunities for paid journalism became increasingly rare, writing and especially criticism in design, namely in the form of book and exhibition reviews, shifted partly to peer-reviewed academic journals dedicated to design history and studies.³⁵ These journals have introduced academic rigour and institutional heft to the research and discussion around design, yet as they are hardly accessible beyond their academic contributors and readers, they engage with the design system and influence design discourse much less than design magazines. This exacerbates an already widening chasm between the practice of design and its media coverage.

The fragmentation of design's public sphere has also affected the professional field. The associations, institutes and other institutions created throughout the twentieth century to defend the interests of professional designers have been crucial in determining design's definitions, principles and discourses.³⁶ They have also provided opportunities for discussing the present and future conditions of design practice in congresses, symposia, summits and other events aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at design professionals and students. They have played an unquestionable role in the institutionalisation of design. With the inexorable expansion of design practices, disciplines and

35. These journals include *Design Issues*, established in 1984; *Design and Culture*, established in 2009 by the Design Studies Forum; and *The Journal of Design History*, established in 1988 by The Design History Society.

36. Such as the International Council of Societies of Industrial Designers (ICSID) and the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (Icograda), founded respectively in 1957 and 1963 to represent and voice the contributions of industrial design and graphic design professionals within the post-war, geopolitical redesign of multilateral institutions.

fields of knowledge, these organisations have witnessed growing competition in their struggle for legitimacy and authority. One example of such competition is the proliferation of design awards, events and festivals (biennials, design weeks and other formats), the promoters of which have become relevant design system institutions with widely varying and often contradictory missions, agendas and discourses. In addition, as designers began exploring new territories of practice beyond the conventional service provision to industry and commerce, the public perception and recognition of design have also transcended the activity's traditional agents, institutions and audiences. As such, in this fragmented professional, institutional and media public sphere, who is addressing the public of design within and beyond its system? An answer to this question may be found by contemplating the public of design museums.

The term 'museum visitors' is used interchangeably with audience, public or, in what is a designation more fitting to this thesis, constituency – a group of people with a shared interest. In spite of often marketing-led efforts to segment their audiences, most design museum directors, curators and educators would admit the main audience of their institutions is the general public. This is in fact one of several audiences or constituencies curators address in their work, of which I highlight six key ones: the curator's peers (other curators); the academic community (design scholars, students and educators); the design media (editors, journalists and critics of design, across or within each of its disciplines); the designers (individual or collective authors of the design initiatives chosen to be shown or collected); the clients of design services (public or private commissioners of such initiatives); the general public (the end users of design, that is, anyone). Peers and scholars exert scrutiny and demand academic affiliation; editors, journalists and critics access, interpret and communicate the curator's intentions and achievements to specialist and generalist audiences; designers expect attention to their work, but also to their personal and collective agendas; their clients assume appeasement and compliance to corporate goals and institutional narratives. The general public or rather, common citizens – a term I prefer to other such as general public or ordinary people – expect at best to increase their own limited knowledge of design or at worst to have their own expectations about design to be validated. All six constituencies matter to curators and the institutions they work at, or with. Yet only the latter, which ultimately includes all other five, may be described as a constituency of common citizens. Addressing this latter constituency does not imply thinking

in simplistic, populist, lowest-common-denominator terms. Nor adopting a universalist approach that dispenses with recognising diverse social origins and cultural subjectivities. Mindful of how these different constituencies influence decisions, discourses and reputations on both a personal and institutional level, I argue curators should treat each of them with the consideration but also the critical distance they demand and deserve. Our work implies conversing with peers, championing the work of designers and acknowledging the intentions of their clients or patrons. Yet I am mainly concerned with the role we play as interpreters between designers and common citizens. Aside from selecting, acquiring, keeping and displaying design artefacts and records of the design process, our chief concern should be to make this broadest of constituencies engage with and ultimately care about design. This thesis and the Brazil Today exhibition are grounded on this concern.

As Appadurai argues, “most ordinary people do not experience their social worlds as either planned or designed. They experience these worlds as given, as external to them, as relatively fixed, and as largely indifferent to their own preferences and desires” (2013, 253). As such, the curator’s role entails inviting and empowering visitors to discover, understand and appreciate the contributions of those designing and planning our social worlds. Which are all but given, external to us, or relatively fixed. More than a quest for legitimation of design as a profession, this preoccupation belies an explicit, publicly minded demand for an awareness of design as a relevant social activity, as a culturally consequential practice and, ultimately, as political action. The current expansion and fragmentation of a design public sphere represents an opportunity for such a demand. In addition, because of design’s pervasiveness across social worlds, its public sphere is also larger than the professional classes, scholarly circles or institutional frameworks that define it. As such, the impact of the knowledge created and transferred by design museum curators, as well as the discourse they sustain about the causes and consequences of design, extends well beyond museum walls and their more immediate institutional reimits. That provides design curators with significant autonomy and authority beyond their status as selectors of artefacts for exhibition and collection, promoters of consumption or harbingers of taste. By managing the experiences and expectations not only of the museum’s several constituencies but also of other design system institutions in the larger public sphere of which the museum is an essential agent, curators have a critical responsibility in shaping the present and future public

understanding of design. This signals to the often overlooked yet undeniable political role of the design curator, but also of the design critic.

Design criticism, to employ the broad definition presented by design critic and historian Alice Twemlow, is “a self-conscious and subjective practice of interpreting, discerning among, encouraging or resisting the various aesthetic, moral, environmental, or social repercussions of the ideas, activities and outputs of the design industry” (2013, 10). Although criticism is more usually associated with formats such as the essay, article and book, Twemlow claims it encompasses other formats and institutional activities. These include periodical publications, public programmes, broadcasts, documentary films and exhibitions. Twemlow adds that design criticism involves “the choreographing of any kind of activity through which one’s arguments about the successes, failures, meanings, and social and environmental implications of design might be expressed” (400). Her expanded conception of a critical format helps “to reveal more facets of critical practice than a consideration of only written criticism would allow” (10). As such, “the kinds of criticism conducted through such activities as editing, oration and debate, performance, the assembling and juxtaposing of objects, and the design process have different registers, textures, methods, and audience responses” (10). An analysis of “such modes, means, and sites of engagement contributes to a fuller understanding of criticism as a pervasive force exerting often invisible and unrecognized pressures on the ways in which design is developed, circulated and used” (10).

As a dimension of design criticism, design curation may be considered akin to journalism as both are based on inquiry, interpretation and exposition. In more than metaphorical terms, design curation can be described as akin either to newsroom journalism, when curators adopt a more passive approach to mainly secondary sources, or to investigative journalism, when curators for all effects report from the terrain, speak the subjects’ language, gain knowledge of local context and privileged access to relevant agents and primary sources. Both approaches have their advantages and shortcomings. The former is more detached, generic and discipline-oriented; the latter is more engaged and oriented towards a particular practice, topic or theme, but especially towards the protagonists of a particular community of practice. As such, as I have earlier elaborated it edges closer to ethnography in its demand for a more in-depth, long-term commitment to a research field, subject or context of practice. This approach to curation tends to be more personal and subjective, which often

undermines the necessary critical distance between the curator, other social actors and the constituencies they are meant to serve. Nevertheless, when developing my own curatorial approach along such principles and goals I have found this is often a risk worth taking.

Regardless of origin, positionality or bias, I argue the work of the critic and the curator should be grounded on the provision of a public service. My argument extends to the design museum as an institution. Even when a museum does not belong or is run by a municipal, regional or national government apparatus, it tends to be driven by a publicly-minded mission. As such it is (or should be) much less dependent on market-oriented goals, demands and agents. This public service provides curators with an additional responsibility. They are not only custodians of public collections: they are champions of the public good, of the *res publica*. The commitment and political positioning of the design curator I uphold in this thesis thus seeks to claim this authority and honour such public service. It does so by addressing several constituencies across the public sphere of design – from museum visitors to the readers of a publication or the listeners/viewers of a broadcast about design – and provide them with the interpretation tools and critical arguments regarding design as a practice that has a direct, consequential impact on their social worlds. As such, this public service should ground the common aims, means and often intersecting careers of the design curator and critic – such as myself. In the following chapter I argue how this sense of public service has been challenged by a series of shifts in the dominant design discourse in the last thirty years. I discuss these shifts and their critical effect on approaches to contemporary Brazilian design, including my own.

Critical approaches to shifts in design discourse, identity and autonomy

In this chapter I discuss positions on editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to design that inform the two central arguments of my thesis: a commitment to understanding and interpreting the context of design practice and a defence of the design curator and critic as an eminently public role. I begin my analysis by addressing a shift the dominant system, culture and discourse of design that has since the 1990s influenced approaches to its practice and results. Gui Bonsiepe has addressed this shift in several of his writings (2005, 2008, 2018), including his aforementioned 2011 ‘Diseño y Crisis’ lecture:

It remains to be explained the strange socio-cultural phenomenon in which since the 1990s the concept ‘design’ experienced an explosion in the media, which has led to a loss of rigour in the original meaning, so that in public opinion the term ‘design’ is often reduced to the aesthetic-formal aspects, and associated with the ephemeral, the expensive, the impractical and even superfluous. Designers have been defending themselves against this misunderstanding for decades. They have also been forced to defend themselves against criticisms, at times Manichean and simplistic, that equate design with an instrument of a wasteful economy that fosters the circulation of commodities and stimulates consumerism and profit (Bonsiepe 2011, 4).³⁷

In a later version of this essay, Bonsiepe suggests there is a more than temporal coincidence between the expansion of neoliberalism in the political and economic field and such associations to design. He argues these associations deem a concern with the function of a product or visual communication almost unworthy, celebrating instead the emotionalism and obscurantism so welcomed by backward, instead of forward-looking forces (2012). Indeed, the neoliberal forces that shaped a dominant economic, social and cultural globalisation process following the end of the Cold War have fostered the increasing

37. Original quote: “Queda por explicar el extraño fenómeno socio-cultural a partir de la década de los ‘90 en la que el concepto <diseño> experimentó una explosión en los medios, lo que ha llevado a una pérdida de rigor del significado original, de modo tal que en la opinión pública el término <diseño> es frecuentemente reducido a los aspectos estético- formales, y asociado con lo efímero, lo caro, lo poco práctico y hasta superfluo. Los diseñadores hace décadas se han amparado contra este malentendido. También se vieron obligados a defenderse contra críticas, a veces maniqueístas y simplificadoras que equiparan el diseño a un instrumento de la economía del despilfarro, fomentando la circulación de mercadería estimulando el consumismo y lucro” (Bonsiepe 2011, 4).

financialization and commodification of everyday life and, in what is a transversal feature in my analysis of design discourse, celebrated individual success as the ultimate personal aspiration. As I argue in this chapter, these conditions were essential for the aforementioned shift in design discourse to occur.

Such neoliberal forces also promoted a downsizing of the state, a weakening of institutions and an exacerbation of inequality, in both developed and emerging nations. More specifically in Latin America, the application of Washington Consensus policy reform propositions intensified the participation of the region's nations in a global economy, but also increased their dependence on external forces and the superiority of market-based competition over national sovereignty, democratic values and transnational solidarity. As the observations and positions collected in this chapter demonstrate, the neoliberal cultural moment exacerbated a distancing of design's public recognition from the reality of this practice, already encouraged by art-historical, modernist narratives and discourses. By addressing these narratives and discourses, but also the personal and professional interconnections implicit in these approaches to design from peripheral nations such as Brazil, I aim to demonstrate how designers from these nations have been both included in (and excluded from) a global design system. Furthermore, in this chapter I discuss how neoliberalism, postmodernism and shifts in technology, education and labour relations have reconfigured design as an expanded field and encouraged designers to find new territories for design practice. Under a relative and contingent autonomy, they have challenged disciplinary boundaries, institutional fields and, above all, the profession's conventional relationship to industry and the market. These shifts have affected the aspirations, expectations, social status and public perception of designers and their work in an increasingly fragmented public sphere. They have also affected how editors, curators and other design system agents have communicated and interpreted their work to diverse audiences, by crafting a discourse around the notion of autonomy. I conclude this chapter by refocusing the discussion on Latin America and engaging with authors that aim to reimagine the notion of autonomy in design by defending its commitment to local context, as well as its critical role in the reduction of dependence, the promotion of social equality and the consolidation of democracy.

2.1. Challenging historical narratives and discourses

In the book ‘The Culture of Design’ (2014), the design historian Guy Julier claims “the system of design curatorship, publication and thus stardom draws predominantly on a fine art tradition of representation. In both these cases, the search for and production of novelty and difference are important” (55). Julier adds that much of design history has been written and disseminated to effectively support a system of professionalisation and differentiation of designers and design consultants. This system aims to both inform the public and build a respectable status for the profession (55). Yet by promoting a public recognition of design, as a profession and a product, grounded on a discourse of ‘pioneering modern design heroes,’ design historians have progressively separated the account of design from the reality of its practice (55). Such a discourse has been central to the historiography of design especially since the publication of Nikolaus Pevsner’s ‘Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius’ (1936). Julier adds that Pevsner’s establishment of the “form follows function” canon as the governing design ideology of the 20th century, as well as his attention to the achievements and aspirations of individual architects and designers, supported a narrative that continuously presented these professionals as individual geniuses, innovators and reformers (56). Privileging modernism as the apotheosis of his design narrative, Pevsner represented the work of designers mainly through specific, mostly product design artefacts (56). This narrative and over reliance on a particular design discipline has sustained editorial, curatorial and historical approaches to design for almost a century. To a point that the term design museum and magazine (but also, for example, design store), has come to be associated with three-dimensional products, most of which aimed at the domestic realm.³⁸

Julier argues that design and architecture historians have not been alone in supporting this narrative. Well aware of the “publishability” of a particular project as its guarantor of commercial success, designers themselves promote and actively reify their work, within and beyond design history (2014, 57). They ensure and mark their place in a design canon by having their work featured in the pages of monographic design books, trade and lifestyle magazines, as well

38. This narrative has nevertheless been challenged by several authors, from the architecture historian and critic Reyner Banham in the essay ‘All that Glitters is Not Stainless’ (1966/2010) to the design historian Alexandra Midal in the book ‘Design by Accident: For a New History of Design’ (2019).

as in exhibitions, design fairs, awards and festivals (57). By exploiting the system of design publishing and curatorship, designers build on the way history is written to provide a discursive framework that legitimates their activities. Julier calls this form of self-representation ‘historicity’ (57). He thus argues that this narrative has manifestly separated the actual experiences of the design profession – a “complex, multidisciplinary industry, accustomed to teamwork, stylistic and operational flexibility and active in a broad range of domains of use and exchange” (57) – from discourses upheld by external and internal agents to the profession. Focused on individual biography, originality, creativity and ultimately personal and professional success, such discourses have not only predominated in the articulation of historical experience, but have also determined a benchmark of ethical and formal development through which designers explain and legitimate themselves (58).³⁹

Bonsiepe claims that because such discourses are drawn on a fine art tradition of representation, they impart on a widespread and misleading assumption: by relating design, especially industrial design, to art (either a minor or an applied art), they fail to make the distinction between two fundamentally different realms despite their common roots in the bodily domain and, he adds, the participation in the ‘domain of retinal space’ (1991, 253). These discourses also limit the designer to the role of “an outsider who would raise the profane world of industrial production to the aristocratic realm of culture”(253). Bonsiepe ties this art-historical misinterpretation to an architectural vision of industrial design, which regards this activity as an offspring of modern architecture. Having started not inside industry but “amongst a small group of people outside the industry: members of avant-garde movements in the visual arts and architecture” (253), such a discussion “can be traced back to Walter Gropius’ vision – expounded at the time of the Bauhaus – of architecture as the integrator of all the arts” (253). Bonsiepe claims that by focusing “predominantly on the habitat of urban homes and offices”, this vision became intimately bound up with the morphological aspects of design. As a result, “industrial

39. As Julier observes, this idiosyncratic self-image of the designer belies the influence of art schools in the teaching of design. The experience these schools offer “continues largely to promote a Romantic, marginal vision of itself” (2014, 54). The art and design system, he adds, reproduces and promotes “specific attitudes to what being an artist or designer means and how their lives might be lived” (54). Indeed, only a few months after the Lehmann Brothers collapse that triggered the financial crisis, the art critic Dan Fox wrote ‘A Serious Business’ (2019), a thought-provoking account of the “shortfalls between the way the art system likes to present itself and the reality of working within it”, most of which apply to the contemporary design system.

design was seen mainly as a visual upgrading of a rather small segment of industrial production, aimed at bringing it into line with the formal paradigms of modern architecture ”(253). Implied in this bias in favour of a morphological approach to design artefacts from scholarly approaches to design – stemming either from art history, applied arts or architecture – is a disregard for industrial production. Such disregard has hindered the integration of design into what Bonsiepe calls an industrial culture, in which considerations such as “the technical feasibility of production, costs, pricing, quality control, scheduling, and marketability” are predominant (253). These external agents have thus detached design from the industrial culture where it emerged but also, crucially, from “the background to the daily life of a culture” (253) – that is, the quotidian, contemporary context where design is practised and used. Bonsiepe considers approaches to design that treat it mainly as a visual-aesthetic phenomenon, but also as an expression of individual talent or genius, have also encouraged a struggle for autonomy and legitimacy of design – in its practice and its research – from other disciplines of the arts and the humanities.⁴⁰ However, he observes such approaches to design as an autonomous and legitimate subject of study misinterpret or dismiss the fact that unlike art history, design history is shaped less by a preoccupation with artistic movements, stylistic trends or the trajectories of individuals. It was precisely these art-historical, modern misinterpretations of design and the aforementioned neoliberal cultural moment that grounded key editorial and curatorial approaches to contemporary design from the 1980s onwards, in particular transcultural approaches to design from and in peripheral countries – such as Brazil.

In her analysis of the symbiotic relationship between The Boilerhouse Project and *Blueprint* magazine, Alice Twemlow suggests style became the main focal point in the postmodern appreciation, collection and exhibition of design artefacts from the 1980s onwards. She mentions that “as subject matter, as a mode of visual and verbal expression, and as a ground of practice”, style helped designers distinguish themselves from their competitors (2013, 232).⁴¹

40. This is an issue Bonsiepe has written extensively about, most notably in his 2004 lecture, ‘Die Dialektik von Entwerfen und Entwurfsforschung’, first published in English as ‘The Uneasy Relationship between Design and Design Research’ (Bonsiepe 2007).

41. The Boilerhouse Project was a temporary exhibition space set up at the V&A by furniture and home accessories retailer Terence Conran and headed by the critic and curator Stephen Bayley between 1981 and 1986. Launched in London in 1983 by Peter Murray and Deyan Sudjic, *Blueprint* magazine covered architecture, design and art mainly for a professional audience. Sudjic was the magazine’s editor-in-chief until 1996.

Twemlow adds that The Boilerhouse Project and *Blueprint*, two key design system institutions of the period, also exemplified “a type of commentary about design and style that was sophisticated, polemical, engaging, and largely apolitical and non-ideological” (234). She claims these approaches were aligned with the neoliberal policies fostered by Margaret Thatcher’s governments: “left-leaning critics of the period, interested in design and consumer culture as subject matter, “pointed to the more troubling aspects of the way in which the media conflated design and style with identity and status during the Thatcher era” (233). For these critics, including socialist cultural critic Judith Williamson and cultural theorist Dick Hebdige, such design practice and design commentary perpetuated “the values that led to the irresponsible use of credit, the concealment of real class and racial schisms, society’s separation from the means of production, and its abandonment of communal values” (233).

Such values were equally and affirmatively attributed to design artefacts in editorial and curatorial approaches at these two institutions. As director of The Boilerhouse Project, Stephen Bayley celebrated design as an expression of taste, status and style among a cosmopolitan, cultural and business elite. He based his approach to curation as ‘three-dimensional journalism’ (Farrelly 2017) on celebrating design icons, promoting limited edition creations and provoking audiences with superficially controversial exhibitions of mass-produced consumption products. Through a deliberate focus on individual fame and subjective meaning over adequate function or collective purpose, his approach emphasised the semantic value of design over its utilitarian qualities.⁴² By emptying the appreciation of design from real life concerns and reducing its social purpose to a superficial expression of a designer lifestyle, Bayley crafted design as a seductive, adjectival and aspirational quality expressed in artefacts destined exclusively at an elite, but also transferable to products of mass consumption.⁴³ He also elevated the role of design curator, from scholarly connoisseur or public servant dedicated to educating the middle-class or promoting

42. In his Terence Conran obituary, Bayley mentions how the entrepreneur “turned ‘design’ from being a description of something people do, to a commodity: something you can buy in his shops.” (Bayley 2020). He also claimed the “sublime emptiness” of the Design Museum’s Kensington building, to which it moved in 2016, “hints at the essential vacuity of the subject” (2020).

43. As John Heskett observes, postmodernist ideas in design have been widely appropriated for commercial purposes to convert efficient, inexpensive, and accessible products into new manifestations that are not only useless, expensive and exclusive but that are also drawn into cycles of fashionable change for the primary benefit of manufacturers (2003, 58).

national industry, to the mundane tastemaker of the 1980s ‘designer decade’.⁴⁴ Bayley affirmed the design curator as an outwardly, populist position, with the autonomy and authority over design as a practice, activity and subject matter.⁴⁵ His positions have influenced the collection, trade, publication and curation of such artefacts, but also the shaping of design discourse in which marketing and public relations have come to determine both the practice and public perception of design.⁴⁶

The deliberative power of design curators and editors to identify, in the formal elements of each design artefact, an instance of a particularly coherent way of designing and form-making – a style – warrants a dependable attribution and value to the work of a specific author. Replicating the aforementioned art-historical approach and modernist narrative to design, the identification of a particular style encourages the connection of both subject and objects to movements or trends. It also places both on a disciplinary timeline defined by a Western design or artistic canon. As such, by equating formal expression or other characteristics in the work of one of more individuals with a nationally-defined origin or inspiration, historians, editors and curators have also introduced the notion of a national style or identity in design. In her analysis of how the practice and discourse of design emerged in Barcelona between 1975 and 1992 (2000, 2007), design historian Viviana Narotzky claimed that the resurgence of a “national question” in the 1980s generated “easy and mediocre” editorial approaches to design and obvious subjects for exhibitions (2007, 90). She observed how stereotypes such as German “efficiency”, Italian “elegance” or English “tradition” were also a mainstay of a style-based, postmodern design

44. A case in point is ‘Taste: An Exhibition about Values in Design’ (1983), in which Bayley addressed the concept of taste and issues of class, social, economic, and cultural capital (Twemlow 2013, 286). Placing objects either on white plinths or on dustbins, he explicitly exercised his authority as a taste-maker. He intended to provoke and unsettle the public by, Twemlow adds, “creating order and drawing evaluative distinctions between dirty, disordered, distasteful real life and the carefully selected, hygienic constructions of an idealized and exotic designer lifestyle” (286).

45. Bayley is far from being the first design curator to have exerted their authority over a dominant design discourse. One of his most notable predecessors was the architect, collector, trustee, benefactor and founding chairman of MoMA’s department of Architecture Philip Johnson. He was the curator of the MoMA’s 1934 ‘Machine Art’ exhibition, in which Johnson coined the term machine art and elevated an interest in the style side of artefacts into an ideology, or a worthy theme “to substitute for the handcrafts” (MoMA n.d.).

46. As the financialisation of the economy (and the diversification of media) made corporate decision-making processes increasingly more complex, marketing and public relations have permeated the professional field of design. The emergence of ‘design thinking’ in the 2000s was an attempt by design professionals to challenge the dominance of marketing and recover a mostly corporate recognition of design’s own contribution to the creation of meaning and value, beyond the crafting or styling of products and messages aimed at consumers.

discourse promoted in exhibitions such as ‘Natural Characteristics of Design’, organised in 1985 at The Boilerhouse Project and curated by the architecture and design critic Jonathan Glancey (90).⁴⁷ Narotzky argues such superficial identifications were often based on comparative studies that highlighted different national styles by expanding semantic analyses of objects and emphasising the commercial benefits of product differentiation (90). She also remarks that, as was the case of Catalan design, a discourse on national identity, based on globally shared and pre-established cultural stereotypes, could be arbitrarily constructed from the outside. Such construction reflected more or less superficial perspectives on the context in which certain products are created and consumed over the appreciation of their formal or “essential” attributes (97). Yet Narotzky also shows how especially during the 1980s and 1990s, designers were actively involved in, and profited from this process of expression and identification of a personal, local or even national style. She mentions that although Catalan designers employed local, formal references in their work, they were more concerned with firmly positioning themselves within the aesthetic and cultural elite of international postmodernism (97). As I address in the following section, Brazilian designers have also progressively positioned themselves, or been positioned by transcultural editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to their work, within such an elite. These approaches have since the 1990s greatly influenced a dominant discourse on Brazilian contemporary design that I aim to problematise and confront with my work as a design critic, curator and researcher.

47. The enduring appeal of this approach to national characteristic being superficially attributed to consumer products often described as ‘design icons’ was patent in ‘Fear and Love – Reactions to a Complex World’, The Design Museum’s inaugural exhibition at its current building. Curated by Justin McGuirk in 2016, this exhibition was composed of several installations by practising designers, architects and researchers. One such installations was ‘The Pan-European Living Room’, created by OMA/AMO, the international practice founded by Rem Koolhaas in 1975. Its contents – chairs, cabinets, lamps or bowls designed or made in one of the European Union’s then 28 members, included both ‘traditional’ and contemporary IKEA designs, modern design ‘classics’ and more anonymous, utilitarian goods. This rather arbitrary selection of artefacts meant however to express European integration instead of national difference (McGuirk & Herrero Delicado 2016, 49).

2.2. Celebrating (national) identity, alterity and style

In 1991, the architecture and design magazine *domus* published the article ‘Il disegno del mobile brasiliano: appunti di viaggio.’ Its author, the architect, designer and journalist Marco Romanelli, travelled to Brazil looking for “autonomously Brazilian voices” (1991, XXII) that would define a new, global decade of increased interconnection, competition and circulation in furniture design. Romanelli begins his article by asking: “What is Brazilian furniture, or for that matter Italian, French, Spanish or Finnish furniture really mean?” (XXII). To answer this question – which evokes Gui Bonsiepe’s aforementioned remark, “What is the Mexicanness or Brazilianness of design?” (2011, 7) – he affirms designers and critics should seek to act according to their difference “with thirst and curiosity”. They should, he adds, “pick up the difference inherent in their socio-natural contexts, so as to build differentiated opportunities for formal expression” (XXII). Such observation and its implied treatment of context, identity and ultimately autonomy both reflected and marked a design discourse that dominated key editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to Brazilian design over the following decades.

Romanelli’s article was the first published by *domus* on the work of a post-modern generation of Brazilian designers: Francisco de Almeida, Adriana Adam, Ginter Parschalk and the design duo of brothers Fernando and Humberto Campana. It was published shortly after the Campana’s debut exhibition, which according to Adélia Borges signalled a point of rupture with functionalism and inaugurated the 1990s in Brazilian furniture design (2013, 23).⁴⁸ In this article, Romanelli calls for the recognition and “the steadfast and serene assumption of difference” (XXII) in design, over “any declamatory, assertive effort or even nationalistic urge in the project.” As a comparison, he lists other designers, which he presents as exemplary individuals endowed with the power to define (or challenge) trends, movements or affiliations on a national, regional or international level.⁴⁹ Romanelli is in fact writing about his peers;

48. In this exhibition, titled ‘Desconfortáveis’ [Uncomfortables] and curated in 1989 at the Nucleon-8 gallery by Adriana Adam and Maria Helena Estrada, Fernando and Humberto Campana presented rough-looking, sculptural furniture pieces made from welded iron rods and sheets.

49. “Alvar Aalto’s stools in bent birch wood, Marc Newson’s chaise-longue/windsurfs in fiber glass, the extraordinary astuteness of Philippe Starck’s neo-Salons Artistes Décorateurs; the perfect frigid elegances of Jasper Morrison” (xxii).

this trip to Brazil is one of many he has made to “furniture countries and fairs” (XXII) in his double capacity as a design professional and journalist. These trips allowed him to realise “how subtle and dangerous is the risk of uniformity and of plagiary” (XXII) and, strikingly, to ask: “How much Italian design is there in Greece, how much Spanish design in Italy and how much Memphis still illuding [sic] the third world, the world of tomorrow?” (XXII).

In his portrayal of design practice as related to a single discipline – product and furniture design – and its related authors and markets, Romanelli insouciantly weaves individual intention, corporate competition and national aspiration into what is a continuation of an art-historical, modernist design narrative. Such insouciance leads him in to proclaim that “Brazil cannot (as Italy, Finland or France can) be reduced to any defining formula” (XXII). He adds Brazilian designers are then stuck between belatedly celebrating postmodernism and the country’s “great tradition of the 1950s – that of Niemeyer, Burle Marx, Lina Bo Bardi and Affonso Reidy” (XXII). He evokes these “intensely Brazilian voices in the world” yet regards the sporadic celebrations of their work as cultural colonialism, set within “a widespread atmosphere of revivalism always indebted to foreign models” (XXII). This observation alludes to a common suggestion in approaches to design from peripheral countries: its dependence from the Western canon. Such suggestion is evident in the testimony, included in Romanelli’s feature, by design journalist and curator Maria Helena Estrada.⁵⁰ Aside from providing a brief local, historical context to Romanelli’s findings and reflections, she reveals how the intertwining roles of designer, journalist and curator have defined approaches to design practice in Brazil:

50. Maria Helena Estrada would become one of the most influential custodians of Brazilian design discourse, especially after in 1997 she founded *Arc Design*, a trade magazine specialised in design, architecture and interiors. This magazine provided her with an unparalleled platform for design journalism and criticism, but also international influence as a Brazilian voice in a global design system. Estrada became one of the ‘grand dames’ of design that since the 1990s became crucial tastemakers and gatekeepers of such system. This select list of design and interiors magazine editors, journalists and curators include authors such as Alice Rawsthorn (design critic for *The International Herald Tribune*, director of the Design Museum from 2011 to 2006); Gilda Bojardi (founder in 1990 of the Fuorisalone festival, which ran parallel to the yearly Milan Furniture Fair, as well as editor-in-chief of *interni* magazine since 1994); Cristina Morozzi (editor-in-chief of *Modo* and later *interni*); Chantal Hamaide (founder of the French magazine *Intramuros*); Ana Domínguez Siemens (curator and contributor to several Spanish-language magazines and newspapers, such as *ABC Cultural*, *La Vanguardia*, *Neo2*, *AD*, *Diseño Interior*, *Elle Decor* and *El País*), Maya Dvash (editor-in-chief of the Israeli magazine *Binyan Vediur* from 2001 to 2006 and Chief Curator of the Holon Design Museum since 2016), Julie Lasky (editor-in-chief of *I.D. Magazine*, founder of the *Design Observer* online publication and contributor to the *New York Times*) or Birgit Lohmann, the German Milan-based designer and founder in 1999 of the digital platform *designboom*.

To anyone asking me what Brazilian design is today, I ought to reply by going back a few decades, to 1922 and to the Modern Art Week – to be precise, to the Anthropophagic Movement. This was the year that marked a break with the official culture of the time and with its European tradition. Underlying those events, which involved the arts, literature and architecture in an ironic and provocative way, were the grounds for real creative emancipation, to be attained through an anthropological – or indeed anthropophagic – practice and as the authentic expression of a new culture. The days of cultural colonialism and inertia, the lack of a craft tradition and of a formal repertoire in the decorative arts, are by now part of a remote past. The Modern Art Week remains, historically, the milestone of a fresh approach to design. But despite this initial strength and transformative energy, and the growing awareness of national values, history, as we know it, took a different turn. The 1980s, as far as design is concerned, saw Brazil once again suffocated by its dependence on European, or rather, Italian models. The '80s found us lost in a fruitless and fragmented search for identity and for paths to pursue. Avalanches of information exceeded every attempt at creative originality. In 1985, with the exhibition “From Modernism to Modernity”, curated by Adriana Adam for Nucleon 8, the early moulds of Brazilian modernism were revisited. Thus some of the most significant stages in the story of Brazilian design were retraced and the bases were established for the development of a contemporary design. New names in experimental and avant-garde design were able at last to build on those catalysing elements. A few years later, it is now possible to present the first fruits of that experimentation. With a new, provocative and exciting idiom, a vocabulary of signs that refer both to the country's primitive and indigenous background and to the most sophisticated technologies, the objects fully express the contradictions of Brazil today (Romanelli 1991, 70).

Estrada's fraught use of the term “primitive” to characterise the background of Brazilian design practice and the creation of a new market – within but especially outside the aforementioned furniture industry fairs – for post-modern creations expresses her adoption of a design discourse enthusiastically dedicated to celebrating personal expression, contradiction and alterity in design artefacts. Three years later, Romanelli expresses such an enthusiasm in his second *domus* article on Brazilian design, which is also the first dedicated by the magazine solely to the work of Fernando and Humberto Campana. ‘Designs from 1991 to 1994’ (1994) included furniture items made from ordinary yet unexpected materials, such as the ‘Vermelha’ chair, designed in 1993 and one of the brothers' most renowned designs. Romanelli describes the designers' idiom autonomous and autochthonous (60), i.e. not passively indebted to other people's formal research, as is often the case, he concludes, “among designers geographically farthest from the centres of design debate” (60). Romanelli is eager to align the Campana's stylistic difference with national

identity. A notable example of such alignment is the armchair ‘Favela’, the first version of which is included in Romanelli’s 1991 article.⁵¹ In my article ‘O Fator Favela’ (2011) I discussed how this chair influenced the following generations of Brazilian designers, whom by aestheticising the *favela* [shantytown] employed it as a superficial metaphor to garner attention from the global design system through an opportunistic exploitation of their country’s poor.⁵² Such exploitation was met by foreign design editors, curators and historians with the kind of interest thus critically described by the design historian Anna Calvera: “to oblige other cultures to preserve their identity because it makes sense for us spectators and foreigners who feel bored when faced with the loss of diversity in the world is also a sort of cruel imperialism” (2005, 379). With his disregard for socio-cultural context and the social worlds where design artefacts exist beyond the studio of the designer, the gallery where they were presented and the magazine or book pages in which ‘iconic’ photos of them were printed, Romanelli’s articles are expressions of how Calvera considers peripheral design narratives relate to local matters. These approaches have, she argues, “always the same structure: a nation is only known by a highlight moment or personage but nobody knows anything about the historical background which explains the work and the character of this highlight moment. The latter becomes the main argument of the research” (2005, 374).

Romanelli’s articles could be considered of little or no impact to a wider historical narrative and curatorial discourse, yet they shaped many future transcultural approaches to the work of the Campana and of other Brazilian designers. By being published in *domus*, they also reveal how, as I address in this thesis, the personal networks and professional circulation of magazine editors and contributors have been crucial for the definition of a global design system and its related public sphere and discourse.⁵³ Indeed, just as *domus*

51. The ‘Favela’ armchair was first made in a limited edition of three and first presented by Fernando and Humberto Campana in 1991. It was later redesigned by the Campana for industrial production and released in 2004 by the Italian manufacturer Edra. It remains in production in Southern Brazil.

52. This association was further explored in the creative fields of product design, fashion and film by the design historian Adriana Kertzer, in her MA thesis research project and book, ‘Favelization’ (2014).

53. After being founded in Milan by the architect and designer Gio Ponti in 1928, the magazine’s editors-in-chief included renowned modern (and post-modern) Italian architect-designers, practitioner-theoreticians such as Michele de Lucchi, Alessandro Mendini, as well as François Burkhardt, Deyan Sudjic, Stefano Boeri and Joseph Grima. These men would also head key design and architecture institutions, such as the Centre de Création Industrielle at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Internationales Design Zentrum in Berlin, the Milan Triennale, the Venice Architecture Biennale, the Istanbul Design Biennial or the London Design Museum.

published Romanelli's 1994 article, a former contributor to the magazine, Paola Antonelli, joined the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.⁵⁴ Four years later, Antonelli curated 'Projects 66', an exhibition that joined the works of the Campana and of German lighting designer Ingo Maurer. In her exhibition brochure essay, Antonelli mentions that "odd associations can sometimes be the most revealing, and this installation provides a unique statement about both the universality and peculiarity of contemporary design" (1998). She provides the ultimate vindication to the peculiar Campana narrative sparked by Romanelli's articles, which explicitly informed her curatorial process: "The Campana's furnishings made their first appearance in European publications in 1994, thanks to the efforts of two design critics, Brazil's Maria Helena Estrada and Italy's Marco Romanelli" (1998).⁵⁵ Antonelli adds how "the world of design, always in search of new heroes," was ravished by the Campana's "spontaneous and genuine talent, and by their personal grace" (1998). She inclusively mentions how Romanelli himself "pointed out, without condescension, that all the powerful qualities of the Campana's 'naïve' production can work as a reminder to other designers, inebriated by technology, of the zero degree of the design process" (1998). Antonelli further affirms the impact of design journalism and criticism when saying that because of the Campana's low-tech approach, their objects have been "described by the press either as 'indigenous' – because the designers are Brazilian, and not American or Italian – 'hauntingly beautiful', or 'shocking'" (1998). This is not, she concludes, "the standard vocabulary of design criticism, but it illustrates the unsettling power of a single-minded passion – even in design" (1998).

Such vocabulary and observations presented by journalists and curators when referring to the work of Fernando and Humberto Campana can be found in articles published in the following decades featuring the work of Fernando and Humberto Campana as a synecdoche of Brazilian design.⁵⁶ A key example of such articles is Christopher Turner's 'New Brazilian designers' (2013), published in the design and architecture magazine *icon* when Turner was its

54. Before moving to New York in 1994 the Italian architect, journalist and curator Paola Antonelli worked a design editor of *Abitare* magazine from 1992 to 1994 and as a contributing editor to *domus* magazine from 1987 to 1991. Antonelli is currently Senior Curator at MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design.

55. Most of the exhibition's 14 items designed by the Campana had been featured in Romanelli's 1994 article.

56. Prominent examples include: Buxton 2004, Dorfles 2006, Fairs 2004, Lang Ho 2003, Picchi 2003, 2007, Roux 2007, Rude 2004, Vendrenne 2002.

editor-in-chief. Written after a trip to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, it provides compelling evidence of the enduring legacy of Romanelli's approach to Brazilian design.⁵⁷ Turner makes several references to the Campana, including a mention of their 1998 MoMA exhibition, which he claims made them "internationally known for their brand of "favela pop"(2013). Yet the article is dedicated to the "young designers they've influenced, who work in the shadow of their fame" (2013): Leo Capote and Marcelo Stefanovicz, Carol Gay, Ana Neute and Rafael Chvaicer, Rodrigo Almeida and Zanini de Zanine.⁵⁸ These designers work mainly on luxury products belonging to the domestic sphere, designed to efficiently communicate a low-tech, craft or neo-vernacular quality. But also national identity clichés and tropes such as *gambiarra* – a term made popular in high-end furniture by the Campana.⁵⁹ Turner replicates at face value dismissive statements made by the designers regarding Brazil's industry, technological development and even state of the economy.⁶⁰ His article

57. Turner was guided on his trip to São Paulo and Rio by a close associate of the Campana, Waldick Jatobá. Described by Turner as the creative director of Firma Casa, an upmarket furniture store he calls "design gallery", Jatobá is also a former financier, art/design collector and one of Brazil's main 'design art' advocates and articulators, having founded the collectible and authorial design fairs Design São Paulo in 2011 and MADE (Market. Art. Design) in 2013. He presides over the Instituto Campana since its founding in 2009 and is since 2017 the executive director of the Instituto Bardi dedicated to managing the Casa de Vidro, Pietro M. Bardi and Lina Bo Bardi's residence in São Paulo, as well as their archive.

58. Capote apprenticed with the Campana while studying industrial design. Gay studied with the Campana and formed a collective called No Tech. Neute and Chvaicer invoke the idea of *gambiarra* to describe their work and acknowledge the Campana's influence, whom "explore materials that aren't design materials" (Turner 2013). Zanine acknowledges being influenced by the Campana, whom he says "started a new language for Brazilian design" (2013). Rodrigo Almeida admits the Campana's influence: "For me they invented Brazilian design. They were the first to look for the roots of Brazilian culture" (2013).

59. As Turner mentions, the Campana "take inspiration from Brazil's rich street culture and its shantytowners' ingenious sense of making do, a form of homespun problem-solving that is referred to in Portuguese as 'gambiarra'. They define this as 'spontaneous design – a way of living for a certain part of the Brazilian population'" (2013). Turner adds the Campana "similarly push everyday, left-over or salvaged materials as far as they can – rag dolls, plastic tubing, discarded fruit crates – until a polished form becomes apparent, a process they compare to alchemy" (2013). Zanine uses a "subversive, alchemical logic" similar to that of the Campana, in his Moeda [Coin] chair and table (2013). Turner's use of the term alchemy evokes 'Novos Alquimistas' [New Alchemists], an exhibition curated by Adélia Borges in 1999. In this exhibition, Borges presented limited-edition creations – mostly furniture and home decoration items, as well as jewellery and clothing – by the Campana and other designers made from everyday, discarded or overlooked materials, as a counterpoint to the glorification of technology, mass consumption and progress (Borges et al. 1999).

60. In what is the article's most bewildering statement, Carol Gay affirms that "In Brazil, we don't have machines or easy access to technology," she says, 'so we have to create with fewer resources and more creativity'. 'We are in shit here', she adds, matter of factly. 'Our economy is in ruins, but we're used to living without stability. Brazilians find a way – they never give up'" (Turner 2013); Neute and Chvaicer side with Gay's low tech, no industry stance when saying "In Brazil we don't have a big industry, so we're free to experiment. We want to explore things, to do things by hand" (2013).

reveals the enduring centrality of the Campana Brothers in a dominant design discourse on contemporary Brazilian design.⁶¹ It is also an example of architecture scholar Fernando Luiz Lara's description of how foreign observers view his country: "Brazil retains a peculiar, and ultimately peripheral, character: the country is always cited in terms of the 'exotic, erotic, or chaotic'; the country is always a curiosity rather than something more serious" (Williams 2009, 261). Taking into account the readership and international influence of *icon* magazine, which by 2013 was one of the leading design and architecture trade publications in the English language, the contribution of Turner's article to a dominant discourse on Brazilian design is far from negligible. In addition, Turner's appointment as keeper of Design, Architecture and Digital at the V&A in 2017, where he has since led the museum's architecture and design department, potentially extends the influence and consequence of his approach beyond the editorial dimension.

Editorial and curatorial approaches to Brazilian design grounded on finding an expression of difference as an evidence of individual and national identity have also influenced the historiography of design. One such example is the 'Latin America 1900-2000' section of the book 'History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400-2000' (2013), in which the designer, art historian and curator Jorge F. Rivas Pérez addresses one hundred years of developments in decorative arts and design in Latin America.⁶² Most design artefacts featured in this chapter reveal more or less nuanced adoptions of the Western design canon, designed by champions of the modern idiom such as Alexandre Wollner or Sérgio Rodrigues. But also regional adaptations or deviations from such canon, by designers – such as Clara Porset or Lina Bo Bardi – whose education, work, writings and interest in local visual and material cultures place

61. This centrality is expressed in the title of the collaborative doctoral partnership project through which my thesis was developed: 'Our poor, beautiful and culturally rich country' is a phrase attributed to the Campana brothers.

62. This 712-page, richly illustrated history book, was published by the Bard Graduate Center and edited by design historian Pat Kirkham and the Center's director, Susan Weber. Rivas Pérez has written on and curated exhibitions of Latin American art and design, most notably 'Moderno: Design for Living in Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela, 1940-1978', co-curated with the Brazilian historian Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos Santos and the Mexican curator Ana Elena Mallet in 2015.

them in an equally Western or Anglo-Eurocentric history of design reformers.⁶³ Rivas Pérez disregards however the role played by these and other designers in the region as public intellectuals or even as revolutionary agents. Nevertheless, he fittingly introduces the idea of industrial design as a discipline tied to large-scale industrial development efforts that took place since the 1940s, which were often stronger in ideological claims than in addressing market realities (587) and resulted, at least in part, of government policies aimed at substituting local products for imported goods (587). Rivas Pérez also describes how the fraught connection between local crafts and design began as early as the 1950s, when both traditional and studio craft gained institutional relevance across the region.⁶⁴ In the chapter's final section, titled 'Toward the third millennium', two products provide contrasting viewpoints on contemporary Brazilian design. One is the popular, affordable and award-winning injection-moulded polycarbonate 'Spirit' ceiling fan, designed in 2001 by Studio Índio da Costa and still in production today. The other is the 2003 version of the 'Favela' armchair by Fernando and Humberto Campana, described as an embodiment of "much of the spirit of 1990s Latin American Postmodernism" (595). Rivas Pérez argues the designers "created a throne-like seat that raised questions about the social inequalities, high-culture values, and the nature of design, using an unorthodox manufacturing method and discarded material to create a luxury item"

63. Rivas Pérez mentions the Butaque chairs by Mexican-Cuban designer Clara Porset which, like other examples, "drew upon local traditions, often simplifying regional furniture types to their essential elements while retaining a modernist sensibility" (2013, 588). He also mentions the 1952 exhibition *El Arte en la Vida Diaria* (Art in Daily life), organised in 1952 at the Fine Arts Museum in Mexico City; this exhibition featured objects that were made in Mexico and that Porset "deemed well-designed, whether by people living in Latin America or not" (588). As the work of Oscar Salinas (2001) and especially the recent research by the Australian political historian Randal Sheppard (2018) on this Cuban-born, New York and Paris-educated member of the well-travelled global design elite show, through her design practice but also her writings and political positioning, Porset played an active role in her generation of artists, designers and architects engaged in providing a modern look and ethos to post-revolutionary Mexico and Cuba. The Italo-Brazilian Lina Bo Bardi appears in this history only as one of several designer entrepreneurs – such the Colombian Jaime Gutierrez Lega or the Brazilian Sérgio Rodrigues – who ventured into manufacturing and retailing modern, high-end products available only to a connoisseur elite, instead of the provocative architect, designer, curator, editor and writer that she was. Much like the British design reformer William Morris, both Porset and Bo Bardi died disillusioned with how their work became reduced to commodities emptied of their progressive, political agency and enjoyed only as expressions of privilege.

64. This institutionalisation was promoted by governments that recognised craft's "centrality to national identity and national and local (rural) economies" (2013, 593) and supported the foundation of government agencies – such as the pioneering *Artesanías de Colombia* (Colombian Crafts), founded in 1964 – and commercially-oriented programmes, "wherein professional designers redesigned existing craft products to be sold at craft fairs or through specialized stores, sometimes without much sensibility to local traditions and materials" (593).

(595).⁶⁵ Yet Rivas Pérez does not critically address these questions, nor does he discuss the overwrought ethical positioning of its authors. He concludes his essay with a vindication of postmodern design: “In its discourses on pluralism and past style, objects, imagery, materials, and techniques, Postmodernism offers a design future rich in visual and cultural complexity” (595). This direction, he adds, “stands as but one possible way forward in a diverse region in both historical and contemporary design traditions” (595). This vindication disregards, as described by the cultural theorist Nelly Richard in her essay ‘Latinoamérica y la posmodernidad’ [Latin America and postmodernity] (1996), the socio-economic gap between hyper-abundance and privation that characterise the reality of Latin American societies (273); yet it expresses what she claims to be postmodernism’s two central ideas: a theory of the excess and an aesthetics of indifference (273). The following section focuses on positions that challenge art-historical and modernist narratives, as well as Western, Anglo-Eurocentric postmodern discourses and neoliberal, market-oriented approaches to contemporary design in Latin America and Brazil.

65. Rivas Pérez mentions the chair’s prototypes were built in 1991 “with an apparently chaotic aggregation of discarded slats of wood from supermarket fruit boxes found on the streets of São Paulo” (595), and that it “represents a careful interpretation of the ramshackle construction techniques of the favelas (shacks) by using only iron nails and glue” (595). However, he fails to acknowledge that the product he is referring to, and was chosen for the illustration reproduced in the book, is not the 1991 chair made by the Campana brothers but its semi-industrial version, launched in 2003.

2.3. Challenging design discourses and the peripheral condition

Gui Bonsiepe has written on design in peripheral countries for most of his almost sixty-year career.⁶⁶ One of his key contributions to this subject is the essay ‘Developing Countries: Awareness of Design and the Peripheral Condition’ (1991).⁶⁷ In this essay he discusses the aforementioned misinterpretations that have guided historical narratives and discourses, warning that a lack of design discourse may constitute the major obstacle for design in peripheral countries (252).⁶⁸ Stating that “the periphery is the place where there is no discourse on design to form the background to the daily life of a culture” (252), he argues for the urgent creation of such discourse, as well as the importance and responsibility of the institutions that create and maintain it. In this and other of his writings, Bonsiepe addresses how a dependence of peripheral countries from central powers not only translates in economic terms. It is also manifested on the social and cultural models that have and still affect design practice, discourse and history, on a local and regional level. The design historians Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei rightly observe, in their introduction to the book ‘National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization’ (2016), that since Bonsiepe wrote this essay “nearly a generation ago, the notion of a periphery, which implies a centre, has been challenged and a model of multiple centres is now more accepted as a way of understanding cultural difference on a global scale” (9). Theirs is a valid point, considering the rise of nations such China, India and Brazil, which have confronted the global hegemony of Western powers. It also expresses the complexity of a globalisation process that intensified

66. Bonsiepe has advised governments, professional organisations and international institutions on design and development policies, in Latin America and beyond. One of his first and most notable reports was written in 1973 for the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) at the behest of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID). Titled *Design for Industrialization*, this report provided the guidelines for UNIDO-supported programmes and served as a point of reference for the Declaration on Industrial Design for Development, which became known as the 1979 Ahmedabad Declaration. Victor Margolin claims that of all the theorists writing about design for development since then, Bonsiepe “is the only one who has honoured the spirit of that document” (Margolin 2007, 113).

67. This essay was published as a chapter of 1919–1990, ‘The Dominion of Design’, the third and final volume of the book ‘History of Industrial Design’ edited by art historian Carlo Pirovano, which presents an abridged history of design practice, education and institutionalisation in Latin American countries and in India.

68. The centre-periphery opposition was first exposed as a conceptual exercise in 1949 by the Argentinian economist Raul Prebisch, who headed the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), an office of the United Nations based in Santiago de Chile where influential Latin American intellectuals gathered to discuss the conditions of capitalism in the developing world (Buitrago & Braga 2020).

since the 1990s, in which neoliberal and Anglo-Eurocentric discourses have been increasingly challenged. Yet, at least in terms of the global design system, such discourses remain persistently dominant.

In 2008 Bonsiepe and his wife, the design historian Silvia Fernández, edited a significant historiographical contribution that aimed challenge such dominance.⁶⁹ ‘Historia del diseño en América Latina y el Caribe: Industrialización y comunicación visual para la autonomía’ [History of design in Latin America and the Caribbean: Industrialisation and visual communication for autonomy] (2008) is an original and ambitious regional history of design, which includes national chapters written by scholars from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela.⁷⁰ In the book’s preface, Bonsiepe questions the often hidden agenda of historians whom, when researching Latin America’s technological and industrial development, pay greater attention to commodities than to how design turns such supplies into physical and communicational artefacts (13). Researchers, he argues, must instead take into account the absorption and incorporation of external influences that lead to cultural hybridisation and to the emergence of real design innovations. They should also go beyond the mere chronological, linear account of facts or data to question their research sources, known and anonymous protagonists, prominent or silenced ideas, divergent and even controversial interpretations of design objectives (13). By concentrating on how the contexts in which designers work are influenced by market forces, consumer trends, social dynamics, geopolitical currents and, ultimately, politics and ideology, historians will be able to regard design not as a culturally isolated, self-absorbed practice, but as an activity influenced by both local and global socioeconomic and sociopolitical processes (13). This observation is equally valid for design curators.

Supporting Bonsiepe’s earlier claim that a history of industrial design, especially of industrial design on the periphery, “is not considered to be primarily a history of individual industrial designers” (1991, 252n1), the editors and

69. The readership and impact of this book would have been more significant if the book had not only been published, in the Spanish language, by a Brazilian publisher. A more recent contribution to the Latin American history of design is the special issue of the *Journal of Design History*, titled ‘Locating Design Exchanges in Latin America and the Caribbean’, edited by Patricia Lara-Betancourt and Livia Rezende (Lara-Betancourt & Rezende 2019).

70. The book’s second half is composed of other essays, written by mostly European authors, on tangential topics to design in Latin America such as the influence of Swiss graphics in Latin America, sustainable design or design and craft.

contributors to this book abdicate from portraying a national identity through the design artefacts created by a very select few of its citizens. As such, images and formal details of the featured projects and artefacts are deemed accessory. Instead, the book's chapters expose the contexts within which design emerged across the region as a professional activity, an intellectual discipline and a subject of discourse. Such contexts were shaped by the often abrupt changes of political regime Latin American nations have gone through, from short-lived socialist experiments to military coups, from patronising dictators to populist democratic leaders. The book's authors scrutinise the state's decisive role in triggering or stalling economic growth, promoting or dwarfing social progress, fostering cultural activity or stifling freedom of expression. They inclusively reveal how state authorities recognised – or often not recognised – the role design plays in these processes. They also demonstrate how the region's designers and other agents reacted to a shared history of import substitution industrialisation programs, export-driven industry subsidies or market protectionism and liberalisation, as well as oscillations in public investment and in private consumption. These approaches also critically emphasise the notion of autonomy in design by revealing how Latin American designers reacted much less to Anglo-Eurocentric artistic canons or stylistic trends than suggested by other editorial, curatorial and historical approaches, some of which I address in this chapter.

Anna Calvera addresses this contextual complexity in her article 'Local, Regional, National, Global and Feedback: Several Issues To Be Faced With Constructing Regional Narratives' (2005). Calvera discusses how Bonsiepe and other authors have challenged the aforementioned Pevsnerean, modernist historiography of design by problematising the role of industrialisation and modernisation as driving forces for design in peripheral nations.⁷¹ She claims that very often "the history of design in developing nations focuses on the adoption of modern ways of living as the normal context for the arrival of design as a professionally acknowledged practice, and the consequent spreading of a design culture" (376). As such, design can be interpreted as the outcome of a change in mentality that has no direct influence in production systems, thus becoming less associated with industrial production and more with a desire for

71. Calvera elaborates on how notions of centre and periphery, developed and underdeveloped, western and non-western nations have been explored in design history and studies, often in alignment with Emmanuel Wallerstein's World Systems theory or influenced by Ferdinand Braudel's conception of concentric peripheries around a centre (2005, 185).

economic development. Highlighting the crucial aspirational role of design in this process, Calvera observes that a culturally changing society adopts design models as a way to reinforce its changing aspirations in the social area (377). The peripheral condition may thus be defined according to the dependency from economic or cultural models, but also of ways of life coming from a centre. These are usually not refused but are instead imported, accepted and integrated to fulfil a new, local reality. Peripheral works and items, Calvera says, “are similar in character and features to those made in the centre while always springing up a little later. There is a delay, sometimes subtle, sometimes quite large, which is culturally speaking the main attribute of the peripheral character” (374). So to discuss how this peripheral character is reflected in design, she defends a geographical approach to its history:

Looking for a new outline of the map of design, two directions have already appeared for research among local or national historians. The first one deals with the differences existing among Design cultures trying to establish identities of Design, grasping peculiarities and national oddities. This is a direction that could easily help to build a general, or rather a common, large narrative of the World History of Design, open-minded enough to be shared by different regions or nations. It permits a research approach that works from the general to the particular. The second research direction aims at finding points and aspects to be compared between different local, or rather national, identities notable for their differences. This approach works from the particular to the general and, through sharing particularities, it should introduce new interpretative models (might we also call these larger narratives?) that are adapted to local realities (Calvera 2005, 372).

Combining geo-economic information with cultural issues and experiences, this geographical approach allows for a more complex and complete understanding of a specific context in terms of intellectual or knowledge production beyond design practice. Such an approach must, for example, accept that sometimes the leading position in determining this context corresponds to economics, while at other times it is taken on by cultural or mentality developments (374). Grounded on the geographic plural, this approach is similar to other plurals that have arisen recently in design history, which by grasping the marginalised or simply omitted (372) represent “the many design experiences left on one side by the standard larger narrative, such as, for example, commodities actually consumed in preference to the heavily promoted ‘high culture’ or ‘designer’ goods” (372). But also “other popular items, whether these are not considered because they address market needs or are inspired

by mass culture” (372). Calvera’s is an important point, for it implies historians and other design system agents must consider subjects, objects and cultural expressions beyond those of elites, as argued by Keith M. Murphy in his aforementioned book, ‘Swedish Design: An Ethnography’ (2015):

One of the chief characteristics of most scholarly treatments of design is a tendency to focus on elite designers and their work—names and images that for various reasons rise to the surface of public consciousness. While elites certainly do exert a tremendous amount of influence on the practices, discourses, and emblems of Swedish design—or of any design tradition, for that matter—there is much more going on both “on the ground” and “in the air” that powerfully contributes to making things mean. Indeed, examining “design” as a socio-cultural formation through a framework predominantly based on elites and the relatively restricted domains in which they operate does not capture the broad reality of designing in action (Murphy 2015, 5).

Murphy supports this observation by stating that “the kind of design expertise that contributes to the ongoing reproduction of Swedish design is fundamentally distributed across a wider range of people, practices, spaces, and institutions that an elite model is able to capture” (6). The “on the ground” and “in the air” expressions he employs signal to the relevance of observing the complex and multiple of relationships developed between people and artefacts in a given national context, across social strata and their respective social worlds. The historian Javier Gimeno-Martínez addresses such relationships in his object-centred approach to a nation-specific expression of identity in design. “If designers can either be or become nationals”, he asks in his book ‘Design and Identity’ (2016), “why not granting this possibility to objects, too? Cannot objects be nationals – as creations of national designers or produced by national manufacturers – or become national – as adopted by a given national context?” (196). Offering a thorough analysis of how national identity has been addressed by design historians and scholars, Gimeno-Martínez rightly acknowledges the complexity and heterogeneity of each nation and its multiple populations and identities, as well as the “global creative broth of multidirectional inspiration” (90) designers work in and with. However, the object-centred perspective he upholds tends to overlook the underlying agency of designers as active social actors. It also neglects the transcultural and transnational potential of design practice, as he himself admits: “in a world where influence spreads through the Internet and where it is increasingly difficult to locate corporations nationally,

methodological nationalism falls short” (89). This observation applies both to the clients and the providers of design services: “The global exchange of influence need not necessarily take place between nationals, but between individuals, who, in turn, do not necessarily need a national framework to communicate” (89). Gimeno-Martínez also argues the production and reproduction of a national canon tends to be based on a cohesive community that justifies the choice of the nation as a framework (88). Defining, defending or even aspiring for the cohesiveness of such community is at best problematic in peripheral nations. Yet as we have seen, successive editorial, historical and curatorial approaches to design from peripheral nations have unproblematically considered elitist design artefacts as instances of a personal or national design style or identity, with scant concern for the complex reality of the societies where they originated. Nevertheless, the global design system has changed considerably in the past thirty years; designers have progressively positioned themselves as tentatively autonomous from the strictures of conventional, service-based design practice, but also the stylistic expressions and metaphorical pluralisms of postmodernism. These quests for autonomy and their related discourse shifts affected the global design system and also, as I discuss in the following section, my curatorial approach to contemporary Brazilian design.

2.4. Looking for autonomy in new markets and territories of practice

The design discourse shift identified by Bonsiepe in the 1990s encouraged the expansion of design, as a professional practice and academic field, into new professional, institutional and commercial territories. These developments influenced editorial, curatorial and historical approaches to design, which in turn affected the design system and its dominant discourse. In this section I discuss positions that reveal how these new territories, created as responses to a quest for autonomy by designers, have both expanded and contracted a public sphere of design, often to the detriment of a wider appreciation and more consequent public perception and recognition of this activity. One such territories is the museum and the commercial art gallery, in which designers began challenging conventions, experiences and expectations related to their work. The design scholar Damon Taylor addresses this new territory in his analysis of two exhibitions organised in London in 2009.⁷² He claims that the designers' desire to behave like artists is not born of an attempt to be outside culture but that instead it is an "effort to find a place within a system of designing and making that is not controlled by the dictates of manufacturing industry, and which confers the rewards, both social and financial, traditionally only open to those making art" (2012, 94). He thus elaborates on the implications of what he describes as "gallery envy":

In the early twenty-first century, designers added the gallery to their repertoire of possible fields of action because it provides a space where they can make what they like, in the manner of autonomous artist. However, in doing so, it seems clear from exhibitions such as Design High what the price can be in such a setting, where what it emphasized is the most art-like qualities of the work: that it becomes almost unrecognizable as design. Because design must always be about something more than itself, it can never be autonomous in the manner of art. This can leave design in the white-cube gallery looking a little clumsy, as it cannot claim to work only on its own terms, just as it appears somewhat moribund on a practical level because what is unique to its form, that is to say functionality, is inevitably suppressed (Taylor 2012, 95).

Taylor adds that designers searched for opportunities to be autonomous in how they operate by originating self-set briefs and exploring their own

72. 'Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design' curated by Gareth Williams at the V&A and 'Design High', curated by Natalie Kovacs at the Louise Blouin Foundation.

concerns, unrestricted by the demands of an organisation or a specific client (94). Calling this practice autonomous design, he addresses a critical feature of the “examples of a type of nominally functional object” that result from it: their contingent autonomy (91). If for art, autonomy “can be said to refer to its essential lack of utilitarian function beyond its existence as a site of critique and reflection, its very outside-ness in relation to everyday life” (93), in the case of design it needs to be something other than useless to be regarded as such. That is, “even if it pitches up in the gallery, design must have a function” (93). Taylor concludes by stating that the provision of a context of use, “where things are employed in the living of life (even a fictional and fantastical one), is to some degree necessary if the strange objects created by autonomous designers are to be experienced not as an uncomfortable form of pseudo art, but as useful things on show, that is to say, design” (96).

As patterns of art valuation and ownership shifted considerably over the 20th century, the art market became increasingly complex and volatile. This volatility was intensified by an expanding network of auction houses, galleries and museums, as well as fairs, biennials and other exhibition formats, which propelled the creation of a truly global art market and cultural institution circuit. The aforementioned progressive financialisation of the global economy led to a growing interest in this market by high-net-worth-individuals and institutional investors, looking to diversify and stabilise their asset portfolios. Such interest encouraged the development of two other ‘blue chip’ markets: old masters and design.⁷³ Most of the commodities sold in the latter became progressively known as ‘design art’ after the auctioneer Alexander Payne coined the term in 1999. As the design historian and curator Catharine Rossi observes in her *Disegno* magazine article ‘Under the hammer’ (2016), this term would come to “describe designs that met art-world criteria in their exclusivity and concept-led craftsmanship” (123).⁷⁴ Although many of these artefacts reflect experimental approaches to materials, technologies and typologies, most items promoted and sold in ‘design art’ auctions and dedicated fairs relate to

73. The commodities that make up these two markets have been considered akin to stock from trusted, ‘blue chip’ companies, which being markets leaders in their fields are trusted by investors and traders, thus enjoying strong financial standing.

74. In this article, Rossi describes how the ‘design art’ or collectible-design market was created at the turn of the century and how it ballooned in agents, figures and influence until the 2008 financial crisis, when it virtually collapsed. Yet by 2015 auction houses, galleries and museums has not only revived this market but also witnessed new, record-high prices in auctions and dedicated fairs.

furniture and the domestic realm.⁷⁵ They range from early- and mid-twentieth century antiques to postmodern creations, but also include more recent limited editions and commissioned works by museums and galleries, including “wet-paint” works, an art-world term that describes those items that go straight from studio to auction (117). The curators, editors, dealers, collectors and the designers of these products determine their value less according to their broader technological, cultural, social or economic relevance, and more in art-market terms, such as their materials, formal originality, style, provenance and the recognition and status of their author(s).

The design critic and curator Emily King states what art and design actually have in common in this peculiar commodity market and related exhibitionary complex: “Where 80 years ago or so the unification of art and design was the fervent aim of the visionary Modernist, now it is the ill-considered corral of the opportunistic gallerist” (2007). Asking “if design can fetch art prices, does that make it art?” (2007), King observes that rising private wealth drives up the cost of almost anything that can be privately owned and is in limited supply, such as artworks and design artefacts. This does not mean however that art and design can be unified by anything else than a price-tag: “The problem is not that things become expensive; it is that they are reduced to being expensive things” (2007). King rightfully claims that a discussion on the difference between art and design within the constraints of this market is not about a search for criticality or autonomy in good designers. Nor is it about the critical distance claimed by artists whose work reflects an interest in mass-produced objects or takes design as its subject. It is instead a matter of representation and reality. In what is a determining definition for design curation and criticism, King claims: “Where art-about-design generates metaphors, design – however critical, radical or even impractical – offers proposals” (2007).

The ‘design art’ market has unfavourably affected the public perception of design firstly by encouraging a skewed, reductionist view on design. In fact, restraining the outcomes that make up its practice to design artefacts with easily identifiable and attributable styles, formal vocabularies and metaphors

75. The most high-profile of such fairs, Design Miami/, was first launched in December 2005 by Craig Robbins and Ambra Medda, a real-estate developer and design consultant couple. Since 2006 it has taken place alongside the Art Basel Art Fair, in both its Basel, Switzerland and Miami Beach, USA locations and dates. Other ‘design art’ fairs have been created in parallel or by established art fairs, such as São Paulo’s SP-Arte, the largest art fair in Latin America, which launched its design section in 2016.

safeguards their value and the market's own efficacy; in this context, any approach aiming at revealing and interpreting the inherent complexity, multiplicity or even criticality of design paradoxically becomes an obstacle rather than a valid contribution. In addition, as design system agents involved in this market concentrate on the sole constituency that matters – the designers and sellers, as well as the potential buyers or collectors of these commodities – they disregard the constituencies of citizens whose lives have little or no connection to their social worlds. In so doing, they discourage a vast audience from engaging with design. Another dimension of this market's negative effect on design's public perception attends to a discrepancy between the perceived social status of objects and subjects participating in this market and the reality of their practice and lives. The pecuniary value, aspirational quality and reified presentation of these objects, but also the expressions of lifestyles and socio-cultural standards they represent, often relate to experiences and social worlds very different from those of the subjects that designed them. This is yet another dimension of how the shift in design discourse that occurred in the 1990s has encouraged both a misrepresentation and a misinterpretation of design practice.

This shift, as well as the aforementioned quest for autonomy by designers, has also expanded this practice into new territories besides 'design art'. In his essay 'Towards Critical Autonomy, or Can Graphic Design Save Itself?' (2003), the designer and curator Andrew Blauvelt signalled to a crisis in design discourse, which extended beyond the professional, institutional and academic fields of graphic design and was transforming an increasingly fragmented public sphere of design. Blauvelt considered its previously distinct agents – professional organisations, publications, schools, design competitions – defunct or interchangeable (38). He also mentioned graphic design as a discipline "is too often reduced to and taught as its commodity form – simply a choice of vehicles for delivering a message: ad, billboard, book, brochure, typeface, Web site, and so on. Implicit in this reductive understanding is the denial of design as a disciplinary practice and with it the possibility of critical autonomy" (39). He claimed this critical autonomy stemmed from the intense period of experimentation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which assaulted on the conventions of graphic design and demonstrated that it was possible to "produce a design avant-garde independent of modernism" (39). Relating academic and marketplace pluralism with a dearth of critical discourse, he states that "the critical reflexivity that had been the genesis of such experimental work was pushed aside

as the promotion of individual expression became paramount” (39). Although he addresses the specific institutions of graphic design, Blauvelt’s discourse concerns apply to other design disciplines:

An important way out of the current conditions of a commensurate pluralism is for graphic design to reclaim a position of critical autonomy. By autonomy, I do not mean a wholesale withdrawal from the social or the kind of freedoms the fine arts claim. Graphic design, precisely because it is an instrumental form of communication, cannot divorce itself from the world. Rather graphic design must be seen as a discipline capable of generating meaning on its own terms without undue reliance on commissions, prescriptive social functions, or specific media or styles. Such actions should demonstrate self-awareness and self-reflexivity; a capacity to manipulate the system of design for ends other than those imposed on the field from without and to question those conventions formed from within. A newly engaged form of critical practice is necessary, one that is no longer concerned with originality as defined by personal expression, but rather one dedicated to an inventive contextuality. Uniqueness should be located in the myriad circumstances and plethora of social and cultural contexts in which design finds itself. Too much time and energy is devoted to the object culture of graphic design, its production and processes, and too little on its effects (Blauvelt 2003, 41).

In his argument towards a critical autonomy and an inventive contextuality, Blauvelt evokes critical design, a definition first put forward by the designers Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby in their book ‘Design Noir’ (2001). Here is one of their first definitions of speculative and critical design (SCD), a then nascent design territory that has since developed a considerable sub-field of design practice and research:

Critical design, or design that asks carefully crafted questions and makes us think, is just as difficult and just as important as design that solves problems or finds answers. Being provocative and challenging might seem like an obvious role for art, but art is far too removed from the world of mass consumption and electronic consumer products to be effective in this context, even though it is of course part of consumerist culture. There is a place for a form of design that pushes the cultural and aesthetic potential and role of electronic products and services to its limits. Questions must be asked about what we actually need, about the way poetic moments can be intertwined with the everyday and not separated from it. At the moment, this type of design is neglected and regarded as secondary. Today, design’s main purpose is still to provide new products-smaller, faster, different, better (Dunne & Raby 2001, 59).

As designers, educators and theoreticians, Dunne and Raby fostered critical design as a new territory for practice that has in effect challenged the 1990s

shift in design discourse discussed in this chapter.⁷⁶ The initiatives Dunne and Raby have developed since the mid-1990s, alongside a generation of designers they taught or inspired, have critically questioned the social role of design but also the commodity value of design artefacts. Although they tend to include or allude to products or three-dimensional objects in their work, the results of SCD practice are often films, photographs and installations, mostly associated with graphic design, film or the visual arts. They are often presented through the exhibition medium, in institutional settings such as design schools and universities, museums and art galleries, as well as in design publications, conferences and festivals. Although they may also be described as “autonomous” designs, these artefacts are not designed as objects of use, decoration, collection or sale. Their unconventional aesthetics and the often uncomfortable issues they raise challenge the aforementioned adjectival or aspirational qualities of design. As such, instead of being promoted by lifestyle publications and the ‘design art’ market, these initiatives and artefacts have mainly been approached in specialist design, art and science publications (including academic journals in science, humanities and the arts). They have also been exhibited and acquired by several museum curators, most notably Paola Antonelli, who became a strong champion of SCD since the 2008 MoMA exhibition she curated, ‘Design and the Elastic Mind.’ In this exhibition, Antonelli explored the contemporary connections and future scenarios developed between design, science and technology, having also coined and since popularised the term ‘design for debate’.⁷⁷ This key curatorial approach to SCD demonstrated how designers are permeating into other professional fields, institutional spaces and their related constituencies and audiences.

Nevertheless, in its almost two decades as an institutionalised practice, SCD has also been the subject of disciplinary and academic criticism. One of its earliest examples is the *Design Issues* journal review of ‘Design and the Elastic Mind,’ in which design history scholar Christina Cogdell proves to be particularly skeptical of Antonelli’s “unwavering faith in the inevitability of

76. They have done so through work developed since 1994 at their own studio and shown in a wide range of editorial and curatorial approaches, but especially as founders of the Design Interactions programme, which they headed at the Royal College of Art in London from 2005 to 2015.

77. The term was suggested by Dunne in a comment on one of the exhibition’s initiatives: “...I think what design can do is fast forward and imagine what happens when those technologies enter everyday life and what kind of new products might emerge. Design in that way can facilitate a debate about whether we want these futures or not” (Museum of Modern Art 2008).

technological and social ‘progress’” and critical of her “elitist positioning of avant-garde scientists, designers, and curators in relation to ‘the masses’ as the grateful recipients of good design” (2009, 97). More recently, the designer and lecturer Matt Ward’s presented a particularly thorough critique of the ambitions and limitations of SCD in his essay ‘Critical about Critical and Speculative Design’ (2019), which complements design scholar Cameron Tonkinwise’s more polemic stance, ‘Just Design: Being Dogmatic about Defining Speculative Critical Design Future Fiction’ (2015).

I find however the arguments presented by designers and researchers Pedro Oliveira and Luiza Prado, in their *Modes of Criticism* magazine article ‘Futuristic Gizmos, Conservative Ideals: On (Speculative) Anachronistic Design’ (2015), more assertive and relevant to a discussion of SCD within the scope of my research. Especially because they highlight issues that specifically pertain to approaches to design from Brazil and other peripheral nations.⁷⁸ Prado and Oliveira observe that although SCD practitioners attempt to distance themselves from market-led agendas, their work predominantly reveals Anglo-Eurocentric perspectives, is expressed through the aesthetics of consumerism and is “still contained within a clear neoliberal framework” (2015). Claiming that for Dunne and Raby the political sphere of critical design “ends where the design profession ceases its responsibility, that is, at the moment a consumer product (or a prototype thereof as “critical design”) comes into being” (2015), they argue “that designers are as politically responsible and accountable for their practice as for their actions as citizens; there is no separation between one role and the other.” (2015). As such, they argue the art gallery is not the most appropriate space for the “provocations” and discussions sparked by critical and speculative design artefacts to take place. Instead, SCD “needs to penetrate public discourse beyond the ‘art and design exhibition’ setting, in order to become an instrument of the political. It is precisely because SCD’s productions—and the debates they aim to incite—rarely leave these specific environments that they stall” (2015). Prado and Oliveira nevertheless believe SCD can be transformed into a strong political agent. As

78. Born and trained as designers in Brazil, Oliveira and Prado have engaged in critical and speculative practice in initiatives developed as research projects and authorial works, both on a collective and individual level. I selected their design initiative ‘Brazil, July 2038’, for Brazil Today, alongside the rhetorical board games ‘Bando Imobiliário Carioca’ and ‘War in Rio’ created by Fábio Lopez, as instances of SCD developed by Brazilian contemporary designers. They are analysed in further detail under the Public Space and Public Good thematic section of chapter 5.

such “it needs to be tested, spread out, modified, re-appropriated, bastardized. SCD’s hesitation in acknowledging its problematic stances on issues such as sexism, classism or colonialism, to name a few, need to be called out” (2015). They also remark that while SCD “seems to spare no effort to investigate and fathom scientific research and futuristic technologies, only a small fraction of that effort seems to be directed towards questioning culture and society beyond well-established power structures and normativities” (2015). Prado and Oliveira’s insightful analysis of SCD’s shortcomings confronts the limitations of a critical autonomy in design by addressing the superficial ethical and social positioning of its practitioners. More importantly, although they criticise SCD’s ties with industry (without however specifying which ties and which industry), they reaffirm design as a practice socially, ethically and politically enmeshed in the everyday. In doing so, they suggest that instances of such critical autonomy may be identified and interpreted not in exceptional rhetorical devices presented in the setting of the white cube gallery, but instead in exemplary design proposals found in widely shared social worlds. As Tonkinwise observes, design makes futures by making new material practices, which although are its essential focus are still not sufficiently acknowledged. What is really radical about design, he argues, is that design, and design alone, “can understand and so intervene in material practices. Any version of designing that misses that undermines design’s power” (2015). As such, Tonkinwise claims, “Speculative and Critical Design must not be distinct from the act of designing, especially in commercial contexts. Critical Design distinct from professional designing is mere speculation. Speculative Design distinct from professional designing is acritical” (2015).

By generating artefacts that in their object typologies, commodity value and both formal and semantic character are more akin to contemporary art, ‘autonomous designers’ have often found their work being presented and evaluated by other disciplines and knowledge fields. That implies the work of designers is appreciated through criteria, values, institutions, agents and markets external to design practice. This is a welcome development, for it allows design to be considered and appreciated as an increasingly expanded professional field. Despite having their work successfully shown and collected by museums, many designers are unwilling or unsuccessful to find a market for their work in the ‘design art’ or collectible-design market, not to mention in industrial or commercial settings where conventional design services are provided. Some,

such as Prado and Oliveira, assume artistic careers. Others become dependent on cultural institutions, such as schools, universities, museums, design centres and other federal, state and local agencies and administrations, to support their work as cultural production. By employing funding and other resources provided by such institutions in the development of their ‘autonomous design’ initiatives, often in collaboration with scholars and professionals from other disciplines, these designers have used institutional settings and networks, but also the discourses of design, art and science to their favour. They have also profited from production and presentation conditions unavailable to designers working in conventional professional settings. This institutional framework has foregrounded the critical contribution of design for research in the context of the knowledge economy. In which, as the designer and author Daniel van der Velden argues, cultural expression is equated with wealth creation and return on investment:

The true investment is the investment in design itself, as a discipline that conducts research and generates knowledge—knowledge that makes it possible to seriously participate in discussions that are not about design. Let this be knowledge that no one has asked for, in which the designer is without the handhold of an assignment, a framework of conditions, his deference, without anyone to pat him on the shoulder or upbraid him. Let the designer take on the debate with the institutions, the brand names or the political parties, without it all being about getting the job or having the job fail. Let designers do some serious reading and writing of their own. Let designers offer the surplus value, the uselessness and the authorship of their profession to the world, to politics, to society (van der Velden 2015, 18).

The provocations van der Velden poses to designers accompany my research and curatorial approach: to find (and interpret) instances and contexts of design practice that challenge the very conventions of its professional field and labour relations, beyond the confines of disciplines, markets and institutions. The welcome expansion of ‘autonomous design’ as a legitimate area of research and knowledge production has however been affected by a neoliberal onslaught on public institutions. Especially since the financial crisis of 2008, many of the institutions that support cultural and scientific production have had their publicly-minded mission undermined by austerity measures. As a response, they often promote design with a market-oriented approach that associated it with social distinction, brand recognition and individual success. This demise of design’s public mission has both profited from and been exacerbated

by a dearth of professional and institutional critique.

There is yet another critical dimension of how the promises and consequences of neoliberalism continue to affect design discourse and practice: education. As Bonsiepe observes, instead of being informed by design's actual and demanding professional reality, many editorial, curatorial and even historical approaches to its several disciplines attract prospective students with promises of a fashionable profession and glamorous career (2009, 250). This has caused a hypertrophy in the offer of design courses, both in developed and developing nations, which has over time fostered a de-professionalisation of teaching faculty, whom by leaving or failing to enter professional careers as designers exacerbate education's disconnection from practice (250). Faced with increasing pauperisation and precariousness, design school graduates have thus re-adjusted their career aspirations but also their expectations of design (250). In so doing, they have significantly circumscribed the means, goals and public perception of their profession. Concurrently, the democratisation in the access to design education, as well as to the necessary tools and means of production – namely in graphic design but increasingly, with the emergence of three-dimensional printing and other manufacturing technologies, distribution methods and business models, also in product design – has led to the multiplication of disciplines, locations, institutional connections and labour relations that have redefined design as a practice. Many design services have gone from being provided by expert consultant firms to be either provided on a freelance, contract basis, or as waged labor inside large companies and institutions. As the design scholar Silvio Lorusso has addressed in his book 'Entreprecariat: Everyone is an entrepreneur, nobody is safe' (2019), the increasing proletarianisation and precariousness has been accompanied by a shift in the design profession from a managerial to a secretarial position. Such conditions have necessarily affected the very autonomy designers attempted to achieve for their practice. That said, can editorial and historical, but especially curatorial approaches to design, respond to such shifts in this activity, within and beyond the socio-economic circumstances of its profession? Can transcultural approaches to the practice of design in nations such as Brazil move forward from past models and discourses, towards rethinking the notion of autonomy, but especially of purpose and community in such a practice? In the following section I will discuss positions by authors that attempt to provide answers to these questions, particularly in and from Latin America.

2.5. Towards design for autonomy

In this section I discuss positions that aim to restore design's social role as a critically autonomous, inherently transcultural and fundamentally collective practice, particularly in the deeply stratified and unequal nations of Latin America. For most of their history, these fragments of colonial empires were governed by elites that have resisted or delayed democratisation, income redistribution and social justice. The sociologist Anibal Quijano observes that a historical-structural dependence between these elites and former colonial powers – later replaced by Western states and multinational corporations – prevented Latin American nations from building the industrial sectors, but also the institutions necessary to establish and maintain more prosperous and fairer societies (2008, 566).⁷⁹ Gui Bonsiepe poignantly comments on how a shared history of persistent dependence, inequality and exploitation shaped design practice in the continent:

First of all, glaring disparities of income, especially in Latin America, place a continuous strain on the social fabric, and bring the ethical implications of design to the surface. Walter Benjamin's gloomy statement that there is no record of culture that is not at the same time a record of barbarity throws a shadow across every piece of "good design" on the periphery (Bonsiepe 1991, 252)

Faced with this past and present contexts, Bonsiepe suggests design for autonomy as a framework aimed at crafting more desirable futures for the societies of Latin America. He introduces this framework in his essay 'Design and Democracy' (2006), in which he upholds a substantial, and thus less formal, interpretation of democracy as the reduction of heteronomy, that is, the domination by external forces (30). Bonsiepe questions the true meaning and credibility of democracy which, he observes, involves more than the formal right to vote. Stating that "in the name of democracy, imperialistic invasions, bombardments, genocides, ethnical cleaning operations, torture, and the breaking of international laws have been—and are—committed, almost with impunity"

79. Quijano reveals, for example, how by answering solely to the social practices and cultures of consumption of the Latin American elites, import substitution initiatives betrayed both a historical dependence on external references (such as their European and later North-American counterparts) and expressed a disregard for social, cultural and even environmental contexts, as well as an antagonism to exploited and persecuted Indigenous peoples and minorities (2008, 566).

(29), he adds democracy must be recovered from neoliberal forces. Which, he claims, “believe that democracy is synonymous with the predominance of the market as an exclusive and almost sanctified institution for governing all relations within and between societies” (29). Defining design for autonomy as a practice of resistance to the dominating forces of colonialism and neoliberalism, Bonsiepe combines a critique to the historical disenfranchisement of Latin American populations with a reaction to the undemocratic imbalance intensified by market pressures (30). Design for autonomy thus becomes a framework to question and indeed overcome the shift in design discourse he claims occurred in the 1990s. Bonsiepe does not introduce the framework of design for autonomy as an alternative to the dictates of manufacturing industry or the market upheld by other quests for autonomy. On the contrary, he emphatically defends industrialisation not only as design’s intrinsic operational field, but also as the most viable possibility for democratising both consumption and production in peripheral societies.

In his essay ‘Between Favela Chic and Autonomy. Design in Latin America’ (2018), Bonsiepe is clear about the changing connotations of the term industrialisation, which have brought about by a growing criticism of its social and ecological impacts. But also by an awareness of its ultimate political and economical beneficiaries, in a region plagued by income disparity, exploitation and inequality (126). He nevertheless upholds a notion of industrialisation as a national, collective effort, which challenges a resource-intensive, extractive economic model perpetuated since colonial times by local elites and external powers. This model has assigned a role for these nations in the world economy, and the international division of labour, as producers and exporters of commodities. As a national effort, industrialisation entails investments in industry, technology, innovation and design that challenge the economic models and related policies of extractivism and neoextractivism, grounded on what Bonsiepe calls ‘designerless’ products (127). It also demands rethinking the very idea of industry, manufacturing and value creation, by taking into consideration how the digital revolution spurred new production methods and the emergence of new fields of practice, such as service design, user experience design and design for social innovation. These have reframed design as an activity centred less on the individual and increasingly towards the communal. Bonsiepe claims industrialisation remains the only possibility for democratising consumption, so to provide a broad sector of the population access to the

world of products and services in the different areas of everyday life (2006, 33). However, from the 1990s onwards the opportunities for public industrialisation withered as Latin America's integration in the global economy under the aforementioned Washington Consensus "fuelled a wave of privatisations and a concomitant plundering of public resources" (2018, 129). Even the 'pink tide' of Latin American leaders that since the turn of the century aimed to foster the development of highly-industrialised, knowledge-based economies, as well as a more equitable distribution of resources, rose to power thanks to a commodity super-cycle. This circumstance prolonged the dependence of nations (such as Brazil) on resource extractivism, unchallenging a development model grounded on promises of inexorable growth and the accumulation of wealth. Bonsiepe argues a profound disregard for human dignity and the dignity of work, expressed in many Latin American institutions and interactions, has further undermined the foundations for productive work, including the work of industrial designers (2006, 33). He observes these nations' colonial past enables design or, in a larger sense, the complex of activities involved in the design process, "to be taken as an example of the multilayered and as yet suppressed attempts at emancipation in such areas as politics, the financial, economic and industrial sectors, and everyday culture" (2018, 129).

In 'Design and Democracy' Bonsiepe introduces the term design humanism as a constructive alternative to such conditions. He characterises it as "the exercise of design activities in order to interpret the needs of social groups, and to develop viable emancipative proposals in the form of material and semiotic artefacts" that focus on excluded, discriminated and economically less-favoured groups (2006, 30). Considering humanism as the reduction of domination, Bonsiepe argues for design humanism as an expression of design for autonomy that aims to foster a professional conduct and a critical conscience in designers, eschewing however any kind of universalistic attitude, naïve idealism or normative request (30). He urges designers in the region to acknowledge their socio-political position, both in their local context and in the global design system, in his aforementioned 'Diseño y Crisis' lecture (2011):

Does locally developed design help reduce heteronomy? Or formulated in positive terms: Does locally developed design serve to strengthen autonomy? This question has several facets, and one of them is the political-social facet that cannot be avoided. In this lies the main difference between the design in the Periphery and in the Centre, or rather in the Centres.

Design at the Centre is not confronted with this question of autonomy. This approach may be inconceivable at the Centre. In the Periphery, a design policy fluctuates between two poles: on the one hand a hetero-directed policy and on the other hand a policy of self-affirmation, a policy to consolidate the Second Independence, a policy of strengthening identity (Bonsiepe 2011, 7).

For Bonsiepe, designers in peripheral nations should eschew imitating, with a lag in time, exhausted development models imported from central countries (7). Instead, they must conceive solutions to their local contexts that foster autonomy and strengthen democracy. In this light, a design initiative in or from the periphery can be interpreted as an instance of cultural or technological dependence, of an inequitable world system under the homogenising push of neoliberal globalisation.⁸⁰ But it can also express a contribution to local autonomy and an evidence of how fairer, more democratic and multipolar worlds can be designed. Herein lies a demanding challenge for curatorial approaches to design from and in Latin America and, most specifically, from Brazil: the selection and interpretation of such initiatives. Bonsiepe remarks that especially in peripheral countries, design contributes to the aforementioned industrialisation efforts by making the world of material and symbolic artefacts more inhabitable (2011, 8). This both modest and ambitious goal belies a utopian component inherent to design but also, he claims, to modernity. Without utopia, Bonsiepe adds, there is no project, or no project related to its social ties: this is where he says modernity and post-modernity reveal their antagonistic positions (8). In his 2018 essay, Bonsiepe returns to the topic of utopia, adding that “the mere mention of the word ‘utopia’ and the possibility of changing existing social structures is an anathema for postmodern ideas and its two political variants of neoliberal conservatism and post-structuralism” (2018, 130).

In this essay he also addresses the recurrent issue of identity in Latin American design, which he then observes as a turn to the ‘own,’ the indigenous or familiar, which can be considered “a reaction against the influence of hegemonic designs of the core countries as well as the attempt to counter this influence” (128). He mentions this turn “signals the desire to challenge the

80. The design historian Patricia Lara-Betancourt claims that, as early as the nineteenth century, the practice of design in Latin America was conditioned by a framework of European cultural, technological and stylistic dependence. By adopting the former coloniser’s material culture, patterns of consumption and social etiquette, design practitioners, their commissioners/clients and consumers, as well as educators, editors, curators and other agents involved in a local, national or regional public sphere of design have collectively reproduced external parameters for social distinction that are also indispensable signifiers of class and national identity (2016, 246).

occidental patterns of thinking and axiologies internalised in the course of the history of colonisation” has since the late 1990s been linked to a body of critique termed decoloniality (128). Can this turn to the ‘own’ mentioned by Bonsiepe represent a decolonial design effort, or does it instead reaffirm design as a practice where the historical-structural dependence of Latin America’s societies on external powers and local elites remains unchallenged? There is no straightforward answer to this question, yet its implications for curatorial approaches to Brazilian design deserve further inspection. Instead of stimulating an aforementioned national effort of industrialisation and related increase of access to goods and services across society, Bonsiepe identifies that this turn to the ‘own’ became associated with a post-industrial turn to designing less technologically complex products. In the face of the region’s de-industrialisation, this version of ‘autonomous design’ is rather unconcerned with the democratising goals of industrialisation within a knowledge-based economy. Instead, it is focused on designing original, high-value added craft products, manufactured in limited editions and destined mainly at an urban, often young market.⁸¹ Most of these products are often studio craft works or the creations of urban designers with access to small manufacturing facilities. Some of their authors, as addressed in this chapter (namely in Turner’s 2013 article) have managed to enter the global design system and the international ‘design art’ market. Other products designed in this context result from so-called designer and community projects. Bonsiepe provides an apt critique of their ambitions and implications:

In these products, as is well known, the functions of design and production form a single unit. When industrial designers adopt craft designs and deliver products then made by craft workers – primarily by women –, this brings with it the danger of using these workers purely as labour rather than fostering their innovative abilities. Moreover, the rich stock of forms for craft products is linked to a traditionally rather narrow range of products. By romanticising the notion of ‘design’, it then becomes possible to present these products as authentic design informed by hypostatised Latin American essence. The enthusiasm with which this option of ontological essentialism is sometimes pursued can be linked to an anti-technological Romanticism with its aura of the supposedly genuine and exotic, intact and unspoilt. Through the appropriate marketing, this creates resonances – not least as ‘favela chic’ offered at art trade prices – in the design boutiques of core countries glutted with industrial products (Bonsiepe 2018, 128).

81. The design historian Ethel Leon observes how this phenomenon is manifested in Brazil in her essay ‘Jovens Objetos Velhos’ [Young Old Objects] (2010).

These designer-led community projects represent a third ‘autonomous design’ practice that emerged since the 1990s and had a considerable impact in Brazil: social design. In her incisive paper ‘A Manifesto of Change or Design Imperialism? A Look at the Purpose of the Social Design Practice’ (2014), the designer and researcher Danah Abdulla observes how a shift in the ambitions and expectations of designers has fostered the development of social design as its own field of practice.⁸² She begins by claiming that “Tired of being part of the problem rather than the solution, designers have shifted their priorities, and have now become interested in investigating the designer’s role in society by tackling community, political, and social issues” (245). “As social design redirects the discipline and rethinks the design practice,” Abdulla adds, “the shift brings with it a sense of responsibility and accountability to communities where the work is taking place, to the design community, and to the role of design and the designer in society” (246). This shift to social design has spurred a wide range of design initiatives, in both the developed and developing world, which have foregrounded how the aforementioned responsibility and accountability of designers to communities reflect power imbalances between central and peripheral nations. But also, in the latter, between privileged elites and disadvantaged populations. Especially since ‘Design for the Other 90%’, the first large museum exhibition dedicated to social design, curated by Cynthia E. Smith and organised in 2007 by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, such initiatives have been presented, interpreted and fiercely debated in a wide range of editorial and curatorial approaches.

As I address in chapter 5, approaching social design is a particularly demanding curatorial challenge. Abdulla identifies several dimensions of this challenge in her analysis of how design graduate programmes have promoted what are essentially ephemeral transcultural relationships between designers and communities. Leading or participating in what are mostly short-term projects with limited funding, set development periods and delivery goals, designers often struggle to properly involve communities in decision making; as a result, its members are often “planned at rather than planned with” (247).

82. The title of Abdulla’s paper evokes the design journalist and scholar Bruce Nussbaum’s *Fast Company* magazine article, ‘Is Humanitarian Design the New Imperialism?’ (2010). Published by a design trade magazine, this provocative article was one of the first and most influential social design critiques, as attested by the notable digest of articles it spurred collected by the editors of *Design Observer* during its first month of publication: designobserver.com/feature/humanitarian-design-vs-design-imperialism-debate-summary/14498

Abdulla raises an issue I have identified in both my observations of design practice and in instances of its coverage: the uneven power relations designers enact in such initiatives, invoked in the establishment of a 'us' and a 'they', as well as a 'here' and a 'there'. Where, as she mentions, 'there' is other, apart and both disconnected and stably distanced from 'here' (249); this relation implies an 'otherness' that is framed by a privileged, central and most often individual subject helping a peripheral, minority and generally collective subject. In Brazil's case, that relation is defined between an elite mainly of urban, white designers and communities of mostly non-white, disadvantaged citizens.

Abdulla observes the social design field emerged both as a consequence of, and a reaction to, the development of 'design thinking' as the ultimate aspirational design practice of the 2000s: "this invasion of design thinking and 'doing good' by corporations has reduced knowledge in design thinking – and the social design discipline – to a get rich quick like scheme, as demonstrated by the title of a blog post by Tim Brown, CEO and President of IDEO: 'How to Become a Social Innovator in 7 weeks'" (252).⁸³ In fact, the promise of profit embedded in corporate design thinking by large design consultancies translated in social design as a well-intentioned (even if some times opportunistic) promise of community aid. Design publications and exhibitions, but especially social design awards and festivals, have consistently misinterpreted the complexity, effectiveness and consequence of design as a service with displays of good intentions, grounded on poorly demonstrated results. In these projects, strategic development initiatives are replaced with acts of philanthropy conducted by designers precariously elevated to the status of heroes helping communities in need. These approaches have created a culture of self-congratulation and unaccountability in a public sphere which, as we have seen, has been long affected by fragmentation and a chronic dearth of criticism. Abdulla observes how publications that document social design initiatives act "more as minuscule monographs that prioritise photographs of people having a good time and slogans over publishing findings from the project" (257). Without proper findings and research, she adds, "particularly in a field that is user centred, we are unable to determine the value of such projects, nor are we able to measure its impact and what lessons can be taken from it" (257). Abdulla claims that although social

83. IDEO is a design consultancy founded by David Kelley, Bill Moggridge and Mike Nuttall in 1991 in Palo Alto, California, which specialised in human-computer interaction and in providing design services to Silicon Valley firms. It has currently nine offices in three continents.

design has the opportunity to involve designers in the decision process, they are chiefly “called in for finishing touches, rather than being considered to participate in major decisions. She mentions that without further knowledge in fields that are directly implicated in the work they produce, this will continue to take place” (255). Nevertheless, social design has been encouraged by design schools and universities, funded by cultural institutions and philanthropic foundations, incorporated in corporate communication strategies and state diplomacy efforts. Abdulla urges designers not to “think of what they personally would like to see in that community or of the awards” (247). Instead, they should articulate “the requirements of the individuals or community they are working in based on their needs, opportunities, wants, constraints, and desires (247). In what is a statement that evokes Bonsiepe’s remark quoted in the introduction of this thesis, Abdulla crucially declares:

Governments, NGOs, policymakers, and decision-makers need to create roles for social designers that goes beyond aesthetics, but these opportunities will not be created unless social designers encourage a culture of criticism, validity, and examination, and an understanding of the issues and contexts they are immersed in (Abdulla 2014, 256).

Abdulla’s exhortation echoes Bonsiepe’s suggestion that starting from local design problems is far from cloistering oneself away (2018, 130). Taking into consideration today’s global flows of people, goods and ideas, any such attitude would certainly be an illusion. Instead, Bonsiepe adds, such a position facilitates the elaboration of design solutions that could sensibly be expanded from the local to other contexts as well” (130). That said, curatorial approaches to the intentions and consequences of social design but also of design for autonomy must necessarily identify, understand, interpret and communicate the relationships created between designers and specific communities. This entails fostering a design practice that aims at social justice. Which, Constanza-Schock observes, implies “the full inclusion of, accountability to, and control by people with direct lived experience of the conditions designers claim they are trying to change” (2020). Such goals are expressed by the anthropologist Arturo Escobar in his essay ‘Autonomous design and the emergent transnational critical design studies field’ (2021). Expanding on Bonsiepe’s design for autonomy framework, Escobar claims the idea of bringing together design and autonomy is not, he observes, readily apparent, but it is both feasible and urgent:

Is autonomous design not an oxymoron? To posit the idea credibly requires seeing a new design's dependence on modernist unsustainable and defuturing practices and redirecting it towards collective world-making projects, in all of their heterogeneity and contradictions. Design for autonomy thus springs out of an ontological design framework; it is centered on the struggles of communities and social movements in defense of their territories and worlds from the ravages of neoliberal globalization (Escobar 2021, 32).

Escobar claims “the basic insight of autonomous design is seemingly straightforward: that every community practices the design of itself” (32). As “social movement activists, transition visionaries, and some designers” warn that current crises point at a deeper civilisational crisis, Escobar argues “autonomously designing new forms of life appears to many communities as an eminently feasible, perhaps unavoidable, theoretico-political project; for some, it is even a question of their survival as distinct worlds” (32). With his focus on the design of everyday life by the traditional and marginalised communities of Latin America, Escobar shifts an approach to design away from the national or the individual. In an earlier essay, he argues the design world exerts a relational pressure on the most recalcitrant of modern constructs, the so-called individual, calling for a “relational personhood to replace it as the default setting in a post-individualist world” (2018, 85). Design would thus cease to be considered only an expert-driven practice and focused solely on objects and services within a taken-for-granted social and economic order (27). In this light, Escobar argues, design evolves into a multitude of practices that are “participatory, socially oriented, situated, and open ended and that challenge the business-as-usual mode of being, producing, and consuming” (27). An evolution towards an autonomous, community-centred design practice must take into account two key notions: “The first is the idea that design takes place today in systems of distributed agency, power, and expertise, within which it is becoming more difficult to maintain the fiction of the isolated individual, and even of the designer genius at work in the studio” (85). The second are “the notions of codesign and dialogic collaboration” through which designers and common folk alike “rediscover the power of doing things together” (85). Interpreting and communicating the emancipatory power of this relationship necessarily demands confronting art-historical, modernist narratives, as well as the neoliberal and postmodern discourses. Which, as observed in this chapter, have affected the practice, appreciation and public recognition of design. This research and the exhibition it is centred on are driven by this productive confrontation.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed a wide range of editorial, curatorial and historical approaches, as well as theoretical positions that inform my transcultural curatorial approach to contemporary Brazilian design. These approaches and positions informed and contextualised my research within a wider design studies field. They also signalled to many of the curatorial challenges this thesis is dedicated to. The first and most important of such challenges regards approaching design in its variety and complexity of material practices, that is, in its breadth and depth. This implies addressing the practice of design as a service to the widest possible range of clients and, ultimately, of users. By taking special consideration on how design practice potentially affects large segments of society, such an approach challenges a scholarly attention given to design artefacts exclusively aimed at elites, but also theoretical positions that justly advocate an ontological and political reorientation of design practice towards the support of struggles for autonomy by marginal and subaltern communities. By contrast, my curatorial approach addresses the design processes, initiatives and artefacts that shape the social worlds of the overwhelming majority of the (Brazilian) population. In the case of this thesis and *Brazil Today*, the everyday lives of over 200 million Brazilians, which are deeply embedded in the open market economy and consumer cultures of a late-capitalist, rapidly-urbanising country. In so doing, I acknowledge the complex realities and subjectivities of contemporary design practice, but also that any notion of autonomy in design is contingent to its context. That demands an attention to how, Keith M. Murphy suggests, designers position themselves:

While the economic value of an artwork can be comfortably subsumed to its symbolic value in the art world, the two value forms are always in an uncomfortable relationship for objects in the design world. This is because the structure of the design world itself is constituted as two interconnected fields that in theory run anxiously parallel to one another—an economic field that trades on aesthetics, and an aesthetic field that resists economics. The task for designers, then, is to learn how to take advantage of this relationship by constructing roles that allow them to float between the two fields, and carefully manage their positions within them” (Murphy 2018, 91).

Such fields, which are far from dialectical opposites, may be as Murphy argues aesthetics and economics, but they can also be authorial expression

or service provision, market-driven goals and public concerns, individual and community, centre and periphery, autonomy and heteronomy, power and struggle, aspiration and resistance. Addressing how designers craft such carefully managed positions between these fields is, I argue, acknowledging a notion of critical autonomy in design practice. It is on this notion that I consider my curatorial approach and research to be grounded. That said, I am particularly interested in revealing how critical autonomy impacts design practice beyond mere client-service provider relations and how it is manifested across a wide range of initiatives, artefacts and the contexts in which they are developed. I am therefore committed to addressing how design has contributed to the policies and struggles that have aimed to challenge and reimagine local and regional social and cultural structures, as well as models of progress, development and lifestyle. By critically acknowledging such conditions and foregrounding the often unexpected and unconventional contexts in which designers operate and define such carefully managed positions, my curatorial approach upholds design not as an individualistic or self-absorbed practice but one that is economically impactful, socially committed, politically consequent and, ultimately, critically autonomous.

Brazil's exceptional decade for design

A remarkable set of economic, social and cultural conditions made the 2004-14 decade an exceptional period in Brazil's history. Throughout this chapter I discuss these conditions by interweaving key events, facts and issues that affected Brazilian society during this decade with scholarly contributions and insights from primary sources, collected during the development of my thesis and the Brazil Today exhibition. In this first section I present the political and macroeconomic settings that drove the administrations of Presidents Luís Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff to enact pioneering policies aimed mainly at fighting poverty and addressing inequality, while showing mixed signals in terms of challenging Brazil's exhausted, extraction-based economic model. In section 2 I discuss how a favourable economic conjuncture and a political commitment to social progress prompted an unprecedented rise in living standards for the vast majority of Brazilians. In section 3 I observe how the emergence of a new middle-class challenged Brazilian society by aiming to turn privileges enjoyed by elites into rights long denied to the masses. I also address how protests against violence, segregation and corruption challenged power structures, historical narratives and hegemonic discourses, as well as the very narrative of what came to be described as Brazil's 'golden decade'. In section 4 I consider the efforts of Brazilian governments, corporations and civil society to claim a more significant role for the nation in a multipolar and increasingly fragmented world. In section 5 I analyse key curatorial approaches to contemporary Brazilian design that took place during this period, most of which were organised as part of these efforts. I conclude by claiming this decade's hopes, ambitions and conquests, but also its shortcomings and contradictory legacies, have defined a nation-specific design practice that hovers between the aspirational quality of Brazilianness and the increasingly ominous consequences of Brazilianisation.

First elected in 2002, Lula da Silva concluded his second presidential term in 2010 with over 80 percent approval rating. Such a degree of popularity reflects the broad reach of his two administrations' progressive social policies, but also a remarkable and often controversial ability to both challenge and appease political, corporate, media, and religious interests. He was succeeded in 2011 by Dilma Rousseff, the first woman to be elected President of Brazil. Rousseff

governed until 2016, when a controversial impeachment ended her second term and a 15-year period of Presidential rule by the Partido dos Trabalhadores [Workers' Party, PT]. The main goals of the PT governments – eradicating hunger, fighting poverty and addressing social inequality – were largely met during a period of economic expansion that began in 2004, when Brazil's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) registered the highest growth rate since the reinstatement of democracy in 1985: 5,7 percent. Such growth took place largely thanks to the aforementioned commodities boom, but also to unprecedented political and financial stability.⁸⁴ Despite a slight slump (-0,1 percent) in 2009 due to the 2008 world financial crisis, Brazil's GDP kept growing until 2014, when the Brazilian economy, after growing by only a mere 0,5 percent, faced its second-worst recession.⁸⁵ These two GDP growth variations bookend Brazil's exceptional decade that I address in my research.

The administrations of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff were part of a “pink tide” that swept Latin America from 1999, bringing to power left-of-centre candidates with ties to labour unions and social movements.⁸⁶ Although the commitment to democracy and the rule of law by these elected leaders varied tremendously, each ran with common promises of challenging past legacies, from Washington Consensus neoliberal economics to the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2008). Their governments shared both an overt social commitment to what political scientist Benedicte Bull calls New Social Movements (NSM), as well as a common political goal: to counter the colonial elites that for centuries dominated and dispossessed marginalised groups in their respective countries (2013). For Bull, these leaders identified with “being situated in a historical movement of resistance against global capitalism and the state as

84. Currency and inflation stability was mainly a consequence of the Plano Real, implemented by then finance minister and later (1995-2003) Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, which consolidated the country's finances and introduced a new currency, the Real (R\$). The commodities boom was significantly fuelled by China's demand for Brazil's two main commodity exports during the 2004-14 decade: iron ore and soybeans (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, n.d.)

85. Brazil's recession deepened as the country's GDP dropped in 2015 (-3,5 percent) and in 2016 (-3,3 percent), having only slightly eased in the following three years (1,3 percent in 2017; 1,8 percent in 2018; 1,4 percent in 2019). Source: IBGE, Diretoria de Pesquisas, Coordenação de Contas Nacionais e Coordenação de População e Indicadores Sociais.

86. This tide was led by the following presidents, (first) elected in their respective nations: Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1999), Ricardo Lagos (2000) and Michelle Bachelet (2006) in Chile, Nestor Kirchner (2003) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007) in Argentina, Rafael Correa (2007) in Ecuador, Manuel Zelaya (2006) in Honduras, Daniel Ortega (2007) in Nicaragua, Fernando Lugo (2008) in Paraguay, Evo Morales (2009) in Bolivia, Mauricio Funes (2009) in El Salvador, José Mujica (2010) in Uruguay and Ollanta Humala (2011) in Peru.

an instrument of repression of local peoples, both of which were brought to Latin America by different colonial forces” (2013). She observes how NSMs in Latin America displayed an ability to form broad alliances, often encompassing groups advocating for growth and industrialisation-based development models with movements that outright reject modernisation and industrialisation (2013). Bull argues that, for example, the environmental concerns of these NSM-affiliated governments have had little to do with post-materialism or with establishing alternative visions to Western models of development or progress; instead, they have been “connected to centuries of resistance to the double exploitation of nature and people they experience under the forces of global capitalism” (2013). As such, Bull adds that “an alliance between groups that advocate a post-capitalist model and states that have evolved through centuries of supporting capitalism is by necessity difficult” (2013).

Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff and several of their counterparts in the region consolidated economic growth and filled state coffers mainly thanks to an increased demand for raw materials (chiefly from China), the supply of which fostered an extraction-based economy. Such an economy has been grounded since colonial times on intensive farming and large-scale, mineral and fossil fuel mining. But also on the depletion of ecosystems and the exploitation of workers, as well as the persecution of indigenous peoples and traditional communities. This extractive, colonial economic model has been associated with the accumulation of wealth and power in landowners, much of which, with the consolidation of a world economy, has increasingly shifted towards multinational corporations. A commitment to a wider distribution of the wealth generated by this commodity extraction model nevertheless led many progressive Latin America leaders to seek or keep state control over the extraction and commercialisation of natural resources, especially fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas. In Brazil, such a commitment led to an overt support by the PT governments of such an extractive model – especially following the announcement of large, “pre-salt” oil reserves off the coast of Rio de Janeiro in 2006 – that has been signalled, critiqued and fought over by a wide range of civil

society agents.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the gains from this model allowed Brazilian and other Latin American leaders to diversify economic ties and increase the importance of regional institutions and relations. These gains broadened a ‘policy space’ for directing social and economic policy in line with the demands of their constituents (Bull, 2013). Understanding the ambitions and the contradictions of policies enacted by the region’s twenty-first century leaders and their populations implies acknowledging how they have responded to contemporary challenges on their own terms and by their own means, however imperfectly and often by replicating external models. Such understanding is key for an appreciation of Brazilian design practice during this period.

A key promise of the PT governments was to foster an economic model in which the country’s wealth, instead of being solely accumulated by landowners, corporate giants and rentier elites, would be created by an increasingly knowledge-based economy and distributed to serve the needs of the population. Although this transition underwhelmed expectations, several numbers and events that marked Brazil’s ‘golden decade’ reveal nonetheless a search for autonomy from external forces. One such event took place in 2005, when the Brazilian Federal Reserve paid the totality of its International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans. According to economist Laura Carvalho, this feat earned the country boastful headlines in international media and a trusted reputation in financial markets and institutions (2018, 35), even after Brazil’s exports were significantly affected when oil prices toppled from record highs in 2008 and the commodity super-cycle slowed down from a 2011 peak. Its more open economy was then increasingly fuelled by foreign direct investment, which grew over tenfold year-on-year from 2003 to 2011.⁸⁸ Brazil’s balance of trade surplus

87. One example of such critique is the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam complex, which began being built in 2011 on the Xingu river in the state of Pará. The first turbine of the world’s fourth largest dam was officially turned on by Dilma Rousseff in 2016; its 18th and final turbine by Jair Bolsonaro in 2019. The journalist and film director Eliane Brum described this R\$40 billion project as the most controversial of the Lula-Dilma governments (2014), a monument to violence (2015) and a synthesis of the contradictions at the heart of Brazilian democracy (2019). Brum considers the legal framework that made it possible, mired in abuses to human rights and the rule of law, “a microcosmos of exception” (2019). The public-private partnership deal that financed it was included in the notorious Lava-Jato [Car Wash] investigation (2015). Yet it is the massive destruction of the natural environment and both the lands and livelihoods of the Indigenous peoples expelled from their homes on the banks and islands of the Volta Grande do Xingu region that have made many question the very progressive intentions and legacy of the PT governments.

88. Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current USD), International Monetary Fund, Balance of Payments database, supplemented by data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and official national sources. Retrieved from: data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.CD.WD

shrank from a high of 45 billion USD in 2006 to only 18,45 billion USD in 2010, a slump Carvalho attributes to the increase in imports that accompanies higher economic growth (36). Indeed, imports grew more than twofold, cumulatively and in real terms, from 2005 to 2010 (43), as retail quickly rebounded to pre-2008 financial crisis levels. This increase stimulated a growing internal market that by 2014 was the world's sixth-largest (42).⁸⁹

Aside from an economic glimpse into the 2004-14 decade, these indicators also illustrate the conditions that led to an expansion and reconfiguration of design as a service sector in Brazil. One such condition is the role multinationals, especially the manufacturers of consumer goods, played in this sector. A growing number of foreign corporations were attracted to Brazil by the aforementioned macroeconomic conditions, but also by the appeal of over 200 million potential consumers, not to mention generous incentives offered by local, state and federal governments. These firms entered either on their own or through mergers and acquisitions of national champions, in sectors such as manufacturing, banking and retail. Often maintaining management in their Northern/Western hemisphere headquarters or keeping and even dislocating production from Brazil to more competitive countries (chief of which China), these corporations promoted the growth, competitiveness and sophistication of Brazil's consumer market. Yet they also substantially increased the dependence of the country's industrial and service sector on global supply chains and foreign decision making. Such conditions, as well as a chronically substandard infrastructure, notorious bureaucracy and the world's most burdensome tax code, led to a dismantling of Brazil's industrial chains (The Economist 2013). As Carvalho observes, when trade grows and industry doesn't, it's because the products people buy are being made somewhere else (2018, 43). Despite the emergence or consolidation of national corporate champions and related consumer brands – some of which I address in chapter 5 – during this decade Brazil failed to develop an adequate industrial policy. By fostering the diversification of its productive structure and the manufacture of value-added goods, its industrial sector could have better supplied a dynamic and more demanding internal market (45), as well as increasingly competitive international consumer markets. Even the policy of tax exemptions and reductions, implemented by

89. According to Households and Non Profit Institutions Serving Households (NPISH) final consumption expenditure (current USD\$) national accounts data from the World Bank and OECD. Retrieved from: [data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.CON.PRVT.CD?end=2011&most recent value desc=true&start=2004](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.CON.PRVT.CD?end=2011&most%20recent%20value%20desc=true&start=2004).

Brazil's federal government in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, failed to prevent a further deterioration of Brazil's manufacturing sector: instead of spending these stimuli in value-adding investments in research, development and design, companies fixed balance sheets, payed taxes and cut spending.⁹⁰ Although these actions expanded corporate profit margins, they negatively affected Brazil's industrial output and aggravated the economic downturn (73).⁹¹ Other factors, such as an overvalued R\$/USD exchange rate and high production costs, contributed to a reduction of the manufacturing sector's share of national wealth. Should this reduction remain unchallenged, Carvalho predicted in 2018, this share could fall to as low as 10 percent of GDP, when Brazil was a primarily rural country (52). The demise of Brazil's manufacturing sector and an increasingly global competition for design services also led to, Ethel Leon has argued, the closure of large Brazilian design offices that had been working on a national level in areas such as transportation, capital goods or street furniture (2013, 39). As addressed in chapter 2, these conditions fostered a dominant design discourse associated with a turn to the 'own' and to the design of less technologically complex products. They also coincided with a reconfiguration of the global economy: service sector firms, organisations and institutions came to not only request design services but also to incorporate designers in their teams during this period. As such, the potential for and an awareness of the impact of design to Brazilian society grew significantly beyond its more traditional connection between to industry. As addressed in the next section, this society was then witnessing unprecedented changes.

90. One such stimuli was BNDES Prodesign, a programme aimed at supporting investments in design, fashion and branding launched in 2013 by BNDES, Brazil's Economic Development Bank. Retrieved from: bndes.gov.br/wps/portal/site/home/imprensa/noticias/conteudo/20131023_design

91. These state actions also fostered, somewhat paradoxically, to transfer income towards the richest part of the population, further deteriorating Brazil's industrial capacity and public accounts (Carvalho 2018, 74).

3.1. The making of a new middle-class

Brazil's 'golden decade' was exceptional not only because of unprecedented political and financial stability, record GDP growth and other encouraging macroeconomic indicators. It also illustrated, as argued by the sociologist Célia Lessa Kerstenetzky, the inversion of sacred dogmas in orthodox economic growth theories and post-Washington Consensus development economics (2017, 31). Such inverted dogmas include growth compatible with redistribution, labour market regulation, public investment and, crucially, a steady increase of the minimum wage. As Kerstenetzky and other analysts have observed, minimum wage appreciation was the most successful socially progressive policy promoted by the PT governments (Bartelt 2013, Bartelt & Paula 2017, Carvalho 2018, Kerstenetzky 2017).⁹² Such an appreciation was supplemented with income redistribution programmes, the best-known and most impactful of which was Bolsa Família. Introduced in 2003 by the first Lula da Silva government, this programme partly consolidated other conditional cash transfer systems initiated during the administration of his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Although Bolsa Família attended only to a fraction of Brazilian families – around 0,4 percent in 2003, 1,28 percent in 2011 – it substantially reduced poverty levels and income inequality; econometric studies suggest its effects were behind a drop of 10 to 31 percent in Brazil's Gini inequality index, between 2002 and 2014 (Carvalho 2018, 19).⁹³

These reductions in poverty and income inequality led to a degree of social mobility hitherto unwitnessed in Brazil. Between 2003 and 2014, the number of Brazilians in classes A and B (with incomes of R\$ 8159,37 and more) rose from 15,3 to 31,3 million, while those in the DE classes (up to R\$ 1892,65) fell from 96,7 to 54,5 million (Villas Bôas 2019). The number of those in the

92. From 2000 to 2018, the growth in income of the bottom 40 percent of Brazil's population was mainly attributed to an increase in formal jobs and a rise in the minimum wage (Carvalho 2018, 149), which increased from R\$260 in 2004 to R\$724 in 2014. By 2017, workers earning the minimum wage represented a fifth of the Brazilian labour market. Roughly 75 million people, or 40 percent of the Brazilian population, were by then living in households where at least one member earned the minimum wage as their main income (Bartelt & Paula 2017, 38), be it as a salary or as a pension.

93. The Gini coefficient compares cumulative proportions of the population against cumulative proportions of income they receive, ranging between 0 (perfect equality) and 1 (perfect inequality). According to the OECD, Brazil's Gini index fell by 6,6 percentage points between 2002 and 2014, from 0,581 to 0,515. OECD (2018) Income Inequality. Retrieved from: data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm.

middle-income group – the C Class – shot up from 67,1 to 116,3 million.⁹⁴ This tremendous increase led economist Marcelo Neri to claim the C Class as Brazil’s new middle-class. Such a claim, made in his book ‘A Nova Classe Média’ [The New Middle-class] (2008), earned Neri scholarly and popular recognition, in Brazil and abroad.⁹⁵ At FGV Social, the research centre he founded in 2000, economists and other scholars have been mapping social mobility and the emergence of this new middle class mainly through the economic criterium of household income.⁹⁶ They have thus employed class as a label not in sociological terms, but as a means to define income groups or economic strata solely based, as Neri observes, on the money individuals have in their pocket (2012b, 17). Such a criterium has since prompted much discussion and controversy, within and beyond social sciences.⁹⁷ As the anthropologist Eliana Vicente observes:

By assuming the idea of social mobility solely through economic criteria, ignoring other analysis categories such as education, sustainability safeguards in the labour market, as well as the symbolic issues that are so important to power relations inscribed in social dynamics, structural factors that contribute to the reproduction of inequality in the country are discarded. To call the emerging population that became part of the C class a “new middle-class” intently demonstrates that the country is based on the middle-class and not on the immense mass of manual workers, service sector workers, on the poor and excluded who still represent a rather significant portion of the population (Vicente 2013, 82).⁹⁸

94. The impact of this impressive increase in social mobility can be further observed when taking into account specific criteria such as region, race, gender and education. From 2003 to 2010, income increased 7 percent for those living in the city of São Paulo compared to 42 percent for the inhabitants of Brazil’s Northeast; 21 percent for whites and 42 percent for blacks; 21 percent for urbanites and 49 percent for rural folk; 38 percent for women and 47 percent for men; 47 for the illiterate and 16 percent for university graduates (Neri 2012b, 14).

95. Marcelo Neri directed the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Avançada (Advanced Economic Research Institute, Ipea) from 2012 to 2014 and was Chief Minister of the Secretariat of Strategic Affairs in Dilma Rousseff’s government from 2013 to 2015.

96. FGV Social was initially named Centro de Políticas Sociais [Social Policies Centre, CPS] when it was founded by Neri at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation in 2000.

97. Neri’s non-sociological class definition has been met with strong critiques from other scholars, chief among which the sociologist Jessé Souza (2015, 2018).

98. Original quote: “Ao assumir a ideia de mobilidade social unicamente através de critérios econômicos, desprezando outras categorias de análise, tais como, educação, garantias de sustentabilidade no mercado de trabalho, assim como as questões simbólicas que são tão importantes nas relações de poder inscritas na dinâmica social, descarta-se fatores estruturais que concorrem para a reprodução da desigualdade no país. Chamar a população emergente que veio a fazer parte da classe C de nova classe média” parece pretender demonstrar que o país está fundamentado na classe média e não na imensa massa de trabalhadores manuais, trabalhadores do setor de serviços, nos pobres e excluídos que ainda representam uma parcela bastante significativa da população” (Vicente 2013, 82).

The near doubling of Brazil's population in the C income bracket has fuelled countless discussions, analyses, studies and policies, with scholars attributing contradictory and even controversial interpretations to its numbers, letters and titles (Neri 2008, 2013, Fleury 2013, Souza 2015, 2018, Bartelt 2013, Bartelt & Paula 2017, Gonzalez, Prado & Deak 2018). Nevertheless, the process of answering the question "What does the C class want?" came to define the 2004-14 decade. Economists and anthropologists, scriptwriters and marketing experts, election campaign managers and designers were faced with a national collective subject that challenged the nation's "traditional" middle classes and elites. I have been interested in this emerging social group since I first began researching Brazilian design in 2009. At the time, the C Class made newspaper headlines and magazine covers as an income group, a consumer category and an electoral target.⁹⁹ In this thesis I adopt the term New Middle-Class (NMC) instead of C Class. I do so first because of its more inclusive and less descriptive character, but especially because it evokes the middle-class as an aspirational designation: to those who have reached this status, those who are yet to conquer this status and, eventually, those who see their status challenged. As Neri observed, with Brazil's most destitute being as poor as the most impoverished Indians and the richest almost as affluent as the wealthiest Russians, during the 2004-14 decade Brazil's income distribution came close to the world's income distribution (2009, 5). As such, Brazil's NMC might have thus be considered the world's ultimate income-based middle-class. The needs, demands and aspirations of its citizens could therefore be considered central to global discussions on matters as varied as consumption, housing, education and the exercise of democracy.

Furthermore, as A. Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein have argued, the middle-class has emerged both as a problem and a model in political debates on how we should live in a globalised world (2012, 4). As a political option, they add, the middle-class "invites those geographical locations that are defined as the Global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) to transcend their multiple, different, and particular modernities by becoming global – that is to say, by aspiring to an American or European way of life" (4). My long-term interest in the relationship between Brazil's NMC and design practice thus aims

99. The C-Class vote was considered by many analysts, pollsters and campaign managers as the most decisive in Brazil's 2010 Presidential election, the second round of which was disputed by Dilma Rousseff and José Serra (Guimarães & Oliveira 2010).

to understand how the former's process of "becoming global" influenced the latter, but also how this influence has fostered local, culturally relevant design initiatives and artefacts. Such an understanding implies the aforementioned awareness of how Brazilian citizens – designers included – have faced their contemporary challenges on their own terms and by their own means. It also demands a more open and critical attention to how the NMC's "becoming global" process may express less a convergence with Northern or Western modernities and more the creation of more autonomous ways of life – in Brazil and beyond. That said, could the NMC's refocusing of a national social, economic and cultural debate shift design's aspirational qualities away from elite tastes, superficial expressions of identity and promises of individual success, as addressed in chapter 2?

A significant part of NMC's aspirations have been related to a demand for economic, social and political inclusion. This demand reorganised a society traditionally determined by catholicism, patrimonialism and oligarchy (Bartelt & Paula 2017, 22). Consumption played a key part in this process. As more people secured formal (if low-paid) jobs, namely in sectors demanding less qualified workers such as services and construction, more products and services previously accessible only to the rich began being consumed by a lower-income segment of the population (Carvalho 2018, 23). To Vicente, these women and men did no longer just dream but could effectively acquire what makes a 'normal' home (2013, 89). The NMC thus began embracing traditional middle-class expenditures, such as first-rate electrical appliances, but also leisure and travel services such as cruise-ship trips along the Brazilian coast, international flights or local food delivery. Other expenditures included access to cultural expressions and institutions, as well as private education, health and banking services. Although the income gains of the NMC were not enough to enjoy middle-class economic security, this sector of the population started to feel symbolically included in everything that has been socially constructed as an ideal life.

The marketing specialist André Torretta argues addressing NMC consumers has been a major challenge for Brazilian firms. He mentioned to me most of these focus on only five million people, which is roughly the population described as belonging to classes A and B (personal communication, September 30, 2016). Torretta observed that these consumers may only represent 0,4 percent of the Brazil's population but they account for the population of, say,

Denmark. He adds that A and B consumers are reasonably undemanding in terms of catering to their needs despite the ups and downs of the Brazilian economy. In contrast, addressing the 100 million of the NMC, or even the over 200 million of Brazil's total population, requires considerably more work, scale, investment, bureaucracy, taxes and, above all, risk. For Torretta, only a handful of Brazilian companies such as Grendene and Natura, or large multinationals such as Nestlé, Unilever, Whirlpool, are able to invest in research, design and development of new products and services destined especially for NMC consumers. Torretta's is a relevant insight, as it shows how much of this effort of inclusion through consumption in fact relies on the Brazilian state. After all, the state is the only entity that truly caters to the needs and wants of a nation's entire population.

Thanks to increased state spending, millions of citizens began not only to consume middle-class expenditures but also access free or low-rate access to public services. As services offered by a chronically under-financed state apparatus improved in availability and quality, a large number of increasingly sophisticated and demanding consumers expanded their purchasing power beyond the nominal rise of salaries. The process of social inclusion through the consumption of public goods and services thus promoted higher levels of access to education, culture, health, safety and other dimensions of welfare and well-being to millions of Brazilians.¹⁰⁰ Researching design initiatives aimed at the NMC from both the private and public sector, I have privileged a context of design practice well beyond the scale of the individual author, fabricator and consumer/collector. On my visits and interviews with professionals at design consultancies and corporate marketing departments, I have accompanied the development of design proposals that had been presented, negotiated and eventually implemented in complex processes, where decision making is distributed across a range of agents. Addressing these processes became key to my understanding of how Brazilian firms, but also state departments and institutions, employed design to address their local markets and constituencies, with the implicit or explicit goals of social justice and emancipation. Likewise, I interrogated if this new base for Brazil's consumption market might have influenced decisions and policies that challenged the conventions and privileges of

100. Chief among which the Sistema Único de Saúde [Unified Health System, SUS], created in 1990 and currently the world's largest and most complex public health provider.

the governing elite, which includes the vast majority of the country's designers.

Part of this emancipation process implied debating the role of public space and the value of the public good. Much like their Latin American counterparts, Brazilian elites have long dismissed public schools, hospitals, housing and transportation so long as they can afford the alternative (Quijano 2008, Souza 2015). Such disregard affects all sections of the population: alongside steering spending from public to private service providers, elites also divert public attention, debate, agenda and funding away from the public services and publicly-minded institutions.¹⁰¹ As addressed in the following section, both these dimensions of social dynamics prompted a difficult but necessary debate in Brazil over rights and privileges. This debate naturally extends to design, yet as I've addressed in chapter 2, it has tended to being sidelined in favour of approaches to design that celebrate it mainly as an expression of creative genius, privilege, status and style. In the following section I highlight how the demand, attainment and expression of rights by a large section of the Brazilian population, but also the tensions that resulted from this class struggle, came to define the 2004-14 decade.

101. A telling example of this is elementary and secondary education, a characteristically middle-class investment since it guarantees the reproduction and perpetuation of the group's social status (Guerra et al., 2006). It does so in two main ways: in the social capital offered by a limited, competitive selection of private schools and ensuring younger generations are more aptly prepared to apply and enrol in higher education, especially the highly ranked, state-run universities. The affirmative action quota system for access to higher education, implemented in public universities since 2002, fundamentally upended this dynamic.

3.2. Rights, privileges and missed opportunities

The intention of creating a new Brazilian middle class through the promotion of public, but especially private consumption challenged the PT governments' role in either supporting or resisting a late capitalist, even neoliberal agenda. As the philosopher Marilena Chauí argues, by redefining social rights as services that have to be bought and sold on the market, as well as by shifting public funds intended for social rights to serve private interests, neoliberalism not only shrinks the public space of social rights but also destroys their very meaning (2016). In a highly stratified and unequal society such as Brazil's, defending but also designing new spaces and meanings for citizen rights implies addressing class privileges:

The first and main obstruction to democracy in Brazil is the fact that Brazilian society is polarised not between conflicting rights or between conflicting interests. If it were already democratic, it would have this polarisation of interests, of lacks, of needs. No: our society is polarised between lack and privilege. The lack of the popular and excluded classes and the privileges of the ruling class. What characterises a lack is that it is always specific. It is a lack of this, a lack of that. It's the lack of school, of daycare... it is not universalised. A privilege, by definition, is always private. The mark of a privilege is that it cannot be universalised without ceasing to be a privilege. We have a lack that does not become a conquered right and a privilege that can never reach the condition of a right. So we are polarised between two absences of rights: lack and privilege. And as long as we do not overcome this, the path, the building of our democracy will always be very fragile and uninterruptedly regressive, because you do not change the core of the social relationship that is lack and privilege. That's what you have to do. Changing this undoubtedly means changing the country's economic and political structure. There's no conversation. This is what needs to be done (Chauí 2016).¹⁰²

102. Original quote: "O primeiro e principal bloqueio à democracia no Brasil é o fato de que a sociedade brasileira está polarizada não entre direitos conflitantes nem entre interesses conflitantes. Se ela já fosse democrática, ela teria essa polarização de interesses, de carências, de necessidades. Não: a nossa sociedade está polarizada entre a carência e o privilégio. A carência das classes populares e dos excluídos e os privilégios da classe dominante. O que caracteriza uma carência é que ela é sempre específica. Ela é carência disso, carência daquilo. Ela é carência de escola, de creche... ela não se universaliza. Um privilégio, por definição, é sempre particular. A marca de um privilégio é que ele não pode se universalizar sem deixar de ser um privilégio. Temos a carência que não chega em se transformar num direito conquistado e um privilégio que nunca poderá chegar à condição de um direito. Então estamos polarizados entre duas ausências de direitos: a carência e o privilégio. E enquanto nós não superarmos isto, a nossa passagem, a nossa construção da democracia será sempre muito frágil e ininterruptamente regressiva, porque você não muda o núcleo da relação social que é a carência e o privilégio. É nisso que você tem de mexer. Mexer nisso significa sem dúvida mexer na estrutura econômica e política do país. Não tem conversa. É isso que precisa ser feito" (Chauí 2016).

For Eliana Vicente, Brazil's "traditional" middle-class has since the 1950s been the privileged beneficiary of government programmes, which have guaranteed its members access to homeownership, social welfare and participation in the political system.¹⁰³ They have also, crucially, fostered a wage distinction between blue-collar workers and those in intermediate positions (2013, 85). Unexposed to significant competitiveness – the poor, Vicente notes, only had some attention from the state at the end of the military regime (86) – the middle-class remained cohesive even after democracy was reinstated in the 1980s. Socially conservative and aware of its powerful status position, its members continued to benefit from resources offered by both the state and the market, even during the period of hyperinflation and macroeconomic instability that ended in 1994 with the aforementioned Plano Real. Under such privileged conditions, this small segment of the population enjoyed increased purchasing power, affordable services (chiefly domestic help) and material well-being. Vicente notes that these middle-class privileges created a sense of inclusion in the political and economic system, which was accompanied by a sense of security made possible through a bargaining process between the middle-class and the government (86). As growing education and income levels lead to a lifestyle the Brazilian middle-class did not want to give up, its preoccupations grew closer to fulfilling consumption goals than to questions of citizenship or ideological discussions. That led this small, yet influential section of the population to acquiesce with economic growth even if based on the curtailment of democratic freedoms, as it happened during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship (86). In her book 'Consumption Intensified: The Politics of Middle-Class Daily Life in Brazil' (2002), the anthropologist Maureen O'Dougherty observed what by the 21st century would be considered Brazil's "traditional" middle-class. She revealed how during the 1990s the individuals of this income group expressed desire, value, frustration and politics through the procurement of goods and experiences (15).¹⁰⁴ She also showed how a dual vision shaped by the immediate reality of crisis, shaped by hyperinflation and political instability, as well as a First-World desired reality, marked a class identity defined by consumption

103. Especially during the so-called "Economic Miracle" of 1968-1973 overseen by the military dictatorship, when GDP grew at over 10 percent a year.

104. Most specifically, O'Dougherty's research highlighted the shared patterns, investments, and discourses of fifty adults aged 35 to 55, born or raised in the city or state of São Paulo and living with their families in the state capital, as well as the references made about them in popular culture (2002).

coupled with a sense of moral and cultural superiority (15).¹⁰⁵

By the 2000s, Brazil's traditional middle class began feeling squeezed by increased financial and social stress (Gethin and Morgan 2018, 3). Although the average national income per adult grew at 18 percent between 2002 and 2014, most economic gains were split between two groups on the opposite ends of the economic spectrum: the poor and the very rich (UNDP 2019, 119).¹⁰⁶ With middle-income salaries stagnating from 2011 onwards, living conditions for a large part of Brazil's urban, educated population deteriorated significantly in what became the most unequal of the world's democracies.¹⁰⁷ The growing economy agitated the urban housing market and increased the prices of services such as housemaids, hairdressers, restaurants and construction; as Carvalho remarks, what for some was a gain in salary for others was a rise in inflation (2018, 47).¹⁰⁸ In its demands for inclusion and in claiming an increasingly active role in society, a large sector of the Brazilian population challenged the tastes, spaces, bodies and discourses of Brazil's traditional middle- and upper classes. One critical dimension of this process took place in the domestic realm. The passing into law in 2015 of the so-called PEC das Domésticas, or Housemaid Constitutional Amendment Proposal, provided a workforce of mainly black and brown women with labour rights long enjoyed by other professional categories. For Eliane Brum, this shamefully late reparation allowed housemaids to leave a kind of contemporary slavery only to become another category of explored workers (2019, 57). As she observes, these changes questioned a privilege enjoyed by mostly white middle-class women and entrenched since Brazil's formation: having another woman, usually black, conducting all domestic chores,

105. O'Dougherty's informants "scorned another middle-class for its lack of project and poor values—or rather, for its frivolous consumption and poor taste" (2002, 26), adding that "the combination of one's own downward mobility (or stationary position) versus the ascent of others was evidently irritating (48).

106. Laura Carvalho and economists from the World Inequality Lab observed that those profiting from Brazil's increasingly financialised economy made great gains during this period. The bullish economic environment observed until 2014 allowed for a buoyant stock market and significant growth in financial products, as well as a rise in consumer credit and in real estate prices. While the absence of any significant reform to the country's regressive tax system gave private investments further impetus, handsome returns were made by resource-owners linked to the commodity export sector (Gethin & Morgan 2018, 4).

107. According to the World Inequality Database, by 2015 the top 1 percent of Brazil's over 209 million inhabitants shared 28,3 percent of national income, while the 50 percent poorest shared only 13,9 percent (Canzian & Mena 2019).

108. Especially following an influx of qualified, high-earning expatriates that settled in large cities. In Rio de Janeiro, these foreign workers were accompanied by athletes and tourists in the lead-up to the 2016 Olympics.

without hourly limits, for a minimum wage (57).¹⁰⁹ In what is a particularly critical comment regarding what is addressed – and not addressed – by approaches to Brazilian design (and architecture), Brum adds: “The maid’s room is not the object of coffee table books, such as the modernist work of Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012), but it is Brazil’s most important architectural concept. Without understanding it, you don’t understand anything” (58).¹¹⁰ Brum further elaborates on the struggle for class status beyond such designed expressions of privilege (and exploitation): for the elite, she adds, “it was not the poorest that were expanding their rights, but rather it that was losing its privileges – or its ‘positive’ class difference” (29).¹¹¹

Towards the end of the 2004-14 decade, the material expectations of a large part of the Brazilian population became increasingly frustrated by economic stagnation and by a lack of an ideologically assertive, political response from the progressive governments that promised a more prosperous and less unequal society (Pinheiro-Machado 2019). A general climate of social unease was aggravated in June 2013, when the largest street demonstrations took place in Brazil since the student-led call for President Collor de Melo’s impeachment in 1992. The so-called “June demonstrations” began as protests against a R\$0,20 bus fare increase in São Paulo. These were loosely organised on social media by the Movimento Passe Livre [Free Pass Movement, MPL]. Yet especially after June 13, when São Paulo’s military police violently repressed demonstrators, these protests exploded in numbers and grievances. Groups of organised demonstrators, activists and political parties, with opposing ideologies and agendas, took over Brazilian cities’ streets. Protests became outlets for citizens of every political faction to express their anxiety and discontent with widespread corruption, the demise of public services, the treatment of minorities and, chiefly, police violence (Charleaux 2017). As Carvalho observed, having erupted with a demand of rights towards a providing state, the June demonstrations were

109. This amendment, approved by the Brazilian Congress in 2013 and signed into law by Dilma Rousseff in 2015, granted housemaids rights such as daily and weekly working-hour limits, overtime and evening hours compensation and access to the Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço (Severance Indemnity Fund for employees, FGTS). This was the most important attainment of labour rights for this sector of the working population since the instatement of a minimum wage by the 1988 Federal Constitution. (Brum 2019, 57).

110. Original quote: “O quarto da empregada não é objeto de livros de mesa, como por exemplo a obra modernista de Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012), mas é o conceito arquitetônico mais importante do Brasil. Sem compreendê-lo, não se compreende nada” (Brum 2019, 58).

111. Original quote: “Para essa parcela da sociedade, não eram os mais pobres que ampliavam seus direitos, mas ela que perdia seus privilégios – ou sua diferença ‘positiva’ de classe” (Brum 2019, 29).

emboldened by a revolt against an oppressing state and expanded with protests against a corrupt state (2018, 157). They were also indicative of how the creation of new civil society movements, political parties and media outlets (such as the activist-run *Mídia Ninja*) fundamentally expanded the public sphere of communication and the very use and contestation over public space. As the anthropologist Lilia M. Schwarcz and historian Heloísa Starling observed, the June 2013 demonstrations confirmed public space as the privileged place for direct citizen participation. Making clear that the time for the country's re-democratisation was over, they argued that from then onwards strengthening public institutions, expanding democracy and consolidating citizenship should set the national agenda. By claiming new civil rights but also for 'the right to difference' evoked by a series of social movements (black, indigenous, quilombola, feminist, LGBT, etc.), more and more Brazilians could reimagine an expansion of citizenship beyond equality and difference (Schwarcz and Starling 2015, 514).¹¹²

A few months after the June demonstrations, another manifestation of Brazil's failure to challenge decades of social prejudice, class segregation and state violence made it to national and international media. In late 2013 and early 2014, hundreds of underprivileged and mostly black teenagers began organising *rolêzinhos* – a diminutive of *rolê*, or hangout – in shopping malls across the country, using social media and WhatsApp. Although these young people did nothing illegal and were just hanging out – and consuming – in safe, clean, air-conditioned spaces, they were often harassed by security guards and in some instances expelled by heavily armed riot police. The reactions of the mall's managers and patrons of these public yet privately-run spaces signalled how these teenager consumers started, by their physical presence alone, to disrupt a century-old social order. As sociologist Jessé Souza observed, they “broke through demarcation lines which are implicit, although illegal, in Brazil's real but unacknowledged system of apartheid. It is the poor pretending they don't know their place” (Rocha 2014). Photos and videos of the *rolêzinhos* were then widely broadcast and shared in conventional and social media. The anthropologist Rosana Pinheiro-Machado addressed this phenomenon

112. Quilombola are the traditional communities residing in quilombos, settlements first established by escaped Afro-Brazilian slaves. The rights of these communities, including claiming property rights to the land they inhabit, were first recognised in 2003 by President Lula da Silva, a decree that was only secured by Brazil's Supreme Federal Court in 2018.

in her book 'Amanhã vai ser maior' (2019), in which she analysed the events shaping Brazilian society from the June 2013 demonstrations until the election of President Jair Bolsonaro. Pinheiro-Machado accompanied suburban youth groups in Porto Alegre and their rôles since 2009, as part of a study of their culture of consumption (44). She claims that as a political phenomenon, the rolêzinhos reveal the obvious: Brazil's blatant class segregation (46). With the simple act of going to the shopping mall, these teenagers claimed their right to roam freely in colour- and class- (veiled) segregated cities, thus reacting to the brutal, profound and quotidian violence the underprivileged in Brazil have long suffered from (48). Although Pinheiro-Machado was an active voice in an international debate over the alleged political nature of the rolêzinhos, she warns against an inability to understand the political repercussion of such a multifaceted phenomenon; she claims they represent an instance of what she calls "ambiguous revolts" (49) that are fostered by neoliberal policies. By loosening labour relations and union politics, neoliberalism acts as "a grinder of collectivities, by dedemocratising, disaggregating and individualising" (49).¹¹³ Once work is no longer the sphere of politicisation, she says, the protests of the most vulnerable tend to be disorganised, decentralised and sparked by social media. Expressing a sense of revolt against concrete issues of an everyday life of hardship, collective action often emerges in a spontaneous, contagious way, with little centralised or strategic planning (49).

The June demonstrations and the rolêzinhos are only two examples of how the 2004-2014 decade provided a fertile ground for observing in Brazil what Appadurai calls the processes that ground the design of social order (2013, 254). But also a crucial opportunity for the design of, and for, collective action and social mobilisation, which is so often ignored or dismissed by approaches to this activity. Such dimensions of design practice result in initiatives and artefacts designed for, or with, collective subjects that range from organic teenage groups to organised social movements, and from political party communication to state propaganda, as addressed in chapter 5. Changes in the use, perception and imagination of what constitutes the public good, but also the protests against violence and segregation, represented an opportunity for designers to critically address the contexts and repercussions of their practice.

113. Original quote: "O neoliberalismo flexibiliza as relações de trabalho e, conseqüentemente, as formas de fazer política sindical, atuando como uma máquina de moer coletividades, desdemocratizar, desagregar e individualizar" (Pinheiro-Machado 2019, 49).

Much of the criticism of the 2004-14 decade's consumption-driven, apolitical promise of material hope has been aimed at the failure of Brazilian society to propose and enact models of progress, development and welfare beyond the Western, late-capitalist extraction, exploitation and consumption model (Brum 2019, Kopper 2019, Carvalho 2018, Cocco 2017, Souza 2015). The political scientist Sônia Fleury states that the project of society and sociability constituted in Brazil during this decade disfigured, in essential aspects, the democratic utopia built from social mobilisation in the 1970s and 80s. Instead, this utopia was transformed into a market project grounded on political marketing, consumption and popular credit, in which Brazilians were included in a community of citizens by their individualised actions based on integration via consumption" (2013, 70).¹¹⁴ It is easier, she adds, to fabricate a middle-class than to build a compassionate, cohesive and just society (2013, 79). For Celia Kerstenetzky, Brazil's income redistribution experiment was an insufficient and incomplete policy, as it centred more on the distribution of income than "on the distribution of an opportunity structure that could improve the living standards of the population, increase the level of well-being and reduce social inequalities" (37).¹¹⁵ The PT governments encouraged the aspirational quality of goods and services offered by the consumer market instead of fostering social consumption, which Kerstenetzky adds could have worked as an identity builder and social reintegrator (37).¹¹⁶

For the philosopher and sociologist Cândido Grzybowski, the project of creating and expanding the middle classes masked a reigning hegemony that aimed to keep everything as it is (2013, 103). Instead of representing real social change, such a project was in effect about changing something so as not to transform the essential (103). Grzybowski also observes how in the name of

114. Original quote: "No interior da relação entre Estado e Mercado e nos embates e resistências da sociedade e das instituições sociais, configura-se o projeto atual de sociedade e sociabilidade. Esse, em aspectos essenciais, desfigurou a utopia democrática construída nos anos 70 e 80 a partir da mobilização social, transformando-a em um projeto de mercado: marketing político, consumo e crédito popular. Afastou-se, portanto da noção de inclusão em uma comunidade de cidadãos, para pensá-la como ações individualizadas a partir da integração via consumo" (Fleury 2013, 70).

115. Original quote: "Foi uma política insuficiente, incompleta, centrada muito mais na distribuição da renda propriamente do que talvez na distribuição de uma estrutura de oportunidades que pudesse melhorar os padrões de vida da população, aumentar o nível de bem-estar e reduzir desigualdades sociais" (Kerstenetzky 2017, 37).

116. Kerstenetzky also claims that researchers could look into the possibilities for the political organisation of the masses who benefited from Brazil's social programs, considering union participation dropped to around 20 percent during this 'golden decade' (2017, 39).

social justice, the PT governments promoted policies that influenced income and consumption patterns over political or civic participation. Such policies include the extension of social protection, the extension of access to credit (both in payroll and for the purchase of durable goods), the Minha Casa Minha Vida [My House My Life] program of subsidised housing or the PRONAF programme of small-scale farming support (2017, 58).¹¹⁷ He also mentions the creation of ministries for human rights, racial equality and women which, although underfunded and more symbolic than consequential, elevated structural social inequality to a state issue and brought it to the public sphere (58). Grzybowski nevertheless claims the measure that most significantly impacted Brazil's antiquated social structure was the affirmative action programme that from 2002 instated quotas for racial and unprivileged groups – black, brown, Indigenous and public school students – in Brazil's state and federal universities (58). Because it faced class advantages and disadvantages in access to high-level university and technical knowledge and access to more stable and better-paid public jobs, the university quotas programme effectively broke social class privileges (58).¹¹⁸

The critical changes to the balance of rights and privileges promoted by this affirmative action programme have significantly impacted the education and practice of design. I first heard about this legislative measure on my 2016 research trip, in a conversation with Zoy Anastassakis, then co-director of ESDI in Rio de Janeiro.¹¹⁹ I've since been interested in understanding the

117. The Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar [Programme for Familiar Agriculture Support, PRONAF] was supported small-scale farming mainly through the public purchase of food for school meals and social assistance programs.

118. According to an IBGE study on race-based social inequalities, in 2018 the number of black and brown students enrolled in public universities first surpassed the number of white students, at 50,3 percent. This figure, still lower than the 55,8 percent of the population self-declared as black or brown (IBGE 2019, 9), is one of the few significant signs of improvement for the condition of this population described in this study, which includes indicators in such areas as employment, income, housing, violence and political representation.

119. Founded as an independent school in 1962 – which makes it the oldest higher education institution to offer design courses in Brazil, Latin America and in the Portuguese language) – the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial [Higher School of Industrial Design, ESDI] was integrated in Rio de Janeiro's State University (UERJ) in 1975. In 2002, UERJ was the first state university in Brazil to introduce affirmative action quotas in higher education, making ESDI the first design school to assign vacancies for students enrolling from public schools, half of which specifically for those self-declared as black, brown or indigenous students; it has inclusively been considered the higher education institution where this measure has had a greater impact (Anastassakis, Z. personal communication, June 30 2016). The Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAU-USP), Brazil's most prestigious architecture school, was one of the last design and architecture schools to apply this affirmative action in 2017, a year after quotas began being applied on a federal level (Rolnik 2016).

effects and potential of university quotas in political representation, media presence, policy making and the quality of debates taking place in the Brazilian public sphere – most notably in design. Finding out more about the university quotas' impact in design education became one of my main research trip goals and a recurring topic in interviews and conversations with students and teachers from several universities. Many of those interviews and conversations took place at NDesign, Brazil's National Design Student Convention, which I attended in July of 2016.¹²⁰ During the event's nine days I interacted with some of the over 1200 students and speakers that came to João Pessoa from all over the country.¹²¹

The convention's final assembly was dominated by the issue of representation: while concerns over LGBT rights and gender identity reflected global identity politics and 'safe zone' discussions, the representation of minorities and marginal identities in Brazilian design education and practise became significantly important, even urgent.¹²² Yet given the notoriously low number of non-white speakers and students at the convention, this discussion also revealed how this crucial debate in academia, in design and in Brazilian society as a whole, has only just begun to include the plurality of voices, subjectivities and experiences it needs to yield tangible results. Nevertheless, the university quotas programme is perhaps the most consequential and enduring effort of social inclusion promoted by the PT governments. It also has the potential to fundamentally change the education and practice of design. First, by allowing access to college education to a part of the population hitherto unable to do so: these students are often the first in their families to occupy their deserved place in Brazilian universities. Most specifically in design, when mainly white students from more privileged backgrounds begin sharing the classroom with

120. The first NDesign took place in 1991 and has since become a Brazilian design institution. From the first group of 700 students assembled in Curitiba to the record-breaking gathering of 4500 in 2010 (also in Curitiba), it is hard to find a Brazilian design professional today that has not attended at least one National Design Student Convention. The event's 26-year history and expansion reflects Brazil's boom in higher education, which also extended to design: today 137 of Brazil's 192 federal, state and privately-run universities offer at least one design course.

121. I sat on talks and sessions of the National Design Student Council, having contributed to the programme with a presentation about my thesis. I also set up an interview table outside the main lecture hall, in which I conducted over twenty recorded interviews. Such conversations provided glimpses into the aspirations and concerns of individuals students.

122. This issue took over others such as the adequacy of design education, study conditions at universities or the regulation of the design profession – a hot topic at the time, since in 2016 Brazilian architects influenced lawmakers to ban other design professionals from authoring projects, such as signage or train interiors.

colleagues of other classes, races and regions – as well as a more comprehensive range of genders, sexual orientations and religious beliefs – the questions and answers they both ask and answer in design briefs have started to change as well. In classrooms that only so recently began reflecting Brazil’s complex social spectrum, there should then be less room and legitimacy for presuppositions and assumptions regarding the needs and desires of potential users of design. Conversely, by addressing that complexity students and teachers can better acknowledge urgent and pervasive issues – such as social inequality, systemic segregation and structural racism – in assignment briefs and research projects that directly confront them. As more socially and racially balanced cohorts of design graduates enter the jobs market, Brazil’s professional designer class will become more diverse and better informed to face Brazil’s challenges. Inspired by the global interactions set forth by Brazilian leaders during the 2004-14 decade addressed in the following section, these designers should also be able to set a more inclusive and emancipatory agenda for design – in Brazil and beyond.

3.3. Brazil's global interactions

The changes that affected Brazil's society during the 2004-14 decade took place as the country aspired to a leading role in a multipolar world and a global cultural economy. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues this economy must be seen as “a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)” (2005, 32). In this section I discuss how Brazil gained a new place in such an economy through a series of global interactions, encouraged by both state and corporate leaders, social movements, civil society and, crucially, cultural institutions. Acknowledging such interactions helps understand how design, as a transnational professional practise and cultural expression, was affected by Brazil's increasingly favourable international reputation during this period. But also by what Appadurai describes as the top-down and bottom-up tensions between cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation that are prompted by globalisation (32).

The international relations scholar Oliver Stuenkel argues the creation of the BRIC group of countries in 2001 provided a critical validation for Brazilian leaders, as they claimed Brazil's new global role could overtly challenge a dominating, idealised type of Western modernity.¹²³ Stuenkel claims this acronym became a key indicator for the rise of multipolar world (2017, 129), in which non-Western actors such as Brazil – as well as Russia, India and China – would no longer be regarded as relatively passive rule-takers (5). He argues that over time the BRICs came to signal how “the world is increasingly becoming dominated by economies with a relatively low GDP per capita and internal challenges typical of developing countries” (99). This, he adds, “complicates discussions about who can serve as a model for the future, and about whom poor countries will look toward for orientation, inspiration, and emulation” (99). During the 2004-2014 decade, Brazil pulled above its economic and diplomatic weight as Latin America's largest nation and economy.¹²⁴ The appointment of diplomat

123. The BRICs acronym was presented by the economist Jim O'Neill in a proposal to reorganise world policymaking forums by considering the projected growth and influence of four emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India and China (2001). From 2001 to 2007 this acronym mainly described an investment category and was confronted with broad scepticism by Western media; yet from 2008 to 2014 it evolved towards an informal political and economic platform, which was renamed BRICS after South Africa joined in 2010 (Stuenkel 2017, 128).

124. Especially with the experienced diplomat Celso Amorim as foreign minister during Lula da Silva's two presidential mandates and as defence minister in Dilma Rousseff's first government.

Sérgio Vieira de Mello as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2002, Brazil's 2004-5 and 2010-11 mandates (and bids) for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, the organising of several high-level summits and Heads of State meetings, or the hosting of the 2012 Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development are but a few of high-level initiatives that consolidated the nation's reputation as not only a leader in a multipolar world but also a nation committed to post-World War II multilateral institutions.¹²⁵

In addition, Brazilian leaders and diplomats benefited from the aforementioned “pink tide” of progressive governments in turn-of-the-century Latin America to promote and consolidate several regional clubs, blocs and institutional arrangements.¹²⁶ Although these reflected varying integration levels, ideological alignments and commitments to regional development across the region, much of this integration dynamic expressed the common goals of resistance to neoliberal economics and the promotion of a new developmentalism, or even of neo-socialist developmentalism (Gonçalves & Aragão 2019). The creation of multilateral regional and interregional cooperation mechanisms, as well as the organising of summits and working groups with a focus on “South-South” relations, contributed to this effort.¹²⁷ A crucial initiative created during this period was the World Social Forum (WSF). Held for the first time in the city of Porto Alegre in 2001, it meant to present an alternative to the World Economic Forum held yearly in Davos, Switzerland since 1971.¹²⁸ As it grew in participation and notoriety, the WSF became a meeting place not only for protesting against western, corporate, neoliberal globalisation but also for

125. In April 2014, Brazil hosted the Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance; at the opening ceremony of this event, which gathered in São Paulo government officials, researchers and internet activists from all over the world, President Dilma Rousseff signed into law the Marco Civil da Internet (Civil Rights Framework for the Internet). This sort of constitution for what is Latin America's largest digital economy reaffirmed Brazil's pioneering role in multistakeholder Internet governance and net neutrality.

126. Such blocs include the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), the Union of South American Nations (Unasur), the Latin American Integration Association (ALDI) and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA).

127. Among these are the Summit of South American-Arab Countries, which first took place in Brasilia in 2005, or the Africa-South America Summit, first held in 2006 in Abuja following an official visit by Lula da Silva to Nigeria in 2005.

128. Porto Alegre, the state capital of Rio Grande do Sul, was first governed by the PT in the 1990s long before the election of Lula da Silva. The city became a worldwide reference of progressive, municipal administration in large part thanks to its pioneering of a participatory budget, which has since been adopted by cities around the world.

discussing courses of action under the motto “Another World is Possible.”¹²⁹

On another, more popular but equally relevant dimension of Brazil’s global reputation, two key international sporting events were announced in 2007 and 2009: the 2014 Football World Cup and the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. The expectations created between their respective announcements and organisation contributed to Brazil’s notoriety – and soft power – well beyond macro-economic indicators. Nevertheless, although both initiatives fostered national self-esteem and galvanised a climate of hope in the country for over half a decade, they also became associated with overspending, graft and the propensity of politicians to invest in spectacular, short-lived events in detriment of a long-term, strategic spending in infrastructure, health, or education.¹³⁰ The construction of stadiums, arenas, avenues and transport systems associated with these mega-events also caused a series of evictions and forced removals which, according to Rosana Pinheiro-Machado and the scholars Paula Alegria and Lucas Bulgarelli, “boosted street protests, self-organised housing occupations and the formation of horizontal political collectives and popular committees in the host cities” (2020, 8).¹³¹ This tension between expressions of the state’s strategic planning and of civil society’s tactical, collective actions is also indicative of how this decade offered new opportunities and territories for design practice. These international events also highlighted the role of Brazilian corporations in the global economy world. These include large firms, in earnings and global reach, such as the construction services conglomerates Odebrecht and Camargo Corrêa, but also the MarcoPolo bus and coach manufacturer, the investment firm 3G Capital (owner of Burger King, Kraft Foods and Anheuser-Busch InBev, among other multinational food and beverage companies) and JBS, the world’s largest producer and exporter of protein, as well as Embraer and Natura, both of which are represented in Brazil Today.

The global interactions promoted by Brazilian government, corporate and civil society leaders were either led by or had a significant impact in the cultural

129. After its first three editions were held in Porto Alegre, other cities such as Tunis, Mumbai, Belém and Montréal hosted the Forum until 2016.

130. To make matters worse, Brazil lost the World Cup Final 7-1 to Germany.

131. Full original quote: “A série de despejos e remoções forçadas em torno das grandes obras para a Copa das Confederações (2013), Copa do Mundo (2014) e Jogos Olímpicos (2016) — como construções de estádios, arenas, avenidas e sistemas de transporte — impulsionou protestos de rua, ocupações de moradia auto-organizadas e a formação de coletivos políticos horizontais e comitês populares nas cidades-sede dos megaeventos” (Pinheiro Machado, Alegria & Bulgarelli 2020, 8).

sector. The appointment of the acclaimed musician Gilberto Gil as Lula da Silva's first Culture minister favoured institutional attention and state support for the country's multiple, hybrid and peripheral cultural production. Such support was essential for the integration of artistic and literary expressions from the margins of society in more mainstream cultural circuits, but also in a wider public sphere. This decade was thus also an exceptional period for Brazilians to express the complex and polyphonic nature of their culture abroad. Brazil's economic prosperity and outwardly outlook, an increased foreign interest in the cultural expressions of its people and, crucially, a dynamic cultural diplomacy led to the organisation of several festivals that celebrated the many dimensions of Brazilian contemporary culture overseas. These included the Year of Brazil in France (2005); the Brasil Festival in Amsterdam (2011), the Rio Occupation London and Casa Brasil Festival or the Year of Brazil in Portugal (2012). In 2016 Brazil was the guest country of the Frankfurt Book Fair – the pavilion for which I included in Brazil Today. Other significant cultural showcases included 'Brazil Contemporary - Contemporary Art, Architecture, Visual Culture and Design', organised by the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, the Netherlands Architecture Institute and the Nederlands Fotomuseum (2009) or the Brazilian pavilion at the Expo 2010 in Shanghai. The architecture exhibitions organised at Brazil's Venice Biennale pavilion, but also the São Paulo International Architecture Biennale, the Brazilian Graphic Design Biennial and the Brazilian Design Biennial represented significant curatorial approaches to Brazilian design and architecture with national and international reach. In the following section I address a selection of such approaches that were organised during this decade, in Brazil and elsewhere. These provide rather different perspectives on how the ambitions and consequences of this decade translated into design initiatives and artefacts, but also helped shape a dominant discourse associated with design practice in the country.

3.4. Curatorial approaches to Brazilian design, 2004-14

In this section I analyse key curatorial approaches to contemporary Brazilian design that took place during the 2004-14 decade. Similarly to *Brazil Today*, these approaches address design as a multidisciplinary practice and as a matter of national (or regional) concern. More than providing a review of each approach or a detailed analysis of its curatorial intentions and discourses, I intend to discuss these approaches as examples of how other curators addressed the context and potential of design practice in Brazil during my period of study. My analysis is based primarily on the exhibitions' catalogues, books and other associated publications, which were valued sources to my own curatorial research and approach. It does not include the critical reception to these exhibitions, expressed in articles or reviews published in specialised or general-interest media and in academic journals.

I first address the *Bienal Brasileira de Design's* [Brazilian Design Biennial, BBD] which, especially considering the absence of a national design museum, centre or collection in Brazil, has been the most important, multidisciplinary national design showcase for over five decades.¹³² Each edition of the 2006-2015 BBD cycle, organised by the private sector and supported by the federal government, was promoted as a popular initiative that expressed a sense of optimism associated with a period of relative affluence and progressive policies.¹³³ Taking place in high-profile cultural institutions and venues, their main exhibitions and public programmes presented design, in its multidisciplinary dimensions and reach, to a broad range of primarily domestic audiences. Its organisation contributed significantly to the institutionalisation of design in Brazil

132. The design scholars and curators Freddy Van Camp and Ivens Fontoura provide a detailed account on the first two biennial cycles in their catalogue essay of the BBD 2010 exhibition 'Design Biennials: Beginnings of an Idea' (Van Camp & Fontoura, 2010). The first took place in Rio de Janeiro between 1968 and 1972, focused primarily on industrial design and laid the foundations for the institutional presentation, discussion and study of contemporary design in Brazil (28). The second was organised in Curitiba between 1990 and 1992; mirroring design exhibitions such as the Milan Triennale and the Ljubljana Industrial Design Biennial, it highlighted design's contribution to social and economic development. Its main legacy was the creation in Curitiba of the Brazilian Design Memorial, the first design-specific museum in America and second in the world after London's Design Museum. It was dismantled less than a decade later (51).

133. Nevertheless, after the worst-ever recession to hit Brazil began in 2014, the spirit, organisation and the very integrity of the BBD was again put into question: its 2017 edition began to be organised in Recife but was eventually canceled.

TABLE 3: Brazilian Design Biennial curatorial overview, 2006-2015

EDITION	EXHIBITIONS
2006 SÃO PAULO Chief Curator Fábio Magalhães	Our know-how [C] Joice Joppert Leal [AC] Fabiola Bergamo, Malba Aguiar, Mercês Parente Exhibition Sections: Objects of the body; Objects of the house
	A glance into the history of Brazilian design [C] Joice Joppert Leal [AC] Fabiola Bergamo
	Contemporary production [C] Marili Brandão [AC] Ricardo Scura Sections: Design For Whom; Small-scale production: signed furniture; Large-scale production; Design for What: Design for Public Use; Design to light; Design to ornament; Design to carry things; Design for Health; Design for packaging; Socioenvironmental design [C] Fábio Mestriner; Who designs design; Manufacturer's design department [C] Christian Ullman; Independent offices; Designer-producers; Brazilian design in the international scene; IF Design Awards; Designers working for international firms; Technology: Visual Design [C] Chico Homem de Mello
	Charlotte Perriand [C] Marie-Laure Jousset
2008 BRASÍLIA Chief Curator Fábio Magalhães	Main Exhibition [C] Fábio Magalhães [AC] Auresnede Pires Stephan
	Popular design [C] José Alberto Nemer
	Bornancini & Petzold [C] Adélia Borges
	Made in Italy 1978-2008 [C] Vanni Pasca
	Roberto Sambonet – From Brazil to design [C] Enrico Morteo
2010 CURITIBA Chief Curator Adélia Borges	Design, innovation and sustainability [C] Adélia Borges [AC] Claudia Gerodo, Neide d'Avila Exhibition sections: Less; The right to come and go; Drop by drop; Turn on-turn off; What's it for?; Cream of the crop; Tell me from where it comes...; Window; New/old attitudes; Belonging; For a Better Life; Originality
	Urban design: a trajectory [C] Jaime Lerner
	Sustainability: what do I care? [C] André Stolarski, Rico Lins
	The Newest of the New [C] Ivens Fontoura
	It's a small world [C] Tina Midtgaard (Danish Design Centre), Karen Kjærgaard (Danish Crafts), Kjersti Wikstrøm (Danish Architecture Centre)
	Memory of the Industry: the case of CIMO [C] Angélica Santi
	Design Biennials – Beginnings of an Idea [C] Freddy Van Camp, Ivens Fontoura
Reinventing Substance [C] Adélia Borges	
	Design Memory in Paraná [C] Antonio Razera Neto, Renato Bertão
2012 BELO HORIZONTE Chief Curator Maria Helena Estrada	From hand-to-machine [C] Maria Helena Estrada Exhibition section: New Technologies [C] Jorge Lopes
2015 FLORIANÓPOLIS Chief Curator Freddy Van Camp	Design for All - For a Better Life [C] Freddy Van Camp [AC] Célio Teodorico, Pedro Paulo Delpino; Exhibition sections: Democratic Design; Special Design; Public Design
	Dutch Design in the Palace of the People [C] Jorn Konijn
	Technological Design - the makers and digital materialization [C] Jorge Lopes
	Design Catarina [C] Centro Design Catarina
	Historical Design - LBDI Memory [C] Freddy Van Camp
	Design for All? [C] Bruno Porto, Rico Lins
	Participatory Design - Creative Collectives [C] Bianka Frisoni, Simone Bobsin, Isabela Sielski, Katia Vêras

Abbreviations: [C] Curator(s) [AC] Assistant Curator(s)

on a regional and national level.¹³⁴ Crucially, the BBD also allowed for the consolidation of the curator as an authoritative profession within Brazil's design system: while the chief curator of its first two editions in São Paulo (2006) and Brasília (2008) was the art critic and curator Fábio Magalhães, the BBD was curated in Curitiba (2010) and Belo Horizonte (2012) respectively by the design editors and curators Adélia Borges and Maria Helena Estrada. The designer and scholar Freddy Van Camp curated the Florianópolis edition (2015). Table 3 presents the full list of exhibitions and respective curators of these five BBD editions.

As a hybrid of trade, state and profession-based exhibition, the BBD's institutional nature allowed each chief curator considerable autonomy and authority in selecting and presenting initiatives and artefacts that resulted from design practice in the recent past.¹³⁵ The BBD's main exhibitions featured a wide range of design disciplines, typologies, scales and manufacturing origins: from design student prototypes to everyday wares made by Indigenous groups, from high-end furniture to large-scale, consumer products created at the design centres of multinationals such as Electrolux, Fiat and Whirlpool. Their institutional discourses, curatorial approaches and artefact selections are thus crucial contributions to the study of Brazilian design beyond indicators provided by industry and trade institutions or professional organisations.¹³⁶ As a curatorial exercise, the BBD signals how the selection and exhibition, not to say the collection of design, often relies more on a given initiative's present potential than on its proven viability or consequence. Each of its main exhibitions presented the results of design practice launched in Brazil primarily in the previous two

134. In 2008, a BBD Strategic Orientation Committee was created under the auspices of the Ministry for Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, which contributed to a more long-term commitment to the event on a federal level. Its execution was delegated to state-level design centres, such as the Centro São Paulo Design, today Senai São Paulo Design, the Federação das Indústrias do Estado de Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte, the Centro de Design Paraná – today Centro Brasil Design – in Curitiba and the Centro de Design Santa Catarina in Florianópolis. These centres have profited from hosting the BBD to secure funding, train staff and, as in the case of the Centro Brasil Design in Curitiba, aspire to a national operating level.

135. Participation in the BBD was not competitive, yet the 2012 BBD edition included two design award showcases. Design awards also informed BBD's curatorial approach: international (iF or Red dot Awards) and national (Idea Brasil or MCB Award) distinctions were mentioned in exhibitions and catalogues.

136. Such as the 'Diagnostic Review of Design in Brazil', a 205-page document organised in 2014 by the Centro Brasil Design for Apex Brasil and the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade. Based on information gathered from over 300 Brazilian design firms, this document aimed to provide a strategic tool to the industrial sector but also to inform policy making. Available at: cbd.org.br/materiais-cbd/diagnostic-review-of-design-in-brazil/

years, often with a laudatory, overconfident tone.¹³⁷ Yet several of the exhibited artefacts – either they were prototypes, consumer products or the results of design-led community projects – often revealed, at later inspection, to have had a short life or not to have been fully implemented. Acknowledging the obsolescence and short-term life spans of design processes presented in these exhibitions, but also how their presentation and interpretation often revealed a lack of critical perspective towards their long-term viability or consequences, was crucial to the selection criteria, interpretation and presentation of arguments related to the design artefacts exhibited in Brazil Today.

Another key contemporary Brazilian design showcase relevant to my research and curatorial approach is the Prêmio Design MCB [MCB Design Award]. First organised by the Museu da Casa Brasileira [Museum of the Brazilian House, MCB] in 1986, this award aimed, in the spirit of MCB's mission, to raise awareness on the creative capacity of Brazilian designers among Brazilian industrialists.¹³⁸ In his essay 'O Lugar e o Papel do Prêmio MCB' [The Place and Role of the MCB Award] (2016), the design historian Marcos da Costa Braga mentions the award's first categories: furniture, household equipment and decoration materials (75).¹³⁹ However, by 2016 the MCB Award acknowledged a total of eight categories: furniture, appliances, lighting, textiles, electronic equipment, building equipment, transportation equipment and

137. Such was my main remark on the 2010 BBD edition in Curitiba, which I reviewed for *icon* magazine (Duarte 2010b).

138. Created in São Paulo 1970 as the state's museum of Brazilian artistic and historical furniture, the MCB has, in spite of its state-level dimension and unsettled history, proven to be Brazil's most relevant museum dedicated to architecture, decorative arts and design. MCB's mission is "to be a centre of reference regarding Brazilian dwelling addressed through the lens of its uses and customs, architecture and design, seeking to preserve the relations between man and his habitat through research, discussion and communication, stimulating social inclusion" (MCB 2021).

139. This essay was published in the book 'Prêmio Design Museu da Casa Brasileira: Trinta Edições' (2016), with which the MCB celebrated 30 editions of its award. Braga mentions how this award was idealised in 1986 at the height of the manufacturing and consumption boom that accompanied Brazil's redemocratisation process. Thought as a kind of 'Good Design Seal' by São Paulo's State Secretary for Culture, this award would be assigned to selected products by a "newly installed Commission of Graphic Arts and Industrial Design" while redefining the profile of the MCB as a design museum (Braga 2016, 73).

written works.¹⁴⁰ In between these dates, the award's organisers constantly removed, subdivided, created and reinstated categories. This inconstancy, Braga argues, reflected virtually all the controversial issues in the field of design during the award's thirty-year history. Among these issues are industrialisation vs. artisanal production, durability vs. ephemerality, an appreciation of unique objects over serial production or an emphasis either on the ergonomic or on the symbolic aspects of artefacts (75). During the award's history there was a notable increase of submitted projects coming from small, authorial productions (89), which reflects the liberalisation and deindustrialisation of the Brazilian economy, as addressed in chapter 2.

To the design historian Ethel Leon, this increase reflected also a shift in the award's discourse, which coupled a postmodern emphasis on pluralism and authorship with a neoliberal appeal to the designer as entrepreneur. The award's exhibitions and catalogues progressively showed industrial design less as a discipline geared towards strategic thinking, social progress or the public good and more, Leon remarks, as an activity concerned with the creation, production and selling of small series of unique objects with a closer affinity to the artistic spheres (2013, 19). Leon therefore considers the award turned inward, becoming mainly a commercial label attributed across a wide range of design categories: from mass-market consumer goods to limited-edition, collectible artefacts, from student projects to research dissertations. She also claims that as a reference for Brazilian designers, over time the award supported an internal narrative that showed little preoccupation towards the public meaning of design as a practice and social activity (19).¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, because the MCB Award is promoted by a public museum, Braga emphasises it connected the

140. In 1996, the critical essay category was created to "stimulate critical and theoretical work in this field of knowledge" (83). This coincided with the foundation of new, trade design magazines but also of Brazil's first scientific journal, called *Estudos em Design* [Design Studies], which was launched in 1983 (83). Braga provides a snapshot of the remarkable increase in scientific research and production in design at Brazilian universities from this period onwards, which was reflected in the increasing relevance and participation of this award category. Renamed 'Written Works' in 2004, this category witnessed such an increase in applications that a separate jury was constituted from 2008; in the subsequent years, tighter criteria of eligibility were introduced as to highlight theoretical and critical production that was exclusively directly related to design disciplines.

141. Leon mentions how such a narrative excludes, for example, Brazil's rich design production fostered by the public consumption of design services during the 1970s, exemplified by the metro systems of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the pioneering pedestrianisation of Curitiba or the state-propelled development of a domestic hardware and software industry, as well as the strategic branding of state giants such as Petrobras and the Post Office. It also leaves out the communication design production for music and film, much of which represented acts of contestation or resistance under the 'lead years' of the 1964-1985 military dictatorship (Leon 2013, 104).

field and practice of design with public administration and power (2016, 91). Thanks to the visibility and social place the MCB's own communication with society provide to design, he considers the award's longevity represents an uncommon example – for Brazil, at least – of a public policy aimed at supporting design that has endured successive changes in municipal administration (91). Nevertheless, in spite of the museum's role as a public institution, Leon remarks that the MCB award fell short in its mission to advocate for design's contribution to the public good or safeguard a place for the public consumption of design (2013, 19). Considering design has not achieved, in the context and discourse of Brazilian museums, a degree of autonomy as verifiable in fields such as architecture or the visual arts (19), she admits that instead of fostering such autonomy, the country's museums – but also its universities – have undermined its public recognition by progressively removing any reference to the actual industrial, economic and social reality of design practice (39).

The work of journalist and curator Adélia Borges, who was MCB's director from 2003 to 2007, challenges the validity of Leon's statement. Especially during the 2004-14 decade, Borges played an essential role in promoting Brazilian design, craft and folk art in her writing, public speaking and curatorial practice, in Brazil and abroad.¹⁴² Borges curated two of the most representative survey exhibitions of design in Brazil that took place during this period. The first was 'Design Brasileiro Hoje: Fronteiras' [Brazilian design today: borders], organised in 2009 at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo [Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo, MAM-SP], which reflected a broad, multidisciplinary approach to design.¹⁴³ The second was 'Design, Inovação e Sustentabilidade' [Design, Innovation and Sustainability], the main exhibition of the 2010 BBD, of which she was chief curator. Unparalleled in this BBD cycle for its thematic range, scope of design initiatives and even advisory team, in this exhibition Borges addressed design practice in Brazil across a range of disciplines, material practices and social worlds with exemplary, didactic pragmatism. In spite

142. Adélia Borges' book 'Design + Craft: The Brazilian Path' (2011) is a prominent example of her dedication and knowledge of this area.

143. This exhibition was an exception in the museum's history and the first to show design since 2000, when MAM held the two parallel exhibitions, curated by Tadeu Chiarelli, then the museum's chief curator: 'Entre a Arte e o Design: Coleção MAM' [Between Design and Art: MAM collection] and 'Entre o Design e a Arte: Irmãos Campana' [Between Design and Art: Campana Brothers]. It included artefacts aimed at a wide range of clients, markets and geographies, from Kiko Farka's 2005 Brazil logo (Borges 2009, 114) to a mailbox designed by Claudia Kayat aimed at the Danish Post office, manufactured by Polionda, a firm based in Rio de Janeiro (100) or Muti Randolph's 2007 fashion catwalk design for Colcci (148).

of their strikingly different institutional settings, these two exhibitions presented Brazilian design as a diverse and atomised practice that is not restricted to Brazil's internal market.¹⁴⁴

Following her post at the MCB, Borges was director of Pavilhão das Culturas Brasileiras [Brazilian Cultures Pavilion] in São Paulo from 2008 to 2010. She curated two large exhibitions at this state-run institution: 'Puras misturas' [Pure mixtures] in 2010 and 'Design da Periferia' [Design from the periphery] in 2013.¹⁴⁵ Borges' inaugural exhibition as the pavilion's director, 'Puras misturas' offered a glimpse into the institution's collections and thematic axes, but also aimed to provide an overview of Brazil's cultural history. Transcending categories between craft, folk art, Indigenous art and even 'design art', the exhibition established dialogues and juxtaposed languages, through which Borges presented a wide range of cultural creations from all over the country. In 'Design da Periferia', Borges featured artefacts "made by ordinary people to meet their everyday needs, using readily available resources such as waste materials and garbage" (Prefeitura de São Paulo 2013). Describing these artefacts as "invaluable lessons of design", Borges further claimed "the aesthetic solutions for their forms are on a par with projects by university-educated designers" (2013). Such as, for example, those that took part in her aforementioned, 1999 exhibition, 'Novos Alquimistas'. Her selection and presentation of original, creative solutions to everyday challenges by common citizens from across the country's peripheries meant to inspire designers and other visitors to consider their immediate surroundings, but also remote locations, as sources of inspiration.

Borges is a keen interpreter and communicator of the complex intentions of designers and the function, social role and anthropological depth of design. Yet her all-embracing interpretation of design and craft presents a forward-thinking but depoliticised celebration of popular Brazilian culture. Such

144. A noteworthy exhibition organised during this decade was 'Design brasileiro: uma mudança do olhar' [Brazilian design: a change of glance], which took place in 2007 at the Itamaraty Palace (Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in Brasília. The exhibition was curated by the designer Fábio Righetto, while Borges authored its catalogue's two-page essay (Righetto & Júnior 2007).

145. This exhibition space and reference centre for the diversity of Brazilian culture promoted by the City of São Paulo was installed in a 1950s, Oscar Niemeyer-designed, landmarked building of the Ibirapuera Park, near the Museu Afro-Brasil [Afro-Brazil Museum]. It was installed mainly to honour, house and showcase the collections of the 1938 Folkloric Research Mission, undertaken by the influential writer, art historian and curator Mario de Andrade, main organiser of the influential 1922 Modern Art Week. It would also integrate the Rossini Tavares de Lima Folklore Museum, which until 1999 occupied the Oca building, also in the Ibirapuera Park and in front of the Museum of Modern Art (Prefeitura de São Paulo 2010).

an interpretation was particularly fitting during Brazil's 2004-14 decade, which celebrated the country's exceptional moment and faith in future.

Borges' unassuming treatment of craft and peripheral design initiatives as authentic, local reactions or as acts of benign, passive resistance to global flows of commodities, symbols and technologies highlights what Bonsiepe mentions as a turn to the 'own' and to the design of less technologically complex products. Her interest in unpretentious, vernacular design signals what Bonsiepe observed is a kind of counterbalance "to the fervor of debates over postmodernism, immateriality, deconstruction, and anti-functionalism with their emphasis on lifestyle and tendency to glamorize design" (1991, 263). However, a more critical and conscious approach to the context of these artefacts can instead encourage critical, autonomous, expert-led (which is not the same to say as expert-exclusive) design practices. These can, for example, be interpreted as examples of frugal innovation, a concept put forward by the Indian marketing scholar Jaideep Prabhu that upholds the creation and design of effective solutions for the largest number of people with minimal resources.¹⁴⁶ Such interpretation foregrounds how the processes, methodologies and consequences of these designs practices extend well beyond the material and aesthetic singularity of the artefacts, or the idiosyncrasy of their non-expert 'designers'. Recognising these artefacts represent more than tactics of consumption, as described by the anthropologist Michel de Certeau (1988, xvii), entails acknowledging their political dimension. Likewise, interpreting their strategic potential, or their potential to be employed by a subject with will and power to influence power relationships (36), is key to safeguard what is an inherent dimension of design. Borges' central role in key institutions of the Brazilian design system has significantly influenced national and international debates regarding the public recognition of design in Brazil and, crucially, the notion of *Brasilidade*, or Brazilianness. Yet her depoliticised celebration of design has also contributed to a steering of a dominant discourse, not to mention a response from design system institutions, away from the country's tremendous social changes, political struggles and other pressing challenges.

Borges was part of a curatorial advisory committee that contributed to one of the most significant curatorial approaches to design from Latin America

146. For an introduction to frugal innovation, see Jaideep Prabhu's paper 'Frugal innovation: doing more with less for more' (2017).

of the 2004-14 decade: “New Territories: Laboratories for Design, Craft and Art in Latin America,” organised in 2014 by the Museum of Art and Design (MAD) in New York and curated by its then chief curator, Lowery Stokes Sims. Similarly to *Brazil Today*, this exhibition was organised by a museum outside the nation or region it addresses and was neither a state or trade exhibition.¹⁴⁷ This curatorial endeavour grew out of Sims’ equally ambitious territorial survey exhibition, ‘The Global Africa Project’, held at MAD in 2010. Yet its development process differed; Sims observes in her curatorial essay that “Unlike Africa, where design was at the time a nascent phenomenon, in Latin America design has been an organized discipline with strong theoretical and critical bases and organized pedagogical curricula” (2014, 10). She broke up the broad, abstract and artificial construct of Latin America by focusing on its main cities and associating a specific theme, or focus, to each (in most cases, each pair) of them. Considering creativity as an activity not circumscribed to a specific industry, territory, market or nation state, Sims reconfigured the geographies and histories, but also the stereotypes associated with the region. She focused instead on “hubs of creativity” or “‘informal’ urban laboratories”, where connections “made on the grassroots level reveal critiques of the status quo and address the aspirations of ordinary citizens outside the parameters of official policy” (13). Curating an exhibition on Latin American design required “careful consideration and consultation with colleagues in the field” (10), which included the appointment of the aforementioned eight-member curatorial advisory committee and trips to several cities.

The exhibition culminated in a dedicated website, several public programmes and a 241-page catalogue: the publication is a lasting proof of the confrontation between the curator and its thirteen contributors, many of which presented challenging, even contradicting arguments and views on transcultural curatorial, editorial and historical approaches. The design historian Adriana Kertzer, who was Sims’ curatorial assistant, provides a remarkable synthesis of the exhibition’s thesis and contents: “Marketing and branding often require stressing differences through the processes of dichotomizing, essentializing and ‘other’-zing. The challenge is how to create design projects that receive international recognition and use storytelling about certain socioeconomic

147. The exhibition also travelled in 2016 to the Albuquerque Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA and the Museo Amparo in Puebla, Mexico.

issues in a way that does not exacerbate stereotypes and unequal power relations” (2014b, 76). The exhibition’s Brazilian section, titled “Focus: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro,” was dedicated to the upcycling and repurposing of objects. It included solely exclusive, limited-edition furniture designs, such as Rodrigo Almeida’s ‘Servant’ Lamp, Zanini de Zanine’s ‘Moeda’ Chair or Leo Capote’s ‘Panton Bolts’ Chair, as well as the ‘Can City’ Stool project by the Anglo-Japanese Studio Swine. As observed in chapter 2, these ‘design art’ artefacts are best considered as metaphors instead of proposals.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, despite Sim’s use of words such as “vibrant” or “thriving” to describe Latin American cities, the artefacts she selected for this survey exhibition are manifestations of design practiced by professionals more concerned with creating an artistic reputation within an international ‘design art’ market than taking positions as active members of their societies, not to mention a disregard for the social worlds of the region they are meant to represent or explore.¹⁴⁹

A curatorial approach to contemporary Brazilian design practice similar to ‘New Territories’ taking place during the 2004-14 period was the exhibition ‘From the Margin to the Edge: Brazilian art and design in the 21st century’. This state exhibition was curated by Brazilian art and design historian Rafael Cardoso and organised at Somerset House during the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, as part of the aforementioned cultural festival that celebrated the forthcoming 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Cardoso divided the exhibition’s 33 emerging and established Brazilian artists and designers according to four sections and conceptual pairings. The anthropological dichotomy of ‘Raw/Cooked’ expressed the savage, or exotic, and civilised or developed. ‘Gambiarra/Craftsmanship’ spoke of cultural translatability and confronted ideas such as art and design, technique and matter, form and idea, making and execution, questioning the commodity status of objects. It included ceramic

148. Some of the works in ‘New Territories’ deserved to be shown in another, contemporary art exhibition. ‘Guitarra’, a musical instrument made from recovered weapons by the Mexican Artist Pedro Reyes, or ‘Articulo 6: Narratives of gender, strength and politics garments’ by the Peruvian fashion designer and artist Lucia Cuba, which raises awareness on the case of forced sterilisations implemented in Peru between 1996-2000, are both examples of conceptually-led work that comments on the region’s complex past and present on a profound level.

149. Exploring instead of representing is an attitude particularly manifest by Azusa Murakami and Alexander Groves, the Japanese-British couple who founded Studio Swine in 2011. They have since become experts in exploring Brazil and other peripheral locations on their design-research-tourism projects, which have resulted in several stylised videos, exhibitions and publications made around the artefacts they create. These are highly reliant on metaphors and elaborate narratives yet are also highly social inconsequential or even ethically questionable. They have nonetheless been shown in several design exhibitions and are sold in the ‘design art’ market by the Pace and Pearl Lam art galleries.

vases and bowls by the ceramists Gilberto Paim and Elisabeth Fonseca, shown alongside the 'Ressaquinha' bench by furniture designer Maurício Azeredo. 'Preserve/Transform' highlighted themes related to the environment, as well as the ambiguity of objects; it included the 'Memórias transportáveis, sonhos encaixotados' swing inside an upholstered cabinet by fashion designer Jum Nakao, and the designer-carpenter-artist Rodrigo Calixto's ten 'Lotus' stools made from different Brazilian woods. In 'Beyond Dichotomies,' the 90-poster 'Seja marginal seja herói' installation by graphic designer Rico Lins covered three walls of a gallery where visitors could also sit on the 'Siri' chair and interact with the 'Reverso' table, created by furniture designer Claudia Moreira Salles and made in Peroba wood and Alucobond.

Cardoso's curatorial approach to contemporary Brazilian design and art asked relevant questions about notions such as centre and periphery, identity and stereotype, high and low culture. Yet the selection of design artefacts reinforced a reading of this practice as limited to a narrow range of authors, disciplines and works, chosen chiefly for their morphological and aesthetic qualities. Interestingly, his exhibition catalogue essay ends with a reflection on the autonomy of art, in which he affirms: "Without a clear sense of artistic autonomy, the distinction between a work of art and a designed commodity is limited to the hierarchies of exchange value that govern their relations in the marketplace." And adds: "It behooves us, then, to think harder about the assumptions involved" (Cardoso 2012, 191).¹⁵⁰ Indeed, distinguishing the autonomy of design practice, however contingent it may be to the marketplace, demands us to think harder about the assumptions involved, but also address design's multiplicity of contexts, disciplines and subjects. The approaches to contemporary Brazilian design I briefly analysed in this section allowed me to reflect on how the pressing changes, issues and themes of Brazil's exceptional decade, as well as the relevant causes and consequences of design practice developed during that period, were shown and interpreted to museum audiences. But also dismissed and excluded from a dominant discourse associated to design in and from Brazil, to which I eventually contributed with *Brazil Today*.

150. This exhibition is by no means Cardoso's most influential and consequential contribution to a rethinking of those assumptions, or to design discourse in Brazil, as are the two highly approachable and original books he authored during the 2004-14 decade. 'Uma Introdução à História do Design' [An Introduction to Design History] (2008) is arguably the most widely read design history book by a Portuguese-language author. His book 'Design para um Mundo Complexo' [Design for a Complex World] (2012) is a thought-provoking exploration of design's contemporary challenges; I selected it as one of the books available to visitors at the *Brazil Today* bookshop.

3.5. Conclusion

During the 2004-14 decade, Brazil's governments, corporations, cultural and education/research institutions provided Brazilian designers with a unique opportunity to develop an original and consequential practice that revealed, but also often challenged, their local context. Concurrently, the quantity and quality of the country's global interactions allowed Brazilian designers and their clients unparalleled possibilities to find new territories for the practice and opportunities for promotion of their work. During this period, curatorial and editorial approaches to design in Brazil addressed it as a more straightforward contribution to the competitiveness of the country's economy, but especially as illustrative of an elusive yet assuring quality, which expresses if not a national identity, at least a national aspiration. This quality became widely known as *Brasiliidade*, or Brazilianness. Such aspirational dimension became a key differentiating indicator in Brazilian design. It prevailed in trade but especially in state exhibitions, events and festivals, such as those organised under the logic of cultural diplomacy. These approaches often affirmed such an aspirational quality in artefacts designed by and from an elite, but also in products aimed the consumer market, uncritically promoted mainly for their newness and originality. By focusing solely on the aspirational aspects of high-end products such as exclusivity, brand value and authorship, but also – as observed earlier with the 'Favela' armchair – on questionable, stylistic metaphors, these approaches overlooked (or misinterpreted) the role of design in the ominous process of *Brasilianização*, or Brazilianisation, through which the world is becoming more Brazilian.

As the historian Giuseppe Cocco argues, the precarisation and impoverishment of the Northern middle classes have been tremendously deepened and generalised by the crisis of global capitalism. As such, these classes are being increasingly faced with the reality and the distressing horizon of Brazilianisation (2017, 98). The masses of poor South Americans are, he adds, "the monstrous, hybrid and ambivalent figure of this biopolitical intersection" (98). Thanks to the widespread adoption of neoliberal and austerity policies, especially after the 2008 financial crisis life for a vast majority of the population in so-called central countries, which enjoyed a relative degree of post-World War II prosperity, has become also more unequal, precarious and unpredictable. In his *American Affairs* essay 'The Brazilianization of the World' (2021),

writer and researcher Alex Hochuli defines this process as our global encounter with a future denied (2021). Hochuli argues that especially after the covid-19 pandemic manifested state failure in the heart of Western capitalism and put paid to “any complacent notions about the End of History and the primacy of one model over another”, we all “seemingly live in ‘less-developed countries’ now” (2021). In his analysis of Brazil’s recent past and its development history, Hochuli claims Brazil is a middle-income country burdened by mass poverty, backwardness “and a political class that seems to have advanced little since its days as a slaveholding landed elite” (2021). These conditions have left its population perennially fluctuating between hope and frustration – “WhatsApp and favelas, e-commerce and open sewers” (2021). Hochuli argues the root of Brazilianisation as a global phenomenon is the process of undoing modernisation, translated in the coming apart of formal employment and the rise of precarisation: “growing inequality, oligarchy, the privatization of wealth and social space, and a declining middle class. Its spatial, urban dimension is its most visible manifestation, with the development of gentrified city centers and the excluded pushed to the periphery” (2021). Crucially, Hochuli observes that “Brazil’s unceasing turbulence since 2013 began with Brazilians becoming sick of mere ‘inclusion through consumption’” (2021). He adds that “Cash transfers may buy elites time, just as private debt-fuelled consumption did for the last few decades, while wages stagnated” and claims Brazilianised state failures in the world’s richest, most powerful countries “are laid bare for everyone to see” (2021). Although protests, revolts and uprisings have become a global phenomenon, “perhaps presaging a more general insurrection” (2021), Hochuli observes denunciation of elites is not enough. For any wave of popular agitation to have an effect, “seizing collective control of our destiny and taking responsibility for our future will be required” (2021).

This chapter, in which I discussed the aspirations, conquests and legacies, but also the missed opportunities of Brazil’s “golden decade”, is animated by this challenge. As I argue in chapter 2, Brazilian designers act upon their contexts of practice and react to them by managing their positions between several interconnected fields. Curatorial and editorial approaches to such practices have tended to emphasize Brazilianness as one of such fields, driving the attention of audiences towards the elusive and contradictory aspirational qualities of design. I argue Brazilianisation should be considered the other interconnected field through which we can assess the positions of designers as instances of

critical autonomy. By acknowledging Brazilianisation not as an aspiration, but often as an intended yet ethically fraught consequence of design practice shaped by the conditions and contingencies of their context, we can foster a more critical and more consequent appreciation of its results in Brazil Today. I presented and interpreted many of such results by explicitly foregrounding the tensions between these two interconnected fields. In the next chapters I addressed this as one of the key challenges of my curatorial approach.

Curating Brazil Today

Having already addressed the institutional framework of the Brazil Today exhibition, in this chapter I discuss conceptual and pragmatic aspects that influenced its curatorial process. In section 1 I delineate the exhibition's discourse and display strategies, through which I communicated the intentions and consequences of Brazilian designers to the citizens that visited the Calheta Palace in Lisbon between September 23 and December 31, 2017. In section 2 I provide an illustrated walkthrough of the exhibition, in which I include the English-language versions of the exhibition's introductory text and the extended exhibit labels of 33 out of a total of 50 selected projects, which I analyse in greater detail in chapter 5. These exhibit labels are slightly adapted versions of the ones presented to the exhibition's visitors, which I wrote for its catalogue after the exhibition closed on December 31, 2017. As such I was able not only to include the information and interpretation presented about each design initiative but also considerations regarding their display. I include the exhibition's introductory text and these extended exhibit labels because they manifest how I crafted Brazil Today's overall tone and discourse, as well as how I presented and interpreted its contents. I consider the verbal interpretations, phrasing and the arguments I present about the design artefacts I selected for the exhibition an integral and essential part of my work as a critic and curator. In section 3 I discuss how I communicated Brazil Today beyond the exhibited artefact, addressing its public programming, communication initiatives and critical reception, which reflect the repercussion of my curatorial intentions and goals in a public sphere that extends beyond the walls of the museum.

4.1. Curatorial discourse and key display strategies

In this section I elaborate on the key principles behind the curatorial discourse and the display strategies through which I established relationships between Brazil Today's artefacts and visitors. In my public addresses as the exhibition's curator, such as interviews, guided tours and lectures, I intentionally avoided the term 'Brazilian design' when describing its subject. Instead, I chose to describe this as an exhibition about design and Brazil in the twenty-first century.¹⁵¹ My first intention with this description was to highlight that for most non-expert visitors, any design exhibition is a potential introduction to the subject. As such, Brazil Today was an introduction to contemporary design and to Brazil. Besides communicating urgency and topicality, the somewhat paradoxical use of the word 'today' in the exhibition's subtitle evokes a reflection by the design scholar and curator Jamer Hunt. He claims that differently from an ethnographer, whose work is rarely projective and is grounded on ensuring the present is rightly defined in ever greater detail, the designer uses the present, however imperfectly, as a provisional leaping off point for reimagining possible futures (2011, 35). Hunt's observation is critical for establishing the specificity of a curatorial approach to design. Although it aimed to provide visitors with glimpses into the everyday life of a nation, Brazil Today was not an exhibition about a nation-specific material or visual culture. I did not include any kind of anonymous, vernacular, traditional or popular elements of such a culture. As an exhibition about design, Brazil Today consisted of exemplary design initiatives and artefacts that originated from an institutionalised design practice. These were interpreted so to reveal the context but also the agency of designers in their contemporary complexity. This important distinction determined the emphasis of my curatorial approach on the subjects instead of the objects of the design process. It considered design plays a significant part in defining the material and immaterial evidence of a particular period in Brazil's history, which roughly coincided with my thesis's period of study, the 2004-14 decade. But it also claimed designers as both the essential social actors of the design process and critical agents in their nation's history.

151. I am aware this terminological avoidance was difficult to maintain in the long-run. In the exhibition and in this thesis I often refer to design in, from and for Brazil, or by Brazilian citizens, as Brazilian design. Nevertheless I considered this terminological challenge symbolic of my intention on moving the presentation of nation-specific design from identity to context.

Brazil Today was conceptually grounded on the notion of perspectives. The term perspective firstly emphasises the agency behind design: a product, interface or instance of research is the concrete result of a designer's own experience and talent, but also of the conditions and contingencies that influenced its creation and determined its purpose. It also signals to visitors that each instance of design they come in contact with is an example of how a designer has dealt with his or her context not in rhetorical but in practical terms. These perspectives were interpreted not as neutral forms to be contemplated but as vehicles for active, engaged transmission of knowledge about a country, a people and a culture in the present moment. They communicated to visitors what designers do, who they are and why they matter. These designers were mainly Brazilian nationals; the initiatives and artefacts shown in the exhibition were aimed specifically at Brazilian contexts of consumption or use. However, in some cases I challenged these nation-centred criteria by including initiatives conceived or developed by foreign nationals, as well as those commissioned by non-Brazilian companies or destined for consumption or fruition outside of Brazil.

Brazil Today thus presented 100 design perspectives: 50 projects and 50 books. The exhibition's 50 projects explored design in its multidisciplinary plurality and in several material and immaterial configurations. Design initiatives were shown in several stages of being and becoming: as a product, an unfulfilled proposal, an implemented plan, an ongoing process or as evidence of social tension or conflict. In choosing each of these 50 projects I was particularly concerned with keeping a disciplinary balance: besides the more conventional disciplines of product or communication design, I sought design initiatives from architecture, fashion, jewellery, interior and interaction design, as well as the design of materials and examples of speculative and critical design. I also included a video record of an artwork – Vitor César's 'Centro Cultural'. Most of the exhibition's contents were brought from Brazil, yet several design artefacts were reproduced or manufactured locally from files sent by their designers. Most were shown as finished products, while others were displayed as prototypes or sketches. Some were especially adapted to the exhibition. The 'Tropical Molotov' tile panel by Coletivo MUDA, presented as a new commission from MUDE, was an exception to a curatorial approach grounded on existing design initiatives encompassing a wide range of material practices, which are part of the everyday lives of millions of people, in Brazil and beyond.

The exhibition's other 50 perspectives were artefacts that visitors could see, touch, browse, read and buy. Conceived as the exhibition's centre, the first temporary bookshop in Portugal dedicated to Brazilian books about design aimed to make 50 titles available to the Portuguese public, most of which for the first time. It was installed in the Calheta Palace's largest room which, with its seventeenth-century, hunting-themed tile panels, high ceilings and eight balconies, was deemed ideal for a reading-room-bookshop where visitors could sit, rest and enjoy the view over the Tagus river, but also pick up a book.¹⁵² Its first goal was to celebrate the work of each book's authors as contributions to design studies and culture, especially in the case of titles edited from masters and doctoral dissertations. Each book was displayed with a 75-word extended caption that elaborated on its contribution to research and knowledge creation in design. The bookshop's second goal aimed to facilitate access to a significant selection of Brazilian design-related editorial production, actively addressing the lack of a shared editorial market between the two Portuguese-speaking nations, thus creating new bonds between the two largest communities of Portuguese-speaking design professionals, students and scholars.¹⁵³

Because it took place outside of Brazil but in the Portuguese capital, Brazil Today allowed me to take advantage of our shared history and, most importantly, our shared language.¹⁵⁴ All wall texts, exhibit labels and extended captions were written in Portuguese and English, while several design artefacts – such as posters, maps and other communication devices, as well as, more evidently, the books on display and for sale – had complementary interpretative tools. The overwhelming majority of visitors could directly access these artefacts and tools in their own language. Such an emphasis on content over form would be much more challenging to carry out had the exhibition taken place in a location outside the Portuguese-speaking world. Nevertheless, as a primarily

152. This temporary bookshop was inspired in the bookshop created in 2011 at the Culturgest exhibition centre in Lisbon, which the curator Miguel Wandschneider conceived as a curatorial statement and a contribution of this public institution (the cultural foundation of Portugal's state bank, CGD) to the local circulation of art and design-related knowledge.

153. Due to logistical reasons, copies of six of the 50 selected titles did not make it to Lisbon. MUDE's bookshop partner, Fnac, sold the books at a rather high price, so sales were disappointingly low. After the exhibition closed, Fnac integrated the unsold copies of these books in its own catalogue and sold them at a significant discount in the following years.

154. I have made this consideration by assuming, as did MUDE's director, that the overwhelming majority of the exhibition's visitors would be Portuguese nationals or Portuguese-speaking individuals, chief among which Brazilian citizens travelling or residing in Portugal.

object-centred medium, the exhibition presented specific challenges to curatorial approaches to design that deserve closer inspection.

In his observations on how design artefacts communicate, John Heskett on how curators may employ objects to address their audiences. He affirms that objects “are a crucial expression of ideas of how we could and should live put into tangible form. As such, objects communicate with an immediacy and directness that is not just visual, but can involve other senses” (2003, 56). Yet, he adds, “The orchestration of sensual effects on several levels can have a powerful cumulative impact. Such diversity in how objects are conceived, designed, perceived, and used also provides multiple perspectives from which they can be understood and interpreted” (56). In *Brazil Today* I sought to both simplify and complicate the visitor expectations and experiences of design artefacts. The development process of each design initiative results in a series of outcomes, records, documents and objects. These artefacts, which include patent files, physical or digital drawings, models and prototypes, are how designers visualise and communicate the ways they respond to a brief. These records also register and communicate a set of instructions and processes through which a fabricator or manufacturer activates the necessary resources and tools to generate a given design outcome. Such an outcome, described as the product or interface destined for human consumption or use, can range in number from one to infinite.

These artefacts may be ontologically considered imperfect surrogates of one another: each outcome of a particular design initiative is specific and unique but it is also potentially equivalent, as a manifestation of the design that originated it, to other physical and digital outcomes and records. The nature of design artefacts as replaceable, unoriginal reproductions or records of a particular design does not, however, imply that when presented in a design exhibition they are deprived of their aura, the “here and now” of the original artwork that Walter Benjamin claimed even the most perfect of reproductions lacked (1936/2008, 22). Nevertheless, not all design artefacts are indeed the same: their differences are contingent on the designers, clients, and other agents involved in their development, manufacture, or consumption contexts. The worth of their materials, conservation status or their provenance, that is, their origin, ownership history and the associated stories that can be extracted from their social life, also greatly influence their appreciation and commodity value. Considering an exhibition is an object-centred medium, my artefact selection

and display strategies therefore took into consideration what historians Glenn Adamson and Giorgio Riello call the charisma of the object:

“... what is the point of producing a global history in the first place? One good answer is that it helps academics and the public to understand cultural relations, both in the past and the present. The charisma of the object is a tremendous asset in this regard. Rather like relics in a religious context, historic artefacts exert a strong pull on the imagination, and are easily made into focal points for narrative. Museums—the world’s greatest delivery system for popular history—are necessarily object-led enterprises. They reverse the historian’s usual procedure, which is to pose an intelligent question and seek out the best available evidence to answer it. Object-based research begins with a piece of evidence (the thing itself) and slowly but surely teases questions out of it. The result of this exercise may, at times, offer a useful corrective to received histories based on textual sources (Adamson and Riello 2013, 177).

As object-based curatorial approaches, design exhibitions often miscommunicate the contingent singularity of the design artefact. They lead visitors to a “one of a kind” thinking that, as Appadurai contends, encourages an interest in the work of designers as producers of “an object that is truly singular, which only one consumer can buy, own, and enjoy” (2013, 259). This interest mistakenly identifies designers with artists. One example of my attempts to confront this singularity aspect were the four furniture design initiatives we presented on and over a long platform that stretched the whole length of the Calheta Palace’s main xylarium room (p.174): the five models of the ‘Milla’ chair designed by Jader Almeida, the four sizes of the ‘Bossa’ lamp designed by Fernando Prado, the three incarnations of the ‘Caipira’ stool designed by Marcenaria Baraúna and two versions of the ‘Africa’ armchair designed by Rodrigo Almeida (analysed in greater detail in chapter 5). This room in fact synthesised two key curatorial and scenographic goals: the long platform on and over which they were placed, as well as the white curtain element that served as the backdrop, highlighted the materiality of these design artefacts among the xylarium’s largest and most imposing wood samples. These four initiatives played on the notion of ‘theme and variation’ in furniture design and highlighted how designers work not on a single object but in lines of products, aimed at different segments of the market and contexts of use. This presentation thus challenged the idea of singularity in design and revealed how these objects, though abstracted from their contexts, are part of what Guy Julier calls flows of material and visual artefacts, instead of reified, single-piece exhibits of the modernist canon, mediated by the expert’s caption (2014, 78).

Added to this contingent singularity is, as addressed in chapter 2, the appeal to function that is inherent to the exhibition of design artefacts. Such an appeal is potentiated or diminished by the visitor's expectation and experience. The appreciation of characteristics such as form, materiality, function and context of use are consequently contingent on visitors' familiarity with the artefacts on display: they can also only understand an artefact's affordances if they are familiar with its function and context of use. The three water purifiers included in Brastemp's 'Programa + Que Água' (p. 153) are a case in point: while they would be considered a staple kitchen appliance by most Brazilians, the majority of the exhibition's visitors were most likely unfamiliar with them. As described in chapter 5, I addressed this unfamiliarity by showing them alongside an extended exhibit label that explained their function, as well as a tablet displaying the subscription service's website.

In Brazil Today I thus acknowledged the contingent autonomy of each of its 100 perspectives. These were shown through a combination of artefact(s), exhibit label and an extended, 150-word label, written so to succinctly and accessibly explore issues or characteristics that could be overlooked and deserved to be acknowledged. These include more uncomfortable dimensions of Brazilian society, such as violence, corruption or class prejudice. Interpretive texts were often supplemented by additional media, such as videos, infographics, news clippings or an Instagram feed, which allowed me to elaborate on the designer's intentions and provide a critical reading of each initiative's strengths and weaknesses, as expressed by Rick Poynor:

... as I have always understood the term, to be critical involves not taking things for granted, being skeptical, questioning what's there, exposing limitations, taking issue, advancing a contrary view, puncturing myths. On occasion, of course, the critic will take the role of supporter and advocate. He or she will seek to persuade us that some idea or thing is deserving of our full attention and merits a closer look. The critic will act as interpreter and explain some seemingly arcane aspect of culture that many or most of us don't yet grasp and are perhaps inclined to resist. But this process of supportive elucidation will always imply its opposite: that there are objects and projects that are not worthy of our attention, that are problematic, flawed and sometimes possibly even pernicious. Any would-be critic who practices only the role of supporter and advocate, who never finds fault, sees nothing to contest, is not really a critic at all (Poynor 2004).

Designing the presentation and interpretation of these initiatives implied discussions with the designers and other agents, which involved negotiation,

adaptation, reinvention and many hours of discussion. I worked closely with two design studios in the visual and material configuration of the exhibition: The Home Project Design Studio (Kathi Stertzig and Álbio Nascimento) and Joana & Mariana (Joana Baptista Costa and Mariana Leão). We discussed and designed ways to create in the Calheta Palace an environment we summed up in the short phrase: ‘pay attention’. Throughout the exhibition we also tried to conjugate verbal rhetoric with visual and sensorial appeal, creating an experience of the design artefact that combined what the literary historian Stephen Greenblatt calls the notions of wonder and resonance:

By resonance I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand. By wonder I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention (Greenblatt 1991, 42)[...] I think that the impact of most exhibitions is likely to be enhanced if there is a strong initial appeal to wonder, a wonder that then leads to the desire for resonance, for it is generally easier in our culture to pass from wonder to resonance than from resonance to wonder. In either case, the goal—difficult but not utopian—should be to press beyond the limits of the models, cross boundaries, create strong hybrids. For both the poetics and the politics of representation are most completely fulfilled in the experience of wonderful resonance and resonant wonder (Greenblatt 1991, 54).

There were several ways in which we tried to achieve this combination. From the judicious use of directed light vs. ambient and natural light (as visitors progressed from the darkened staircase to the bookshop the rooms became brighter) to the use of white curtains to create divisions and circulation paths, or of tropical plants to create a more inviting environment for reading or taking a break in the exhibition’s bookshop. I also placed great care in honouring the immaterial and material qualities of artefacts such as ‘WebSeer’, ‘DingBat Cobogó’ and the UnB Pro typeface, but also the books published by Ubu since its launch in 2016. I employed my experience as an exhibition and museum visitor – particularly of design and architecture exhibitions, biennials and other curatorial approaches – to experiment with the expectations and experiences created, as well as the intentions and limitations presented by this medium. The following section presents an illustrated walkthrough of Brazil Today, where many such display strategies can be observed.

4.2. Exhibition walk-through



Fig. 1 Calheta Palace, Tropical Botanical Garden, Lisbon

Introductory panel text

How to pronounce design in Portuguese: ‘Brazil Today’ is an exhibition about Brazil and design in the twenty-first century. Brazil is a country with a continental territory, a multi-ethnic population, the greatest biodiversity on the planet, the world’s fifth largest internal market and a brutally unequal society. Which during this century witnessed a period of economic growth, democratising of consumption, social mobility and unprecedented attainment of rights. But also a prolonged recession and a severe political-institutional crisis.

In our century, design has assumed such a complexity in disciplinary breadth and depth that any effort to restrict it to categories such as product, communication, fashion, or architecture is as reductive as it is useless. Like Brazil, design today challenges any classification or simplification.

Instead of simplifying, this exhibition explores, and celebrates the current complexity of a country and activity. In the services they provide, the initiatives they create, the research they conduct and the positions they adopt, the Brazilian designers represented here show how they have promoted but also questioned ideas such as consumption and inclusion, memory and heritage, public space and citizenship, innovation and collaboration, progress and protest. Their work exposes the relationships, processes, potentialities and limits of a profession in a specific context. It reveals and challenges the identities, dominant discourses, and power structures of society. And it suggests the application and global appeal of design thought in the Portuguese language.

The dozens of projects and books presented here are not shown as objects of contemplation. They are rather perspectives, points of view, and vehicles of knowledge. Examples of how design reflects, interprets and acts on the present to build a future that is larger than a country (MUDE 2017, 2).



Fig. 3 Non-Electoral Campaign, MUDE HQ scaffolding, Rua Augusta, Lisbon



Fig. 5 Campo Concreto, Bial de São Paulo building

Campo Concreto ,Ovo, 2014

Campo Concreto (Concrete Field) is the outdoor version of Campo (Field), a sofa composed of several modules covered with fabric in varying colours according to the location and budget. Launched in 2007 by the designers Gerson Oliveira and Luciana Martins, Campo has since been the biggest seller of ,Ovo – their studio, company and furniture brand. The success of that and this version of Campo reflects a greater porosity in public space designed in hotels, multinational headquarters and institutions such as the Mário de Andrade Library or the Bial de São Paulo building. With its irregular geometry and robust presence, this concrete seat is also characteristic of these designers' work, which is based on an unusual sophistication in drawing, an unexpected use of materials or on visual perception and language games with which they create objects of contemplation and products of everyday use. Due to production issues this project was not part of the exhibition (150).



Fig. 6 FJ Pronto Pra Levar living room, exhibition view

FJ Pronto Pra Levar Fernando Jaeger, 2017

Fernando Jaeger is one of the most experienced and respected Brazilian furniture designers. The family-owned company he manages with his wife, the textile designer Yaskara Jaeger, owns two brands: the most exclusive Fernando Jaeger Atelier and the most affordable FJ Pronto para Levar [FJ Take Away]. Its three stores – two in São Paulo, one in Rio de Janeiro – are established in houses where each room is decorated exclusively with furniture, accessories and textiles designed by the Jaegers and produced in Brazil. Like those who make up this replica of a room set up in the ground floor of the Calheta Palace, identical to three other set up in FJ stores during the exhibition's opening period. Similarly to visitors to the stores, visitors to the exhibition could appreciate the design, the quality and the prices shown on the label of each of the nine products of this brand that has conquered the Brazilian middle class. They could not however touch, try, nor later pick up their choices from the store's warehouse (169).



Fig. 7 Projeções, exhibition view

Projeções

Coletivo Projeção, 2013 –

Coletivo Projeção is a communication and activism collective formed in 2013. The members of this autonomous, horizontal and non-partisan structure – which includes several designers – first used a video projector during the large 2013 demonstrations in Rio de Janeiro. Since then, they’ve invested in the occupation of public spaces as a form of political expression. They generate content and promote direct action on the street, using a medium of nimble communication and great visual impact, whose momentary presence persists in countless digital records. They also promote, in articulation with partners (activists, social movements, artists, etc.), film clubs on squares, occupations, open classes or debates. And other “project-actions”, like those made in favelas, magnifying to urban scale the words of those who often have no voice. By beaming images and videos updated fortnightly by the collective, the video projector installed in the grand staircase of the Calheta Palace broadcast in Lisbon their messages and the troubled present of their city – and country (207).



Fig. 8 Web Seer, exhibition view

Web Seer

Fernanda Viégas + Martin Wattenberg, 2009

The Brazilian designer Fernanda Viégas and the American computer scientist and artist Martin Wattenberg began working together in 2003 on Wikipedia's first scientific study. Since then they led IBM's Visual Communication Lab and now head Google's Big Picture data visualisation group in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In the interim they have developed projects and artworks that explore one of the contemporary design's last frontiers: how to access, process and interpret the overwhelming volume of data we create. Online since 2009 (hint.fm/seer), Web Seer lets users compare the results of two Google searches. This Internet oracle of sorts reveals, through the design of what we see (interface) and don't see (code), our most intimate anxieties. But also collective questionings such as those expressed in a selection of searches on design and Brazil – the world's fourth largest country in Internet users – shown as a 16-minute animation projected on a panel suspended at the entrance of the exhibition. Deprived of an interactive experience of the interface, visitors could however learn, through the 62 search comparisons of terms associated with Brazil and design (recorded in as many video screen captures), how the domain of the internet in Portuguese is in the hands and minds of the Brazilian people (229).



Fig. 9 Maré Street Plaques, exhibition view

Maré Street Plaques

Laura Taves, 2012 –

Launched in September 2012, the Maré Street Guide included for the first time in Rio de Janeiro’s official map every street, alley and lane of the 16 favelas that make up the Maré Complex. Atelier Azulejaria, a collective workshop founded in 2003 by the architect and artist Laura Taves in the Nova Holanda favela, started to produce plaques for these streets. Developed with the Redes da Maré NGO, this pilot project involved the residents in the naming of the streets and the manufacture of tile plaques. Its composition, colours and typography consciously echo the 1979 design attributed to Aloisio Magalhães – a key figure in Brazilian design – still used on the “asphalt” streets of Rio. Having speeded up the official designation of Maré streets by the Municipal Secretariat of Urbanism, this citizen action shows how design as a tactic can redraw the strategies and power structures that either draw apart or weave together the formal and informal city. The exhibition featured three Maré street plaques and three photographs of their production and implementation. And also an “asphalt” plaque – kindly donated by Plamark, the firm responsible for its production and implementation – of the André Stolarski Street. With which we paid homage to another key figure in Brazilian design, eternalised in 2017 on Rio de Janeiro’s street map (201).



Fig. 10 Vila Matilde house, exhibition view

Vila Matilde House Terra e Tuma Arquitetos, 2015

The only architecture project in the exhibition was presented in two folders that showed a Brazilian house in two distinct dimensions: design and media coverage. In 2016, this house designed by Terra and Tuma had two important distinctions: it integrated the Brazilian Pavilion of the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale and won the Archdaily Building of the Year award (House category). This distinction, attributed by readers of the world's most visited architectural website, allowed this remarkable example of a design adequate to the needs and contingencies of its client to challenge the international expectation surrounding Brazilian architecture, known mainly for public works of modern boldness and private houses of contemporary luxury. At the same time, this project also garnered attention from mainstream media - newspapers, society magazines, TV shows - where both in Brazil and other Ibero-American countries the use of the expressions "architect house" and "humble woman" reveal social prejudices regarding what good design is and whom it is for (155).



Fig. 11 MOVE Transportation Network Map, exhibition view

MOVE Transportation Network Map Verdi Design, 2012-2016

This map was designed by the team coordinated by José Antônio Verdi, whose Porto Alegre-based studio developed the name, visual identity and graphic design for MOVE, Belo Horizonte's BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) system. In addition to fast and conventional bus lines, run by private concessioners at the service of the BHTrans municipal company, this map includes the city's metro line, operated by the federal company CBTU. Initially designed in a tone of blue equivalent in contrast to the bright green of the MOVE network, the metro line became less visible after the bus firms pressured BHTrans to exclude or reduce the presence of its competitor. This design is a rare, and worthy example of a public transportation map in Brazil. It is also proof of the failure of governing authorities, in this and other large Brazilian cities, to put the interests of citizens above the demands, contradictions and inefficiencies of the public-private partnerships to which they are held hostage (183).



Fig. 12 SAC24, exhibition view

SAC24

MegaBox design, 2010

The 24-Hour Custody Monitoring System (SAC24) is an integrated electronic monitoring solution for sentenced citizens. Designed by Megabox Design for Spacecom, two companies based in Curitiba, it is the only one with Brazilian technology and characteristics adapted to the country's reality. Such as the mechanical resistance required to the kind of activities a user can perform (i.e. cleaning septic tanks). Or the specific legislation each of the 28 contracting entities – States, Federal District and Government – stipulates for their hardware and software. This punishment tool is the opposite of an object of desire: its users will do whatever it takes – and many do, including “white-collar” ones – to get rid of it. But knowing Brazilian prisons, where 40% of inmates await trial, are amongst the world's most overcrowded and violent, this system not only reduces the cost of monitoring a prisoner by 90%. It can also save her life. The exhibition featured a TZ SAC24 custody ankle bracelet and its respective UMI - SAC24 monitoring unit, alongside this page of the O Globo newspaper, with an article on electronic bracelets as a punitive measure in Brazil's corruption cases, illustrated with an infographic about how the system works and photos of some of its most notorious users (211).



Fig. 13 Bomba Hacker, promotional image

Bomba Hacker **Flui Coletivo, 2014**

São Paulo's metropolitan area faced its worst ever hydric crisis between 2014 and 2016. Water rationing forced 20 million people to change their consumption habits. Drastically, in many cases. It was then that Leonardo Massarelli and Barão di Sarno, two founders of the design studio *Questto Nó*, joined the designers Jaakko Tammela and Christian Ullmann, and the latter's students at the Instituto Europeo di Design. Together they created the *Flui Coletivo* (Flow Collective) and designed a device that transfers, and reuses, water from one place of the house to the other (washing machine/backyard, washbasin/toilet, etc.). Cheap and easy to make according to an open-source design template downloadable at fluicoletivo.org, the *Hacker Pump* - like the one produced for the exhibition at FabLab Lisboa - shows how design professionals and students are responding, with 21st-century tools and processes, to urgent problems of their contemporary context (141).



Fig. 14 Programa + que Água Brastemp, exhibition view

Programa + que Água Brastemp Global Consumer Design Whirlpool Latin America, 2010

Whether in its traditional (terracotta) or advanced (electrical appliance) version, the water filter is an ordinary feature of Brazilian kitchens. It warrants something water and sanitation companies cannot convince to provide: quality and safety. Whirlpool is one of several multinational corporations that, after acquiring Brazilian companies such as Brastemp, in the last decades maintained their brands and design centres. And inclusively began selling in other countries products, such as water filters, conceived by designers experienced in a consumer market as heterogeneous as Brazil's. This know-how export also applies to this product, launched in 2010 and modelled on cable TV subscription, which adds a private quality service to the public provision of an essential good turned into a consumer product: water. The + que Água [More than Water] Program – displayed in the exhibition through its website and three purifier models (Economy, Essential and Technology Plans) – is an evident case of design adaptability to the corrosion of belief in the *res publica* [“public affair”] in Brazil. A sentiment shared by a growing number of consumers in an increasingly privatised world (205).



Fig. 15 Brazil Pavilion, exhibition view

Brazil Pavilion

T+T Projetos and Celso Longo + Daniel Trench, 2013

In 2013 Brazil was in the centre of the literary world for five days. Designed under the motto 'A country full of voices', this pavilion surprised visitors to the Frankfurt fair by challenging stereotypes often associated with Brazil, such as tropicality or exoticism. The walls, tables, benches and other elements that configured and furnished the 2500m² of this temporary structure were made of cardboard. If the material was chosen by the designers to honour the printed book and the characters of Brazilian literature, its shapes and motifs evoked modern Brazilian design. Athos Bulcão's patterns, Oscar Niemeyer's curves, even the redário [hammock room] designed by Lucio Costa for the Milan Triennale in 1964 inspired the pavilion's six areas of discovery, debate, and reading. Presenting, also through design, a nation proud of its heritage and confident in its culture. For the exhibition a wall was built from the originally used cardboard module, complemented by a video showing views of the pavilion and a reproduction of the poster used for its promotion (199).

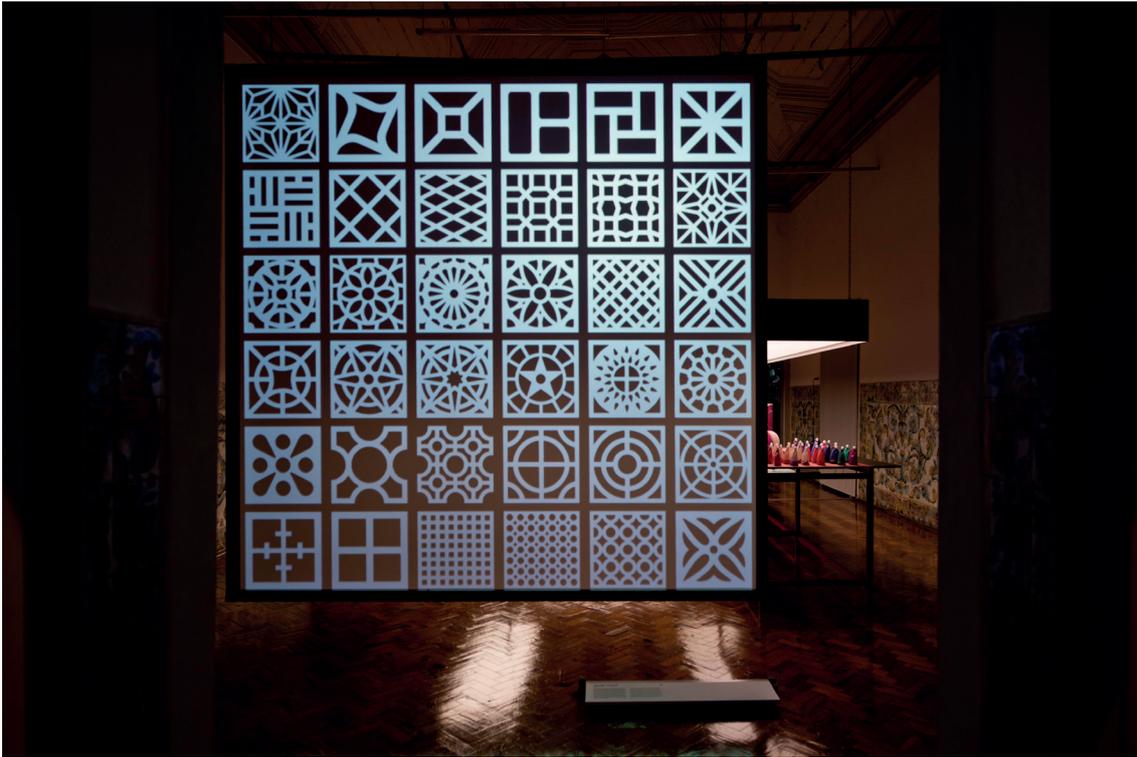


Fig. 16 Dingbat Cobogó, exhibition view

Dingbat Cobogó **Guilherme Luigi, 2013**

The patent for the perforated cast element known as Cobogó was registered in 1930 in Recife, the state capital of Pernambuco. The product's name originates in the first surname syllable of each of the engineers who designed it: Amadeu Oliveira Coimbra, Ernest August Boeckmann, Antonio de Góis. Numerous variations have since been created – in design, geometry and sophistication – of this building element of simple manufacture and straightforward application. In 2013, the photographer and researcher Josivan Rodrigues published a book about Cobogó's history and relevance for the visual and material culture of the Brazilian Northeast. In addition to designing this book, the designer Guilherme Luigi created a dingbat font with 72 cobogó designs in two versions: positive and negative. Having applied these dematerialised elements to wall posters, he also made the font available for free (at dingbatcobogo.com.br) so that many other users, designers or not, can build their own compositions. For the exhibition Luigi designed an animation which, projected on a suspended 300x300cm screen, simulated a digital “wall” momentarily erected from each of 36 Cobogó modules (163).



Fig. 17 Sou packaging, exhibition view

Sou Packaging

Questto Nó + Tátil Design, 2012

In 2011, Natura invited two design consultancies to work together on a new product. It should use fewer resources, cost less, address a new consumer and carry a conscious consumption message. Through ethnographic research, the designers realised how, instead of refilling a hard shampoo bottle, many consumers “misused” a refill pouch as the final container. That insight on scarcity led them to create the world’s first final beauty product pouch packaging. This revolutionary design includes the machine that cuts, shapes and fills a roll of film with the formulas of over 30 products, all with the same fragrance. And Sou’s sexy, not preachy, first ad made for Youtube. These three different dimensions of Sou’s design were presented at the exhibition by a set of 29 packages of different products, two rolls of film and a tablet showing the two-minute ad. Sold in pharmacies, vending machines and online, the Sou line is also disrupting Natura’s traditional, direct sales-based business model. Considering Brazilians are among the world’s highest spenders on beauty products, could Sou’s national success be replicated worldwide? (213).



Fig. 18 Superpop washing machine, exhibition view

Superpop washing machine Chelles & Hayashi, 2008/2017

Gustavo Chelles & Romy Hayashi founded one of the most respected industrial design offices in Brazil in 1994. In 2008, Mueller Eletrodomésticos launched one of its most awarded projects: Superpop. This semi-automatic washing machine is manufactured in plastic (polypropylene) and packed in two pieces – one inside the other. An innovation demonstrated in the exhibition by two machines, one assembled and another disassembled inside its respective box, shown next to a demonstration video. Such innovations bring down the product's weight, price and, above all, its packaged volume when compared to conventional machines. That makes it easier to carry and keep more items in stock but also allows each customer to take the device home and assemble it right away. Making this appliance – considered the main object of desire for Brazilian families after the stove, refrigerator and television, according to recent findings – more accessible to lower-income consumers. Whom give it a prominent place in their home and, in what for the designers was an unexpected realisation, often share it with family and neighbours (217.)



Fig. 19 Confete prosthetic cover, exhibition view

Confete prosthetic cover **Furf Design, 2016**

The first customisable cover for mass-produced leg prosthesis in the world was designed in Curitiba by the young designers Rodrigo Brenner and Maurício Noronha. Their client, the Rio de Janeiro-based orthopaedic specialist Ethnos, launched it in 2016. Each cover is made of polyurethane, a lightweight and durable polymer that is easily trimmed and adapted to its user's height. Its design fits most combinations of both left and right knee and foot prostheses. An affordable price (R\$499,99), an eight-colour line and a hole grid that invites customisation make Confete much more than an orthopaedic instrument. This product – distinguished with the “Best of the Best” Red Dot Award and the Bronze Lion at the Cannes Festival – gives back lost leg volume but above all self-esteem to its users. As demonstrated by the Instagram feed created by the hashtag #vistasuaconfete, shown in the exhibition on a smartphone placed next to three prosthetic covers: one let open showing its constructive details, another closed and a third one demonstrating a customisation option (161.)



Fig. 20 STED crutch, exhibition view

STED crutch Cusco Studio, 2015

Mercur, a company known to Brazilians for its rubber erasers, promoted in 2015 a call for ideas to improve the lives of people with reduced mobility. The three young designers of the Cusco Studio, based in Porto Alegre, won this competition with a crutch for permanent use. Having not yet passed the design phase, this product shows how designers are responding to a global phenomenon. Thanks to growing urbanisation and advances in average life expectancy (75 years in 2017), between 1960 and 2010 the Brazilian population witnessed one of the world's fastest ageing rates. While the fertility rate decreased from an average of six to less than two children per woman, the number of elderly jumped from three to 20 million. Seniors represent 8.5 per cent of Brazil's current population and will count for 30 per cent by 2050. Active ageing is a challenge but also an opportunity for any designer today. Such as these young Brazilians (215).



Fig. 21 Cerâmica do Cabo, exhibition view

Cerâmica do Cabo O Imaginário, 2003 –

O Imaginário is the design laboratory of the Federal University of Pernambuco, where since 2001 professors, students and technicians from various fields of knowledge have studied the region's artisanal and industrial productions. Through the application of a multidisciplinary methodology, their research projects enhance the identity values of artisan communities, promote the establishment of associations and allow for this activity to respect the local culture and establish itself as a sustainable way of life. One of these projects has been taking place since 2003 with the community of ceramic artisans from Cabo de Santo Agostinho, on the outskirts of Recife. Exemplary in its long-term commitment between designers/researchers and artisans, this collaboration includes project counselling, market consulting, the creation of manufacturing tools and communication vehicles, and the construction and co-management of the Wilson Architect Campos Júnior crafts centre. In the exhibition we presented one of the first products created within this project, the Petisqueira Celé, a 2004 creation by Mestre Celé. Around it an illustrative panel was designed to elaborate on O Imaginário's process and methodology (159).



Fig. 22 Linha Brasil Rio, exhibition view

Linha Brasil Rio

Rede Asta, 2016

The objects shown in the exhibition – the Silk Cristo Messenger Bag, the Rio Wine Bottle Carrier and the Corcovado Pillowcase – were produced with recycled materials by groups of artisans from underprivileged regions of Rio de Janeiro. Rede Asta promotes the empowerment of these women through the creation of their own businesses, providing training, establishing production networks and opening up sales channels for their products. The Rio-based social enterprise has innovated in the social sector by working with design consultants and brand-clients for specific lines, ensuring all product orders while on the design phase and thus guaranteeing the sustainability of the business. This line does not have a particular designer or client. Still, it introduces in social trade products that are not corporate gifts, decorative handicrafts or souvenirs. Designed with motifs that echo the landscape of Rio, including its favelas, these objects with a function and daily use contain memories of this city. Above all, they are testimonies of inclusion and hope (179.)



Fig. 23 Tupyguá packaging, exhibition view

Tupyguá packaging Do-Design Brasil, 2016

The Tupyguá “honey” is produced by stingless bees of the *Melipona* genus, which are native to the Brazilian rainforest. The Tupyguá brand, created within a meliponiculture project headed by the ecologist Jerónimo Villas-Boas, is composed from the names of the indigenous ethnic groups that produce it in the state of Espírito Santo: the Tupiniquim and the Guarani. Their representatives asked Anna Paula Diniz, founder of the Do-Design Brasil studio, for the brand to be printed in gold. It just so happens that for the Indians the honey of native bees, with which they have lived for thousands of years, carries the sun. However, in the absence of legislation that identifies, qualifies and regulates the extraction, processing and distribution of this rare, delicate and culturally significant foodstuff, its sale (and export) is illegal. For Brazilian lawmakers only honey from European and African bees is considered honey. This makes beekeeping in Brazil just another reflection of its colonisation. Until when? Such is the message, as poetic as it is transgressive, conveyed by its package. In the exhibition, this message was underscored by a timeline with key dates associated with beekeeping in Brazil and the settlement of the Espírito Santo state, while four empty packages, shown in different stages of opening, provided information about native bee honey as product – and a cause (223).



Fig. 24 Melissa Creatives, exhibition view

Melissa Creatives

Creatives da Melissa, 2016

Melissa is the best known of the eight brands owned by Grendene, Brazil's largest shoe exporter. Their colourful, bubble gum-scented PVC sandals and shoes are sold in more than 70 countries. Since the 1980s the team led by Edson Matsuo, Melissa's creative director, has collaborated with internationally renowned designers such as Jean-Paul Gaultier, Zaha Hadid and the brothers Humberto and Fernando Campana in models released at Melissa Galleries in S.o Paulo, London and New York. More recently, his team has also included the Melisseiras, the brand's "power users" that for decades have been sharing their enthusiasm and purchases on social networks and WhatsApp groups, in the design of new models. The two sandal models -shown in the exhibition over a layer of PVC granulate impregnated with Melissa's patented fragrance - were launched in 2015 after an eight-month co-creation process with 20 young influencers from Rio de Janeiro. An exemplar case of consumer inclusion in the design process (189).



Fig. 25 Exhibition view: graphic design



Fig. 26 Bailes fanzines and vitrine, exhibition view

Bailes fanzines and vitrine

Danilo de Paulo, 2016

With the five fanzines series Bailes: an immersion into the black dances of the 1960-70s in São Paulo, Danilo de Paulo gives voice to five ‘discotecários’ who promoted dances where in several areas of the city the fourth generation of post-abolition black citizens danced to Elza Soares and Ray Charles, the funk of the Ohio Players or the ‘samba-jovem dançante’ of Conjunto D’Angelo. In 2016 the designer presented the fanzines in São Paulo inside a vitrine that included flyers used in communicating these dances, tools employed in their printing, photographs and a 1974 TV Cultura news bulletin. Re-installed in Lisbon, this vitrine celebrated a moment of unprecedented affirmation of black culture in Brazilian urban society, while safeguarding the multiple visual languages of a city, a country, a transnational community or a cosmopolitan experience. It also showed how designers have been opening – inside and outside academia – new trajectories, narratives, and histories for their discipline (139).



Fig. 27 UnB Pro, exhibition view

UnB Pro
Gustavo Ferreira, 2011

The first University of Brasília logo was designed in 1963 – a year after its foundation – by Aloísio Magalhães, often named the founding father of modern Brazilian design. In 2011, UnB, as it is known, had the latest redesign of its visual identity. Coordinated by Rafael Dietzsch, this redesign retained the original logo but added a key element to it: a new typeface. Dietzsch commissioned the also type designer Gustavo Ferreira to create two types of fonts: the UnB Office and UnB Pro, designed based on the Liberation Sans free-access typographic family developed in 2007 by the American designer Steve Matteson. The UnB is a rare example, on a worldwide scale, of a font made available by a public institution of higher education to its entire academic community – and beyond – under a free software license. And an example that not all design is geared towards consumption. In the exhibition the immaterial nature of this project – a digital typographic font that exists in the world solely as a set of electronic files – was safeguarded by its display device, a large flat screen playing a seven-minute typographic animation under a mirrored surface: light in letter forms, visible as if by magic (225).



Fig. 28 Exhibition view: expressions of materiality



Fig. 30 Objects of the Forest, exhibition view



Fig. 31 Exhibition view



Fig. 32 Pós-tropical vase, exhibition view

Pós-tropical vase
Guilherme Wentz, 2014

Guilherme Wentz (born in 1987) is one of the most renowned industrial designers of his generation. In 2014, he was invited by the designer Marcelo Rosenbaum to create a limited edition work for the Collectors Club of MAM, São Paulo's Museum of Modern Art. He then designed and produced 100 specimens of his less industrial project: a vase made from two metal elements and a piece of charred wood, cut from one of the trees in his hometown. Founded by Italian and German immigrants – like Wentz's ancestors – Caxias do Sul is the second city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and an important manufacturing centre. It snows there in the winter. Be it a regional proclamation or generational manifesto, a critique to cultural hegemony or a denunciation of a development model, few objects such as this question, in their origin, form, matter and title, the contemporary identity(ies) of Brazilian design (203).



Fig. 33 Aura pendant, exhibition view



Fig. 34 Aura Pendant, exhibition view

Aura Pendant **Estúdio Guto Requena + D3, 2016**

Love Project is an ongoing research into the use of emotion and technology in design, started in 2013 by the designer Guto Requena and the D3 digital products studio. This project began employing complex brainwave sensors to generate simple 3D-printed objects, questioning ideas such as co-creation, the performative component of design, or the origin and authorship of form. AURA is its latest and most sophisticated manifestation. By creating an object of high material and symbolic value from the recording of memories and emotions, this app combines the timeless function of jewellery with the interaction with the ultimate interface of our contemporary intimacy: the smartphone. Exhibition visitors were invited to download the app and find inside the Tropical Botanical Garden the ideal place to tell their love story, while obtaining an exclusive discount on their piece of jewellery – in 18k solid gold or 18k rose gold – by using the code MUDEBRASILHOJE. This code remains active at loveproject.com.br (135).



Fig. 35 Exhibition view: main xylarium/theme and variation room



Fig. 36. África armchairs, exhibition view

África armchairs

Rodrigo Almeida, 2009/2016

Rodrigo Almeida is the most cerebral of Brazilian furniture designers. His furniture, featured in design magazines and galleries around the world, challenges universal notions such as comfort, meaning and taste. It also reveals the textures, colours, materials and intricate roots of Brazilian culture. The first, Africa, launched in 2009 in a single limited, ten item-edition, is a chair simple in structure yet exuberant in appearance whose title appeals to the Bahian ancestry and ethnically mixed origin of its author. The second is a product more refined in form, sophisticated in materials and commercial in ambition. It is part of the first collection of ITENS, a brand created by Almeida in 2016 to promote the creation and sale of designs by him and other of his contemporaries. Both bear witness to the evolution of a career but also of a designer's engagement with different cultural contexts and consumer markets (133).



Fig. 37 Exhibition view: bookshop



Fig. 38 Exhibition view: bookshop



Fig. 39 Exhibition view: bookshop (Oppa furniture)



Fig. 40 War in Rio and Bando Imobiliário, exhibition view

War in Rio and Bando Imobiliário **Fabio Lopez, 2007**

Designer Fabio Lopez created these two board games to comment and discuss the violence and corruption of his city, Rio de Janeiro. War in Rio is an adaptation of Risk, the strategy game created in France in 1957, in which the warring territories are the favelas of Rio. Bando Imobiliário Carioca is a version of Monopoly, a property trading game first launched in the USA in 1935. Both games are examples of design for debate, an area of this discipline in which designers question the past, present, and near future of our societies through critical and speculative projects. Designed not to be mass-produced or even played, these rhetorical devices are still, even ten years after their creation, remarkably prevalent in their scornful criticism of two of Brazil's most severe and endemic problems (227).



Fig. 41 Material Concept Lab Embraer, exhibition view

Material Concept Lab Embraer MateriaBrasil, 2013

Founded in Rio de Janeiro in 2005, MateriaBrasil combines design, environmental management and material and process consulting. Its services include the design and leasing of materials such as the Material Concept Lab, implemented at the Embraer headquarters in 2013. This collection, the first of its kind in Brazil, is composed of 150 material samples of national origin selected through several dynamics and research initiatives. A selection of these samples could be seen and touched by visitors to the exhibition. Some of these materials with sustainable characteristics and social priorities have been pre-validated by Embraer's Interiors Validation Centre, having undergone rigorous tests necessary for them to be included in an aircraft interior. This collaboration between an innovation studio and the world's third-largest commercial aircraft manufacturer shows how Brazil, the nation with the greatest biodiversity on the planet, can be a leader in a fundamental yet still underemphasised area of design: the development and application of new materials (187).



Fig. 42 Brasil, Julho 2038, exhibition view

Brasil, Julho 2038

A Parede, 2014

“What would be the social and political tensions Brazil would face twenty-something years from now, should a highly conservative and neoliberal coalition rule the country?” In 2014, the designers Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira created a speculative timeline between 2018 and 2038 triggered by this question. Through the manipulation of the graphic interfaces of media outlets and social networks, but also of other devices – such as this future National Identification Document that exposes each citizen’s genetic risk group –, they intend to provoke a debate about the present and the immediate future, in Brazil and other Latin American countries. Brazil, July 2038 is also part, together with the doctoral thesis projects of both its authors at the Universität der Künste Berlin, the project Design in Times of Crisis. With which they question us: how can design research prepare us for a State of Exception? (145).



Fig. 43. Away to Mars, Tropical Molotov, ESDI Aberta #UERJ Resiste, exhibition view

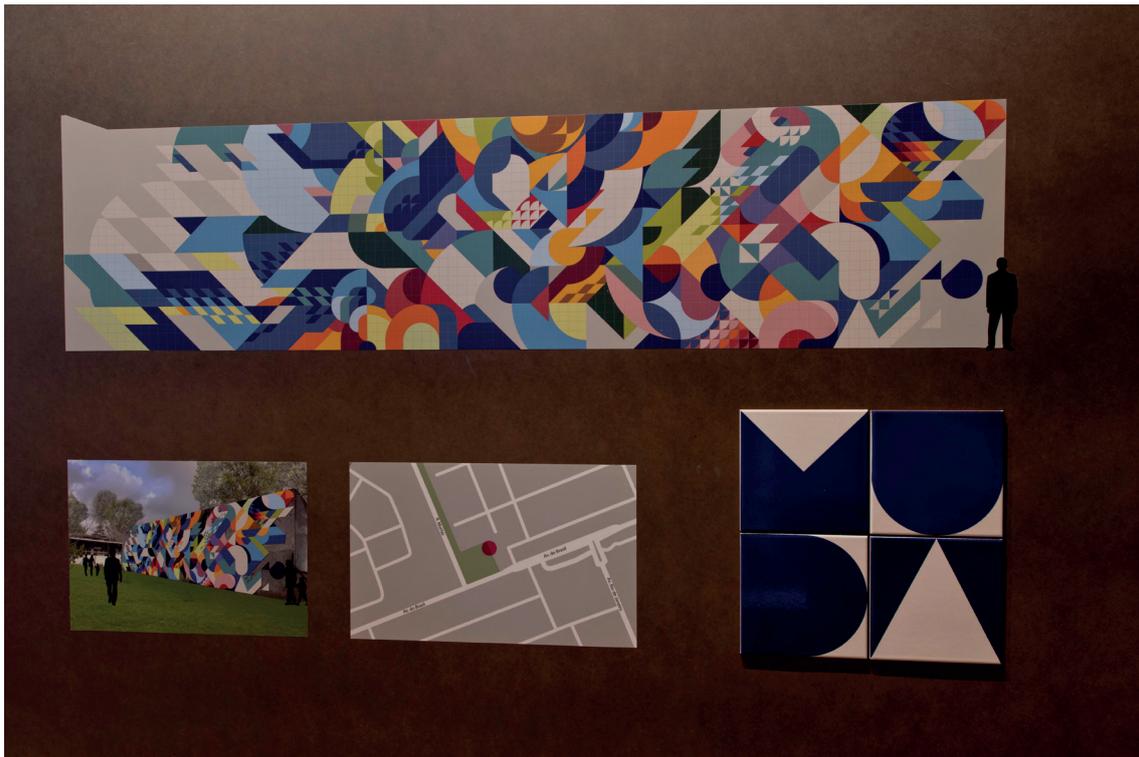


Fig. 44. Tropical Molotov, exhibition view

Tropical Molotov **Coletivo MUDA, 2017**

The designers Bruna Vieira and João Tolentino, and the architects Diego Uribe, Duke Capellão and Rodrigo Kalache began making unsolicited tile panels in 2010. Coletivo MUDA is a pioneer in using this medium in much the same way as other street artists use a spray can. They have since been adding small and discreet interventions to walls and other public spaces of their city – Rio de Janeiro – and others they have travelled to, in Brazil and around the world. Their geometric and colourful panels grew in scale, presence and commissions. Today they are not only found on the street but also outside and inside homes, hotels and hospitals. And, in the form of portable works, in art galleries. On the occasion of the exhibition their first large commissioned panel for Lisbon will arrive, until the end of 2018, to the new Aquilino Ribeiro Machado Park, on Avenida do Brasil (219).



Fig. 45 AwayToMars, exhibition view

AwayToMars **Alfredo Orobio, 2015 –**

Launched in 2015 by Alfredo Orobio, this co-creation platform based in London and Lisbon has been challenging the fashion industry with its collaborative take on design. Each user of this online community can submit – regardless of origin, age or design education – their idea, concept or design for a garment or accessory. These are discussed, refined and crowdfunded by other users, and assisted by a team of expert designers. The final products are manufactured in Portugal and sold under the brand's label through its website. Although its founder is Brazilian, AWAYTOMARS is a notable example of an approach to design that questions notions such as authorship or national identity. In the exhibition, the original piece of the AWAYTOMARS 2017/18 Autumn/Winter collection presented at Moda Lisboa (Lisbon Fashion Week) in March 2017 was shown alongside other ready-to-wear garments produced from its motif (137).



Fig. 47 Exhibition view: first guided tour

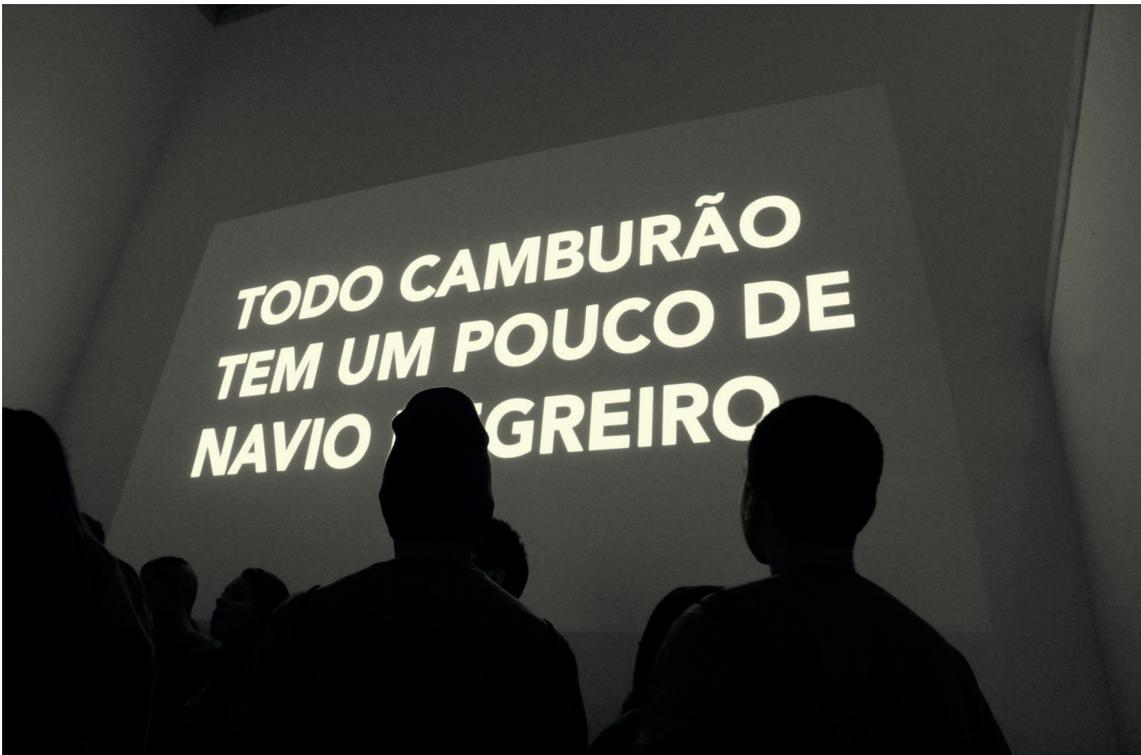


Fig. 48 Guided tour to 8th-grade Brazilian students, November 9 2017.
The Coletivo Projetação projection reads “Todo camburão tem um pouco de navio negreiro” [Every paddy wagon has a little of a slave ship].

4.3. Public programming, communication and critical reception

In this section I elaborate on how I communicated to visitors and other audiences beyond the selection and display of design artefacts. MUDE does not have an education department or staff member dedicated to exhibition mediation; as such, all public programming initiatives associated with Brazil Today were entirely dependent on my proposals. In most cases they were also arranged and organised by me. The main such initiative were the 27 guided tours I gave of the exhibition, which allowed me to consolidate my discourse and reflect on its thesis and goals. I conducted a series of general-audience tours which were scheduled by the museum for every other Sunday at 3pm, from the exhibition's opening weekend to its last day, December 31st. I also conducted some specially appointed tours, such as one aimed at doctoral students at FBAUL, or those aimed at undergraduate and masters students at the School of Arts and Design in Caldas da Rainha.

One of these specially-appointed tours was particularly insightful. On 9 November 2017 I hosted a group of around eighty fourteen-year old students from three Brazilian public schools.¹⁵⁵ Before we started the tour I asked them if they knew the meaning of the word design. Most of the teenagers remained quiet. One timidly said *desenho* [drawing], another *decoração* [decoration]. To emphasise how objects, images and messages these teenagers recognised as part of their world are instances of design, I described the choices, the responsibilities and the limitations of the Brazilian citizens involved in the design of a selection of such artefacts. I told them that instead of creating single objects, designers normally produce series or flows of designs with different results, uses and applications. I also emphasised the clever, playful or hopeful nature, as well as the urgent or uncomfortable messages these artefacts communicated. I ended the tour inside ESDI's installation, reminding the group that public education – of which they are beneficiaries – must be defended, everywhere. Their reactions and enthusiasm during the tour manifested a widespread understanding of the exhibition's arguments and a connection to the majority of

155. This group of 8th grade [in the UK 13-14 age children go to Year 9], public school students from the states of Bahia, Pernambuco and São Paulo was in Lisbon during a 10-day trip to several monuments and cultural sites in Portugal, promoted by the art-education project "Era Uma Vez Brasil" [Once upon a time Brazil], led by the designer Marici Vila. After knowing she was in town, the designer Levi Girardi introduced us and we quickly integrated the tour in the group's schedule.

its contents. This group of young Brazilian citizens, with manifest little knowledge or preconceptions of what design is, or what terms such as “deserving designers” and “innovative practices” (Lupton and Blauvelt 2011, 10) mean, showed me that the interpretation and presentation of design I aim for as a critic and curator was justified. That by conciliating celebration and criticality, I could reveal that the work of designers matters because it is part of the everyday lives of people such as these teenagers.

While curating Brazil Today I suggested to MUDE the development of several public programmes that would complement these guided tours. Using the exhibition as a pretext to address and connect several constituencies, I aimed to combine perspectives *from* design, such as those of design professionals, students and scholars, with perspectives *towards* design, that is, of other constituencies such as representatives from the corporations, institutions, state departments or activist groups. Only one of many proposals I presented to MUDE went ahead: the screening of ‘Marajó das Letras,’ a documentary directed by the designer Fernanda Martins that was one of Brazil Today’s 50 projects. The film’s screening and Q&A with Martins and her design studio partner, Sâmia Batista, took place on September 22nd 2017 at Caleidoscópio, a venue that like the Calheta Palace belongs to the University of Lisbon.¹⁵⁶

On September 21st I organised the launch in Lisbon of the book ‘Marcenaria Baraúna: móvel como arquitetura,’ together with Marcelo Ferraz, architect and founder of Brasil Arquitetura and Marcenaria Baraúna, and Otavio Nazareth, founder of Olhares Editora, a São Paulo-based book publisher specialised in design and architecture. This book, which was first launched in 2017 and to which I contributed with an essay, was one of my 50 choices for Brazil Today’s bookshop; I also selected three ‘Caipira’ stools from Marcenaria Baraúna as one of the exhibition’s 50 projects. As both Ferraz and Nazareth planned to come to Lisbon to attend the exhibition opening, we planned a small book launch and talk at A+A, the bookshop of the Portuguese architecture association, two days before. It was quite well-attended, considering the small size of the bookshop. This launch was also a chance to communicate the exhibition among architecture professionals and students.

156. The screening was rather well attended, especially by the local typeface design community, which responded to the film’s focus on the lettering of boats in the Marajó archipelago. It inclusively promoted through an invitation specially designed by Mário Feliciano, Portugal’s most-renowned type designer.

The other main public programme associated with Brazil Today was related to ESDI. On October 27, FBAUL hosted ESDI's directors and a few students on a one-day symposium called "a esdi nos (pre)ocupa" [esdi concerns/occupies us]. They presented ESDI's recent events and challenges to ESDI's, while FBAUL's president endorsed a declaration of solidarity with ESDI in defence of public education. On the following day, Anastassakis and Martins gave a tour of the exhibition. These were quite well-attended events, especially by Portuguese and some Brazilian post-graduate students. They were mainly symbolic yet no less significant actions, through which I intended to fulfil one of the exhibition's main efforts: bring the Portuguese and Brazilian design communities closer together.¹⁵⁷

157. By late 2019 Brazilian students represented a third of the just over forty-five thousand foreigners studying in Portuguese higher education institutions, with design being one of the four most sought-after courses (Maakaroun 2019). As such, it may be likely that in the absence of transatlantic design media and institutions, education and academia will contribute in a more organic way for these communities to get to know and understand each other's challenges.



Figs. 53 . Street Poster outside the Tropical Botanical Garden

Brazil Today was promoted by MUDE mainly through a series of street posters and an A5 leaflet. The graphic designers Joana & Mariana and I decided the exhibition's posters would not highlight a particular design artefact shown in the exhibition but rather emphasise its long title through a typographical composition. The designers created a custom typeface for the exhibition, the irregularity and unstableness of which evoked my an approach to Brazil and design that is more critical than laudatory. Because the exhibition was part of the 'Lisbon 2017: Ibero-American Capital of Culture' festival, it incorporated the graphic elements of its visual identity, which evoked the flags of Portuguese and Spanish-speaking countries. This composition of typeface and visual elements was applied to a series of four different posters, displayed in bus shelters and other municipal information supports around Lisbon. In some of these posters, the word Design was replaced by four other – Progress, Beauty, Protest and Consumption – that foregrounded dimensions of Brazilian society directly impacted by design. The back of the A5 flyer contained a sort of shopping list of what visitors could find in the exhibition. I also suggested a smaller, 50x70cm poster could be made to promote the exhibition in universities, cultural venues and other locations, which MUDE does not customarily produce.¹⁵⁸

During the exhibition visitors could pick up a free, 8-page newspaper that included MUDE's institutional text, my introductory panel texts and the short captions to its 100 perspectives, as well as a map of Brazil that showed the approximate location of all the exhibition's participants, both in terms of designers and their relevant clients, commissioners or manufacturers (MUDE 2017). This newspaper complemented the 272-page exhibition catalogue, which was only developed after the exhibition was over (Duarte 2018).¹⁵⁹ It includes my curatorial essay, an essay by the editors of *Piseagrama* magazine and views of the exhibition's set-up. Each of its 50 projects was addressed in a two-page spread, which included their edited exhibit label, as found in the exhibition walk-through section. Each of the 50 selected books was also listed with its respective, 75-word extended exhibit label.

158. Joana & Mariana suggested printing in silkscreen; 150 posters were printed at the Lavandaria print studio yet their final cost was so high MUDE decided not to distribute but sell them at the exhibition. Only one was sold.

159. Printed in 2018, Brazil Today's catalogue remains as the exhibition's lasting document, yet by 2021 it had not been officially launched by MUDE. It can only be purchased directly from the museum's staff or from the Lisbon Municipal Libraries bookshop.



Fig. 49 Street Poster with alternative word to design (Consumo)



Fig. 50 Street Poster with alternative word to design (Progresso)



Fig. 51 Street Poster with alternative word to design (Protesto)



Fig. 52 Street Poster with alternative word to design (Beleza)

Uma campanha não eleitoral, uma parede de protestos projetados, três placas de rua da Maré, um banco (de) concreto, duas ideias de África, uma jarra pós-tropical, três bancos caipira, uma sala de estar pronta para levar, um candeeiro em quatro dimensões, um mapa de transportes para Belo Horizonte, um painel de azulejos para Lisboa, um produto-serviço para gerir a qualidade da água em casa, uma bomba hacker, uma colaboração entre académicos e oleiros pernambucanos, as quarenta e oito capas da revista KultuRRvolution, cinco modelos da mesma cadeira, doze mesas e cadeiras para ler e descansar, uma mesa de objetos da floresta, uma viagem pela Serra do Mar, uma linha social de souvenirs cariocas, a família tipográfica da Universidade de Brasília, uma embalagem de gel de banho revolucionária, uma parede de cobogó digital, um documentário sobre os abridores de letras do Pará, uma imersão nos bailes black de São Paulo, todos os livros da Ubu Editora, o pavilhão do Brasil na feira do livro de Frankfurt de 2013, uma memória de cartazes da Tropicália, um novo número da revista Habitat, o universo das Melisseiras, as Havaianas para além da chinela, uma tornozeleira eletrónica, uma muleta para todos os dias, um quarto de criança, a linguagem das lojas quem disse, berenice, uma máquina de lavar a roupa para todos, uma casa da Vila Matilde, uma xiloteca, uma materioteca, uma loja online de artes indígenas, um oráculo da Internet, dois jogos de mesa para discutir o Rio de Janeiro, oito cadeiras para jogar e oito bancos para assistir, uma marca de roupa colaborativa, uma capa de prótese esperançosa, um pote de mel de abelhas nativas, um centro cultural intermitente, uma visão distópica do Brasil em 2038, uma história de amor feita jóia no smartphone, uma celebração da primeira escola de design da língua portuguesa. E mais cinquenta livros disponíveis para consulta e compra na primeira livraria em Portugal especializada em design do Brasil.

Como se Pronuncia Design em Português: Brasil Hoje. Uma exposição sobre o design e o Brasil no século XXI

Rua General João de Almeida 15, Belém, Lisboa
10h – 18h Ter/Dom Tue/Sun Encerrado Seg Closed Mon

A non-electoral campaign, a wall of protest projections, three Maré street plaques, a concrete seat, two ideas of Africa, a post-tropical vase, three caipira stools, a ready-to-go living room, a lamp in four dimensions, a transport map for Belo Horizonte, a tile panel for Lisbon, a citizen app, a product-service for domestic water quality management, a hacker pump, a collaboration between academics and potters in Pernambuco, forty-eight KultuRRvolution magazine covers, five models of the same chair, twelve tables and chairs to read and rest, a table of objects from the forest, a trip through Serra do Mar, a line of social souvenirs from Rio, Brasília University's typographic family, a revolutionary shower gel package, a wall of digital cobogó, a documentary about Pará's letter openers, an immersion into São Paulo's black dances, all of Ubu's books, the Brazil pavilion at the 2013 Frankfurt Book Fair, a memory of Tropicália posters, the new issue of Habitat magazine, the Melisseira universe, the Havaianas beyond the flip-flop, an electronic ankle bracelet, an everyday crutch, a children's room, the language of quem disse, berenice stores, a washing machine for everyone, a house in Vila Matilde, a wood archive, a material library, an online store of indigenous art, an Internet oracle, two board games to discuss Rio de Janeiro, eight player chairs and eight audience stools, a collaborative brand of clothing, a hopeful prosthesis cover, a pot of honey from native bees, an intermittent cultural centre, a dystopian view of Brazil in 2038, a piece of jewellery made from a love story told to a smartphone, a celebration of the first design school in the Portuguese-speaking world. Plus fifty books available for browsing and purchase at the first bookstore in Portugal specialised in design from Brazil.

How to Pronounce Design in Portuguese: Brazil Today. An exhibition about design and Brazil in the 21st century

www.mude.pt
#brasilhoje #mudebrasilhoje



Fig. 55 A5 Flyer (back)

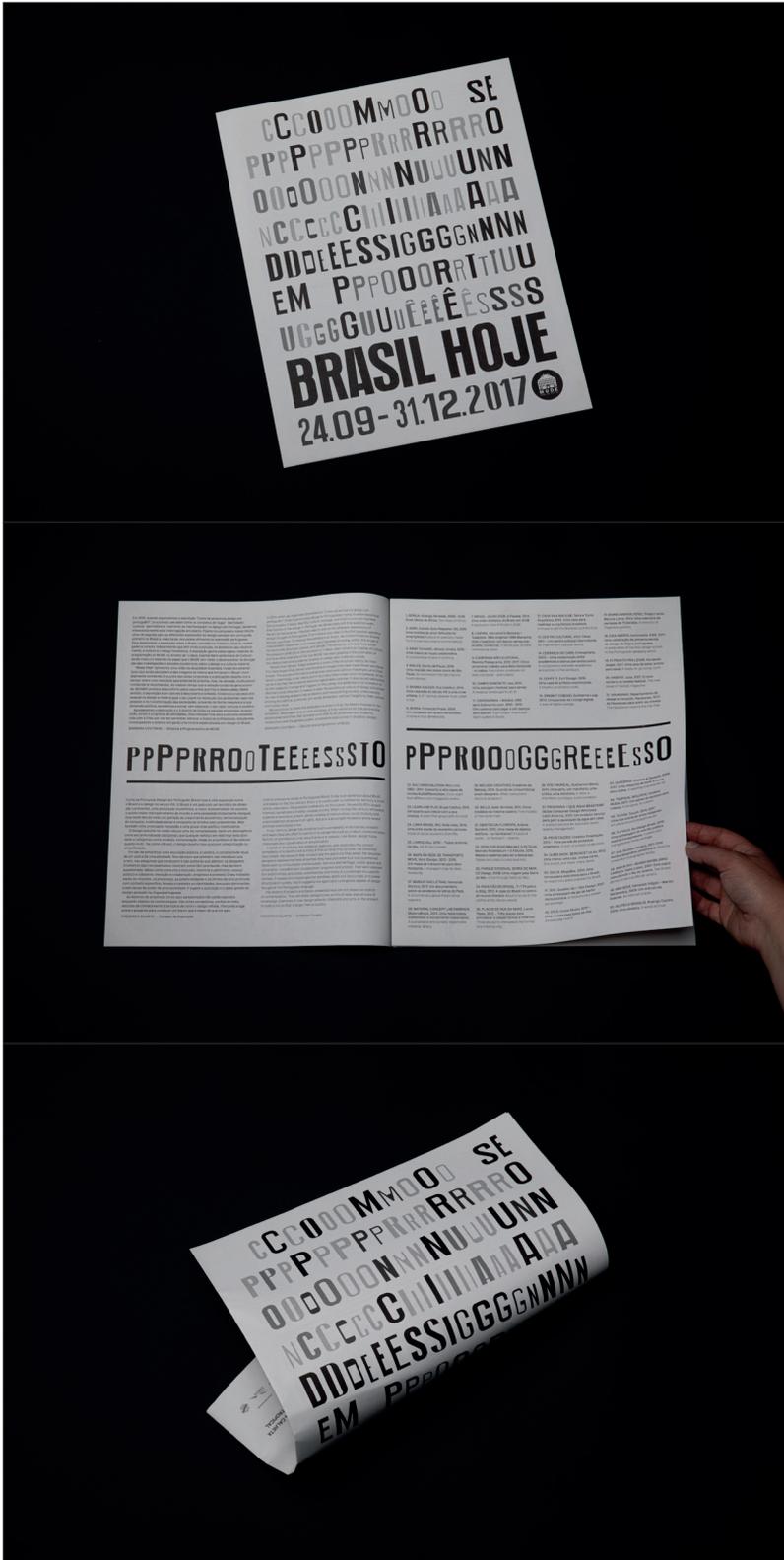


Fig. 58 Exhibition newspaper



Fig.57 Exhibition Catalogue

The main outlets through which I communicated Brazil Today were, apart from social media, the articles published about the exhibition in Portuguese and Brazilian media. During the exhibition's opening week I gave guided tours to journalists from the *Público* and *Diário de Notícias* newspapers, as well as the *Visão* weekly news magazine. In addition, I was interviewed over email by journalists from the *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Globo* newspapers in Brazil.¹⁶⁰ Some of the key arguments upheld in Brazil Today, but also in this thesis, were picked up by journalists that usually write for the culture or lifestyle sections of their respective publications. The arguments I presented included the following: looking for a Brazilian identity in design implies the establishment of a power relation (Cardoso 2017); we often think of design as an authorial affirmation, although that happens only on rare occasions (Belo 2017); as a curator I am mainly interested in showing ideas, not only commodities or images (Gama 2017); the idea of the designer as a service provider is largely removed from design discourse, especially from the dismal media landscape that deals with this activity (Gama 2017a). I also affirmed that I intended Portuguese visitors to leave the exhibition with more doubts than certainties about a country we think we know, but in reality know very little about (Dale 2017), and argued that the quotas for black, Indigenous and public school students have sparked a true ideological debate in universities (Pereira 2017).

Brazil Today's only review was published in *eye* magazine. Titled 'A sharp *eye* for Brazilian design' (2018), it was authored by John L. Walters, editor-in-chief of the renowned graphic design publication, with whom I visited the exhibition. This section aptly interprets my work as a curator and researcher:

Curator Frederico Duarte has devoted an impressive level of critical scrutiny and energy to this big show. As a Portuguese visitor to Brazil, Duarte is an outsider who speaks the language, and he has been able to approach the materials from first principles, documenting the form, the brief, the context and the processes behind each element. There is little that could be said to be in any existing design canon. Despite the breadth of geography, sector, style and manner, 'Brasil Hoje' has a sharp focus on the way design can affect the lives of ordinary people, including schemes for recycling water, a crutch and a lightweight washing machine for low-income families (Walters 2018, 115).

160. Apart from periodical publications, the exhibition was featured briefly in RTP2's daily Arts programme and in the weekly Antena 1 radio column of the Portuguese journalist and writer Alexandra Lucas Coelho.

Walters' review expressed several of my aforementioned goals for the exhibition and the character of my curatorial approach. His remark on design canon, in fact, signalled a rather unintended consequence of my approach, as the issue of explicitly challenging or following a design canon was not on my mind when developing the exhibition's curatorial framework. Concurrently, Mara Gama's *Folha de São Paulo* article emphasised my focus on design as a service in its title: "Design é serviço", diz curador de mostra sobre produção do Brasil' [Design is a service, says curator of exhibition about production in Brazil] (2017). I found this emphasis particularly rewarding, as this focus was one of the central arguments of the design discourse I crafted for the exhibition.

4.4. Conclusion

In *Brazil Today* I approached the work of Brazilian designers less as exacerbated manifestations of difference or undesirable expressions of a national identity. Instead, I interpreted them as reactions to the local, complex contexts of a country shaped by geographic, economic and ethnic heterogeneity, persistent economic instability, infrastructural feebleness, bureaucratic complexity and brutal social inequality. This interpretation aimed to foster in visitors an understanding of the social worlds in which Brazilian designers work and to which they contribute. Such understanding was grounded not on a search for identity but for recognition, as elaborated here by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur:

The term “recognition” seems to me much more important than that of “identity” which is the focus most of the time of the debate on multiculturalism. In the notion of identity there is only the idea of sameness, whereas recognition is a concept that directly integrates otherness and allows a dialectic of the same and the other. The demand of identity always involves something violent with respect to others. The search for recognition, on the contrary, implies reciprocity. (Ricoeur 1998, 60)

The reciprocity that Ricoeur mentions implies a consciousness of the Other as someone we can understand and relate to. In the case of *Brazil Today*, this Other included the designers but especially the common citizens they serve and who navigate everyday life through the artefacts they design. As such, in my selection of design initiatives and artefacts I attempted not only to display design in its broadest spectrum of disciplines and material practices but also to open up, as much as possible, the field of possibilities presented to design practice where that sense of recognition could emerge. In this I paid topical attention to how these artefacts translated key events, facts and issues that affected Brazilian society during the 2004-14 decade. I therefore presented them as evidences of how the work of designers shaped and was shaped by the everyday.

There is an additional intention or characteristic of the exhibition’s curatorial framework and discourse that I only became aware of in the process of writing this thesis: the notion of instability. Such a notion is translated from the exhibition’s graphic materials to its initiative selection, from the differing materiality, stability and tangibility of displayed artefacts to their varying access to visitors. It is also, to be sure, in my critical interpretations of the exhibition’s contents. Providing its visitors with an unstable or unsettling environment

or experience – which is not the same as unusual, unorthodox or surprising – was in fact, implicit in my curatorial approach and discourse. But as I came to terms with Brazilianness and Brazilianisation as the two interconnected fields between which Brazilian designers define their critical autonomy, this notion of instability became more explicit, relevant, even urgent. For it not only translates the context in which these designers work, the contemporary nature of design or our increasingly unstable societies, but my transcultural position and experience as a curator. This position was defined less by strategic authority and more by a tactical sense of vulnerability, uncertainty and self-doubt, regarding my relationship with the museum’s staff, the exhibition designers, its over 200 participants – from designers and book authors to their clients, as well as other agents – and, ultimately, its visitors. The exhibition’s development was itself an exercise in instability, with contents, arriving half-way through its three months, unexpected participant cancellations and many other kinds of obstacles. Nevertheless, I consider notions such as instability, vulnerability and self-doubt as productive grounds for the presentation and interpretation of design but also for design criticism. Many of the questions I have raised in this thesis about curatorial, editorial and historical approaches to design are connected to a dearth or even an absence of such notions. Instead, I attempted to open mine to instability and vulnerability but above all to listening, observing and giving back to a community on which it is grounded, as well as the constituencies I aim to serve. In the following chapter I analyse a selection of design initiatives shown in *Brazil Today* and I reflect on the contradictions and shortcomings of my own transcultural approach.

**Brazil Today: an exhibition
as a testing ground for a collection**

In this chapter I analyse the selection, display and interpretation of 33 out of a total of 50 design initiatives presented in Brazil Today. This analysis is divided according to four thematic challenges, which are considered less as categorical and exhaustive and more as porous and open-ended perspectives into these initiatives and the artefacts that resulted from them. The first, Consumption and Inclusion, emphasises how designers included the aspirations, needs, choices and habits of the individuals that make up Brazil's consumer market during its considerable expansion in the 2004-14 decade. The second theme, Discourses and Identities, contributes to a discussion over national identity and design in Brazil, by interrogating how during this period design was employed to either reinforce the idea of a Brazilian hegemonic national identity or reveal the nation's contested identities. The third theme, Public Space and the Public Good, addresses three crucial issues in contemporary Brazil: the expansion of a public sphere, the reconfiguration of public space and the intensification of a debate over the public good – the *res publica*. The fourth theme, Innovation and Collaboration, regards the expectations and often contradictory values and practices evoked by these two terms, with an emphasis on designer-led community projects. This analysis' fluid structure interweaves insights mainly collected from primary sources with other observations relevant to what is a critical and self-reflective approach to my work as a curator. It is necessarily complemented by the reading of the extended captions I wrote for these initiatives, which are reproduced in chapter 4's exhibition walkthrough section. I refer to each of these captions at the start of each initiative's first analysis paragraph. I conclude this chapter by observing how this artefact selection can reflect an approach to the collection of Brazilian contemporary design, namely at this thesis' institutional partner, the V&A.

5.1. Consumption and Inclusion

Interpreting consumption as a symbolic, collective act and design as an inherently collective practice, in *Brazil Today* I intended to present original, consequential contributions from Brazilian designers – as individual and collective subjects – to the needs and aspirations of the Brazilian population during the 2004-14 decade. The design initiatives and artefacts analysed in this section are examples of how designers answered but also encouraged such needs and aspirations. My approach to consumption as social inclusion, however elusive and contradictory it may be, aims to challenge shortsighted curatorial and editorial approaches to Brazilian design, which by focusing exclusively on products aimed for an elite market are not only vastly unrepresentative of design practice in Brazil, but also oblivious to the country's social reality. Resulting from design processes that have taken place on a wide range of manufacturing scales, consumption markets and sectors of the economy, the artefacts I selected for *Brazil Today* manifested specific contributions by designers to society. In my interpretation of their intentions and consequences I aimed not only to provide a glimpse of life in contemporary Brazil but also, crucially, steer a discussion about design away from the individual designer or the singular object and towards a complex, but necessary debate over individual privileges and collective rights in Brazil.

One of my first design initiative selections was the packaging for Natura's Sou product line (p. 156).¹⁶¹ I made a point of including it in all my exhibition and thesis presentations, journalist interviews and guided tours. Sou reflects one of my main research interests: Brazil's health and beauty market, arguably the world's most important.¹⁶² As such I have been interested in how designers react to this market in the visual and material configurations of product packaging, fragrances, brands and campaigns, as well as the design of systems for extracting ingredients, manufacturing, distributing, marketing and

161. This design initiative was in fact selected by Bárbara Coutinho for her MUDE exhibition on BID, the Ibero-American design biennial, which preceded *Brazil Today*. It was presented there by three packaging units and a vectorial drawing that emphasised the water drop-like form of its packaging.

162. In 2010 Brazilians were the highest *per capita* spenders on health and beauty products, ranking on top in the use of products such as perfume and deodorant (Euromonitor 2011). The country's climate, ethnically mixed population, culture of hygiene and cult of self-image, as well as the rising number of women in formal employment – which from 2002 to 2011 increased from 9 to just under 15 million (Alvarenga 2011) – are but a few factors that made Brazil the world's third-largest personal care, fragrance and cosmetics market by 2014, after the USA and Japan (ABIHPEC 2015, 11).

selling these products to an increasingly sophisticated market.¹⁶³ Launched in 2013, the first Sou line consisted of 27 products, sold in 200ml packages and priced from R\$4 to R\$10.¹⁶⁴ Sou was created less as a line of products aimed directly at the NMC and more as a complement to Natura's existing sub-brands, which have a mainly premium market positioning and are therefore considered aspirational for many consumers. It was nonetheless positioned by Natura as an entry-level brand, which allowed the firm to reach new consumers and compete with mass-market brands from multinational corporations such as L'Óreal, Unilever and P&G. My main interest in Sou goes beyond acknowledging its innovative design process, in which a national manufacturing champion employed two renowned design consultancies to create an ambitious product based on an insight gathered from ethnographic observation.¹⁶⁵ It also goes beyond the morphological, material and manufacturing innovations that have earned Natura several patents, design awards and significant sales records.¹⁶⁶ Or the significant savings made possible by certain key design decisions, such as giving the whole line of products the same scent.

In Brazil Today, this initiative was presented by three artefacts: a series of product units, two rolls of film and the line's presentation video created for Youtube. This video aimed to show how Sou's packaging works and reportedly uses less resources, while persuading citizens to consume more sustainably. However, the model's white skin and reddish hair may be considered unrepresentative of most of Brazil's NMC women, which tend to have much darker skin

163. Research by Instituto Data Popular showed that expenses with hygiene and personal care jumped 388 percent across the country's population from 2002 to 2010, with NMC families accounting for over 45 percent of that spending (2011).

164. These values correspond to around a third of the cost of similar products from other Natura sub-brands. By 2017 the number of Sou references had increased to over 40, which began being sold in 200ml and 400ml packages.

165. In 2011 Natura approached Questto Nó and Tátil Design to work as a single company on a disruptive product for the brand. According to one of Questto No's design directors, Leonardo Massarelli, this product had to do four things: use less resources, have a lower price point, address a new consumer and have a "conscious consumption" message (personal communication, August 21, 2016). The designers realised that many consumers, including consumers of Natura products, use the refill packaging of liquid soap or shampoo as the final packaging instead of refilling an existing hard shape. They found two strengths in this misuse: a disregard for the often over-designed "hard" packaging and an appreciation for a wise use of resources.

166. One example of which is the line's packaging material, a film that at Natura's main filling plant in Cajamar, São Paulo enters on one side of two custom-built machines and exits as packaged products on the other. This process saves 75% of resources such as water and energy, as instead of having hard plastic packages being blown in one plant and carried empty to be filled in another, Natura does all under one roof.

tones.¹⁶⁷ Such choice of model may be seen as naïvely misinformed or problematically unrepresentative, but it may also be considered cunningly aspirational. It asked an uncomfortable question: does whiteness sell?¹⁶⁸ Addressing this question in depth could foster a more detailed analysis of this design initiative and its artefacts, which goes beyond the remit of this thesis. Yet I alluded to it on my guided tours and interviews about the exhibition, highlighting less obvious and also less benign aspects of design. By consuming less resources, avoiding waste and costing less, Sou products may encourage a more conscious kind of consumption, especially in a new group of consumers such as Brazil's NMC, even set a new packaging standard. Yet they may also make other Natura products and brands feel redundant, antiquated, overpriced, even wasteful to consumers. This, I learned from Sou's brand managers – Maria Paula Fonseca and Fabiana Pelicciari, which I interviewed in 2016 alongside the designer Leonardo Massarelli, as well as Pedro Cresti and Carla Fernandes, whom I interviewed in 2018 – is a major challenge for Natura, which remains unresolved.¹⁶⁹

A final observation on Sou regards the updatable, unstable nature of a design initiative and the wide range of artefacts it generates, which poses a considerable exhibition and long-term collection challenge. While the set of Sou packages shown in Brazil Today reflected the brand's original graphics created in 2013, how would a redesign of its elements reflect changes in the market, or adaptation to other markets?¹⁷⁰ I explored Sou's many dimensions and challenges in the several guided tours I conducted; the many positive reactions from visitors and journalists foregrounded the original and consequential contribution of designers to this initiative, yet also its contradictions and limitations.

Next to Sou we presented the Superpop washing machine (p. 157), a product I have been interested in since I began researching Brazilian design in 2009.

167. As a population sample, a study conducted in Brasília concluded that by 2011 over 60 percent of NMC citizens were self-declared black and brown (Russo 2018).

168. Nevertheless, following this first video, Sou's above-the-line campaigns did however include models of different races and hairstyles, in a more representative sample of the line's potential consumers.

169. During my 2016 research trip I met Maria Paula Fonseca and Fabiana Pelicciari, which managed Sou during different periods since its launch. On my 2018 visit to the Natura HQ and main manufacturing plant in Cajamar, São Paulo I was accompanied by Pedro Cresti, then Sou's brand manager, and Carla Fernandes, an earlier brand manager for Sou that was the liaison person at Natura during the production of the Brazil Today.

170. In 2018 Pedro Cresti told me the Sou line, which he considered a product of Brazil's 21-st century economic miracle that answered the desire of a large group of citizens to become consumers, was set to undergo a complete redesign of its packaging graphics and above-the-line communication in 2019, so to be closer to its customer base. Sou was indeed relaunched in January 2020, with new graphics centred on colourful illustrations of female profiles by the Brazilian designer and illustrator Willian Santiago.

Washing machines have proven particularly significant for Brazilians during the 2004-14 decade: according to the 2014 PNAD, although only 58,7 percent, or 39,3 million households, owned a washing machine, there was a remarkable 5,1 percent increase in sales from 2013 to 2014 alone. As a larger number of women entered the workforce during this decade, a more affordable machine allows more women to save time in domestic chores usually attributed to them (Amorim et al. 2015). Superpop is made entirely in plastic, is sold in two parts and is lighter and cheaper than traditional, heavier models. It also represents a local, culturally relevant innovation by Mueller Eletrodomésticos, a Brazilian home appliance manufacturer founded in 1949 that in the 1950s launched the country's first washing machine. The presentation of this design initiative in Brazil Today emphasised its more evident but no less original technical and material qualities. Beside two of its units – one inside its cardboard box, the other fully assembled – a TV screen showed a 3D-animation of its assembly, which allowed visitors to understand the technically ingenious nature of this product. A less evident but no less meaningful consequence of the product's success as a driver for inclusion was revealed to visitors in the exhibit's label. This insight, explained to me by Gustavo Chelles, head of the design consultancy that designed this and other products for Mueller (personal communication, August 30, 2016), truly resonated with visitors, for it challenged the expectations of who the average consumer of such products is, but also of the social worlds in which they live. It demonstrated a dimension of design appropriately adapted to local conditions that expresses expectations of value and experiences of ownership among a complex, fluid consumer market.

Shown across the room from Superpop, Confete (p. 158) is a prosthetic leg cover designed by Rodrigo Brenner and Mauricio Noronha of Furf design. I learned about Confete in 2016 when I interviewed the designers at the NDesign student design convention, where they spoke and headed a workshop. They told me how the cover they designed, which had just been launched, could be applied to prostheses of both legs and how its light material – polyurethane – and manufacturing process greatly reduced costs of what was hitherto considered a costly, and ultimately dispensable, aesthetic addition to a medical device. This means that in effect, Brenner, Noronha and their client – ID ethnos, a healthcare equipment startup founded in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro – turned a medical device into a cheap, popular product. The product's low cost has since allowed its acquisition to be fully subsidised by Brazil's Sistema Único de Saúde

[Unified Health System, SUS] and Instituto Nacional de Segurança Social [National Social Security Institute, INSS], making it free for any Brazilian citizen. It has also granted its international success: by 2019 Confete was sold in more than 15 countries. By turning a costly, hard to replace and often unattractive accessory to a medical device into a product more akin to a Havaianas flip-flop, Brenner and Noronha added an accessible, emotional appeal to this inclusive product. They told me this emotional connection was especially evident on Instagram, as Confete users shared photos of themselves and tagged the manufacturer. So we chose to include in Confete's exhibit, alongside three covers shown in different guises, a mobile phone with the Instagram app open on the #vistasuaconfete hashtag, so visitors could understand how content created daily by Confete's users displayed a regained sense of self-esteem. This interpretative tool proved rather effective with visitors, as by refreshing the Instagram feed they engaged with this design initiative and connected, in a rather direct and familiar way, with its users and consumers.

Next to Superpop, Sted (p. 159) also showed an innovative and inclusive design from a young design consultancy. I met the founders of Cusco Studio in Porto Alegre on the last day of my 2016 trip, just months after they won the competition organised by Mercur, a renowned rubber products manufacturer.¹⁷¹ Although by 2017 this crutch had not yet passed its design phase, I found it a compelling example of how young designers are placing ageing as a critical and often overlooked issue on the contemporary design agenda. As I indicated in its exhibit label and in tours and interviews, a crutch designed less as a health device and more as a consumer product confronted visitors with the issue of ageing, but also of design for senior citizens, which poses a series of new challenges of inclusion through design and consumption. I also intended this design initiative to resonate amongst Portuguese visitors, considering ours is one the Europe's oldest populations (Eurostat 2020). Sted's exhibit included a 3D-printed, real scale model of the crutch on top of a graphic display designed by Cusco Studio, which informed visitors of the product's components and

171. Cusco Studio's proposal for a walking cane was incorporated by Mercur in a new product the firm launched in 2020. Fully designed and manufactured in Brazil, the fixed walking cane was developed in collaboration with the Instituto Brasileiro de Tecnologia [Brazilian Institute of Technology, IBTeC] and the Laboratório de Pesquisa do Exercício [Exercise Research Laboratory, LAPEX] at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul [Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, UFRGS]. Among its many innovations is the use of 2.4% less aluminium. For more information see: mercur.com.br/mercur-desenvolve-nova-muleta-com-fabricacao-e-materias-primas-nacionais/

functions. This was one of the instances where I invited the exhibition's participants to incorporate interpretative media that communicated their initiative's development process and goals. Although these media interfered somewhat with the integrity of the exhibition design, I considered these were concessions worth making. Other examples were the Cerâmica do Cabo and Tupyguá packaging initiatives.

Tupyguá is the only food-related initiative I selected for Brazil Today (p.162). Its exhibit was composed of three packages and a timeline that briefly explained honey extraction in Brazil and expanded the interpretation of packaging as the main point of contact between manufacturers and consumers. I learned about the origins and potential of meliponiculture, or the extraction of honey from bees native to South America, from my first conversation with Anna Paula Diniz, Tupyguá's designer. I first invited her to take part in the exhibition because of Sururu, the social currency she designed in 2013, but during our first Skype conversation she told me it did not succeed as planned; she then suggested a more promising, recent design: the Tupyguá brand and packaging.¹⁷² Diniz then introduced me to her client, Jerônimo Villas-Bôas, one of the most outspoken leaders of a movement, led by NGOs and government agencies, which is promoting meliponiculture as a sustainable agroforestry that includes traditional, often Indigenous communities in territories usually considered on the margins of development.¹⁷³ This design initiative showed visitors how food packaging can be designed as a tool for inclusion and civic engagement, while foregrounding meliponiculture as both a cause and promising industry. Through appropriate packaging design and communication, this small but decisive effort to develop a viable, sustainable and ethical alternative to apiculture can reach a growing number of conscious consumers.¹⁷⁴ As I elaborated in 'What is not Mine is Yours: Meliponiculture as design humanism' (2019), Tupyguá can be considered a case of design for autonomy. It is an example of

172. I learned about Sururu, a social currency designed by Anna Paula Diniz and Marcelo Terça-Nada, founders of the DoDesign Brasil studio in Belo Horizonte, in the 2015 BBD catalogue. I intended to include this initiative, which by aiming to foster the economy of the quilombola communities of Vale and Bacia do Iguape in the state of Bahia was a crucial example of design for autonomy.

173. I spoke with Diniz and Villas-Bôas over Skype in 2017, during the preparation of the exhibition. I also met Villas-Bôas on my 2018 trip to Brazil. João Meirelles, director of the Peabiru Institute in Belém provided me with further insights on meliponiculture.

174. In 2021 the Tupyguá visual identity, packaging of its expanding product range were redesigned by the São Paulo-based designer Teo Menna. Despite having changed the brand's typeface and polished its symbol, Menna kept Tupyguá's distinctive golden colour.

how Brazilian designers are rethinking notions such as industry, sustainable development, but also our ancestral connection to territory.¹⁷⁵ This was one of the most successful exhibits in ‘Brazil Today,’ having gathered many positive reactions from visitors and the attention of local media. Villas-Boas, Diniz and I discuss how we could engage different audiences in the exhibition by promoting collaborations between Tupyguá and local chefs and brewers, in tastings and the production of local beer with this honey. Yet our plans did not go ahead.

Next to the Tupyguá jars were three products from Rede Asta’s Linha Brasil Rio. This line of Rio de Janeiro-related products includes pillows, toiletry cases, wine carriers and messenger bags designed with motifs that echo the city’s landscape – including its *morros*, or *favelas* [shantytowns] – made from up-cycled materials. Rede Asta is a compelling example of a social business that employs design in the development of products manufactured by groups of low-income citizens. On my 2016 research trip I interviewed Alice Freitas, the founder and director of Rede Asta, who by then was managing a network of 60 productive groups formed by women artisans from 10 Brazilian states, with an emphasis in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro (personal communication, September 6, 2016). Founded in 2005, Rede Asta provides these women, whom are often on the verge of marginality and indigence, with a lifeline in the form of business counselling, production organisation and, most importantly, a reasonably steady stream of orders. Rede Asta launches two product collections each year and works with designers as consultants, yet its originality lies in the integrated management of the product’s value chain, which includes design, manufacturing, distribution and sales, both in stores and online. When describing the social enterprise’s pragmatic attitude to design, Freitas admits these products are made by the bottom of the pyramid but consumed by those at the top. That is, most of Asta’s consumer base is of the A and B classes. This demands the positioning of handcrafted items as aspirational consumer products, in which quality in design and manufacturing are key (personal communication, September 6, 2016). Rede Asta also works with large brands as clients for specific lines, guaranteeing the purchase of stock from many product lines even before their manufacture begins. As such, it has managed to overcome a

175. I wrote this essay upon an invitation from Paola Antonelli to contribute with an essay for the catalogue of ‘Broken Nature,’ the XII Milan Triennale’s main exhibition, which she curated with Ala Tannir in 2019.

challenge placed to several other designer-led community projects: long-term sustainability. With its focus on efficiently producing and selling everyday, inexpensive items, it is also more consumer-centred than other designer-led community efforts, which generate mainly rarefied, expensive decoration items. As I have observed several times, their design development process often reveals scant concern for the establishment of production models, distribution chains or consumer target groups. I elaborate on the curatorial challenges of designer-led community projects in my analysis of the Cerâmica do Cabo design initiative in section 5.4.

For *Brazil Today* I chose specific items from the Linha Brasil Rio product line, which has been a staple of Rede Asta's catalogues for over ten years, because it problematises the very market and function of handicraft products vis-a-vis products designed for the souvenir market. The former are often steeped in visual and material culture, as well as a particular origin, tradition or place of manufacture, but have often been crystallised in terms of their function or context/culture of consumption. The latter are highly symbolic of a place yet often have no relation to it in terms of manufacturing. Rede Asta's products shown in *Brazil Today* represent a meeting of both markets: they are objects of everyday use, applicable to domestic contexts in and outside Brazil, that also perform a valuable, socially inclusive function in their territory of manufacture. I also chose this line to provoke a discussion regarding the role of designers in the process through which local and national symbols are chosen and perpetuated in everyday, utilitarian and decorative items, especially those of the souvenir market. How do such choices reveal outdated or rediscovered functions, hegemonic narratives or contested symbols associated with a particular place, people and their respective identities? What, or whom, do they also choose to include or exclude?

5.2. Discourses and identities

Acknowledging Brazil is a community of over 200 million individuals, which in 2011 was officially defined as majority of minorities, is key to understand the contemporary conditions and context of design practice.¹⁷⁶ In their shaping of personal and collective imaginations, designers have crafted top-down, dominant discourses associated with elites or authoritarian states, expressed in official propaganda but also in the silencing of dissenting identity expressions. Yet they have also amplified bottom-up approaches that encourage citizen participation and the emancipation of marginalised communities. A transcultural approach that pro-actively addresses expressions of multiculturalism or the politics of difference in contemporary design necessarily acknowledges those interconnected fields of practice. It also recognises the contributions from civil society, and not just the state, in plural and polyphonic expressions of a fragmented, collective national identity that is far from cohesive or uncontested. By including the intentional actions of designers in their context of practice, but also their reflections on personal history, ancestry or the legacy of their own disciplines, in this section I aim to problematise the notion of identity in contemporary Brazil. These initiatives and artefacts also deal, in many guises and nuances, with an issue identified in chapter 3: representation. They express the Brazilian voices of those involved in design practice during the 2004-14 decade, but also aimed to foster in visitors an awareness of what, or whom, is (not) represented in Brazilian contemporary design.

The first such initiative was the FJ Pronto Pra Levar living room (p. 145). Placed at the entrance of the exhibition next to its introductory text panel, this 10-item living room ensemble was shown as a kind of fourth place between the home, the shop and the museum. Its exhibit label informed visitors this domestic environment was identical to others visited – for all effects, in real time – by consumers in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Visitors could see the price of each item expressed on their respective labels in reais and euros. They could not

176. The expression “a majority of minorities” gained particular significance after Brazil’s 2010 demographic census, the results of which were released in late 2011. In contrast with the three previous census (1980, 1991 and 2000) where an enquiry over self-declared colour or race was included only in sample questionnaires, this one included it for the totality of the population. As such, from a total of 191 million inhabitants 97 million, or just over 50 percent of the population, defined themselves as black or mixed race – 15 million as black (7.6 percent), 82 million as brown (43.1 percent), 2 million as yellow (1.1 percent) and 817 thousand as indigenous (0.4 percent) (IBGE 2010) – while 91 million, 47.7 percent, labelled themselves as white (Phillips 2011).

however touch, experiment or use any of them. On the guided tours – the vast majority of which were given in Portuguese¹⁷⁷ – I conducted, I asked visitors the same two questions about this living room: “Do you think this furniture looks or feels Brazilian?” and “Would you like to own any of these products?”. The answers to the first question were mainly non-verbal manifestations that revealed the strangeness, even the senselessness of looking for national identity in the contents of a living room. The answer to the second question was a virtually unanimous yes. Much like the exhibition’s other perspectives, this room intended not to confront visitors with difference but with commonality. It also meant to foreground that thanks to its continental size and remarkable differences in geography, commercial configurations and housing conditions, Brazil is an exceptional territory for the design, trade and study of domestic goods and environments.

As the main nation in a region still unexplored by IKEA, Brazil is the world’s largest consumer market still unaffected by the Swedish chain’s upending of notions such as value, taste, style and obsolescence.¹⁷⁸ FJ Pronto Pra Levar is not as cheap as IKEA is to most of its customers and there are more affordable furniture and home appliance stores and brands in Brazil – I inclusively selected for Brazil Today tables and chairs from Oppa and Orb, two brands that have recently entered the Brazilian furniture market with innovative approaches to retail and design.¹⁷⁹ Yet the designs sold under the more accessible of Fernando Jaeger’s two brands have been purchased and owned by countless middle-class Brazilian consumers since 1994. Many of which, Jaeger admitted to me, have lived with them for three generations (personal communication, January 7 2021).¹⁸⁰ This kind of recognition reflects the value many Brazilian families attribute to FJ Pronto Pra Levar products, but also the longevity of

177. I gave only one English-language tour to a group of guests from Second Home, a co-working space I worked at during most of 2017.

178. Although IKEA has several suppliers in Latin America as part of its global supply chain, it has only a retail presence in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Its South American expansion is set to begin in 2022, when the first of the region’s nine stores and e-commerce operations opens in Chile (Reuters 2020). IKEA has not unveiled plans of opening stores in Brazil.

179. Other chains include Etna and Tok&Stok, as well as the more popular Casas Bahia and Magazine Luíza.

180. I interviewed Fernando Jaeger in São Paulo during my 2016 research trip and again in early 2021 for an essay I wrote for a forthcoming book on his work published by *monolito*, an architecture and design magazine and publisher based in São Paulo.

Jaeger's career as a designer and entrepreneur.¹⁸¹ Apart from his two brands, Jaeger has designed many hundreds of successful products for other clients, such as the Tok&Stok chain of furniture stores. This has given his work a remarkable centrality in the Brazilian furniture market, as well as a significant presence in Brazil's domestic landscape. However, Jaeger's work has hardly been the subject of attention in international curatorial approaches to Brazilian design or been integrated the catalogues of non-Brazilian manufacturers and retailers.¹⁸² In fact, Jaeger admitted to me he does not need or seek an international recognition to his work, nor is he thinking about exporting or even expanding his business. By placing the FJ Pronto Pra Levar room at the beginning of 'Brazil Today,' I aimed not only to confront visitors with the work of one of Brazil's most prolific designers, but also with his unique context of practice. In so doing, I also aimed to question how notions such as national identity and difference, but especially local context and value, are presented to mainly foreign citizens in a nation-specific design exhibition.

As visitors went up the Calheta palace's staircase and reached the main floor of the exhibition, they came across a large video projection of the Web Seer digital interface (p. 147). I have followed the work of Fernanda Viégas since I saw her speak at TEDx São Paulo in 2009. Although I wanted to commission her and her partner, Martin Wattenberg, a new data visualisation project for the exhibition, due to time constraints we decided instead to show an earlier work of theirs.¹⁸³ Web Seer first questions the notion of national identity in design by showing the result of a collaboration between a Brazilian and a North American citizen, conducted outside of Brazil, with no direct relation to the country's population. Secondly, with this visually unsophisticated online interface I intended to confront visitors with how, in a global sense, the Portuguese

181. The history of furniture design in Brazil is also, in large part, a history of designer-entrepreneurs. Among the designers that founded and managed – with varying degrees of success – manufacturing and retail outlets are Joaquim Tenreiro (Langenbach & Tenreiro), Sérgio Rodrigues (Oca), José Zanine Caldas (Móveis Z) and Michel Arnault (Mobília Contemporânea).

182. In 2007, Jaeger's 2001 Bienal stool was incorporated by the US furniture retailer Design Within Reach as part of its Brazilian collection (it has since been discontinued). In 2015, Christian Larsen included Jaeger's 2014 Deliciosa chair in the exhibition 'Philodendron', which he curated for the Wolfsonian Museum in Miami.

183. Before Fernanda Viégas and Martin Wattenberg joined Google they founded Flowing Media, Inc., a visualisation studio focused on media and consumer-oriented projects. Viégas is known for her pioneering work on depicting chat histories and email, while Wattenberg's visualisations of the stock market and baby names are considered Internet classics. They are also known for their visualisation-based artworks, which have been exhibited in venues such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, as well as London's Institute of Contemporary Arts.

language is essentially Brazilian Portuguese. Thirdly, by placing an emphasis on Web Seer's straightforward use of language instead of its visual quality or originality, I aimed to deflect visitor attention from aesthetics to performance, supporting an appreciation of design from the morphological characteristics of artefacts to the relationships they create.

After Viégas and Wattenberg agreed to have Web Seer presented as a large-scale projection of screen capture videos, the designers Tereza Bettinardi and Guilherme Falcão helped me come up with 62 amusing, poignant, political, even intimate search pairs.¹⁸⁴ By revealing the most common Google search results for a specific word or phrase in Portuguese, Web Seer provides an unexpected glimpse into the collective psyche of a country that by the end of the 2004-14 decade was the world's fifth-largest in internet and second-largest in social media users (Medrano 2015). It also showed the unmediated explorations by common citizens of our shared language. One of the search pairs that made this evident showed how Brazilians asked a question Portuguese nationals would not even consider: to the search pairs "Quem descobriu / Quem conquistou" [Who discovered/Who conquered] the most common answer was "Brasil", while in fifth place, after "a america", "a eletricidade" [electricity], "a penicilina" [penicilin] and "a gravidade" [gravity], was... Portugal. One of the most striking was the pair "O Brasil é / O Brasil não é" [Brazil is / Brazil is not]; just before the exhibition opened, the most common result was "um país racista" [a racist country]. Yet as Web Seer's results are dynamic, by the date these videos screen captures were made (September 19 2017), it had changed to "um país capitalista" [a capitalist country]. This project was highly successful among exhibition visitors, which I often observed stood watching the animated searches for a significant part of the video's 16-minute duration.

At the opposite end of the exhibition's first room, visitors found a wall covered with the cardboard modules of the Brazil pavilion at the 2013 Frankfurt Book Fair (p. 154). This pavilion is a remarkable instance of how designers employ their own history and heritage to define an expression of national identity that challenges cultural assumptions and stereotypes. In fact, national pavilions have long played a central role in the history of design, most notably in the exhibitions that preceded and followed London's Great Exhibition

184. These two São Paulo-based designers are not only expert social media agitators but were at the time running *Escola Livre*, an experiment in graphic design education (Its website has since been down but most of its outcomes can be seen at facebook.com/escolalivre.design).

of 1851. They have provided design scholars with a valuable resource to reflect on how national identity and culture have been crafted and communicated on a national and international level for over a century.¹⁸⁵ In its originality and audacity, Brazil's 2013 Frankfurt Fair Pavilion represents a landmark example in both the country's literary and design history. Designed to be the fair's centre-point as Brazil was that year's guest country, this 2,500-square metre structure was conceived by Daniela Thomas and Felipe Tassara, a duo widely known for their set designs and films. Intended to pay homage to the printed book, the pavilion's cardboard module walls carried bold graphics designed by graphic designers Celso Longo and Daniel Trench. By employing several modern architecture and design references, this team added design, but also design at the service of literature, to the range of practices that constitute Brazil's cultural heritage. They also used that heritage as the very substance of their design. Manufactured in Lisbon, the wall of interlocking, stacking cardboard boxes that covered one of the sides of the exhibition's first room gave visitors a sense of its original scale and experience. A 1:1 scale reproduction of the poster designed by Trench and Longo showed another medium through which Brazil communicated its design heritage as part of a national identity. Which, as Daniela Thomas confided in me (personal communication, April 17 2017), starkly contrasted with the national references – a palm tree and a parrot – included in the fair's own official poster for Brazil as guest country. In its multiple artefacts, this initiative claimed design as part of Brazil's contemporary cultural expression and contributed to an awareness and recognition of its heritage outside the design system.

Shown in the same room as Brazil's Frankfurt Fair pavilion, the Vila Matilde house (p. 149) was the only architectural design initiative shown in Brazil Today. This house was designed for the mother of an acquaintance of one of Terra e Tuma's founders, a retired cleaning lady living in Vila Matilde, a working class neighbourhood of São Paulo. The house's design and construction were paid by their client with the savings of a lifetime of work. This house demonstrates an admirable simplicity and exemplary economy of means. It also, crucially, challenges public expectations of architecture and dominant design discourses. We presented it in two stacks of A4 and A3 sheets, bound

185. One such scholar is the design historian Livia Lazzaro Rezende, whose doctoral thesis is devoted to the representation of Brazilian identity by the nation's first international exhibition pavilions (Rezende 2010).

to one of the exhibition's tables. These folders paired different approaches to the representation of this design initiative: one showed the records used in its design and implementation process, while the other showed instances of its communication to audiences both within and beyond the architectural design discipline, starting in 2016. Especially after it won the 2016 Archdaily Building of the Year Award and was selected for the Brazil Pavilion of the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, this house began challenging the international reputation of Brazilian architecture, mostly known for modernist public works and luxurious private villas. Neither an example of social housing or a rich client's residence, this house represents an exceptional but also exemplary exercise in critical autonomy: its designers responded to a client brief with an original and appropriate design, with which they contributed to a discussion about the value and public understanding of their discipline. However, several of the over 100 press clippings we collected showed how editorial approaches to design also expressed class tensions in Latin American countries.¹⁸⁶ The headlines, texts and comments of articles published in Brazil and other countries often referred to this design as a poor woman's architect house, revealing discriminatory attitudes both to what makes good design and what makes a good design client. I suggested the two-folder approach to Terra e Tuma's partners because I first intended to interrogate how publications create and propagate design discourse. Secondly, I wanted to question the predominant role of architecture photography in the representation of results from this specific design practice. Instead of showing large reproductions of the most commonly used images of this design – the stylised and staged photos of the house's exterior and interior taken by Pedro Kok – I confronted visitors with the repetition of these images in editorial approaches to this design.¹⁸⁷ This display made visitors, especially architects, acknowledge how the work of design professionals is communicated and discussed beyond the appreciation of form. This design initiative also demands taking in consideration registering the passing of time and changes made to an architectural design by its owner(s), as well as other records of the client-service provider relation, such as oral history interviews and testimonies, that can

186. I learned from these titles and comments from Becky Quintal, and a former D-Crit colleague of mine who in 2017 was Head of Content at Archdaily, the international Santiago de Chile-based online architecture magazine.

187. Marcelo Ferraz, one of the founders of Marcenaria Baraúna, told me Terra e Tuma borrowed some furniture items from this exclusive furniture manufacturer based in São Paulo for staging the photos of the house taken by Pedro Kok, one of Brazil's leading architecture photographers (personal communication, October 21st 2017).

complement its interpretation and collection.

I learned about Bailes (p. 165) when Danilo de Paulo and I met in Madrid at the opening of BID, the Ibero-American Design Biennial, in November of 2016. I was a jury member of BID's 5th edition and this set of fanzines was selected for its award exhibition. I learned from de Paulo that he had presented his research earlier that year, inside a vitrine displayed at an independent publishing event in São Paulo. Conducted outside of academia, this research project is a collaboration between him, the journalist Cecília Araújo and Gilberto Tomé, the designer who runs the studio-printer-publisher Gráficafábrica. I invited de Paulo to take part in Brazil Today not just with the four fanzine/poster editions but with the vitrine in which Bailes had first been shown. This vitrine, which emphasised the research component of this pioneering design initiative, revealed de Paulo's determination to uncover and register what he describes as an important moment for São Paulo's black community. The fanzines, alongside the vitrine's other artefacts, present a uniquely Brazilian visual expression and urban culture of a community of black citizens that in spite of systemic violence, structural racism and repression by Brazil's 1964-1985 dictatorship achieved a remarkable degree of local visibility. In the exhibition I emphasised how Bailes inscribes this visual expression in a design heritage that is not only circumscribed to São Paulo, or to Brazil, but that belongs to a global, black popular culture. Bailes is a crucial example of a design initiative that addresses the issue of representation in two ways: it highlights a marginal visual culture but also the work of a marginal constituency of Brazilian design practitioners: non-white citizens. The exhibition's only initiative developed by a black designer, it is one of a small, if expanding universe of design practice that thanks to the growing numbers of black Brazilians studying, researching and practicing design is expanding in all design disciplines. I included Bailes also as an inspiration for further research projects, conducted inside or outside academia, on and by less visible communities and identities – both in Brazil and Portugal. This vitrine was rather successful with visitors, who recognised the originality and pertinence of its research, as well as its contribution to a wider debate on Brazil as a majority of minorities.

Much like Danilo de Paulo's Bailes, Andrea Bandoni's Objects of the Forest project (p. 168) emphasises self-initiated design research. These objects are deeply situated in a specific region and a particular biome – the Amazon rainforest – but also in how they represent or translate local, immaterial practices,

rituals and traditions.¹⁸⁸ This design initiative challenges the perceived vs. the actual temporality of this set of tools: these could have been collected in an ethnographic mission to Indigenous people settlements over two centuries ago, reflect a decades-old hybridisation process that combines European and Indigenous references in regional handicrafts, or may have recently been created as products aimed at the souvenir industry. In fact, all options are valid: by presenting them as contemporary tools (more so than products), Bandoni locates these artefacts in a sphere of material and immaterial culture that transcends time and space, but also the culture or identity of one (or more) local, regional or national populations that create, manufacture, sell and use them.¹⁸⁹ These artefacts may thus reflect a national (Brazilian), regional (Amazonian) or Supra-National (Latin American) identity, but also an Indigenous, caboclo (someone of mixed Indigenous Brazilian and European origin) or cafuzo (someone of mixed Indigenous Brazilian and African ancestry) material culture.¹⁹⁰ Above all, they express a complex series of processes of consumption, use and making that through countless intersections and contaminations of identities and cultures have led to their progressive hybridisation and appropriation.¹⁹¹

I exercised my rhetorical influence as a curator by encouraging local

188. This was one of three perspectives in the exhibition that had a specific connection to the Amazon; the other two projects were Fernanda Martins' 2017 'Marajó das Letras' documentary and Tucum, a brand and online marketplace dedicated to indigenous and traditional arts and crafts.

189. An example of this is the Cuias from Santarém, in the state of Pará. The half-spheres bowls made from gourds of the cueiria tree [*Crescentia cujete*] are mainly known today as the vessel of choice for tacacá, a staple of the Amazonian state's gastronomy. These utensils have been treated in a lacquer-like process and traded in the Amazon before the arrival of the Portuguese. Their motifs range from geometric patterns, which relate to the Indigenous Marajó culture, to the floral motifs of Portuguese faience wares, brought to the region mainly by Portuguese missionaries since the 17th century. These artefacts are relevant evidences of a cultural syncretism between the coloniser and the colonised, but also the existence of a contemporary market for such products (Gonçalves Carvalho 2011).

190. In fact, one of this project's shortcomings is how Bandoni omits the origins of certain artefacts from a specific Indigenous community or people in her selection. By doing so, she may appear to have overlooked, even disrespected their symbolic, ritualistic or spiritual characteristics. This was, in fact, a criticism Bandoni received from Amanda Santana, founder of the Tucum label, when Objects of the Forest was shown as part of Helsinki Design Week in 2020. Santana was notified by an email announcing the exhibition which, because of the covid-19 pandemic, had only a digital, online dimension (objectsoftheforest.com). Bandoni invited me to contribute with an essay (Duarte 2020) for the exhibition, in which I reflected on my curatorial approach and experience of selecting and displaying her project in Brazil Today.

191. I acknowledge my own generalisation regarding my own approach to these objects. I did not characterise them as part of a specific Indigenous material or immaterial culture, acquired body of knowledge or epistemology belief system. Nevertheless I did not aim to relativise or dissolve the different cultures, beliefs and epistemologies of the various peoples that originated them, in particular the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon. I aimed instead to foster a cosmopolitan design perspective that recognises, respects and honours these differences, but also supports the just demand of these peoples for recognition, autonomy and survival.

designers to, inspired by the potential of Bandoni's research, (re)discover our forests as sources for a visual and material culture that is also both local, contemporary, non-exploitative and mindful of the ancestral knowledge of the peoples who inhabited and still inhabit these territories.¹⁹² This research initiative thus confronted exhibition visitors (with an admitted emphasis on designers) with objects that are evidence of the social worlds where they were thought, made, consumed and used. As many other in *Brazil Today*, it also interrogated our origins and commonalities. I would like to have involved the local community of anthropologists and material culture scholars in the exhibition by connecting Bandoni's collection of objects with the Amazonian galleries of Portugal's Museu Nacional de Etnologia [National Ethnology Museum, MNE], located only a short walk from the Calheta palace. This would have been a welcome approach to the exhibition by a knowledge field beyond design, yet it did not come to fruition. In addition, I aimed to include both Bandoni's book and Danilo de Paulo's fanzines in the exhibition as two of its fifty projects and fifty books. Yet as both were self-published editions, which MUDE's bookshop partner, Fnac, does not carry, they could not be sold at the exhibition. Nevertheless, Lisbon's most-renowned independent art, photography and design bookshop, STET, agreed to sell the book and fanzines, creating an unexpected but also welcome point of connection between these research projects and local communities. They were later purchased from STET by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Art Library, thus making them available to the readers of Portugal's foremost art, design and architecture library.

While Bandoni defines *Objects of the Forest* as an open-ended initiative, where the designer acts as a researcher and mediator, Guilherme Wentz's *Pós-Tropical vase* (p. 171) is an example of a design artefact that aims to provide an authorial synthesis of a personal but potentially collective identity. Since it was launched in 2014, this solitaire vase has been widely published in Brazilian and international design publications. It is often portrayed as the first breakthrough product of one of Brazil's most prolific and renowned young industrial designers (Okamoto 2018). Although it can be seen as a sort of turn to the 'own' mentioned by Bonsiepe, this vase is in fact one of the less industrial designs by

192. Through this process, visitors could acknowledge and reimagine the potential of their natural surroundings beyond the artificial divisions that restrict our comprehension of the peoples, biomes and ecosystems of the Iberian Peninsula. One example of such potential lies in cork, a material extracted from the bark of the cork tree (*Quercus suber*), of which Portugal has the world's largest forested areas.

a designer that has dedicated most of his career to working in and for Brazilian manufacturers – such as Lumini, Riva and Decameron – before launching his own brand of furniture, named WENTZ, in 2019. However, despite the rarity associated with its first, limited edition of 100 vases, Pós-Tropical has circulated widely as an image. Most specifically, the photograph taken by the designer, stylist, journalist and curator Bruno Simões, which has become one of contemporary Brazilian product design's most appealing and iconic images. The vase's charred wood cylinder was shot on a white background, with a branch of an Adam's Rib plant [*monstera deliciosa*] placed inside its brass tube, so to provide scale and function to this mainly decorative artefact, but also an identifiably tropical, living element. This vase was one of the most popular images used by MUDE, but also the media, to promote Brazil Today.¹⁹³

I selected one of the 100 vases produced by Wentz for MAM's Collector's Club in 2014, instead of one of the re-editions he included in his brand's portfolio in 2019.¹⁹⁴ We presented it in a way that intentionally challenged its iconic quality. We placed this rather small vase – 30cm in height – in front of a large glass door, which opens to one of the Calheta Palace's small balconies. As such, visitors saw it mainly lit from the back. This created an experience of the object that was rather different than its most widely spread representation. I placed Pós-Tropical next to Xiloteca Brasilis, an archive of Brazilian wood cubes created in 2011 by the Rio de Janeiro-based designer, artist and carpenter Rodrigo Calixto. This room was one of three of the Calheta Palace that included exhibits and vitrines from the Colonial Agricultural Museum, namely stands and cabinets containing samples of the museum's Xylarium. Such presentation decisions, as well as a mention to Wentz's regional and ethnic origins in the vase's exhibit label, aimed to remove more evident connections to any idea of a collective and hegemonic national identity of this rather personal reflection of what can be a post-tropical, post-industrial, decorative object.

A different kind of reflection on personal and collective identity is manifest in *África* (p. 175). In 2009, the designer Rodrigo Almeida launched the

193. After the exhibition closed I learned that Pós-Tropical was acquired by Bárbara Coutinho, MUDE's director, for the museum's permanent collection. To my knowledge no other of the artefacts I selected for the exhibition was acquired; in fact, I was not consulted on such acquisitions, as in MUDE this is a process conducted solely at the director's discretion.

194. The Pós-Tropical vase has been reedited by WENTZ in two versions: Black Aluminum, with an aluminium tube and ebanised Caixeta [*Tabebuia cassinoides*] wood cylinder and Cobre [Copper], with a natural finishing copper tube and Sucupira [*Pterodon emarginatus*] wood cylinder.

first version of this armchair, which in its materiality and symbolism echoes the Vermelha chair designed by Fernando and Humberto Campana in 1998.¹⁹⁵ África is an apt representation of both Almeida's material-driven approach to furniture design and of his inclination to material exploration in detriment of drawing, as he admitted in our conversation (personal communication, August 31, 2016). Almeida's designs for limited-edition furniture and decorative items have been exhibited in galleries, collected by international museums and featured in design publications, where he is often referred to as an up-and-coming Brazilian designer, a disciple or descendant of the Campana (Khemsurov 2010, Turner 2013). Although a critic of the 'design art' market, Almeida has been one of its main Brazilian beneficiaries. He has also dedicated most of his career to crafting his own language as a competitive advantage in this market.¹⁹⁶ He admits that this language, translated in formal attributes but also symbolic references, ultimately defines him, as he told me fashion designers so frequently do, as a brand. This definition effort includes the author's self-image, which he cultivates with both discretion and aplomb.

By 2016 Almeida ventured out of his limited-edition, 'design art' creations and began collaborating with Brazilian furniture manufacturers. The 2016 version of África, a paired down version of the 2009 armchair, is a result of such collaborations.¹⁹⁷ I aimed to show these two versions of arguably Almeida's most renowned design to first express his move from limited-edition design to a more commercial, even industrial dimension. But also from a design artefact aimed at being exhibited and collected within an international 'design art' market to a product aimed at being used in a domestic setting within a national furniture market.¹⁹⁸ I primarily aimed to question the value of the word Africa as the title of both Almeida's design artefacts. The first is purposely aimed

195. África has since been widely published by Brazilian and international publications. It was also shown in the aforementioned travelling exhibition, 'Brazilian Design - Modern and Contemporary', organised at MUDE in 2012, which included the Vermelha chair - the only Campana-designed artefact in the museum's collection.

196. In a 2017 interview with design journalist Regina Galvão, Almeida acknowledges the 'design art' was an invention of the market, namely of the Design Miami fair, and not of the designers (Galvão 2017).

197. I first saw it at the 2016 edition of DW (São Paulo's design weekend), when it one of the first products to be featured by ITENS, a company launched that year by Almeida and the journalist, luxury industry manager and design consultant Mariana Amaral.

198. Curiously, the first África has over time proven more successful than the second. Almeida left ITENS and his designs are no longer part of the brand's portfolio of mainly lighting fixtures. In 2018 he launched a new version of the 2009 África, titled África Ayabá, sold exclusively by Legado Arte, a collectible and 'design art' gallery based in São Paulo aimed at the international market that is the sole representative of his work.

at the 'design art' market of collectible design galleries and auctions where, as addressed in chapter 2, such expression of metaphor and even stereotype is valued. The other is aimed at the furniture and home decoration market, where items such as an armchair are not expected to have a title, express a metaphor, evoke a continent or manifest a national identity. These two versions of Almeida's armchair confronted visitors with the often opportunistic manifestation of difference by non-Western designers, but also the irrelevance of such manifestation of difference when the market changes.

5.3. Public space and the public good

The design initiatives presented in this section aim to question how Brazilian designers reacted to the changes in the use of public space and the perception of the *res publica* during the 2004-14 decade, as observed in chapter 3. This selection addresses the practical but especially the ethical challenges designers faced in their contributions to strategic instruments developed for state authorities and corporations, as well as tactical proposals developed with particular communities and constituencies.¹⁹⁹ Some were presented as activist initiatives that pushed the boundaries of public and private space, or created spaces for collective action and political contestation. Others were displayed as expressions of the corrosion of public trust in government or Brazil's chronic condition of patrimonialism, i.e. the appropriation of the public good by private interests.

The Campanha Não Eleitoral [Non-Electoral Campaign] (p. 143) is a series of five posters designed by Piseagrama, a non-profit editorial platform based in Belo Horizonte.²⁰⁰ It was the first initiative I selected for the exhibition and also the first its visitors were confronted. The campaign itself was launched during Belo Horizonte's "Noite Branca", a cultural initiative modelled on the Nuit Blanche cultural festival popularised by Paris in the 1990s (Beck 2014). During this all-night event, square stickers and tote bags with the five slogans were made and sold. After the latter sold out that same night, the campaign's initiators realised it could be extended well beyond that occasion. They could employ it to act, through design, in the field of politics. Their first opportunity to do so came up during Belo Horizonte's 2012 municipal election, when they pasted the campaign's square posters over party candidate posters. They were however unable to repeat their audacious feat in the following local election, as Belo Horizonte's mayor outlawed campaign posters and billboards in the city,

199. An example of this strategic instruments and tactical proposals are two recent approaches to public space in São Paulo. One is the closing of Paulista Avenue to vehicles on Sundays, which began in 2015 during the municipal administration of Fernando Haddad (PT) and continued following the end of his term in 2016. The other is the A Batata Precisa de Você [Batata Needs you] citizen collective, which in 2014 promoted a tactical urbanism initiative that intended to improve the design and use of the Largo da Batata [Batata Square]. The micro interventions since enacted in that square by architecture and design professionals have actively contributed to challenge public power and thus start a dialogue with city officials (A Batata Precisa de Você 2015).

200. Primarily dedicated to editing an eponymous semi-annual magazine, this collective of designers and scholars also carries out public interest actions, such as discussions, urban micro-experiments, workshops, campaigns and the publishing of books.

effectively removing an outlet for political propaganda and civic communication.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, they aimed to take the campaign to other cities and reach more citizens with their civic ideas:

As an alternative to the rhetoric of this deaf-mute politician talking shop that takes over of the city on the eve of municipal elections, direct action was presented in the form of ‘the word that manifests the disagreement.’ If the action’s first paradox is in the coincidence of ephemerality/permanence, the second paradox is found in the association of the poster with a name, face or party. The phrases, unsigned, were set free to be seen and captured by any name, face or party. With no claim to authorship, the words conveyed by the coloured posters sought to rescue, in the political desert in which we find ourselves, the link between words and things. As things, words design ideas, images, landscapes and open source practices: available to free appropriation, to concretisation in the territory and, even, to national exchange – from the river Arrudas we sailed to the Tietê and the Capibaribe, in a fictitious basin connected by the idea of swimming, fishing and sailing again on our dead rivers (Piseagrama 2014).²⁰²

The “national exchange” of rivers Piseagrama’s editors allude to regard the printing and pasting of posters in other Brazilian cities.²⁰³ The campaign’s simple layout and hashtag logic has been since 2012 applied to a variety of causes and statements. The campaign returned to Belo Horizonte’s streets during the June 2013 demonstrations addressed in chapter 3. Citizens then protesting against bus fare increases appropriated the campaign’s red, #ônibussemcatraca poster and remade it into several communication artefacts.²⁰⁴ I first intended to include this design initiative in the exhibition by reprinting one thousand

201. However, this collective found an application for their political communication ideas when they participated in the campaign of Muitas, a political platform created by the PSOL party that elected candidates Áurea Carolina and Cida Falabella for Belo Horizonte’s City Council in 2016.

202. Original quote: “Como alternativa à retórica desse parlatório político surdo-mudo que toma conta da cidade nas vésperas das eleições municipais, foi oferecida a ação direta na forma da “palavra que manifesta o desentendimento”. Se o primeiro paradoxo da ação está na coincidência efemeridade/permanência, o segundo paradoxo está na associação do cartaz com um nome, rosto ou partido. As frases, sem assinatura, se lançavam livres para serem captadas e capturadas por qualquer nome, rosto ou partido. Sem reivindicação de autoria, as palavras veiculadas pelos cartazes coloridos procuravam resgatar, no deserto político em que nos encontramos, o vínculo entre as palavras e as coisas. Enquanto coisas, as palavras desenham propostas, imaginários, paisagens e práticas de código aberto: disponíveis à livre apropriação, à concretização no território e, inclusive, ao intercâmbio nacional – do rio Arrudas partimos ao Tietê e ao Capibaribe, numa bacia hidrográfica fictícia conectada pela ideia de voltar a nadar, pescar e navegar nos nossos rios mortos” (Piseagrama 2014).

203. The Tijuana printed art fair in São Paulo in 2012 (Tietê), the “Praia do Capibaribe” project in Recife in 2014 (Capibaribe) and the “Ocupa Tapumes” project in Porto Alegre in 2016 (Guaíba).

204. The most visible of which was the flag hoisted on the mast of Belo Horizonte’s Town Hall during an occupation of the building by protestors. Other applications and publications followed, such as the wiki page of the Horizontal People’s Assembly, created in the context of the June 2013 demonstrations (Piseagrama 2014).

copies of each poster and pasting them in several locations across the city, thus presenting the campaign's proposals for Belo Horizonte to the citizens of Lisbon. This action would disseminate one of the exhibition's contents across the city and spark local curiosity (but also generate engagement and promote the exhibition on social media through the use of its hashtags).²⁰⁵ However, because the exhibition opened only a few weeks before Lisbon's local elections, I was advised by MUDE's director to limit placing the campaign's five posters only on two sites: the scaffolding in front of the museum in Rua Augusta (Lisbon downtown's busiest pedestrian street) and on the Calheta Palace loggia. Although its potential reach and impact were certainly diminished from my initial intention, I was particularly satisfied to have brought to Lisbon this self-generated set of citizen-designer proposals imagined for Belo Horizonte.

In our initial exhibition designs, the Non-Electoral Campaign wall would share the Calheta Palace loggia with ,ovo's Campo Concreto bench (p. 144). According to Gerson Oliveira and Luciana Martins, the founders of the ,ovo design studio, this piece of indoor/outdoor urban furniture translates a change in mentality towards the porosity of public space that has taken place over the past decade in Brazil (personal communication, August 24, 2016). This porosity also reflects a more outwardly look of public and private institutions in Brazil.²⁰⁶ My intention was to evoke this porosity in Lisbon, with this concrete bench being one of the exhibition's "you can sit on it" artefacts. Placed under the palace's loggia, it would break the barrier between an object of contemplation and a product of use that was one of my curatorial approach's main goals. However, this design initiative was not shown in Brazil Today. The first option for bringing one set of concrete modules from Brazil proved inviable due to MUDE's exhibition production management. Meanwhile, I attempted to find a local supplier by contacting AMOP, a Portuguese manufacturer of concrete

205. The *ônibussemcatraca* poster, demanding free public transportation, would be potentially lost in translation: the sentence 'Ônibus sem Catraca' makes no sense in Portugal: the Portuguese call a bus *autocarro* instead of *ônibus* and call a turnstile *torniquete* instead of *catraca*. Unlike in Brazil, the position of bus fare operator has long disappeared from buses in Portugal; fares are charged by the driver so there is no need for this post or the turnstile whose passing implies a fare being charged. The *#umapraçaporbairro* proposal is actually the name of a current municipal administration that has been implemented rather somewhat successfully.

206. A case in point is the *Serviço Social do Comércio* [Social Service of Commerce, SESC], a non-profit Brazilian private institution known for its Cultural Centres and related Education, Health, Culture and Recreational programs and events. Opened in 2017, the 24 de Maio SESC Cultural Centre in São Paulo was designed by the architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha and the MMBB Architecture studio. Its outdoor furniture was designed by MMBB's Marta Moreira and Luciana Martins.

outdoor furniture. The firm initially showed interest in including this design in their product portfolio and started a negotiation with the designers, having also contemplated the production of a prototype in time for the exhibition's opening. However, that process was ultimately unsuccessful as it didn't fit AMOP's development schedule and investment priorities. I nevertheless acknowledged Campo Concreto's importance to my curatorial approach by placing its respective exhibit label in the Calheta Palace loggia and dedicating a spread of the exhibition catalogue to it.

In the exhibition's first room visitors were confronted with another example of a pro-active, self-initiated design initiative that interrogates the management and legacy of the public good: the Maré Street Plaques (p. 148).²⁰⁷ In my conversations over Skype in 2016-17 with its designer, Laura Taves, I learned how her work is a fitting instance of this interrogation and of critical autonomy in design. It is both an institutional critique of the power structures that control the naming of streets in Brazil (Roncolato et al. 2016) and an acknowledgement of Brazil's graphic design heritage. Besides expressing the agency of designers working for the right to the city to its long-marginalised populations, this initiative reveals the legal and institutional challenges faced by designers working on the side of civil society in cities like Rio de Janeiro. I made sure to include it in my interviews and all the guided tours I conducted, where visitors appreciated its exemplary contribution to the community, but also its recognition of Brazil's own design heritage. In 2018, Taves told me how she applied to Rumos, a major grant program run by the Itaú bank, to fund the project's second stage aimed at fully implementing the manufacture and placement of street plaques. Although her application was successful, Eliana Sousa Silva, founder and director of Redes da Maré, deemed cultural grants an inappropriate funding source for the project. To her, these plaques are, in their function and use, just like any other street plaque: a piece of infrastructure. The municipality should pay for their manufacture, provision and placement as such. Sousa Silva's argument is critical for an approach that takes in consideration the social life of design initiatives over the long run. But also to a debate regarding the institutional nature and dependence of 'autonomous design' initiatives such as this one.

207. I came across this design initiative at Brazil's Venice Architecture Biennale pavilion, which in 2016 was curated by the architect and urban planner Washington Fajardo. He selected these plaques as one of fifteen "stories of people who struggle for and effect change in the face of institutional passivity in the nation's big cities" (Fundação Bienal de São Paulo 2016).

Displayed in the exhibition's first room in front of the Maré Street plaques, a display of Belo Horizonte's public transportation network (p. 148) revealed to visitors a poignant example of how the public good is undermined by private interests in Brazil. I co-wrote the display's exhibit label with its designer, José Antônio Verdi, so to accurately portray the limitations and compromises that affected its fraught design process.²⁰⁸ As an interpretative tool to the three-map composition, this caption revealed an attempt by a designer and the denial by its client of a crucial action to address urban mobility and inequality in the design of Brazilian cities. It shows how Belo Horizonte's governing institutions failed to challenge the corporate agents entrusted with providing this public service, which are disposed to compromise its functionality in their quest for market dominance. This map is also proof of a wider, nation-wide issue. The weakness of civic authorities foregrounds the Brazilian state's failure to develop adequate public transportation systems that challenge the high social stratification of Brazilian cities. It also, as observed in chapter 3, manifests the disregard from the country's traditional middle class towards public services. As such, Brazilian citizens have been left mainly with highly inefficient public transportation systems, where operators, even public ones, compete with each other for the same passenger market.²⁰⁹ This situation worsened during the 2004-14 decade, when thanks to income increases and both direct and indirect state support, the sale of automobiles increased by over 100 percent between 2001 and 2014 (Rodrigues 2016, 88). Investment in public, collective transportation unmatched this boom in individual transportation. Although mobility projects such as MOVE were prioritised in the run up to the 2014 World Cup (and the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro), the long-term, chronic problems of mass transportation in Brazilian urban areas have not yet been tackled by truly integrated metropolitan projects (91). These conditions make this map one of

208. I first came across the branding for Belo Horizonte's new BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) system in the catalogue of the 2015 Brazilian Design Biennial. During the preparation of my 2016 field trip to Brazil, I contacted the studio's founder and head designer, José Antônio Verdi, who is based in Porto Alegre. We met at the very end of my trip and had a long conversation about the project he developed after his proposal won a nationwide competition (personal communication, September 22, 2016).

209. Even in the case of Curitiba, which introduced the world's first BRT system in the late 1970s, public transportation in Brazilian cities is managed by municipal, state and federally-owned enterprises, which often hand the exploration of their services to private concessions or consortia. This has fostered the development of a transportation sector run by powerful families, such as the Barata, whose domain on Rio de Janeiro's buses extends for over 50 years. Proofs of massive, high-level corruption between Rio's public officials and transportation companies were exposed in 2017 by Operation Ponto Final (Betim 2017).

the exhibition's most relevant design initiatives: it not only highlights a fraught effort to mitigate a chronic problem in Brazil's public good but it also, and most importantly, reveals the underlying forces and the limitations of design practice. Although no designer works in an ideal world, that is, without limitations or constraints, this initiative represents how the very idea of critical autonomy in design this thesis aims to uphold is rendered unviable by a particularly adverse context of practice. I also found it to be a remarkably clear example of how to speak about the causes and consequences of contemporary design practise to non-specialist audiences – as were the majority of the exhibition's visitors that can easily relate to Belo Horizonte's citizens who use this map on a daily basis.

The 'Programa + que Água' [More than water programme] (p. 153), launched in 2010 by Brastemp, is a nexus of two of my main research interests. The first regards how following the mergers and acquisitions of domestic appliance manufacturers in Brazil, local design know-how was not only often kept but also exported. This corporate design resilience counters the dependence on external centres of corporate decision making that, as addressed in chapter 3, affected Brazil's economy and industry since the 1990s. It also highlights the global appeal of Brazil's heterogenous consumption markets and specific conditions for design practice, which have given the design departments of these companies a considerable global advantage. Such is the case of Brastemp, a well-known Brazilian brand of home appliances founded in 1954, which merged with its main competitor Consul in 1994 and was acquired by Whirlpool, the world's largest home appliance manufacturer, in 2000.²¹⁰ Since then Whirlpool's Brazilian subsidiary, Whirlpool Latin America, sells its products under the Brastemp, Consul and KitchenAid brands. Concurrently, other Whirlpool subsidiaries sell Brazilian-designed products to customers in other countries (Borges 2010, 89). One such products is the water filter or purifier, a staple of Brazilian kitchen counters that is another research interest of mine. During my 2016 trip to Brazil, I asked interviewees, all of which admitted to owning a water filter, why they need one. The causes varied – old building pipes, faulty city ducts, chlorine-heavy to brackish water – yet one issue proved

210. Mainly based in the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, the design centres of brands such as Consul and Brastemp (acquired by Whirlpool), but also Prosdócimo (acquired by Electrolux) and Arno (acquired by Groupe SEB), continued to work not only for Brazil's internal consumer market but also for other markets where these multinationals operate.

dominant: a distrust of Brazilian citizens in the public good. Such distrust extends from water to public transportation, education, health or the police. As addressed in chapter 3, those who can afford it have got used to switching their trust from public to private hands. As such, even though water in Brazil is mainly provided by public utilities, its quality control has long been held in private hands.

I mentioned my interest in water filters and Brazilian design centres to Mario Fioretti, who worked as director of design and innovation at Consul, Brastemp and eventually Whirlpool Latin America, from 1988 to 2015. He enthusiastically told me about a design initiative he worked on that joins both interests: the + que Água programme, which Fioretti coordinated before retiring from Whirlpool (Personal conversation, August 29, 2016). This service highlights a generalised distrust with the public good as a particularly Brazilian context for design practice. It also reveals the ethical dilemma between corporate pragmatism and public responsibility that shapes such practice, as this distrust favours the entrenchment of private interests over public concerns. Notwithstanding such dilemma, this plan represents a noteworthy example of a Brazilian design export. Thanks to an expanding neoliberal agenda, public utilities providing citizens with transportation, mail distribution and water provision services have been, especially since the 1990s, handed over to the private sector, in both developing and developed countries.²¹¹ As such, should distrust of public utilities and of the services they provide increase – either organically or as part of campaigns aimed at influencing public opinion – in markets and contexts other than Brazil, Whirlpool already has an ingeniously designed solution ready to be implemented. We showed this initiative and highlighted its ethical implications in Brazil Today through a selection of three purifiers and a tablet displaying the programme’s website. Its presentation aimed to primarily confront visitors with these local, culturally meaningful artefacts and the ethical dilemma they embody: instead of contributing towards a collective demand for better public services, are Brazilian designers helping large corporations profit from the distrust of individuals and even the demise of the public good? Confronted with less familiar appliances (water filters are not as widespread

211. Even in the British and German cities where they were first considered essential public services in the mid-1800s; after the manifested inefficient and unfair provision of novel commodities such as gas and water caused the first consumer protests and propelled city authorities and governments to take these utilities from private to public hands, in what was then called municipal socialism (Trentmann 2016, 184).

in Portugal as they are in Brazil), would visitors consider them as artefacts of necessity, objects of desire, or an unwelcome evidence of a dystopian present and future? On my guided tours I suggested this service could be available in Portugal if only Whirlpool identified a level of distrust from citizens that would allow for its local implementation. Such suggestions were mainly met with rejection from visitors. However, they often acknowledged this was a remarkably successful, if problematic design. This initiative also represents the limitations of design for autonomy as a framework: although it expresses an instance of design practice that reveals an attention to local context in devising solutions that apply to other communities and markets, it also confidently reaffirms the dependence of citizens from predatory, corporate forces.

Shown across the table from Brastemp's water filters, the black plastic cases of the two SAC24 units (p. 151) also confronted visitors with a complex and often uncomfortable side of Brazilian society. Aguilar Selhorst, founder and head designer of Megabox Design, described to me the characteristics of Brazil's electronic bracelet components, as well as the peculiarities of its procurement, when we met in Curitiba (personal communication, September 16, 2016). Selhorst told me ankle bracelets are often worn by Brazilian convicts when they perform community work, which includes the cleaning of septic tanks and other hostile environments. He also told me that unlike the USA, where there is a police officer to almost every electronic bracelet user, in Brazil police is so severely understaffed that the SAC24 surveillance system needs to work with much less human surveillance than in other countries. Selhorst also told me Spacecom had to change its logo and staff uniforms because of continued harassment from lawyers and employees of white-collar offenders. As to provide visitors with local and topical context to the use of these artefacts, we showed a SAC24 bracelet and control unit alongside a 1:1 print of a *O Globo* newspaper article on the use of electronic bracelets in the context of the Lava-Jato operation (Sanches et al. 2016).²¹² This tool for both punishment and survival, as well as its interpretation medium, allowed visitors to understand an uncomfortable, but necessary context of design for the public good in Brazil.

Towards the end of the exhibition, visitors were confronted with its two

212. The Lava Jato [Car Wash] operation, notoriously headed by judge Sérgio Moro, led to the arrest of several prominent figures in Brazilian business and politics, chief among which former President Lula da Silva. Arrested in 2018, Lula da Silva refused to wear an electronic bracelet and remained in Curitiba police custody for 580 days (Baran 2019).

speculative and critical design (SCD) initiatives. When I first selected Fábio Lopez's War in Rio and Bando Imobiliário Carioca (p. 176), I wanted visitors to interact with these critical versions of Risk and Monopoly. I thus invited Lopez to produce one copy for display and another for play: knowing most visitors to the exhibition would not understand the particular power dynamics these board games exposed, I aimed to invite Brazilians living in Lisbon, as well as Portuguese journalists and scholars specialised in Brazil, to play them as a public programme. These players would activate this room, engaging with a small audience and discussing the violence and corruption in Rio and beyond. On regular days the board games would just be found inside a Plexiglas case. However, Lopez rejected my proposal outright. He argued these design initiatives were not thought as games; as their author, he did not intend to use them that way. On a reply to my email, Lopez thus justified his position:

1. War in Rio and Bando Imobiliário Carioca are not games. They are graphic design projects that elaborate on the reality of the city of Rio de Janeiro materialised in the 'board game' format, using the strategy of parody as a trigger for parallels between the object and what it represents. This 'tool', so to speak, was intended (at the time) to also discuss violence as entertainment (or entertainment based on violence), in the wake of the film *Tropa de Elite* [*Elite Squad*, a 2007 film directed by José Padilha], which forged catchwords and characters for leisurely consumption by placing violence as fiction (causing a dangerous detachment from its real meaning). From the War in Rio blog: "the idea is to ask the carioca citizen if he thinks this type of entertainment demands popcorn or a profound reflection on the reality of his city."²¹³ So to play them seems to me a contradiction or a moral incoherence: I sincerely believe that this reflection can occur in other ways, and not through a staging of just something that the projects are not - games" (Lopez, F. personal communication, September 11, 2017).²¹⁴

Lopez added that as a citizen of Rio de Janeiro and author, he would be embarrassed to know people in Lisbon would be using his project for fun. Even

213. warinriothegame.blogspot.com

214. Original quote: "1. War in Rio e Bando Imobiliário Carioca não são jogos. São projetos de design gráfico que discorrem sobre a realidade da cidade do Rio de Janeiro materializados no formato 'jogo de tabuleiro', usando a estratégia da paródia como gatilho para paralelos entre o objeto e o que ele representa. Essa 'ferramenta', por assim dizer, tinha como intuito (na época) discutir também a violência como entretenimento (ou o entretenimento à base de violência), na esteira do filme *Tropa de Elite*, que forjou bordões e personagens para consumo no lazer ao colocar a violência como ficção (causando um perigoso descolamento de seu real significado). No blog do War in Rio: "a ideia é perguntar ao cidadão carioca se ele acha que esse tipo de entretenimento combina com pipoca ou com uma reflexão profunda sobre a realidade de sua cidade." Então me parece uma contradição ou incoerência moral jogá-los: sinceramente acredito que essa reflexão possa ocorrer de outras formas, e não através de uma encenação de justamente algo que os projetos não são - jogos" (Lopez, F. personal communication, September 11, 2017).

though I mentioned the discussions generated by playing his games would be moderated and far from light-hearted, I acknowledged my misunderstanding and naturally agreed to his request. In fact, Lopez had already received considerable media coverage because of his games when he launched the blog that contained them in 2007. With journalists questioning Rio de Janeiro's then Rio de Janeiro's state security secretary if War in Rio was being used as real-life strategy tool for militias (Pennafort 2007, Zuazo 2017), Lopez was especially weary of how these games could trigger enjoyment in players for violence and corruption. For this reason, he told me, he never distributed or commercialised the files that could be used to print their respective artefacts. With his board game manifestos and his ethical rectitude, Lopez provided one of the most eloquent exercises of critical autonomy in design I came across as a design critic, curator and researcher. Both games were displayed in the bookshop room, on the same table and under a Plexiglas case. Their function as rhetorical devices was presented, much like other instances of SCD, as both evident and potential. They were nevertheless highly efficient in communicating to visitors the hijacking of Rio's public administration by corrupt politicians, corporate interests and violent militias.

In 2014 Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira created the other SCD initiative selected for Brazil Today. They devised a dystopian, not-so-distant future for Brazil in 2038 that responds to their criticism of SCD, expressed in Chapter 2. As to overcome the ironically anachronistic nature of a practice that creates futuristic gizmos for profoundly conservative moral values, Prado and Oliveira claim "designers have to look beyond given socio-economical [sic] and political structures and inquire *how* and *why* our societies got there in the first place" (2015, emphasis in the original). Their 'Design in Times of Crisis' project, of which Brasil, Julho 2038 is part, is a practical answer to their demand. A computer screen showed visitors a timeline of fake news, created on Prado and Oliveira's website (a-parede.de, since deactivated) through the manipulation of the visual and editorial language of several Brazilian media outlets. They also designed a mock version of a plastic identification card, printed in cardboard and framed in a Plexiglas rectangle, that represented a speculative Brazilian identification document containing each citizen's Genetic Risk Group status. This exemplary case of critical autonomy in design confronted visitors with the very subversion of the public good, and even of human dignity, by a conservative establishment that bordered on authoritarianism. Shown in Lisbon

just over a year after President Dilma Rousseff's controversial impeachment and a year before the election of President Jair Bolsonaro, Prado and Oliveira's critical vision of a country ruled by a neoliberal and authoritarian government proved prescient, not to say premonitory.

The last perspective I selected for 'Brazil Today,' the ESDI Aberta #uerjresiste (p. 185), was also a critical and more urgent reaction to recent events in Brazil. During my research trip in 2016 I visited ESDI several times and interviewed its directors, Marcos Martins and Zoy Anastassakis. I learned then about the school's exceptionally dire situation but also of their efforts to safeguard the school's survival. In 2017 they celebrated two openings – a new gate connecting the school's grounds in central Rio to the city's first public park and a new web portal designed by recent graduates – with the event ESDI Aberta #uerjresiste. This event celebrated the school's community and proved how despite its present adversities the oldest design education institution in the Portuguese-speaking world could resist.²¹⁵ I thus invited Anastassakis and Martins to take part in the exhibition with a reference to that event. Drawing upon the motto ESDI Aberta #uerjresiste, they summoned a group of students to create an installation inspired by Hélio Oiticica's 'Penetráveis'. Built in Lisbon from student designs, this walk-through installation showed images and videos of the 2017 event and honoured the institution's long history mentioned in Chapter 4. It also made visitors aware of the fragile situation of Brazilian design education institutions, where many of the questions raised by the exhibition's perspectives are placed, discussed and reimagined, but also as a fundamental place where designers are taught and design is defined and redefined.

215. The first higher education design courses opened at Escola Superior de Belas-Artes de Lisboa (ESBAL) in 1975, one year after the April 25th revolution that ended Portugal's 48 year-long dictatorship. ESBAL was incorporated in the University of Lisbon in the 1990s and is known since as its Faculty of Fine Arts (FBAUL).

5.4. Innovation and collaboration

By connecting innovation with collaboration, this thematic section highlights design initiatives that react or even define new contexts, tools and frameworks for the practice of design, in Brazil and elsewhere. It aims to answer a broader question: is collaboration a kind of unique and specific Brazilian contribution to innovative design practices, in particular given the shifts in design discourse addressed in chapter 2 and the transformations that occurred in Brazil addressed in chapter 3? My analysis distinguishes the innovative contributions designers bring to research and development in the corporate sector, with more radical and urgent experimentations made in the context of collective action and political protest. In both these rather different approaches I consider innovation itself as a collective process. I nevertheless safeguard the importance of collaboration by acknowledging that it takes place on a wide range of contexts, scales and value creation circuits. I also uphold that a truly critical autonomous design practice pushes or blurs the boundaries of professional fields, trespasses disciplinary boundaries and institutional settings, and eventually aims to change the laws under which we live in the present to ultimately reimagine the future.

One of the first artefacts that resulted from such initiatives was the Hacker Pump (p. 152), a cheap, do-it-yourself water pump with which a group of designers responded to a local, urgent issue. São Paulo's 2014 hydric crisis led to an acute awareness of poor water management by municipal and state authorities (Delgado 2015), but also to a broader acknowledgement of the effects of climate change and of deforestation (Marengo & Alves 2014). Wishing to do something about the situation, a group of designers got together at Questto Nó, a design consultancy already represented in the exhibition as one of the firms that designed Natura's Sou product line. Leonardo Massarelli, one of Questto Nó's founders, shared his enthusiasm about this project's development when I interviewed him about Sou in São Paulo (personal communication, August 22, 2016). Massarelli told me that within weeks of their first meetings, the collective released designs, presentations and photos on their website, support materials on Google Drive and 'Instructable'-like videos on Youtube.²¹⁶ They

216. Instructables is an online community for user-created, do-it-yourself projects created in 2005 by MIT Media Labs graduates Eric Wilhelm and Saul Griffith, currently owned by the software firm Autodesk.

also started a Facebook group to discuss further actions and designs. I asked Massarelli about the pump's "success" – a sensitive term for any design initiative, for its assessment is dependent on assessing short-term effects as well as long-term goals. Massarelli mentioned that despite some limited press coverage upon the pump's launch in 2015, the collective struggled with reaching a wider audience and thus assess the pump's reception among potential makers and users. In fact, the pump's urgency was soon eased as the rain replenished São Paulo's dam system in 2015, effectively ending the draught. Yet such a device may be needed once more, when the world's seventh-largest metropolitan area faces its next hydric crisis.

Honouring the initiative's open-source ethos, instead of bringing a Hacker Pump from São Paulo I contacted Bernardo Gaeiras, the manager of FabLab Lisboa (a facility which, like MUDE, belongs to the municipality of Lisbon), and asked him if it was possible to build a Hacker Pump there. His team struggled to find the exact same parts, as piping components differ between Brazil and Portugal. Yet we managed to show a locally-assembled version of the device. We presented it alongside a tablet showing Flui Coletivo's video, so visitors could understand how it is made. In 2018, the curator Amelie Klein recognised the Hacker Pump's attributes and included it in the Vitra Design Museum exhibition she co-curated with Alison J. Clarke, 'Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design,' as a contemporary example of Papanek's self-building approach to design.²¹⁷ The Hacker Pump's collective approach, open-source methodology and publicly-minded goals make this a telling example of critical autonomy and of design for autonomy. Its development process reveals how some of Brazil's most reputed and award-winning designers, who usually provide services to large national and foreign clients, contribute with their talent and expertise to address local, urgent causes.²¹⁸

Having started in 2003, *Cerâmica do Cabo* (p. 160) is one of several long-term projects developed by O Imaginário, a design and craft laboratory hosted at the Federal of University of Pernambuco (UFPE) in Recife. This professor

217. This exhibition was organised by the Vitra Design Museum and the Barcelona Design Museum in collaboration with the Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna. In this case, the pump was manufactured at the Vitra Design Museum's own exhibition-building workshop in Weil-am-Rhein, Germany.

218. In 2020, *Questto Nó* led a similar collective, multidisciplinary approach during the Covid-19 pandemic with the development, in just over a month, of the first prototype of their VentFlow ventilator. Levi Girardi, *QuesttoNó's* CEO, shared this experience during an online interview held on May 22, 2020 with the design historian Ethel Leon and myself.

and student research collective, whom I've met upon my visits to Recife in 2009, 2011 and 2016, have developed a specific methodology through workshops, consultancies and technological transfers (Queiroz de Andrade 2015) with communities in and around Recife, includes the creation of new designs, finishes and improvements in production, but also advising on sales and finding markets for their products, such as the local tourism industry. They have also developed tools that go beyond form creation, such as an online product price calculator, which allows the potters to calculate material and manufacturing costs. I intended to centre the presentation of Cerâmica do Cabo in Brazil today on this artefact, of which I learned about during my visit to Recife in 2016. Yet O Imaginário's research team were developing it under a grant that prevented its public presentation in unfinished form. Much of their work has been funded by foundations and corporate sponsors such as Petrobras – which funded the building of the Wilson Queiroz Campos Júnior Craft Centre, where the potters are based since 2014 – but especially by Sebrae, which has been a key promoter and funder of designer-driven community projects throughout Brazil.²¹⁹ The Cerâmica do Cabo initiative was the only such project I included in Brazil Today. It provides a glimpse of the complexity of its associated design process and the long-term commitment of a team of university researchers to a community of artisans, which we communicated by associating one of Cerâmica do Cabo's best-selling products with a graphic panel. This panel elaborated on the laboratory's methodology and on the nature of collaboration between design and craft that goes beyond form making and supplying a consumer market.

As I mention in chapter 2, designer-driven community projects became a significant outlet for design practice in Brazil, especially during the more prosperous 2004-14 decade, when public institutions and private foundations invested heavily in such collaborations between designers and underprivileged communities. I selected this exemplary case first of all because it is more research-based than market-driven. This characteristic determines its long-term goals over potential short-term results, but also significantly influences how its results and goals are communicated. Its researchers address the multiple

219. Dedicated to the support of micro and small businesses, this private non-profit organisation, established in 1972, is part of the Brazilian "S" system, a conglomerate of organisations such as Sebrae, Senac and Senai created by the productive sector (industry, commerce, agriculture, transportation and cooperative) dedicated to training and education in trade and business.

roles enacted by designers in such projects, which range from market consultants to form-givers, efficiency experts to arbiters of local social and political relations, with the kind of critical analysis other, more commercially-oriented initiatives tend to disregard. I have accompanied several such projects since 2009, having participated as a journalist in two of those developed by the designer Marcelo Rosenbaum.²²⁰ I also interviewed several designers with experience in this practice.²²¹ Over time I have observed that, as Abdulla mentions in chapter 2, the most common communication outlets of such initiatives are often little more than plainly written, profusely illustrated, expanded product brochures or reports requested by their private and public sponsors. The films and exhibitions made about these projects also rarely manage to challenge their function as promotion tools. Yet for these projects to be taken seriously – and they should – by design museums and other institutions, they must be accompanied with more rigour and a sense of critical self-reflection. They must also be covered on a long-term basis, so to best define the expectations, processes and consequences involved in what are complex, intercultural exchanges that reflect complex social relations. During the curatorial process of Brazil Today I concluded that this exhibition would not be the appropriate medium to communicate this complexity. Which, I would argue, demands dedicated exhibitions, documentary films and more objective editorial and critical scholarly approaches that address their intentions and consequences with the depth and scrutiny these initiatives deserve.

One of the most impactful initiatives I selected for Brazil Today confronted visitors with ‘Projectações’ [Projectations] (p. 146), phrases projected on the darkened, double-height wall of the stairway connecting the Calheta Palace’s ground floor with its first floor, where the exhibition was installed. I became aware of Coletivo Projetação’s ‘projectations’ during the June 2013 demonstrations in Brazil, when they began using video projections as an immaterial, ephemeral medium for protest in public space. I found their first projection – a

220. During my 2016 trip I spent ten days with Marcelo Rosenbaum and his A Gente Transforma team in the village of Nova Colômbia, part of the Mamirauá sustainable development reserve deep in the Amazon rainforest. In 2012 I accompanied his team as a journalist to Várzea Queimada, a village of just under 500 citizens in the south of Piauí state, one of Brazil’s driest and poorest regions. This would in fact be the start of a long-term relationship Rosenbaum developed with this village’s artisan association, which has spurred a wide range of initiatives, collaborations and outcomes.

221. Such designers include Paula Dib, Mana Bernardes, Nicole Tomazi and Sérgio Mattos, but also the scholar José Antônio Nemer, founder with the designers Heloísa Crocco and Marcelo Drummond, of Laboratório Piracema de Design, one of Brazil’s pioneering designer-led community projects.

photo montage of the then mayor and governor of Rio de Janeiro, both pointing guns at the statue of Christ Redeemer – innovative, provocative and highly effective.²²² Yet I was interested in identifying a designer’s specific and original contribution to their images, that is, question if the visual and typographic quality of these messages expressed a peculiarly original aesthetic or even an expert sensibility. I got in touch with one of the collective’s founders, the designer and illustrator Júlia Rocha, who introduced me to the collective’s other members. We began discussing their participation in the exhibition in the summer of 2017, in long, late-night Skype meetings. My intention was not to include records of their ‘projections’, but to commission the collective to create new messages and images to be projected in the exhibition.

We then created a shared folder, which the collective updated regularly with images that were projected during the three months of the exhibition. Some of the phrases they created alluded to Rio’s context, such as “No Brasil, negro, pobre e favelado é preso por portar garrafa de desinfetante” [In Brazil, a black, poor man from the favela is arrested for carrying a disinfectant bottle], which referenced the arrest of Rafael Braga, a young man from a Rio favela, arrested for carrying a bottle of bleach, in what was then considered an abuse of authority case by Rio’s police. Some referred to protests related to broader Brazilian issues, such as “Não esqueça Mariana” [Don’t forget Mariana], which alluded to the 2015 Mariana dam environmental disaster. Others, such as “No Brasil, o equivalente a 32 campos de futebol são desmatados por dia. Somos o país que mais assassina ambientalistas no mundo” [in Brazil, the equivalent of 32 football fields is deforested each day. We are the country that kills the most environmentalists in the world] and “Salvem os índios isolados” [Save the isolated indians], reminded visitors of Brazil’s woeful environmental and humanitarian record. A third projection category related to more global protests, such as “Basta de genocídio da juventude negra [no more black youth genocide] or “A justiça não é cega. é racista e burguesa!” [Justice is not blind. It is racist and bourgeois!]. A few of these projections reminded Portuguese visitors of our shared, problematic history: “517 anos exterminando povos originários” [517 years exterminating native peoples]; “517 anos sendo colônia de exploração” [517 years being an exploration colony]; “Portugal foi o primeiro

222. I had been aware of designers using video projections and other open-source tools for urban communication, such as the Graffiti Research Lab, founded in 2005 by Evan Roth and James Powderly in New York, yet by 2013 I had not seen video projectors used in the context of political demonstrations.

país a transportar pessoas escravizadas para as Américas. A prática só foi abolida 4 séculos depois” [Portugal was the first country to transport enslaved people to the Americas. The practice was only abolished 4 centuries later] and, finally, “Por um museu da escravatura em Portugal” [For a museum of slavery in Portugal]. The latter was particularly timely, as 2017 was the year a Memorial to Enslaved People was attributed funding from Lisbon’s Participatory Budget.²²³ The activists of Coletivo Projecção invited visitors to photograph these protest messages, share them with the hashtag #projetamude and contribute to a discussion on the issues they raised. As this projection of rather provocative messages was one of the first design initiatives visitors came in contact with, it also firmly set the exhibition’s discourse as grounded less on aesthetic contemplation and more on thoughtful confrontation.

The UnB Pro typeface (p. 166) and the Dingbat Cobogó (p. 155) design initiatives were, much like Coletivo Projecção’s ‘projections’ and Web Seer, presented in their original, digital medium. Both their designers built them from existing designs: while Gustavo Ferreira based the UnB Pro typeface on Steve Matteson’s 2007 Liberation Sans, Guilherme Luigi contributed with his digital, freely-shared version of a Cobogó to the recognition of an important element of Brazil’s design heritage, designed in the 1930s by a team of engineers. UnB Pro reveals notable critical autonomy from Rafael Dietzsch, who in 2011 redesigned the visual identity of Brasília’s university. He had not only the rather uncommon audacity to commission type designer Gustavo Ferreira to design a new typeface for the institution, but interpreted the public mission invested in his role to share this commission with a wider community of users by making the typeface free for everyone to download and use. DingBat Cobogó is the first outcome of a collaborative research project by Guilherme Luigi and Josivan Rodrigues, which recognised the authors and local origin of the cobogó, an innovative architectural element often considered vernacular or anonymous. The dingbat font Luigi designed as part of this recognition process lends itself to myriad uses, aptly illustrating Ezio Manzini’s aforementioned definition of the designer’s role: to trigger and support “open-ended co-design processes, using their design knowledge to conceive and enhance clear-cut, focused design initiatives” (2015, 53).

223. For more information on the memorial and its development, see memorialescravatura.com

These initiatives were presented in their essentially digital quality. In UnB Pro's case, I was inspired by one of the Danish pavilion at the 2016 Architecture Biennale exhibitions, the wall text of which was displayed as light on a mirror; on closer inspection, I realised this text was projected from the back of the mirror. Instead of a video projector we used a widescreen TV with a mirror-film covered glass on top, which displayed the typographic animation I designed with Ferreira's typeface. This display combined both wonder and resonance (Greenblatt 1991) to achieve the exact effect I was looking for: present a collectively designed, freely distributed Brazilian public good to visitors by emphasising its immaterial nature. Dingbat Cobogó was presented in the exhibition to full scenographic effect: Luigi answered my request of an animated "wall of cobogós" that was projected on a large screen, suspended from the ceiling in one of the exhibition's rooms. It dynamically merged built element with digital sign, form and background, module and pattern, material and immaterial. This collaborative initiative was quite successful with visitors, many of which admitted they were unaware of Cobogó's Brazilian origin or that it was even a patented design.

The Aura pendant (p. 173) is the latest iteration of Guto Requena's Love Project, which he describes as "a design, science and technology experience that transforms captured emotions and love narratives into everyday objects".²²⁴ Requena included a performative component in the project's first iterations, presented at Galeria Baró in São Paulo in 2014 and Dubai Design Week in 2015. The participants of Requena's sensory apparatus had their vital signs, such as brain waves and heartbeat, registered as they told the defining love story of their own lives. These installations proved cathartic for their users and revealed the strength of the interface and experience Requena, his team and the project's partners designed.²²⁵ However, the objects that resulted from the process – mandalas, bowls and small vases – looked and felt as weak, arbitrary carriers of such charged content. When Requena launched Aura in early 2017, I

224. en.gutorequena.com/love01-en/

225. Guto Requena's multifaceted career as a designer and architect has included other noteworthy projects that include the notions of innovation and collaboration. One such example is 'My heart beats like yours', the LGBT+ memorial his studio designed and installed in 2018 in São Paulo's Praça da República, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first LGBT+ activist community that took place on this square. Designed as a large-scale, interactive sculpture of large cylinders that serve as public seating and merge in a vertical structure with the colours of the LGBT rainbow flag, this memorial includes speakers that play a loop of audio statements made by LGBT+ activists of their experiences, alongside the sound of their heartbeats, registered as these statements were made. Should it have been installed earlier I would definitely have included this initiative in the exhibition.

sensed his Love Project had found the process and material result it deserved. The iPhone application it is based on allows users to have the emotions in their voice read by the device's microphone and their heartbeat measured by covering their iPhone camera with an index finger. The Aura app then creates a unique digital file of a mandala, a complex form that users can order to be materialised into a gold-plated or solid gold pendant. As Requena found in D3 a partner for Aura that is both an investor in 3D printing and in jewellery, the app became part of a vertically-integrated service that combines the 3D-printing of the mould with the crafting of the final pendant by a goldsmith. The result of this digital-physical design and manufacturing initiative is later shipped to the app's user/client. Aura's users generate, visualise, create and send their own data to be made into a valuable object that symbolises the power of, if not love, at least a relationship. Requena told me was particularly impressed by how people "misuse" the product: one such example occurred when users took a screenshot of the mandala visualisation and sent it to their loved one, bypassing the materialisation but also the commodifying of emotion this design initiative implies. Requena also mentioned that at least one couple "tricked" one of their iPhones by telling their love story together, speaking on the same microphone and placing one and then the other lover's finger on the camera. We showed Aura's results, 3D-printed model and a final, gold-plated mandala, under a borosilicate glass dome alongside a print with a diagram that informed visitors about its design and manufacturing process. Requena told me that no orders were made using the MUDEBRASILHOJE discount code created for Brazil Today's visitors. Nevertheless, we might never know in what ways they might have played on the intentions of Aura's designers.

Although shown in different rooms of the exhibition, the Melissa Creatives project (p. 163) and the AwayToMars 2017 collection (p. 184) represent collaborative approaches to fashion design. They also highlight how designers of mass consumer products are critically engaging with the push-and-pull dynamics of supply and demand, by integrating consumers as active contributors to the design process. I invited the design departments of Brazil's two most-renowned footwear brands, Havaianas and Melissa, to take part in the exhibition, yet I asked their representatives if we could include each brand without showing their respective main product: the Havaianas flip-flops and the Melissa

PVC-scented shoes.²²⁶ During my conversation with the brand's design department at Grendene, Brazil's largest footwear manufacturer, I learned about the Melisseiras, or Melissa's power users. These are women who have grown up with the brand, are obsessed with it and congregate on a range of social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Orkut), where they communicate their obsessions and purchases.²²⁷ The designers have not only been following the conversations these consumers generate but have also created online forums and organised workshops in which they engage with this community. Aiming to present Melissa more as a consumption phenomenon than a product, I challenged Grendene's designers to reveal an example of how they have been incorporating these conversations in the design process. After they told me about the Melissa Creatives initiative, we decided to show two pairs of shoes created by a group of users that are also social media influencers. We placed them on a PVC granulate of which they were made, employing its patented fragrance as a sensorial magnet to exhibition visitors, many of whom recognised the collaborative and innovative nature of these products.

By outsourcing the initial stages of the creative process to the general public, AwayToMars also allows its users/designers/consumers to generate innovative clothing concepts and products. Following the submission of drawings, concepts and ideas online by users, the brand works with a team of technical experts, organises the crowdfunding for each product, oversees its production process and sells the finished item on their website. After first meeting Alfredo Orobio in London (where the designer and entrepreneur is based) in January 2017, we agreed AwayToMars would be represented by a projection showing the development of the brand's Fall/Winter 2017/18 and Spring/Summer 2018 collections. This animation would reveal how a particular piece of clothing from

226. I thought of this approach after seeing an exhibition curated by designer Jader Almeida during the 2016 São Paulo Design Weekend. For this showcase of Brazilian design, Almeida selected several examples of mainly industrially made products such as the Havaianas. He showed the brand through an amalgam of flip-flops hanging from the ceiling with nylon threads, which emphasised their cheap, abundant, familiar quality. The opposite strategy could be to show just one pair – perhaps one belonging to a celebrity, thus providing a unique “aura” to an ordinary artefact. Eventually I decided to show process instead of product, having challenged the Havaianas product design and innovation team, then comprised of over 15 professionals, to reveal their creative process through a display of elements such as sketches, prototypes, material samples and product models, showing not only how they have been creating and recreating this brand, but also building a universe of products on top of an icon.

227. Orkut was a social network developed by the Turkish software engineer Orkut Büyükkökten at a Google which, following its launch in 2004 became so popular in Brazil it became the country's most visited website by 2008. Before Google shut it down in 2014 Brazilians were the platform's largest user base.

each collection was or is being developed by its community of users. However, after Orobio's team was unable to produce the required animation, we simplified the presentation of this design initiative by showing a few selected pieces of its 2017 collection on a copper rack. These artefacts only made it to the Calheta Palace almost halfway through the exhibition. Considering AwayToMars has presented its collections at ModaLisboa (Lisbon's Fashion Week) since its launch in 2015, I aimed to connect its audiences with the exhibition. However, I did not manage to develop this connection with the organisers of an event that is highly supported by the City of Lisbon and has an evident institutional relationship with MUDE, which is also dedicated to fashion design. It was another missed opportunity for the exhibition to reach a wider public.

The Embraer Material Concept Lab (p. 180), developed by the material design consultancy MateriaBrasil, reveals a crucial dimension in Brazilian contemporary design: material development. Considering the country has the world's largest rainforest and greatest biodiversity, but also the reputation for some of the most destructive farming and mining practices, the sustainable development and innovative use of natural materials is one of the most critical challenges faced by Brazilian designers. In Rio de Janeiro I invited three of MateriaBrasil's founders to take part in Brazil Today with the materioteca [material library] they developed for the private jet division of Embraer, Brazil's aircraft manufacturer.²²⁸ I aimed to show how they provide research and consultancy services to both small and large clients, while including one of Brazil's global corporations in the exhibition. We discussed my proposal with Luciana Monteiro, Embraer's manager in charge of the material library. She suggested we should show proposals for the Embraer's 2040 Green Cabin Concept, then being developed by the students of KEA, Copenhagen's School of Design and Technology. Monteiro invited me to take part in a 3-day workshop promoted by Embraer in February 2017, where several of Embraer's partners met at KEA in Copenhagen to present and discuss technical and material innovations that would be shared and applied in future concepts and products.²²⁹

228. I first met Bruno Temer, Bernardo Ferracioli and Pedro Themoteo in Rio de Janeiro during my masters thesis research trip in 2009. They and Thiago Maia founded Fibra Design Sustentável in 2005, which was one of the first design studios in Brazil to have a pioneering, materials-driven approach. In 2017 they merged with the material consultancy MateriaBrasil.

229. These partners included the Portuguese design consultancy Alma Design, the French Peugeot Design Lab, Portuguese and Austrian cork and leather suppliers, a Catalan air filter developer and a French synthetic scent diffuser manufacturer, as well as the University of Copenhagen and Germany's Fraunhofer Institute.

This workshop gave me an introduction to the private jet industry's design and manufacturing model, in which collaboration is not a statement of intent from a particular designer or company but the result of a complex, long-term design, research and development process that involves several stakeholders. However, Embraer's private jet division directors eventually decided not to show the results of the 2040 Green Cabin Concept development process at KEA. As such, we reverted to my first proposal and displayed a selection of material samples from Embraer's Material Concept Lab. I was nonetheless pleased with including this meaningful example of design for autonomy from a young design consultancy in Rio for one of its most relevant clients, which describes itself as a global aerospace company headquartered in Brazil. It also allowed me a glimpse into a little-known design service sector, which is seldom addressed by editorial and curatorial approaches. I am aware that describing the building of private jets, a highly pollutant and elitist industry, as an example of design for autonomy may seem paradoxical, even facetious. Yet it is nonetheless an example of a highly competitive, collaboration and innovation-driven industry, in which Brazil is a key player. It is also an industry where new materials and processes can be employed and later applied to other industries, uses and design approaches. I would like however to have developed this connection and explore the complexity of this initiative in public programmes with Embraer and its local partners, yet I did not enjoy the conditions to do so.

Also shown in the exhibition's final room, the 'Tropical Molotov' tile panel (p. 183) hinted at a lasting contribution by Brazilian designers to the city of Lisbon. I invited the members of Coletivo MUDA to take part in Brazil Today after I met Diego Uribe and Duke Capellão in Rio de Janeiro during my 2016 trip. I was particularly interested in how they began merging the actions (and the ethics) of graffiti writers/artists with the legacy of the artist and designer Athos Bulcão. MUDA started their graffiti-like panels on the streets of Rio de Janeiro and later applied them on walls in other cities, where due to their unsolicited, illegal nature, have proven as ephemeral as any conventional graffiti. As MUDA's reputation increased, by 2010 they began to take on commissions for public and private buildings, as well as also commercial spaces, such as Facebook's studios during the Rio 2016 Olympics. In 2013 they started showing mobile, hangable panels in art galleries. I invited MUDA to design a new, permanent tile panel for the city of Lisbon, which would build on MUDE's history as a commissioner of public works. In 2016, MUDE unveiled the world's largest

outdoor tile panel, commissioned to the Portuguese-born French street artist André Saraiva, following his monographic exhibition organised at MUDE in 2014. The obvious locations for MUDA's panel were the Brazil and Rio de Janeiro Avenues, both of which are part of Lisbon's freguesia [borough] of Alvalade. Alvalade's borough officials showed interest in the proposal and even suggested a location: a 100-square metre wall, ideal for a tile panel, that was part of a new park scheduled to open later that year. MUDA designed and titled a panel for this wall, which we showed in the exhibition through a combination of a sketch, a tile sample and a synopsis written by its designers. MUDE's director looked into funding options for the panel within the city's departments – which include an Urban Art department and a program for tile research, safeguard and protection – yet eventually gave up on the initiative.²³⁰ This panel would not only be a significant, lasting legacy of this exhibition but would also be a new, collaborative and permanent public work designed in Brazil for the citizens of Lisbon.

230. Upon MUDE's director request (which I protested against), they wavered their author's fee to lower the panel's implementation costs. I also tried to intervene in finding a sponsor from Portuguese tile manufacturers, considering MUDA's designers usually work with standard, industrially-made tiles, but with no result.

5.6. Conclusion

How did Brazilian designers face up to the socio-economic advances, political struggles and global interactions that shaped their nation during its 'golden decade'? Did they concentrate on more immediate problem-solving and in addressing short-term market needs? Or did they see this decade as an opportunity for a more long-term, critical and consequential reflection on past models, paradigms and stereotypes? If so, did they present visions and versions of individual and collective aspiration to Western, late-capitalist models of development, well-being and lifestyle? The design initiatives I analysed in this chapter attempt to answer these questions and emphasise how the aspirations, needs, choices and habits of over 200 million Brazilian individuals play an increasingly important role in a world system of production of wealth and meaning. Each of Brazil's multiple populations, citizen constituencies and consumer markets reflect specific local, regional and national, as well as transnational contexts and identities. Being aware of this segmentation means identifying and especially interpreting how multiple, complex and nuanced identities and subjectivities are lived and expressed in a particular nation at a specific time.

Understanding that the challenges faced by Brazilians are often shared by other common citizens in our increasingly liquid, flexible, hybrid societies was a crucial step in the process of selecting, exhibiting and interpreting contemporary Brazilian design. Considering Brazil as a leading actor of an increasingly interconnected and multipolar, but also unequal and unstable world, this understanding required addressing each initiative as the result of a carefully managed position by its designer(s) between the aspirational quality of Brazilianness and the notorious evidences of Brazilianisation. This implied asking a fundamentally social and outwardly political question to the exhibition's visitors: what does it mean to lead, or aspire to a good life? The most critical and consequential answers to this question provided by Brazilian designers express the dual forces that drive their increasingly transnational and inevitably intercultural practice. A centrifugal force, which spreads the effects of Brazil's complex context for design to the rest of the world, and a centripetal force, which draws in information from all kinds of global sources to the practice of design on a domestic level. Understanding how these forces work in a design practice that is enmeshed in the everyday eventually settles the identity vs. context tension presented at the introduction to this thesis. That is why I

determined the analysis of key design initiatives shown in Brazil Today to be grounded around themes that are specific to Brazil but can also be applied to other social worlds and contexts of design practice, regardless of nationality.

As such, I argue for the acquisition and collection of these artefacts by design museums not as samples of a national design collection, but as contemporary Brazilian contributions to theme- or issue-based collections and exhibitions. This argument is, in fact, aligned with the collecting approach of the V&A's Design, Architecture and Digital Department (DAD). As stated in the museum's latest Collections Development Policy (2019), the emphasis of this department created in 2015 is primarily on contemporary collecting, through which it seeks to engage with the work of the contemporary creative industries and reflect the concerns of a changing society. (9). By 2019, DAD's collecting priorities were to consider design within the context of society; document important global shifts in the practices and processes of design; show connections between the designed world and current socio-political concerns (9). The international scope of this collection shows "the global circulation of objects from production to consumption, and the impacts of globalisation on labour, how things are made and the environment. It is diverse and inclusive, reflecting multiple voices and viewpoints (of gender, age, race, class, sexuality and ability), and scales and modes of practice, from the DIY to the mass-produced" (9). Crucially, the subject areas covered by DAD "are not exclusive of one another or defined by medium or geography, and DAD curators work across the wide field of design to explore relevant, contemporary issues and new practices" (9).

The V&A's Policy report also mentions DAD's future collecting priorities, through which the department "will continue to expand the collection of industrial and product design from the second half of the 20th century through to the present, to tell a broad story of design and society, a story for the many not the few" (10). These include, as stated in the report's design and digital design collection sections, mass manufacture – acquisitions connected to electronic and product design that document the rapid changes in distributed manufacture, new technologies and new materials; Inclusivity – instances of ergonomic design, objects aimed at different abilities and at increasing accessibility; Utilitarian – "design that aids the navigation of daily life, including lighting, household appliances and communication devices, and which stands as evidence of technological change, and changes to consumption habits and their impact on society" (10); Environmental – "key design innovations that

consider the constraints of finite resources” (10); Innovation – “examples of the work of innovators and change-makers (such as Apple, and the work of the 3D-printing ‘maker’ movement), and objects that represent significant ‘turning points’ in digital design, such as those which have gone on to influence the design field at large” (13); Tools – “examples of software, tools and processes that present the digital design tools that assist or enable design as designed objects in themselves (such as computer-aided design)” (13); Public – “design that shows how we are living with digital design today, highlighting important socio-political and socio-technical concerns as digital design objects and digital culture become ubiquitous, embedded and every day” (13); Critical – “work that surfaces issues around digital design which are intangible or difficult to communicate (such as the internet or aspects of social media design) through speculative or critical design work” (13). The report also mentions DAD’s Rapid Response Collecting section, which was created in 2014 and is described as a “reactive mode of collecting that enables the acquisition and immediate display of designed things that articulate important moments in the recent history of design and manufacturing” (14). Its acquisitions are brought into the museum – according to the report, DAD aims to acquire 10-12 objects per year in the next five years – while being the subject of public and/or critical discussion. “Standing as evidence of social, political, technological and economic change, these objects expand the definition of design and further public understanding of the role it plays in contemporary society” (14).

While the V&A’s 2019 Collections Development Policy report states the context in which the results of my research into contemporary design would be articulated at its partner institution, its authors do not mention a collecting strategy regarding the two less-explored territories of its collection: Africa and Latin America. These are however suggested in the previous Collections Development Policy report (2015), which mentions research was being strengthened into the historic holdings of Latin American art and design, so to “recover forgotten histories of such objects in the collection” (66) and inform future collecting. Its authors state the museum is prioritising fields where work from Latin America has international standing, such as architecture, furniture, and textiles (66) and focused on “building knowledge of and contacts with the major Latin American countries in order to strengthen our contemporary holdings of Latin American design” (66). To have a grasp of these holdings, more specifically of design holdings from Brazil, in late 2020 I inserted the term

Brazil in the 'Place of Origin' search box on the V&A's online collection database. After removing entries of Portuguese Baroque imagery and English landscape painting from Brazil's colonial times, I defined a stricter set of items authored by Brazilian individuals or collective entities, dating from 1822 (the year of Brazil's Independence) to the present. These results from this search showed an extensive array of artworks and design artefacts from Brazil, kept in different collections. Revealing several curatorial strategies or preferences – such as a predilection for footwear or certain artistic and design trends, as in the works acquired from street artists in 2009 and 2010 – these artefacts betray the influence of donations to the museum's collection. Only one was placed on display during my thesis' development period: a *chaise longue* designed by Joaquim Tenreiro, included in 2014 in the V&A's Internationalism & Modernism gallery semi-permanent display, dedicated to twentieth-century furniture design, craft and graphics. Because they were acquired in different times, by different people, with different criteria and for different collections of the museum, these artefacts do not devise or even hint at the creation of a Brazilian design collection that I could contribute to. During the development of my thesis I did not have significant contact with the V&A's curatorial or research departments besides informal presentations of my research in 2015, 2016 and 2020.²³¹ I was also not involved directly in discussions regarding the applicability of my research or the interest of my Brazil Today artefact selection to the museum's collection or forthcoming curatorial approaches. Nevertheless, the overall findings and specifically the analysis I present in this chapter inform the exhibition and collection of Brazilian contemporary design by this and any other design museum with an international, multidisciplinary collection.

231. In October of 2015 I attended a meeting of the V&A Americas Strategy Group, where I presented my thesis and discussed how it could inform future collecting of Brazilian contemporary design. I wrote a post for the V&A blog related to my research during its 2016 research trip: vam.ac.uk/blog/projects/brazilian-design-travel-notes-1. On October 13th 2020 I presented my thesis as part of the V&A Research Institute (VARI)'s Tuesday research seminar series.

6

Conclusion

6.1. Review of the thesis and main contributions

In this thesis I addressed the particular challenges of a transcultural curatorial approach to contemporary design in Brazil and of the curator and critic in a global public sphere of design. My commitment to understanding the context of design practice, as well as my engagement with the crucial actors of its process, allowed me to observe and interrogate their key intentions and ambitions, as well as the consequences of their actions.

In chapter 1 I elaborated on the institutional framework of this thesis and the exhibition it addresses, both of which were developed by taking a broader, multidisciplinary view of design as subject matter and of Brazil as a matter of concern. In this chapter I argued for designers as the protagonists of curatorial approaches to design and discussed the intertwining careers and missions of the design critic and curator. I observed how a symbiotic relationship between magazines and museums has both fostered institutional synergies and equated readers and visitors in a global design system dominated by Anglo-Eurocentric institutions and discourses. I addressed my positionality within this design system, as well as the cultural and institutional framework of my research. As an example of a transcultural approach to design in peripheral countries, my work aims to challenge narratives, agendas, discourses and conceptual frameworks through which topics and issues pertaining to design have been addressed and presented to constituencies of readers and visitors across several languages, geographies and markets. I recognised how the fragmentation of design's public sphere in the twenty-first century has positively questioned this Anglo-Eurocentric dominance and created opportunities for new interpreters, approaches, institutions and discourses on design to emerge. Because of design's pervasiveness across social worlds, its public sphere is also larger than the professional classes, scholarly circles or institutional frameworks that define it. By managing the experiences and expectations not only of the museum's several constituencies but also of other design system institutions in the larger public sphere of which the museum is an essential agent, curators but also critics thus hold a critical responsibility in shaping the present and future public understanding of design. Regardless of origin, positioning or

bias, I argued that a publicly-minded conscience in critics and curators results in a more inclusive practice.

In chapter 2 I critically engaged with theoretical positions that informed by curatorial approach to Brazilian contemporary design. I discussed how art-historical, modernist narratives, as well as the expansion of neoliberalism and a postmodern fixation with expressions of individual and national identity, have fostered a shift in design discourse since the 1990s. Such shift has progressively separated the coverage and public recognition of design from the reality and complexity of its material practices. Successive editorial, historical and curatorial approaches have associated design with adjectival qualities such as style, taste and fame. They have encouraged a discourse that favours the expressions of personal or national of identity, in detriment of meaningfully addressing the context of design practice, particularly in peripheral countries. By confronting key approaches to design in and from Brazil, I revealed the lasting consequences of superficial, transcultural interpretations of identity and alterity. I also addressed the substantial influence a small number of agents within that system have in creating and sustaining a dominant discourse on design.

I observed how a quest for autonomy from mainstream service-provision has allowed designers to explore new territories for their practice and presentation of their work, in which they have blurred disciplinary, professional and institutional boundaries. I addressed the contingency of such autonomy to a new market for design artefacts, but also to the possibilities and limitations presented by institutions that support design as cultural expression, knowledge production and research. I introduced the framework of design for autonomy in Latin America, which aims to consolidate democracy through a reduction of dependence of its populations from external powers and local elites. This quest implies the adoption of industrialisation as a national effort centred on the needs, struggles, subjectivities and desires of local communities, but also on their potential to determine their own futures. I observed how designers, faced with a context of de-industrialisation in Brazil and elsewhere, expressed a turn to the 'own' associated with the design of less technologically complex products in their quest for autonomy. Much like the practice of social design, this turn has largely left unbalanced power relations and outdated social and economic models unchallenged. I concluded by elaborating on the challenges of these positions and arguments for curatorial approaches to contemporary Brazilian design.

In chapter 3 I discussed Brazil's exceptional 2004-14 decade of socio-economic advances, political struggles and global ambitions, which provided Brazilian designers with a singular context for their practice. I presented key events, facts and issues that affected Brazilian society during this decade, such as the political and macroeconomic settings that allowed the PT governments to enact pioneering social policies and challenge (not without contradictions) Brazil's exhausted, extraction-based economic model. I observed how a new middle-class questioned elite privileges in its demands for rights, as well as how protests revealed the unmet promises and expectations of Brazil's 'golden decade.' I elaborated on Brazil's global ambitions to have a more significant role in a multipolar and increasingly fragmented world and analysed how key curatorial approaches to contemporary Brazilian design, organised during this period, reflected the shifts in practice and discourse in design. I concluded by claiming that during this decade, the practice and the appreciation of design practice in Brazil hovered between the interconnected fields of Brazilianness and Brazilianisation.

In chapter 4 I addressed my own curatorial approach, which resulted from a selection of design initiatives and artefacts developed in Brazil within a time-frame that roughly coincided with my thesis period of study. These design initiatives underscored the contribution of Brazilian designers but also of their clients, consumers or end users, to a global system of value and meaning creation. This chapter's main section is an illustrated walkthrough of Brazil Today, which provides views of the exhibition's contents and installation. I included in this section the introductory panel text and the extended exhibit labels of a selection of 33 such design initiatives, so to reveal how I communicated with exhibition visitors through the selection and display of artefacts, but also through critical, verbal interpretations of their intentions and consequences. In this chapter I also addressed the exhibition's discourse, design artefact selection criteria, display strategies, communication initiatives and critical reception.

In chapter 5, in which I analyse the aforementioned selection of 33 design initiatives and artefacts as expressions of critical autonomy in Brazilian design, is divided in four thematic challenges. In Consumption and inclusion, I emphasised how designers included the aspirations, needs, choices and habits of a large number of consumers during the considerable expansion of Brazil's internal market. In Discourses and identities I presented initiatives that question the notion of identity, language, value and heritage in design, but most

importantly of representation, recognition and social discrimination in a miscegenated, complex society that is since 2011 a majority of minorities. In Public space and the public good I addressed a debate over the *res publica* in Brazil and a reconfiguration of public space, revealing how designers are reflecting tensions between rights and privileges either by serving strategic interests or by enacting tactical actions that give voice to protest movements and collective actions. In Innovation and Collaboration I elaborated on how through a collaboration-based approach Brazilian designers have responded in innovative ways to specific challenges in their society, from corporate agendas to calls for collective action. By questioning the role of consumers, users and producers in the design process, the initiatives selected under this theme also problematise the limitations of curatorial approaches in addressing the complexity of designer-driven community projects through the exhibition medium.

6.2. Future research outlooks

In 2019, the journalist Luciana Belin asked for my contribution to an article on Brazilian design for *Haus*, the interior design magazine of the *Gazeta do Povo* newspaper (Belin 2019a). A few weeks later, she published the answers I gave to her email interview as a separate article. To her question “How is Brazilian design seen outside our map?” I gave her the following answer:

It depends on the interest of the person you ask: between furniture, books, video games, infographics, aeronautics, clothing, typography, housing, food or public services, there is no area of our society where design is not present. As I have a rather ecumenical perspective on design, that is, I am interested in all areas, I would just say the following: I hope that Brazilian design will be seen as an activity that knows how to respond to the tremendous challenges of the past, present and future of its people. The set of responses to these challenges represents the Brazilian design that interests me. Taking into account the recent events of fires in the Amazon, liberalisation of pesticides and relaxation in the inspection and penalty of environmental crimes, but also the attacks on Indigenous and Quilombola populations, dam accidents and other violations of human rights and the rights of nature that with this government are not just being perpetuated but also legitimised, I believe that a design practice with less environmental impact is not enough. It is necessary to promote a design practice of resistance that safeguards human and environmental rights, the ancestry of Indigenous peoples and the expression of minorities. The recent “good years” of economic growth, social mobility and the achievement of rights that I mentioned earlier, and to which I dedicate my doctoral research project, were also years of promoting a development model based on buying a house, a car and meat for all. This is a clearly unsustainable model. I think this is the biggest flaw in politics, but also in design in Brazil in the twenty-first century: not having the ambition to create new forms of coexistence and consumer cultures alternative to the Western model, which respect a population that despite its brutal inequality contains in its genes the whole world, a continental territory and the greatest biodiversity on the planet. Brazil is also one of the largest (and most protected) domestic consumer markets, where large-scale experiments can be made, combining the responsible use of natural and human resources with the promotion of conscious consumption, well-being and social justice. This is also a huge challenge for design in these times that are once again of crisis (Belin 2019b).

This answer synthesises what I argue made the 2004-14 decade in Brazil – the “good years” I refer to – truly exceptional: the social actions that balanced the notions of aspiration and resistance. My remarks, made over a year after the exhibition closed, also express where my approach to Brazilian contemporary design could have gone further in terms of addressing critical autonomy

as a careful managed position between Brazilianness and Brazilianisation.²³² My commitment and engagement with the practice of design in Brazil since 2009 has also evidently included a dedication to this country and its society beyond its design system. Design is, after all, only one of the many social actions through which the life of a nation is expressed or revealed. Yet it is also the one I am most dedicated to as a critic, curator and researcher. The social actions I attempted to reveal and interpret in *Brazil Today* thus reflect the participation of designers in the life of a nation in their varying scales and material practices. I presented them neither as examples of unmitigated personal expression or of powerless submission to external forces (the first of which being the client of a particular design service). Instead, I attempted to show these actions as instances of critical autonomy in how designers reacted to their present context.

In his essay ‘The future as cultural fact’ (2018), Arjun Appadurai considers aspiration as one of three “notable human preoccupations that shape the future as a cultural fact, that is, as a form of difference” (286); the other two are imagination and anticipation. These are also, I would argue, notable design preoccupations. Defining and communicating design’s aspirational quality has been fundamental to the creation of historical narratives, discourses and canons that have signified this activity, profession and cultural expression. As I’ve discussed in this thesis, successive editorial, curatorial and historical

232. Original quote: “Depende do interesse da pessoa a quem se pergunta: entre mobiliário, livros, videogames, infografia, aeronáutica, vestuário, tipografia, habitação, comida ou serviços públicos, não há área da nossa sociedade em que o design não esteja presente. Como tenho uma perspectiva bastante ecumênica do design, ou seja, interessam-me todas as áreas, diria apenas o seguinte: espero que o design brasileiro seja visto como uma atividade que saiba responder aos tremendos desafios do passado, presente e futuro do seu povo. O conjunto de respostas a estes desafios representa o design brasileiro que me interessa. Tendo em conta os acontecimentos recentes de incêndios na Amazônia, liberalização de agrotóxicos e relaxamento na fiscalização e multa de crimes ambientais, mas também de ataques às populações indígenas e quilombolas, acidentes em barragens e outros atropelos dos direitos humanos e da natureza que com este governo estão a ser não só perpetrados, mas também legitimados, considero que a prática de design com menor impacto ambiental não chega. É necessário promover uma prática de design de resistência e de salvaguarda dos direitos humanos e ambientais, da ancestralidade dos povos indígenas e da expressão das minorias. Os “bons anos” recentes de crescimento económico, mobilidade social e conquista de direitos que mencionei anteriormente, e que aos quais dedico o meu projeto de pesquisa doutoral, foram também anos de promoção de um modelo de desenvolvimento baseado na compra de casa, de carro e de carne para todos. Este é um modelo claramente insustentável. Penso que essa é a maior falha da política, mas também do design no Brasil no século 21: não ter ambicionado criar novas formas de convivência e culturas de consumo, alternativas ao modelo ocidental. Que respeitem uma população que apesar da sua brutal desigualdade contém nos seus genes o mundo todo, um território continental e a maior biodiversidade do planeta. Mas também um dos maiores (e mais protegidos) mercados internos de consumo, onde se podem fazer experiências a larga escala, articulando o uso responsável de recursos naturais e humanos com a promoção do consumo consciente, do bem-estar e da justiça social. Esse é também um enorme desafio para o design nestes tempos que são mais uma vez de crise” (Belin 2019b).

approaches to design have since the 1990s fostered a shift in the dominant design discourse that related its aspirational quality to elite tastes, expressions of style and individual success. By interrogating the very meaning and intention of aspiration, other such approaches may uphold a different aspirational quality to design and thus resignify the purpose of design practice. Most importantly, these approaches may bring its account closer to the reality of its practice and thus restore its public perception and recognition. Appadurai adds we can make the case for aspiration as a critical piece of the future as a cultural act by saying that “hope is the political counterpart to the work of the imagination. For it is only through some sort of politics of hope that any society or group can envisage a journey to desirable change in the state of things” (293). As such, aspiration challenges an understanding of design as a homeostatic practice: in small gestures or bold steps, any design process envisages and begins such a journey. Brazil’s exceptional decade represented, for most of its population, the beginning or at least the hope for such a journey to desirable change. Much of this period’s politics of hope was also tied to collective action, the defence of the public good and the struggle for autonomy from external forces. That is, to a form or attitude of resistance.

Indeed, much of the history of Brazil and of Latin America is a history of resistance. Multiple forms of systemic and non-systemic resistance against colonialism, the rule of global capitalism and external dependence have been led by citizens, social movements and governments across the country and the region. Their struggle for autonomy and emancipation has demanded recovering interstitial spaces of transcultural communication, but also creating new epistemological platforms from which new forms of political imagination can emerge and proliferate (Moraña et al. 2008, 10). These practices and discourses of resistance include themes explored in this thesis, such as contested identities and territories, oppressed languages and histories, otherness and heterogeneity. But also the right to the city, to education, justice and health – in sum, the right to a good life for all. These resistances are expressed in the cultural mediations that have connected historical events, political struggles and institutional protocols with the much more elusive domains of social subjectivity and symbolic representation (21). As I argue throughout this thesis, design is one such cultural mediation. By addressing the causes and intentions of design practitioners, I have foregrounded how the consequences and legacy of their work extend, in their diversity, complexity and contradiction, much beyond

their professional field or the design system.

As such, I consider the main answer to my research question – *How should local, culturally distinctive artefacts that result from contemporary design practice in Brazil between 2004 and 2014 be exhibited, interpreted and collected by an international design museum?* – to be the presentation of such initiatives and artefacts as resulting from the carefully managed positions of Brazilian designers between the interconnected fields of aspiration and resistance. It is in this balance that the exceptionality of the 2004-14 decade, but also the critical autonomy in Brazilian design practice can be found. To be sure, the social actions to which such curatorial approaches are dedicated do not take place outside the constraints of the market, the tenets of consumerism or the structures of power. They encompass myriad material practices and result from complex decision-making processes, the ambitions and intentions of which are not always benign. This is why the carefully managed positions of designers between aspiration and resistance, but also a curatorial approach to such positions, must imply the dimensions of ethical reflection, political action and imagination. These are useful dimensions for understanding the critical autonomy in Brazilian design practice, which as I have observed hovers between the notions of Brazilianness and Brazilianisation. I consider both these notions as undesirable destinations of the aforementioned journey to desirable change in the state of things. If the former symbolises a questionably cohesive and uncontested expression of national identity, the latter manifests a capitulation of design, as a culture and a practice concerning how things ought to be in order to attain desired functions and meanings (Manzini 2015, 53), to the reactionary forces that profit from the dedemocratisation, disaggregation and individualisation of society (Pineiro-Machado 2019, 49).

As I conclude my thesis research in 2021, I acknowledge many of the journeys envisaged during the 2004-14 decade, but also the memory of the social actions that fostered these journeys, are under severe threat from the reactionary forces that took over Brazil's federal government and many of its institutions, especially following the 2018 presidential election. I allude to how these forces have already affected Brazilian society in my aforementioned answer. As such, identifying and supporting design practices that resist those threats and aspire, inspire and anticipate the future as a form of difference is therefore both essential and urgent. Such support is in addition a critical challenge to any design museum, understood in this thesis as a public-minded institution

dedicated to long-term social concerns over short-term market demands. But it is primarily a crucial goal for new institutions to be established, new perspectives to be taken and new constituencies to be formed in our fragmented public sphere of design. For this we need new, bold voices in design curation and criticism aiming to approach these practices with a transcultural commitment to understand their local context, interpret their causes and consequences and allude to their multiple applications and implications to other contexts and localities.

These new voices should engage in editorial and curatorial approaches which, as I have observed, address design practice as determined by a specific kind of knowledge that is not restricted to aesthetic judgement or the making of formal decisions. Secondly, they must interrogate not only historical narratives, discourses and canons but also the media chosen to communicate and interpret the intentions of designers through the results of their work. This interrogation includes the medium and nature of the exhibition, as well as the model of the design museum. As a future development of my research, I would interrogate how design museum curators may reimagine the experience, interpretation and collection of design artefacts by questioning the conventions and discourses that associate the design museum either with museums of contemporary art and with museums of social and cultural history. This interest is informed by a remark by gallerist and author Ivan Karp in his introduction to "Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display" (1991), which gathers contributions on exhibitions from a range of curators and museum scholars. Karp claims that the book's participating authors, affiliated either to museums of art or cultural history, tend to respectively conform the exhibition as a vehicle for the display of objects or as a space for telling a story (12). This may seem a crude distinction between how museums determine the conditions for what Karp calls the singular experience of appreciating an object (12). Yet as I attempted to demonstrate with my analysis of *Brazil Today*, often the object-centred medium of the exhibition is not the most appropriate for interpreting and communicating the causes and consequences of design. I would extend this questioning of the exhibition medium with conventions associated to the art museum model, such as authorship, originality and provenance, but also the stability and singularity of the design artefact. I would additionally challenge the validity of notions such as the individual designer and, as such, of the monographic or nation-specific exhibition. As I argue in this thesis, there is

no such thing as a nation-specific design practice, only locally-specific contexts for what is an inherently transnational practice. I would therefore argue that by questioning the exacerbated role of the individual designer in the history, editorial coverage and curation of design, which has fostered approaches to design practice grounded on notions such as biography, career or body of work, may be unhelpful or even irrelevant for a meaningful and consequent appreciation and interpretation of such practice. Instead, topic- or issue-based approaches that address this activity across an expanding variety of contexts, disciplines and material practices, may provide significantly more consequential opportunities for making common citizens care about design. By safeguarding designers as the main, but not the only social actors of the design process, such approaches interpret design as a world-making profession dedicated to the collective creation of futures and of a shared imagination.

Furthermore, by focusing not on individuals but on communities, such approaches may provide a more constructive awareness of design's intentions and potential. Such is the focus of Sasha Costanza-Chock's book 'Design justice: Community-led practices to build the worlds we need' (2020) and the Design Justice Network she co-founded in 2016. As a framework for design practice, design justice rethinks design processes, centres people who are normally marginalised by design and uses collaborative, creative practices to address the deepest challenges faced by communities.²³³ Costanza-Chock mentions such impacts are often overlooked by universalist design principles and practices, which "erase certain groups of people, specifically those who are intersectionally disadvantaged or multiply burdened under white supremacist heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism" (2020). As a framework, she adds, design justice "urges us to explore the ways that design relates to domination and resistance at each of these three levels (personal, community, and institutional)" (2020), which is particularly relevant for approaches to design in peripheral nations. Nevertheless, Costanza-Chock mentions, "when designers do consider inequality in design (and most professional design processes do not consider inequality at all), they nearly always employ a single-axis framework" (2020). In addition, most design processes, she claims, "are structured in ways that make it impossible to see, engage with, account for, or attempt to remedy the unequal distribution of benefits and burdens that they reproduce" (2020).

233. For more information on the Design Justice Network and its ten principles, see: designjustice.org

Design Justice thus presents a demanding but urgently necessary framework for design practice, but also for how such processes can appropriately be understood, interpreted and communicated by editorial, historical and curatorial approaches. This framework demands a change of priorities, discourses and, as I have mentioned, new institutional configurations.

As complementary to the framework of design autonomy suggested by Bonsiepe and Escobar, design justice is also particularly suited for future curatorial approaches to Brazilian design. Especially, I would argue, to approaches committed to one of the boldest steps taken by Brazilian society during the 2004-14 decade: the introduction of affirmative action quotas in universities. In his essay 'Research as Human Right' (2018), Appadurai illustrates how this bold step may be considered a crucial part of Brazil's journey to desirable change in the state of things: "the capacity to aspire and the right to research are necessarily and intimately connected. Without aspiration, there is no pressure to know more. And without systematic tools for gaining relevant new knowledge, aspiration degenerates into fantasy or despair" (283). I consider this capacity to aspire and to research by hitherto under-represented social groups the most promising and consequential way in which the 2004-14 decade created an opportunity for designers to contribute to the life of their communities, both within and beyond Brazil's national dimension. As such, I would argue an appreciation of the reconfiguration of design education and practice by this generation is the greatest challenge for future curatorial approaches to Brazilian design. Understanding how these present and future designers, but also future critics and curators, address a broad and expanding spectrum of design practices and disciplines implies advocating for centring such approaches on collective action, care and community. But also implies interpreting their work as expressions of an expanding plurality of views, practices, contexts and shared futures. I hope my work informs and inspires future Brazilian contributions to the transcultural construction of a critical yet hopeful, global design imagination.

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