

Printed Amazon: the creation of surface design from cultural references

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates the use of cultural references, with the choice of certain signs, in the creation of textile prints, intending to value cultures, identities, and territories, as well as in the search for original and creative results for surface design products, and can contribute to the rescue of collective memories, feelings of belonging and affection. To this end, a case study of two prints from the Amazon-themed collection O Coração é o Norte, from the fashion brand Farm Rio, is presented, analyzed from the model proposed by Joly and adapted by Santos. This model allowed a systematic investigation of the meanings of the constitutive elements of the prints, separated by the plastic, iconic, and linguistic axes, analyzed separately and then together, to find a synthesis, and finally, to analyze and confirm that the communication of the prints represents the Amazonian culture.

Keywords: Affection, Belonging, Identity, Print, Surface design.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, drawings and interventions on surfaces have been presented to tell stories and preserve traditions. In this way, it is understood that the surface has been used as a medium of symbolic communication since always, as affirmed by Evelise Rüttschiling (2008), a Brazilian researcher and designer. As examples, one can list the figures of hunts in caves, passing through the decorated and ceramic bands of Greece, Byzantine and Roman mosaics, Islamic tiles, Egyptian hieroglyphs, Chinese calligraphy, the surfaces of Celtic metals, African jewelry, Persian carpets, Marajoara ceramics, and indigenous basketry, to cite some of the best-known manifestations.

For designer Cecília Consolo (2009), design is a tool for propelling messages, responsible for the "visual translation" of information, making communication much faster, more dynamic, and more efficient. In addition, design can also be interpreted as a cultural indicator, capable of converting cultures, stories, and memories into symbolic language.

Thus, Consolo (2009) emphasizes the importance of the role of the designer, as the mediator of this process, with the task of pointing out and signifying the world, while recording culture and the evolution of humanity, using design as a means of communication. For the author, it is the designer who sees and mediates with the culture where the layman only sees the object.

It is in these issues, raised by the authors mentioned, that the interest in this study lies: in the investigation into the design as a cultural vector and the importance of planning creative doing, to favor the reflective and critical work of the designer, contributing to more original, creative and innovative results.

In this context, it is important to take into account that design assumes an increasingly fundamental and amplified role as a result of its presence in people's daily lives, especially from the 1960s and more intensely in recent years, meeting various needs, "in what dignifies them as human beings or in what allows them to exercise their citizenship more fully," as Braga (2011, p. 65) highlights. The same occurs with surface design, the focus of this study since it is found in the most diverse products and utensils present in everyone's lives. About this area of design, surface design, Rüttschiling (2008) defines it as a technical and creative activity responsible for projects that combine aesthetic, functional, and structural qualities in the constitution and benefits of surfaces, always taking into consideration the adequacy of the sociocultural context, to the distinct needs, in addition to the production processes.

Already Manzini (2017) characterizes the surface as the skin of the artifact, its interface. From this definition, it is possible to understand that the surface is the place where the artifact communicates with the user, in the form of sensory, symbolic, and functional feedback. This is a key aspect of the design of surfaces, since the surface is the place where the user makes contact with the product, and it is through it that the communication of the product with the user occurs.

Given that design is an important communication tool and surface design is configured as strategic in this process, as previously pointed out by the authors, this article aims to investigate the use of cultural references and the choice of signs in the creation of prints in fashion brands, more specifically, cultural representations of the Amazon in surface design. To this end, a case study of some printed pieces from the *O coração é o Norte* collection, from 2018, by the Rio de Janeiro fashion brand FARM Rio, inspired by the Amazon region, will be carried out.

For the analysis of the prints, the image analysis model proposed by Joly (1994) was used, which proved to be very effective in several image analysis studies, including recent research on surface design and fashion brand identity (Santos, 2020). The analysis was carried out on two representative prints of the Amazonian theme, each with a different type of creation references: The reference of the first is the Amazonian nature and cultural manifestations of the region and the second is the vernacular typography of the region's letter openers. According to the Pernambucan designer Fátima Finizola (2010), the term vernacular is used to characterize graphic solutions based on local and popular customs, elaborated independently of formal rules. The results presented can be useful for other investigations on representations in surface design and the analysis method can also be used as a guide for new print projects.

1. THE THEORETICAL REFERENCE

1.1. Language, memory, and identity in design

According to Ferreira and Orrico (2002), we use language and other socially constructed systems of signification to forge meanings and representations that give meaning to life and our existence. In this study, as already mentioned, the importance of understanding design and surface design as an instrument for a type of language, for communication, is highlighted. In the words of Ferreira and Orrico (2002):

It is through language that human cultures are constructed, that is, the narratives and discourses that guide our actions are constructed (...) Language presents itself as the privileged locus for studies that seek to investigate how narratives and identities that emerge from it are constructed and how memories that connect the past and present of social groups and that will guide relations with the future are constructed (Ferreira, Orrico, 2002, pp. 8-9).

Ferreira and Orrico (2002) treat the concepts of memory and identity as bridges between the past, present, and future. For them, it is through language and its manifestation, in everyday verbal or imagery discourses, that we build our references that support memories and that make us recognize ourselves as members of a given social group. Language represents and preserves memory, and it is responsible for bringing people together around a group.

Rosa Júnior and Santos (2012) add to the discussion about the memory of the issue of historical valorization and, in their research, affirm that places of memory "are defined as remnants of the practices and representations of a collectivity that is maintained through historical revaluation, since these practices and representations are no longer natural" (p. 38) and, therefore, are essential for these traditions not to be forgotten and, finally, to die. The authors reinforce the importance of memory for the preservation of history and collective traditions.

Another concept dear to this study is that of identity. On the subject, the Italian designer Dijon de Moraes (2010, p. 9) points out an important paradox: the idea of identity can be used both to denote singularity, originality, and authenticity, as well as to reinforce feelings of belonging to a group or territory.

The author also notes that identity in design is inherently linked to the concept of complexity. According to Moraes (2010), to design well, taking into account identity, it is necessary to think about the entire design process, from the selection of raw materials and production techniques - "which bring with them the dimension of the territory" - (p. 9), through the designer's own experiences, with all their cultural repertoire and characteristics, to the user, the final customer/public, with their lifestyle and consumption choices.

1.2. Identity, culture, and creative differentiation in design

In her research on national identity printed in the prints created by the Brazilian textile industry between the 1950s and 1970s, Luz Garcia Neira (2012) concludes that there was not a single plastic solution that summarized and characterized a "national style" per se, in the textile prints of the studied period. According to Neira (2012), it was not possible to use "adjectives similar to distinct fabrics", since the creators belonged to groups with different experiences, references, and interests:

Therefore, the different plastic solutions probably resulted from the use of references to Brazilianness and different signification processes, presented by artists, designers, or craftsmen according to their motivations. From their point of view, they were all trying to approach our identity. (Neira, 2012, p. 224)

However, according to the author, there was a genuine attempt to approach Brazilian identity and, in some way, each of the creators represented it, based on their relationship with the national and international market, but also and, mainly, according to their point of view.

Considering the current market, Ortiz (2018 cited by Alves, 2018) states that the approach to local characteristics does not have to be antagonistic to the global. On the contrary, they can be interconnected, as the singular and unique raise the status of the product since these are characteristics that are highly sought after by consumers.

According to Moraes (2010), in times of globalization, countries have equivalent production capacity, with the same access to raw materials and technologies, and for this reason, national productions would be increasingly similar. The solution proposed by the author for the creation of truly genuine products would be to draw on national/regional sources and valorize local territories and cultures.

Cardoso and Centeno (2012), in the same vein, defend that, given the new market rules, it is necessary to think about a new local representation, which necessarily involves the issue of identity and cultural formation, although they admit that, facing such diverse and heterogeneous groups, translating all these elements and information into an identity is not a simple task.

According to Li Zhang and Fei Hu (2019), traditional culture has been considered an important part of sustainable social and economic development. As a result, products with cultural character are gaining more attention. The study also points out that using regional culture as an inspirational element for the creation of creative products has proven to be a very effective way for the long-term development of regional culture and that this process would reinforce the sense of belonging and pride of the people in the represented region.

Another example of research that points in the same direction is that of He, Lyu and Chen (2019), who highlight the importance of creating an emotional connection between objects and people and suggest that ethnic and regional culture is a fundamental element in this process. For them, successful cultural and creative products based on regional culture carry the past and point to the future, using traditional characteristics, but they emphasize the importance of presenting the projects with a new appearance, in a contemporary way.

Viale (2018) states that there has always been a search for differentiation and that, increasingly, this search has made some consumers feel the need to establish identity links in products, with "creative concepts, symbolic messages, and historical values" that stand out in the face of the numerous variety of other items and gain visibility "by adding new judgments, identities, and meanings, becoming differentiated". (p. 17). In this context, surface design is fundamental in the process of valuing objects and projects, granting cultural product status.

For Alves (2018), fashion is an important field, where the individual seeks representation and belonging to a certain culture, such as the idea of nationality, regionalism, or simply belonging to a certain group, also through consumption. Fashion is configured as a space of mediation between individuals, social, and cultural groups and, therefore, composes cultural identity and expression.

According to Cardoso and Centeno (2012), both design and fashion are relatively recent fields of production, and the search for regional and national identity still has a vast field of experimentation. They argue that brands and designers such as Farm, Osklen, Ronaldo Fraga, Lino Villaventura, and Isabela Capeto, among others, appropriate this discourse in a more contemporary and less caricatured way.

In the words of Cardoso and Centeno (2012):

The creation of a past and the construction of a narrative are the guarantees of future projection. In this exercise of remembering and forgetting, imagining and projecting, the nation ends up constituting a story that is told and updated permanently (...) Over time, it was realized that to build, it was necessary, first, to deconstruct or, perhaps, forget. Only then, Brazilian themes inspired by music, literature, banditry, the slums, and religiosity began to be researched in depth and then became a reference for creation. (Cardoso, Centeno, 2012, p. 43)

For the authors, fashion and design have proven to be effective stages for constructing identities, and mediating between market, culture, and consumption. According to Cardoso and Centeno (2012), thinking about identity in contemporary design is "transcending the myth-generating concept of Brazilian-ness..." (p. 54) and creating space for new and surprising experiences.

1.3. Visual reading in surface design

According to designer and professor Donis A. Dondis (2003), the intellectual ability to create and understand visual messages is a result of training. The author also emphasizes that this type of "literacy" is increasingly important for those working or intending to work with communication and images.

Motivated by similar goals, several authors have developed research and created methods of visual reading that can be used in studies on this subject. For this article, the model of image analysis created by Joly (1994) was used, which has been applied and adapted by Santos (2020) with good results in research on visual reading in surface design.

According to Santos (2020), the first step in analyzing visual images is to describe the literal visual elements of the design, which can provide important insights for the overall analysis. After this initial step, the analysis proceeds to other levels proposed by Joly (1994) based on three axes of visual messages: plastic, iconic, and linguistic. According to this method of analysis, a complete understanding of the meaning of the image is achieved after studying these categories of messages separately and then their interaction.

According to Joly (1994), adapted by Santos (2020), the plastic message refers to the visual elements perceived in the image/print, regardless of the function they perform. It includes characteristics such as the forms, composition, colors, textures, and scale of the elements that make it up.

Regarding the analysis of the iconic axis, according to the authors, it is necessary to understand the sign in three dimensions: the figurative element of the print; the object that is the reference of the created image; and the meanings that these elements bring. These are levels of reading and perception of meanings that can be achieved through the signs chosen in the composition.

According to Joly (1994), it is necessary to take into consideration what is not chosen for representation in the analysis of the choices made. According to her, significant choices relate to what is prioritized to show and what is preferred not to address.

The linguistic axis refers to the analysis of the message based on a verbal text about the communication of the image. According to Joly (1994), it can function in two ways: as an anchor, to define which interpretive path to follow, considering other possible imagery

interpretations; or as a substitute, when the communication of the image is not sufficient to convey the intended message.

Santos (2020) highlights that, in the case of prints, verbal texts are not always present in the image. In these cases, she proposes the analysis of the names of the print, the collection, and/or supporting texts used by the brands.

After this phase of analysis, the general synthesis of meanings is carried out to verify whether the messages are consistent, reinforce interpretive paths, or are conflicting concerning the initially proposed communication, in the theme of the collection.

To summarize, in this text, the authors discuss the importance of visual literacy in the field of surface design and present a method of analysis developed by Joly (1994) and adapted by Santos (2020) for studying the visual messages in prints. This method involves three axes of visual analysis: plastic, iconic, and linguistic, and is used in a case study of Amazonian-themed prints from the collection "O coração é o Norte" (2018) by the Brazilian brand Farm Rio. The focus of the analysis in this study was on the representation of Amazonian cultural identity in the prints.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this research was a case study of two projects featuring Amazonian-themed prints. The analysis of the prints was conducted using the method proposed by Joly (1994). The case study focused on prints from the FARM Rio collection (2018), which were created using Amazonian themes. This Brazilian brand was chosen due to its relevance in the market for over thirty years, its discourse on Brazilian identity, and the frequent use of Amazonian references in print collections. In the specific case of the studied collection, the name itself, "O coração é o Norte" (The Heart is the North), reinforces the brand's intention to use the region as a "guiding force" in creation.

In terms of methodology, for this research, two printed pieces from this collection were selected for analysis. The selection was based on the chosen references for the creation of the prints: one based on Amazonian nature and the other inspired by the vernacular typography of the letter openers in the represented region, i.e. a cultural manifestation.

Since there is no reference to the name of each print, these will be cited numerically, in increasing order, as they are mentioned in the work. The analysis, therefore, begins with print 1, on the theme of flora and fauna. Next, attention is given to print 2, created from vernacular typography.

The model used for the analysis of the prints was proposed by Joly (1994) and adapted by Santos (2020). This model studies the way of producing meanings of the images and elements of the prints, how they produce meanings, and possibilities of interpretation, at different levels, which is very coherent with the objective of the work.

3. RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY: O CORAÇÃO É O NORTE COLLECTION

3.1. Print created from Amazon nature references

Print 1 is presented in Figures 1 and 2, the print is applied to a shirt from the collection. From the print, one can infer leaves of the species known popularly as Adam's rib, bunches of bananas, and the representation of a toucan. The elements are of medium size, which does not hinder their identification on the garment. This version of the print has a light background, in a rosé color, and the contrast and identification of the elements are facilitated by the dark outline of the drawings.



Figure 1 and 2. Promotional material from the O coração é o Norte collection. Farm, 2018 Sources: <https://www.facebook.com/adorofarm/photos/a.331580433524403/2071566889525740>.

From the point of view of the plastic message, this is a case of a print with figurative elements, where the representation immediately directs towards the image that originated the drawing, although with more stylized motives. The drawings have a black outline, which makes them seem less "real" and closer to the cartoon style, young and fun, as can be seen in the joke with the beak of the toucan, yellow with black spots, imitating the banana peel.

There is a simulation of light and shadow, with the use of distinct tones of the same color or the deliberate use of another unconventional color for the element, such as the purplish blue in part of a leaf. These unexpected points of color also bring more youthful aspects to the stamps.

It is a full-composition, full-coverage stamp, with overlaps, but with some "breaks", with spacing between one or another motif. The composition and proportion of the elements give a dynamic rhythm to the stamp, making the eye quickly scan the piece to understand the entirety of the stamp. The repetition of the module is not obvious, which makes it clear that it was designed on a medium to large scale.

For this version of the print, the colors from the color palette presented in Figure 3 were used:



Figure3. The color palette of print 1

In this pink background, elements that take up a significant portion of the piece give a feeling of color, primarily light tones but with touches of stronger colors such as orange and purplish blue, and black present in the contours, in the toucan's feathers and spots on the banana and the bird's beak. The colors chosen for this print reinforce the message of joy, freshness, expansiveness, and wit.

In terms of the characteristics of the figurative elements of the print, its direct references, and meanings resulting from these, it has what Joly (1994) characterizes as iconic messages. Therefore, in print 1, one can see the representation of bunches of bananas, a typical fruit of tropical countries, which has been used several times in allusion to national identity, although it has Asian origins. It can be associated with food, heat, maturity, and abundance; the costela-de-adão, a plant native to Mexico, is found in places of tropical temperature and is often used as an ornament, including in representations. It can denote nature, tropicality, environment, luck, hope, long life, beauty, and ornamentation; the toucan is a bird found in the Amazon, but also in various tropical climates. They can be associated with nature, flight, freedom, tropicality, agility, creativity, and communication.

In the analyzed print, where there is no verbal language in its composition, linguistic communication takes place from the collection's name. In this case, specifically, the message is given with characteristics of substitution, in which it adds implicit meaning to the images, based on the communicative intention of the brand with a collection about Amazon.

After the analysis phase of the three axes of messages, we move on to a general synthesis of comparison of the meanings present in the visual elements of the print. Print 1, created under references the Amazonian nature and part of the collection "O Coração é o Norte," by Farm Rio, reinforces messages of joy, playfulness, and freedom, present in the choice of colors, the style and strokes of the drawings, the arrangement and scale chosen for the elements. It is also possible to recognize messages related to nature, the environment, Brazilian identity, and tropicality, in the choice of banana, costela-de-adão, and toucan, three elements that are very recurrent in national representations.

Predominate the messages of Brazilian identity, joy, and spirituality, which are consistent with the profile of the brand and its consumers. However, as the objective of this analysis is to identify whether the visual message of the print is consistent to depict the Amazon, or a part of it, as indicated by the collection's name, this is not the case, as there is a representation of nature, with elements that refer to tropical forest, but do not necessarily depict peculiar Amazonian aspects.

3.2. The stamp was created from cultural manifestation references: the vernacular typography of the region.

In the specific case of this line of typographic stamps, the brand contacted the Paraense design office, Mapinguari Design, from the partners Fernanda Martins and Sâmia Batista. The

designers act as teachers and in classroom and research, as well as the Letras que Flutuam project, with the boat lettering of Belém, since 2004. Among the participants of the project, a local artist created an alphabet with characteristics of vernacular typography, used in boat paintings, inspired by the typography of the 19th century and very present in the region. The project maps the lettering of boats, in various riverine municipalities, in the regions of Santarém, Marajó, Belém, and Salgado, in the state of Pará. www.letrasqflutuam.com.br. From the created alphabet, the brand's design team composed the stamp collection, as can be seen in Figures 4 and 5.



Figures 4 and 5. Stamp 2 was created for the collection "The Heart is the North". Farm, 2018.
(Font: <https://www.facebook.com/adorofarm/photos/a.331580433524403/2071567122859050>, 2018).

The print chosen for this study presents a simulation of jaguar skin, which features a pattern known as animal print, in the background, with the overlay of the word "Amazon", composed of the alphabet created by the opener of letters of the region depicted. The application of the verbal text is centralized at the top of the back of the piece, with a slight arching of the types.

Following the principles of Joly (1994), from the perspective of the plastic message, the simulated texture of leopard skin is perceived in a repeated pattern throughout the entire printed surface of the piece, using repeating modules of the pattern in a harmonious way that goes unnoticed to the eyes of a non-expert.

Regarding the animal print pattern, there is the application of the pattern with the verbal text "Amazon" in a localized way, at the top of the back of the piece. It is called localized because it is designed to be positioned in a specific location by the design team. The texture has a handcrafted appearance, with layers, which contrasts with the smooth and flat appearance of the background. The overall or repeated background pattern is presented on a smaller scale than the localized pattern, creating contrast in sizes and, therefore, depth in the overall pattern. The verbal text is in the foreground.

The typography, as previously mentioned, is based on the vernacular typography of the letter openers from Pará, which in turn, dates to the tradition of 19th-century paintings. The letters have decorative embellishments and are divided in half, with chamfers, points, and fringes, where each part is colored with a different color and a projected shadow acts as both a contour and background, which makes it easier to read the verbal text on the animal print pattern and follows the same logic of color division. The type also maintains the handcrafted appearance of the original alphabet.

The colors of the leopard print were like those found in the animal represented, and other colors were added, such as off-white, mustard, and turquoise blue, adding more vibrant tones to the composition. The chosen color palette is shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6. The color palette of print 2.

Regarding this classification of image message, the leopard spots and texture can be listed, which evoke the wild animal, but also strength, energy, claw, courage, speed, cunning, perseverance, freedom, and nature.

The typeface created specifically for this collection are letters of the Latin alphabet, and its style and characteristics, proper of vernacular typeface, date back to manual craftsmanship, to something made by human hand, and on another level of reading, to personal, intimate, unique and rare, as well as to tradition, origin, and history.

In this pattern, about linguistic communication, the message of verbal language is given both from the collection name "O coração é o Norte" and the verbal text present in its composition, with the word "Amazônia". In this case, both function as anchor messages, which establish the visual reading of the image in a concept, as classified by Joly (1994). In the case studied, the intended message originally by the brand, is about the North and the Amazon, the theme of the collection.

From reading the levels of understanding of the three axes of messages proposed by Joly (1994), we move on to a synthesis of the meanings expressed by the pattern. It can be seen, in the analysis of the constitutive elements of pattern 2, under cultural references of the Northern region of the country, the concepts of tradition, present in the choice of the starting point of the central element of the line of patterns, the vernacular types present in the represented location. This tradition coexists harmoniously with contemporaneity, expressed in the color palette. There is a combination of classic and sober colors of the animal print and more fluorescent tones, mustard, and turquoise. In addition, the craftsmanship of creating the letters, indicative of the presence and intervention of a human, next to the wild animal's fur, denotes the harmony between nature and humans.

In this pattern, messages that refer to nature, human beings, and the customs of the Amazon region predominate, showing that the image discourse is consistent with that proposed by the campaign and collection "The Heart is the North," with references to the Amazon.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research confirms authors who point to surface design as a privileged communication tool, as it is the "coating" and therefore the first point of contact between the public and the project. In addition, it reaffirms its potential to function as a "trigger" of memory and identity, capable of exciting, educating, and even persuading people around an idea or concept.

Understanding these issues and working consciously, planning, and strategically, to support the proposed message in the design and prints is a task of great importance for the development of more genuine design and fashion projects, which make more sense, sensitize, and mobilize those who consume and those who are portrayed.

This work followed the case study methodology, comparing two prints created for the same collection, The Heart is the North, from 2018, by the brand Farm Rio. To do so, the image analysis model proposed by Joly (1994) and adapted to surface design by Santos (2020) was used. This model proved to be quite efficient, as it allowed for a systematic investigation of the meanings of the constitutive elements of the prints, separated by the plastic, iconic, and linguistic axes, analyzed separately and then together, to find a synthesis, and finally, to analyze the communication of the prints about the representation of the Amazonian culture.

It's important to note that the analysis was not done in technical terms of print creation, or critical terms of quality. All the prints presented have the undeniable quality standard of the Farm brand, which has been operating in the national market for more than 20 years and recently started catering to the international market. Similarly, the brand's branding or marketing actions are not contested, but the purpose of this analysis was to investigate the representation of the identity and culture of a region in surface design.

In this sense, from reading the prints analyzed under the criteria of Joly's model (1994), it was noticed a greater communicational coherence between prints and the expressed goal of Amazonian cultural representation in the case of print 2. Although there are painted jaguars and vernacular typographies with references to the 19th century in other locations, this line of typographic prints comes from a construction that involves people who live and know the region, telling their own story, which makes the imagery discourse consistent with the communicational purpose proposed with the collection: highlighting the peculiarities of the North, the stories of the Amazon.

This conclusion points to future investigations, to better understand the role of involving people with experiences and experiences on the portrayed theme, such as the participation of the artist and letter opener of the region, to generate deep and expressive stories of the Amazonian culture and identity, bringing information and curiosities specific of the region, what can revive and help in the preservation of memory and local customs, contributing that they don't die, but gain new perspectives, new garments, and reach more people and new generations.

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