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FASHION EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DISCUSSION IS TO DEMONSTRATE HOW THE NARROW PERSPECTIVE OF THE TEXTILE AND FASHION INDUSTRY IN BRAZIL HAS INFLUENCED THE PROFESSIONAL VIEW OF FASHION (ITS DESIGNERS, STYLISTS AND/OR CREATORS), AND HOW THIS HAS HAD SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN FASHION AND DESIGN.

In addition, it seeks to address the economic challenges arising from the process of globalisation, which has given a key role to education and an attempt is made to breathe new life into this sector by recognising that the fashion designer is the professional who is best suited to take a lead in confronting these challenges. In view of this, the discussion conducted here, sets out to investigate the establishment in Brazil of a textile and clothing sector. This entails taking steps that lead to the professionalization of the field, while at the same, giving due weight to the role of the industrial sector at each stage by conducting a historical review. By setting out from an understanding of the fashion industry as a cultural sector, what is apparent from recent changes, is that the sector in Brazil can be seen to be lagging behind. Particularly in historical terms, given the fact that there is a need to view fashion as a 'cultural economy', which involves reviewing the role of the fashion industry and fashion education together.

THEORETICAL SUPPOSITIONS

In the current debate, there is a consensus among academics and the media concerning the period of deindustrialization that Brazil underwent in the mid 1990s. According to analysts, this phenomenon reduced the capacity of Brazilian manufacturers to remain competitive in a globalised world, evidencing the difficulty of competing with the import market (Cunha et al. 2013). In this situation, ‘...some subsectors of the Brazilian economy deserve special attention, in particular the clothing/garments subsectors of the textile industry’. (Cunha et al. 2013: 482)

Traditional Brazilian textiles and clothing manufacturers have recently turned into importers of fabrics and finished products and the local market is trading in a large number of imported goods. As a means of protection, some professional associations and companies are urging Federal Government to take strategic steps to allow the manufacturing sector to survive, for example, with adjustments to import tariffs and tax exemptions, and reduction of payroll taxes on employees. In short, they are seeking the adoption of protectionist measures because industry does not recognize that its difficulty in competing with imported products can be based simply on a comparison of the intrinsic quality of its products. Traditionally, it has never been necessary to invest in the development of products, since an extensive internal market has always protected from imports. It is only in the last fifteen years that the Federal Government has insisted that the industrial sector should be responsible for innovation, since this has become a feature of competitiveness and survival in the globalised scene.

In an official government report (ABDI 2010) it was shown that products in

the textile and clothing supply chain in Brazil are not competitive because they lack innovation. The following problems were highlighted: a lack of strategic partnerships between the retail outlets and suppliers with regard to the development of products; little computerisation and a lack of quick response systems; difficulty in producing smaller batches and or production methods requiring little implementation; problems with international trade arising from inexperience and finally, low financial investment in the development of products and design (ABDI 2010) According to the *Brazilian National Development Bank (Banco Nacional do Desenvolvimento - BNDES)*, in the case of the Brazilian entrepreneur, this condition arises from a widespread belief that ‘innovation’ simply means acquiring machinery and equipment (Costa & Rocha 2009). Findings suggest that less than 0.2% of employees in the textile and clothing supply chain are involved in innovative activities and when innovation occurs, on most occasions, it is caused by an information supply chain that is out-of-date and managed by the company that relies on trade fairs, publications, supply networks etc (Costa & Rocha 2009) Only 16% of companies in the textile sector and 3% in the clothing sector have Research and Development (R&D) areas, which is evidence that the sector is more devoted to ‘...the process of incorporating and adapting new kinds of technology than implementing original innovations’ (Costa & Rocha 2009: 192). It has been found that the textile and clothing supply chain has the lowest number of professional qualifications among all the industries that have undergone change in Brazil (Costa & Rocha 2009) This is a sufficient indication that the lack of innovation can be linked to low competitiveness and in turn, to the low

investment in professional education. In an attempt to correct these distortions, new guidelines suggest that the kind of innovation defined as ‘interactive organizational learning’ (Costa & Rocha 2009: 197), should be replaced with the development of ‘...an institutional basis or arrangement that creates an environment conducive to innovation...in which the State, companies, universities and research centres can take part, together with the educational system and funding schemes’.

Suggestions for restoring the productive capacity in Brazil by adopting new educational perspectives, which cover the entire manufacturing sector are widely divergent. In the industrial sector many of the remedies arise from economic policies. In the view of the Federal Government, it is the responsibility of the sector to become more competitive through industrial management, since its role is to regulate professional education and combine with new perspectives for development by carrying out coordinated activities that involve for example, the Ministries of Education, Science and Technology.

In view of the differences in the various positions adopted, this paper discusses opinions about design within the textile and clothing industry and shows how the stance taken by industry inhibits and contradicts the position of education. On the basis of a belief that in the case of Brazil, the difficulty of competing is largely due to failings in production management, an attempt is made to show how for a period of two centuries, Brazilian industry resigned itself to a situation where it had a guaranteed market and did not feel the need to invest in innovation. This will be discussed through an examination of the historical background of education in design and the textile and clothing industry.

EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY: THE COURSE OF ITS HISTORY

The change of Brazil's status as a colony (1500-1822) to that of an empire (1822-1889) represented a release from cultural dependence, as well as political independence. However, there was rarely any stimulus to creative activity in its broadest sense, since the country was possessed by the idea that European culture was superior to that of Brazil. At the time when the first manufacturing industries were set up, the system of handicraft training was based on the Portuguese corporate model, characterised by workshops in schools (Martins 2008), designed for orphans and the poor, and this associated industrial learning with people most in need. Apprentices in these workshops were only trained in manual skills, without any concern for scientific or rational interests. Therefore, there was no development of the industrial arts, since artistic activities were regarded as a type of manual work (Belluzzo 1990). The pedagogical procedures that were used were based on imitation and training: '...it was more a question of muscles and feelings than imagination because it was only based on imitation. With regard to the kinds of activities involved, this kind of direct learning has lingered on almost until the present day.' (Flexor 2002: 186)

The first attempt to give legitimacy to the importance of teaching fine arts that could be applied to industry and trade, involved setting up an artistic learning program that could serve the internal economy of the country and thus enable the country to move beyond its attachment to an agrarian lifestyle. With the founding of the *Royal School of Sciences, Arts, and Crafts (Escola Real de Ciências, Artes e Ofícios)* in 1826 (established by Royal decree in 1816), the government invested in a teaching project that

combined arts and crafts for industrial development that depended on teachers and '...specialist foreign immigration' (Martins 2008: 43). A new training system emerged in 1855 which was devoted to handicrafts and artists, designed to imitate 'civilized nations' (Squeff 2000). However, this was only part of a plan coordinated by the industrial sector, who proposed that the teaching of design at the *Lyceum of Arts and Crafts (Liceu de Artes e Ofícios)* in Rio de Janeiro (1858), should be at the forefront of social development and progress:

[The Lyceum] also sought to stimulate the talents and skills of the apprentice students through artistic teaching applied to arts and crafts and improving industrial design. As a result, the arts became widespread and hence a new aesthetic quality in Brazilian products succeeded in leveraging the rudiments of industry in the country by making them generally competitive in the market.

(Bielinski 2009: unknown)

Neither the *Lyceum* nor subsequent initiatives were devoted to specialisation in textiles because the manufacturers of fabrics were situated a long way from the urban centres, which meant that they set up their own schools where they taught their crafts (which included design). The procedure also involved imitating imported fabrics in a simplified way because local conditions for production were rudimentary and the fabrics produced consisted of cheap merchandise that was aimed at the poor social classes.

The first step towards improving products came in the aftermath of the First World War, when production expanded to meet the growing needs of the internal market, as well as the countries that were not being supplied by the more industrialised nations.

There was a greater diversification in the production of fabrics with more financial investment in the quality of the textiles and production of luxury goods to meet the demand of the wealthy classes (Loureiro 2006: 261) and prevent workers and equipment from being idle. During this time, the practice of copying continued and was highly valued or rather, it was a definite advantage to be able to imitate. From the 1920s onwards, this attitude began to be condemned but it was only in the 1950s that this change in attitude had real effect. During this period, which marks the cultural modernisation of the country, artists and intellectuals rejected the foreign model – and its supposed superiority – and promoted the idea of a search for national identity. Then the first school was founded that aimed at providing artistic abilities and competences for industrial demands (i.e. education in design), and not only the training of craft skills.

The Institute of *Contemporary Art (Instituto de Arte Contemporânea – IAC)* was established within the premises of the *São Paulo Art Museum (Museu de Arte de São Paulo – MASP)* and combined the pedagogical models of the *Bauhaus* with those of the *Institute of Design of Chicago*. Its objective was to train designers – and not artists – to assist industry in general, by appealing to a contemporary spirit and taste. An Italian couple, the art critic, Pietro Maria Bardi, who became the first director of MASP and Lina Bo Bardi, an architect, who migrated to Brazil in 1946, founded the art museum. This project was closely aligned with similar schemes that arose in the United States of America (like Brazil, at that time still a young country). As Faerm (2012: 211) points out:

...duplicated by many of America's leading fashion design programs,

Bauhaus students were encouraged to learn design principles 'by doing and making', and studied various art and design fundamentals... In order to provide this education, faculty were active, practicing artists and designers who imparted their expertise by placing emphasis on how things were made in the contemporary practice.

At the IAC, fashion was highly valued and the textile and clothes studio held an important event in 1952 called *Moda Brasileira* [Brazilian Fashion], which displayed 'models and textiles created by national artists with the aim of adding to the studio and developing fashion' (Bardi 1952: 1). The IAC only lasted for two years because, according to its planners, Brazilian industry did not want to face risks when it was accustomed to low costs and an ability to imitate at ease.

Professional and technical education during the period of accelerated progress and expansion (from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s) called the 'Brazilian miracle', stressed the need for import substitution. A technical education was planned that was intended to 'train professionals who did not need to think in either a critical or scientific way, but only had to reproduce, operate and maintain the technological and industrial processes that the country imported – mainly from the United States.' (Brandão 2007: 5) Mention should also be made of the role that military dictatorship (1964-1985) played at this time through its politico-pedagogical planning at every level of teaching.

Although the creative activities in the textile sector initially took the form of imitative processes, owing to the social dimension of fashion, imitation and adaptation were also the main kind of collective and technical learning during the period of industrial growth.

From the self-employed seamstresses to the textile companies, in the last 50 years, the system of copying was the competitive asset – or design methodology – which was most widely relied on for developing fashion products. During the period of dictatorship, this sector broadened its productivity and diversified its production in response to the ready-to-wear market. Traditional businessmen collated information about fashion and adopted a model for vertical production with great success, while being supported by a climate in which there was a lack of differentiated goods, owing to the political circumstances of the country. The '...technical baggage and culture of the product' (Kontic 2007: 45) was the creative epicentre of the factories and replaced any kind of training. All knowledge was inherited from mechanical learning and the capacity to innovate began with periods of imitation and differentiation, eventually leading to entrepreneurs/stylists at the end of the 1980s managing to create their own styles. The 'economics of apprenticeships' with the support of the whole network (suppliers, trade fairs etc.) acquired an 'endogenous capacity for production design' (Kontic 2007: 64), since there was no need to count on graduates from teaching institutions for the creation of a *Brazilian fashion*.

The impressive economic growth of fashion and textiles at this time was so great that it led to the discipline becoming an academic field of study. The first higher education course in fashion appeared in 1986/1987. This was guided by a syllabus based on the plastic arts, with specific subject areas in the field of fashion, which sought to improve skills similar to those found among important fashion designers. This view of a creator as someone who was entirely fit for the development of authorial fashion, was

closely aligned to the profile the sector had at that time and, as was the case in the UK, their work was viewed '... ideally as pieces to be hung on the wall, and more reluctantly as pieces of clothing' (McRobbie 1998: 13). This involved having a brand that made clear the identity of its owner who was probably holding a large exhibition at that time (since it was the time when the first fashion weeks were organized in Brazil). Moreover, it helped to give legitimacy to the field by means of its social distinction.

When a view of design was conceived as a specific area of knowledge underlying fashion production (Kontic 2007: 67) the redefinition of the designer's role within the company made possible '...a shift from differentiation and imitation to creation and innovation in both the style and the product'. Particular areas of research, style, development etc., were introduced which involved hitherto unknown risks. The question of creation and style began to be regarded as a strategic social value among the industrial community and a support for innovative and authorial entrepreneurial practices which distinguished the creative brands of *Brazilian fashion* from those that remained in the copying system. The former were aimed at the elites and the latter at the working classes. However, although the brands and officially recognised creators commanded great media attention, the bulk of the sector focused on mass-produced goods. Thus, when new educational goals take into account the interdependence between the educational sectors and decisions made in the sphere of policies and technological strategies (Cassiolato & Lastres 2005), the analysis conducted can clearly explain why there was a mismatch between training in fashion and the needs of the country at the time and their adverse effects on the sector.

At the end of the 1990s, the government finally realised that stimulating industrial development and setting out suitable policies required ‘...acting under the constraints of a particular macroeconomic, political, institutional, and financial framework’ (Cassiolato & Lastres 2005: 36). Moreover, in the case of underdeveloped countries like Brazil, it was clear that the defined policies would be ineffective unless these components were combined. Therefore, the review of educational goals for the productive sectors acquired political significance in the form of a proposal involving a set of actions – in which importance was attached to design as one of the concepts of infrastructure and long-term planning and a part of the new educational guidelines for vocational training, which drew closer to productive tendencies (Ramos 2002).

With regard to curricular reforms, technical teaching can be distinguished from the scientific area, due to the fact that there is a need to modernise education, for instance by making technological advances. The curriculum is based on the idea of carrying out projects or problem-solving by simulating a work environment (Ramos 2002). At a national level, these guidelines gave legitimacy to ‘...a kind of curriculum that is centred on practice and subordinates its concepts to the limits of its instrumentality or spontaneous formulations’ (Ramos 2002: 413). This change of perspective was apparent in the fashion training courses and was met with resistance. Until then, the staff involved in the training put forward the idea that creation had an artistic status and was based on accounts of aesthetic trends in European and North-American fashion. Following this, the new guidelines shifted fashion to the centre of industrial design on the basis of a classic perspective that involved

the questioning and recognition of the user. This not only meant a considerable change in pedagogical planning but also an alteration of the social role of the professional in developing countries.

The current curriculum challenges the government guidelines and still assumes a professional is someone who has a broad experience; perhaps this is to maintain the status of the art of fashion, which some people believe it has lost. The subject-areas of most of the courses can be divided into three categories:

- a) basic and instrumental
- b) communication and expression of fashion
- c) technical and productive.

At present, there are 13 nomenclatures for different types of training and to distinguish between the training profiles (fashion management, fashion creation, fashion production etc.). Currently, the government is seeking to bring about a convergence of courses as a means of controlling them more effectively without curtailing the freedom of the academic authorities to form a curriculum in a way that can be adapted to the reality of different regional situations. The aim is to ensure that at a technical level the course will tend to be applied, short and precise, while at a university degree level it will lead to a designer with a wide-ranging and analytical training. According to the *Ministry of Education (Ministério de Educação e Cultura – MEC)*:

Fashion Design and Technology draws up and manages plans for the clothing manufacturing industry while taking account of aesthetic, symbolic, ergonomic and productive factors. Some of the activities of the professional in this area are as follows: conducting research into trends in behaviour, colours,

shapes, textures and finishing’s; ‘stylish’ in fashion; the development of fashion products from a historical, sociological or predictive perspective; the preparation of portfolios and dossiers; the graphic representation of one’s creations; the designing of prototypes and models; and carrying out an analysis of the technical feasibility of the project.

(MEC 2006: 86)

The Bachelor’s degree course in Design:

...entails the creation, development and undertaking of projects which include visual information, products, spaces or socially and economically contextualized materials and examines historical factors, cultural traits and the technological potential of productive units. It is able to create new products or adjust those that exist to new conditions in the market, technological change and the needs of the user. It can set out ways of tackling problems with a focus on environmental sustainability. It also interacts with specialists in other areas by making use of a wide range of knowledge and taking part in interdisciplinary teams in the preparation and undertaking of research studies and projects.

(MEC 2010: 28)

By having two training modalities (at least in theory) companies can count on professionals who are in a position to face the technical challenges of the sector and also rely on designers who are prepared to think in a more analytical way, with a long-term perspective. From the industry standpoint, it is still impossible to know to what extent these professionals have helped to make the Brazilian fashion industry more competitive because the results of this training have still to be analysed.

FEATURES OF THE ANALYSIS: INTEGRATION OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF COMPETITIVENESS

Sectors of Brazilian industry and the leading trade unions have decided to unite to seek changes in the economic policies and measures that have given prominence to the so-called 'deindustrialization', with a view to restoring competitiveness to the Brazilian productive sector and maintaining employment in the country.

(G1, ECONOMICA 2015: unknown)

In their view, this is because the country is undergoing a period of high interest rates, an exchange rate that is still over valued, an elevated tax burden and a cumulative tax system.

(VEJA, ECONOMICA 2015: unknown)

As discussed earlier, the Brazilian textile sector is facing a huge crisis, which is putting at risk its very survival. According to the *Brazilian Association of Textile Industries (Associação Brasileira da Indústria Têxtil – ABIT)* this can be explained by a 'series of macroeconomic and structural issues that are removing the competitiveness of the Brazilian fashion industry to the outside world' (ABIT 2014: 9). The plan of action for reversing this trend involves a number of activates, the key ones being: the amendment of labour laws applied to the sector; control of economic policies to avoid additional costs to industrialised products in Brazil (especially with regard to the exchange rate and taxes); access to lines of credit for development; an improvement in the relationship between industry and vocational education; improving export procedures and the protection of national products; giving support

for small businesses which form the bulk of companies in the country. In the case of the industrial sector, political and economic issues overlap with regard to the need for financial investment in products and the concept of innovation, although this commitment has not been displayed as a part of a quid pro quo, or some kind of loosening on the part of the government.

Unlike other centres of fashion (Paris, New York, Milan etc.) where the sector has been given government support, in Brazil, this responsibility was transferred to the private sector in the period 1980-1990, and this led to a '...distorted view of the main players in the competitive areas of this industry' (Kontic 2007: 74). Thus, the private sector sought to gain recognition for its brands and names by giving legitimacy to the social values bound up with fashion, style and design (Kontic 2007), without creating the infrastructure needed to meet the challenges raised by the globalisation of this century. At a time of crisis like the present, it seems only right that the sector should be given some financial assistance by the government, since it has not done anything throughout the whole of our history.

Therefore, it is easy to understand why the role of training in fashion has until now been defined (albeit indirectly) in terms of a private initiative. However, this system did not manage to prevent Brazil from being opened up to imports in the 1990s, which means that it is now necessary to have professionals ready to examine the fashion industry from another angle. This has raised a serious problem too, since the teaching of fashion design, which is now accustomed to meeting the requirements of industry, pays little attention to global trends and is even less concerned with reacting to them.

Around the world, fashion design programs are reexamining their long-held academic philosophies in order to respond to several circumstances. These included a highly accelerated and globalized industry, the industry's demand for new graduate attributes, and an evolving student generation. Fashion design education is attempting to address these challenges by placing greater emphasis on "design thinking" and conceptual processes that will produce designers who can understand broader global contexts, innovate fashion design, and rethink business systems.

(Faerm 2014: 107-108)

This conflict of interests explains why the attitudes of industry to industrial/academic partnerships make schools simply places for laboratory experiments. For this reason too, official data suggests that this kind of integration more often supports companies that use the university system because the leaders do not believe that innovation forms a part of the academic world.

A recent analysis of the clothing sector found that the greater the role of leadership in a company, the more endogenous the process of bringing about innovation. These companies resort to their network of suppliers and development departments to suggest innovations, whereas companies that following in their wake (and also emerging companies) have turned to the schools, because they do not have a creative identity of their own and are thus more reluctant to make innovations. Legislative reforms in the profession have, to some extent, attempted to correct this distortion and renew the role of technical training in this scenario. It appears to be recognised generally that the State has a great organisational role to

play to ensure that the large amount of funding necessary, is paid to the educational sector, so that it can attain competitive standards in the global market (Frigotto et al. 2005). Economic growth and development are matters of great political and pedagogical complexity (Frigotto et al. 2005) and are probably not fully catered for by the proposed technical training, which combines industrialisation with progress. Moreover, in the case of Brazil, there is a desire for a rapid advance in the future to make up for lost time. For this reason, reformulating the curriculum within universities is not enough because it is...

...a political and not an academic issue. It concerns strategic goals. Those who question this economic modernization forget that, as a general rule, this questioning of modernization is undertaken from the standpoint of social development in the broadest sense of the concept. It is from this perspective of development that we should learn how to regard and make interventions in the educational system.

(MEC 2004: 5)

Therefore, this modality of learning takes on a strategic importance in the development of the country and in setting out guidelines for the activities carried out by MEC.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Although there is a wide range of ancillary activities that are aimed at the survival of the textile and clothing sector (and which involve encouraging an interaction between industrial and structural/economic or educational policies based on a revision of the entire historical process and current climate), it can be confirmed that there is a lack of understanding about the role of design in confronting these challenges and not just difficulties of

integration within industrial process. The long-term goals for 2023, when it is believed design will be the main factor responsible for creating value in products, include, for example: requirements such as drawing up a plan for manufacturing 'clothing for the people' where lower taxes would be levied; support given for personalised 'genuinely' Brazilian design; allowing the lower classes access to design (i.e. design for everybody); the incorporation of 'technology' into clothes, with a view to producing simple and functional shapes aided by the inclusion of technology (ABDI 2010).

There are some nuances in these perspectives which underly the plan to include fashion in the field of the 'cultural economy' as adopted by the Secretary for the Creative Economy (Ministry of Culture - MinC) since 2013 (MINC 2012). Although a novelty in Brazil, twenty years ago it was discussed by Angela McRobbie (in her thesis from 1998) and more recently remembered by Bill (2008: 69), who stated that this 'new cultural economy' envisaged that '...the authorities should seek to implement particular policy initiatives'. In Brazil, before they can be given government support, creators or companies must (through their processes and products) be able to offer products that meet the terms of one of four essential criteria, which treat fashion as culture:

- to seek to give Brazil a more international image;
- to have a distinct Brazilian symbology;
- to assist in the training of new professionals in the Brazilian sector;
- to assist in preserving collections of Brazilian fashion products (Suplicy 2013).

This support is restricted to what can be seen as 'national' in all of its

sectors and has led to ideas that have even influenced the design of the new curriculum (however, this does not lie within the scope of this study), in an attempt to design better training so that all those who are taught fashion every year, can be in a better position to obtain employment. The importance of technical skills in fashion design on creativity (from a technical, higher education perspective) does not seem to be consistent with the economic perspectives of the sector. Whittle (2001) believes that an ideal format could be achieved by striking a balance between the two skills (Bill 2008).

If the technical model for teaching encompassed all the skills required by industry, perhaps the government would have to review not only its curriculum but also the economic role of companies in the sector. As Bill (2008: 23) argues, '...in the process of re-imagining fashion as a creative industry, government projects have also introduced a set of assumptions that have re-positioned fashion design as a cultural, rather than industrial or craft-based education', while taking into account, as stated at the outset, that there is a need to compete in the globalised market. However, the Brazilian situation (once it is understood that it is worthy of State support for its inception and development), is very diverse in the same way as the fashion industry that is encouraged by the United Kingdom. In Brazil, it is feasible to promote Brazilian fashion provided that the resulting product contains what can be regarded as national features. In contrast, according to *Creative Skillset* (2015) the British are committed to supporting the creativity of students, entrepreneurs, professionals and educators in general.

Clearly, the Brazilian approach inhibits some individual businessmen and makes it difficult for the country to be

included in the globalised system of fashion or have a decisive influence on fashion design projects. The sector still keeps the practice of organising projects that involve products that were previously conceived and marked out by a set of aesthetic parameters. Thus, the decision to introduce the idea of innovation to the Brazilian industrial sector is made as the result of real achievements and acquires a material form in the products produced. However, it does not entail repositioning professionals in any part of this industry where '...the capacity to innovate is different from taking initiatives to differentiate and diversify the products on offer' (Kontic 2007: 48).

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