

THE VALUE OF DESIGN RESEARCH

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REDe: Rhapsody of Entrepreneurship and Design

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ABSTRACT

REDe: Rhapsody of Entrepreneurship and Design is a research project aiming at legitimizing the notion of rhapsody as an interpretation of an interpretation (Plato cit in Méridier, 1931). As design methodology, rhapsody shapes a new rationality for designing material culture, taking as reference the individual, ultimate recipient of the designed product. We aim to contribute towards an innovative design, more than problem-solving or a solely solution-oriented process, devoid of dialogue with the problem. The hypothesis of rhapsody as design methodology ultimately recognizes the designer as a rhapsodist (interpreter) of the liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). However, if the designer as a rhapsodist should know how to recite and to interpret reality critically, this research aims to understand how designers avoid attempts to mimic society (Barthes, 1957). We therefore advocate the designer should also act in reality as an entrepreneur. Our study aims to distinguish the entrepreneurial activity in connection to design, towards a model to build future Design Schools. This study is based on connections between design and music. These disciplines share similar learning methodologies, as learning by doing. They also share a common terminology, as composition, structure, or harmony. Designers as rhapsodists of their reality are agents of sustainable change. They contribute towards the competitiveness of a geographic region through rhapsody methodology, symbiotic technologies and hybrid language. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to a dialectical and cross-disciplinary thinking, including the entrepreneurial universe in the scope of the project, conceptual and operative system for design.

Keywords: rhapsody as design methodology, connections between design and music, entrepreneurship

1 INTRODUCTION

In Ancient Greece there were two different personas dedicated to conveying the truth, using language according to the audience/viewer and the context. The hermeneus critically interpreted Homer and other poets (Bleicher, 1980), conveying the words given by the gods to tell human beings (Gadamer, 2006), and the rhapsodist, travelling bards who stitched verses and recited in public festivals, markets and theatres from city to city. They performed the poetry, transmitted orally by travelling poets who had the creativity to be able to sing thousands of lines and dozen of stories of different poets, especially Homer. These men crossed the poems that were being designed by the poets with their performative skill, blunting a creative oriented process. As Sarah Price states (2004) "rather, the Homeric poems are oral because they were composed at the

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same time as they were orally performed.”¹ In this process, all actors - rhapsodes, poets and their reality – transmuted into each other, the rhapsode being an active and participant element.

Different authors as Roland Barthes (1957) argue that for Plato, a hermeneus was an interpreter who could recite as the rhapsodist; however, he interpreted critically, willingly ruling out any mimesis with society. It seems Rhapsodists, on the other hand, explained a subject by connecting it to something else. In fact, “rhapsodists were often called tailors or ‘stitchers’ of pieces of poetry.” (Salvini cit in AA VV, 1830: 1927). This article addresses the rhapsodist approach due to the similarities with design methodological approach. Actually, the relationship established by the rhapsodist with his reality appears as an action in which both are changed by such connection, triggering creativity and eventually sustainability and competitiveness.

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2 RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 RHAPSODY, DESIGN & MUSIC: COMBINED

The need to create variations when performing, reciting a poem or retelling a story, brings rhapsodists close to musicians. For the twentieth century Hellenic scholar and philologist Giovanni Tarditi, rhapsodists resemble musicians because “rhapsodists were singers who joined thoughts one after the other, placing them in a row (...)” (Tarditi, 1998).

This is paramount for design pedagogy using rhapsody as creative method. It includes time, space and causality as factors to be considered during project development, in an open process. If as design method rhapsody is an interpretation of an interpretation, and a rhapsodist as a musician is a designer, it is substantial to identify possible connections between design and music, to understand how rhapsody may be a design methodology. Design and music are subject matters with similar rationale, for instance, regarding importance of knowing how to structure a project. On the one hand, one of the elements these two subjects share is the methodological grounding of the educational process, namely through learning-by-doing. On the other hand, design and music are both based on terminology, as they both explore composition and the search for harmony and structure. They also share operating on a linguistic basis, since both yield investigation conducing to language renewal. Music and design teaching also share the need to follow hybrid paths and metissage. Variations and updates inform the ability to tell a story and trump the story itself. This is also the case of modern avant-garde movements. According to Tarditi, it all comes down to choosing “(...) the contribution of the parties in setting up a recital.” (Tarditi, 1998).

Rhapsody is an alternative to the traditional product-oriented project. It fosters an open path, intersecting time, space, and the randomness that define reality: “A free-style composition usually in one movement, often on folk melodies.” (Harnsberger, 1996: 50). One of the authors who popularized rhapsody in music was George Gershwin. He considered for instance that noise was music.

¹ http://www.yale.edu/heyzeus/spring2004/zeus_sarah_price.pdf, accessed on 14/10/2014.

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Figure 1 –Excerpt from rhapsody by George Gershwin. Source: <http://www.di-arezzo.co.uk/> accessed 14710/2014.

As for the rhapsody, it “(...) exposed the possibility of large-scale achievements by a talented composer using a popular language, and simultaneously, the serious limitations of a conventional ‘symphonic’ style as vehicle for this sort of musical speech” (Cooper, 1974).

However, the hermetic and product-oriented structure that qualifies the academic world seems to prevent the rhapsody method from being applied in teaching and research projects. “Rhapsodic practice is hardly conceivable within the existing academic structure of disciplines that are strictly detached from each other, favoring specialized compartmentalized knowledge instead of cross-disciplinary questioning and dialogue.” (Statkiewicz, 2009).

This article aims to advocate the opposite, considering that design can only act if transformation is interpreted as synonym of reality. A reality in which designer and reality transform each other. Hence, as a rhapsodist, the designer applies an all-inclusive methodology, with no hierarchy, advancing and receding, in tune with time, space and randomness. This attitude also applies to the business world, since “(...) it seems increasingly inappropriate the simplified concept of the company as a single entity, part of a system that is a combination of several simple elements. What is now envisioned is a system-company with the complexity of internal dynamics and external dynamics of the environmental in which it operates (...)” (Ingaramo, 2006). This is the setting for project REDE, rhapsody between entrepreneurship and design.

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2.2 RHAPSODY AS DESIGN METHOD

Rhapsody as design method can be understood as an interpretation of an interpretation. Concerning the rhapsodist and the transmission of poetry and truth, in his work "Ion", Plato conceives a dialogue between Ion (a professional rhapsodist) and Socrates². Considering that a rhapsodist performs works from other poets and that a poet is an interpreter of the gods, Socrates convinces Ion that a rhapsodist is an interpreter of an interpreter. The designer as a rhapsodist interprets an interpretation, since he is oriented towards how to perform a story, rather than towards the story in itself, and always changing the subject.

This connection to design benefits from connecting the notion of rhapsody and Walter Benjamin's reasoning (1936). His action was based on knowing how to tell a story rather than on a story per se. For Walter Benjamin, storytelling was a non-literary and very ancient cultural practice of oral transmission. Definitely this resembles the rhapsody culture. According to Walter Benjamin, writing allowed intelligence storage in a more compact and definitive fashion than auditory memory.

Subsequently, he emphasized writing as a means to relieve individual memory and to externalize memory. Oral transmission depends on memory, which is fleeting, but also on writing and changing communication media, allowing change and correction of what was previously established. The same happens with rhapsody. According to Philippe Simay, "(...) the cognitive capacities of memory are limited and inevitably give way to oblivion, deformation, but also innovation." (Simay, 2005: 139). This interpretation of the individual's relationship with his context implies a notion of tradition that finds in the past an overtly accepted legacy, openly allowing appropriation of signs onto the present.

In design, the interpretation of historical tradition depends on the ability of the designer to establish connections to reality. It depends on his ability to dispose of the historical narrative, placing himself in the universe. As Walter Benjamin argued "a story does not aim to convey an event per se, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds the event in the life of the story-teller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. I thus bear the trace of the story-teller, much the way an earthen vessel bears the trace of the potter's hand." (Benjamin, 2003: 316).

The proposition to face tradition discontinuously as a form of transmission and reception from the past may translate into Walter Benjamin's views on fragmenting history and stories. Performances that establish a different relationship with the past through interpretation, such as rhapsodies breaking up with traditional proposals, "What remains to be done is to establish a different relationship with the past, to find how it can be transmitted without lapsing into the pitfall of a normative continuity." (Simay, 2005: 143). For design, the 'story-teller' method is the rhapsody of a story prioritizing the act of telling in detriment of the story's actual content.

² <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/ion.html>, accessed 20.10.2014.

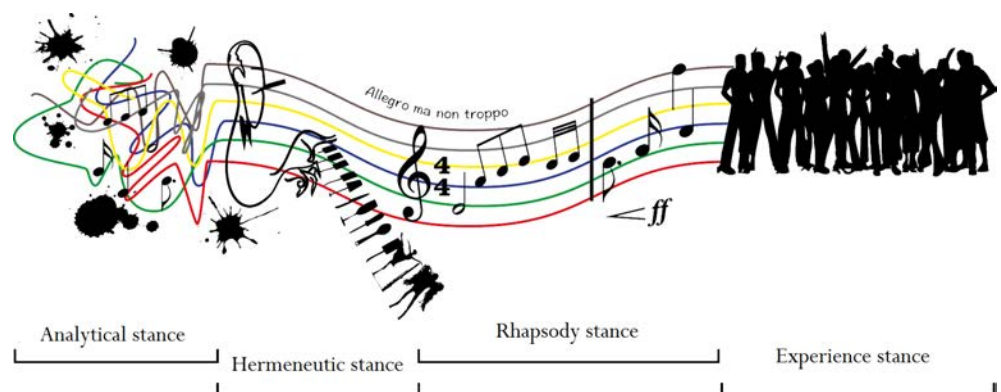


Figure 2 –Rhapsody as design method. Source: Image from the authors.

3 PARTICIPANTS AND METHOD

The purpose of this study is to develop and legitimize creative processes, enhancing product involvement in the territory and also the construction of new product typologies for new markets. Pedagogically, design students are expected to reach two goals. Students are expected to learn to design, questioning certainties and promoting connections with other actors from the reality in which they operate. On the other hand, the future designer is expected to learn to build bridges towards possible partnerships regarding products that benefit design in a prospected market.

3.1 METHOD AND CREATIVITY: FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Minho region is located in the North of Portugal. Most businesses are family owned small or microbusinesses, employing 10 people or less. They operate mostly in the secondary and primary sector, and mainly in the municipalities of Monção and Melgaço.

Predominantly artisanal, main trades include carpentry, cooperage, whitesmithing, lighting fixtures, weaving, pottery, pyrotechnics, ironworking, ceramics, decorative pottery, stone statuary, woodworking, regional embroidery, weaving, lace-making, fishing nets making, cordage, tapestry and basketry³. Such diversity of trades could be interpreted as translating the cultural complexity of the region, namely, fostering connections among different social actors of the region. current reality defies the continuous articulation of local responses able to challenge the global market. According to Ampelio Bucci: "(...) it appears strategic to bet on products with their own identity and that also allow the individual to express his own identity." (Bucci, 2003).

The Product Design course is held at the city of Viana do Castelo, in the Minho region. Methodologically, it offers learning/research exercises that intertwine the project culture and the handmade tradition. This has had a positive impact both

³ <http://gib.cm-viana-castelo.pt/documentos/20080521135344.pdf> (accessed January 29, 2013).

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upon design teaching and upon local manufactures, allowing the survival and sustainability of ancient trades and crafts, carriers of the Minho region identity.

3.2 PROPOSITIONS FOR RHAPSODY DESIGN

The REDe project, rhapsody between entrepreneurship and design, is a protocol established between the Academy – the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (IPVC) - and local businesses, especially the Association of Parents and Friends of the Mentally Handicapped - APPACDM. This project aims to create products with a clear and obvious semantic connection to their reference territory, undertaking project scopes that draw opportunities for product marketing. Since this project has an entrepreneurial aspect, and that the involved are senior students, the partnership with APPACDM is intended to connect projects and favor partnerships, aiming at future designers' business prospects. For this purpose we analyzed the relationship between the two main players:

- Geographical proximity: the IPVC Product Design course has 6 schools in different areas: Viana do Castelo, Ponte de Lima, Valença and Melgaço. The APPACDM has branches in Viana do Castelo, Ponte de Lima, Valença, Melgaço and Ponte da Barca. This provides a geographic connection between the two.
- Learning goals: students learn in a metissage environment based on rhapsody, learning at school and at the APPACDM handicraft workshops.
- Methodology: Students become professionals who envision the design process as a system combining different elements.



Figure 3 –Minho region and common areas between Faculty and Enterprises. Source: Image by the authors.

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4 RESULTS

The students worked in teams of three elements, exploring the culture of Viana do Castelo and Ponte de Lima, and Ponte da Barca, Valença and Melgaço. Students were free to develop any sort of product systems, except objects with electronic components, vehicles (of any type or locomotion); physical spaces (static or ephemeral); furniture, ironmongery, faucets, watches, and any other products that don't allow prototyping.

These project limits assured the student would materialize and mingle with the enterprises. Although departing from a common analytical foundation, the projects were oriented towards generating different solutions. Hence, with the same rationale, the project REDe would provide many possible configurations in order to meet the individual taste of the final consumer, promoting a greater and more diversified supply, leveraging new alternative markets. The project development was based on a craft-design alliance, bringing different actors together. Initially, the process involved students, teachers, and the APPACDM company (artisans and mentally disabled).

AGRADECIMENTOS



Figure 4 –Poster with companies involved in REDe project. Source: student Jacinta Silva.

Throughout the project, students were stimulated to seek other companies, using rhapsody as method. These connections caused discussions, models, advances and setbacks. The students' proposals were presented to the public. 40 students were divided in 13 teams, all sharing the main scope and partner, but developing proposals for individual typologies. "[Problems] must be built from materials from problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. To switch a problematic situation into a problem, the project-maker must make a certain kind of work" (Schön, 1983).

Initially, the facilities of APPACDM in Ponte da Barca and Ponte de Lima were visited. This moment was vital since it was the first contact between students and artisans. The next stage was research, with fieldwork, collection of data and

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analysis. Throughout the process, depending on the working group's interpretation, it was necessary to revisit the production sites. In some cases, projects demanded other materials, other techniques, other partners or other artisans, causing new partners to join the project. Among these new contacts stand out crafts such as linen embroidery or leather crafting, based on geographic proximity. The work proposals were presented in Viana do Castelo. Students, representatives from APPACDM, and entrepreneurs, attended this meeting. There were 33 companies involved, along with 41 artisans and the support of a Municipal Council.

5 REDE CASE STUDY

5.1 PROJECT "RUFO" (TAMBOUR), VIANA DO CASTELO

This project was developed by the student Patricia Maduro, using Viana do Castelo as reference for the design project.

The handbag produced represents one of the main events in the municipality of Viana do Castelo, the Pilgrimage of Our Lady of Agony. Among the several activities and moments of this Pilgrimage, the tambours were chosen as symbols due to their significance for locals and visitors.

Tradition was conveyed to a modern suitcase, joining two opposites, the masculine connotation of the drum, as instrument that is played only by men, with the feminine connotation of the handbag for women.



Figure 5 – Project "Rufo". Tambours of Viana do Castelo. Left side image: Festival of Our Lady of Agony in Viana do Castelo (<http://www.cm-viana-castelo.pt/pt/festas-da-sr-da-agonia>. e <http://olharvianadocastelo.blogspot.pt/>). Right side image: bag by student Patricia Maduro.

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5.2 PROJECT "NOBLESSE PRODIGE": PONTE DE LIMA

The "Noblesse Prodiges" project was developed by the student Roberto Alves, using Ponte de Lima as reference for the design project. The Noblesse Prodiges bench is intended to suggest the natural richness of Ponte de Lima and its green spaces.

Its production includes specific values that were conveyed onto the chosen raw materials, aiming at sustainability and simplicity, based on abundant resources. When closed, this bench takes the form of a tree.

Noblesse Prodiges performs differently and as a rhapsode, retelling the story of the natural surroundings of Ponte de Lima, particularly the Manor House of Calheiros (Paço de Calheiros).



Figure 6 –Project 'Noblesse Prodiges'. Left side: Manor House of Calheiros in Ponte de Lima ([http://www.solaresdeportugal.pt/PT/.](http://www.solaresdeportugal.pt/PT/)) Right side: bench by student Roberto Alves.

5.3 PROJECT "EL LAGARTO": MELGAÇO

The project "El Lagarto" (the lizard) was developed by the student Carlos Almeida using Melgaço as a reference for the design project. The "Lagarto" product is packed with symbolism and history.

With this object, the purchaser does not take home a simple souvenir, but a product able to tell a story of a place through music, a story-telling device. "El Lagarto" tells differently, as a rhapsode, the traditional tale of the lizard from Lamas de Mouro, in Melgaço.

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Figure 7 – Project “Lagarto”. Left: traditional tale of the lizard of Lamas de Mouro, in Melgaço. (<http://acer-pt.org/>). Right: instrument by student Carlos Almeida.

6 CONCLUSION

The project REDe – Rhapsody between Entrepreneurship and Design has demonstrated that the Academy should use a modus operandi in which the subject matters intersect, favoring a cross-disciplinary research instead of a compartmentalized knowledge, detached from the actual context.

The choice of the rhapsody as project methodology allowed students to mingle with the community and local businesses. This prompted them to perform as themselves, as social agents and as entrepreneurs of their own reality.

For design teaching, this experience allowed showing that a learning process through experimental and empirical work allows students to experience the potential of satisfactory hypotheses while propositions of a design that transforms with reality.

For design discipline, this craft-design alliance allowed the industry to develop, since the project REDe connected companies that did not know each other, becoming project partners since this contact. Also, the result of this collaboration between the faculty and the business world showed that local businesses that imports knowledge from other activities may become a source to export for new languages for new markets. Creating semi-industrial products, by the Academy and the local companies, is meaningful for both. On the one hand, the Academy develops research for the companies that cannot afford to invest in innovation. On the other hand, companies share new knowledge, bearing change and identifying the designer as vital for their development.

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Finally, this article identified that designers, as rhapsodes of their reality, are agents of sustainable change and contribute to the competitiveness of a geographic region through a hermeneutic methodology (rhapsody), symbiotic technologies and hybrid languages. This study contributes to establish design as a discipline with a dialectical and interdisciplinary thinking that includes the business world. This contemporary way of interpreting the project is supported by change and is the representation of the current reality and the right to an identity.

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