The Local Dimension in Design Products During a Pandemic Time: Reflection on Intra-territories

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Abstract. What new aesthetic and world-perceiving ways are emerging in this pandemic period? And how do they impact design practice? We propose a brief and open reflection on the changes that have occurred in product design. We reviewed some initiative in which the production was already related to a place and a surrounding landscape. Aiming at developing this reflection, we share some thoughts and questions. Therefore, this essay is a theoretical discussion from this time of movement restriction. Methods include literature review in the fields of social sciences, geography, and design. We carried out a narrative review and we also share case studies, based on documentation and analysis of recent design products. Through the case studies, we can identify paths in the production related to the changes that occurred due to new work dynamics, with special focus on authorial design. We introduce the concept of "intra-territory" and propose to consider meanings of contemporary design praxis.

Keywords: Design products · Territories · Pandemic influence on design

1 Introduction

Our reflection begins with some questions. Their purpose is to open dialogues. We are less interested in the answers and more in questioning. We want to discuss how the pandemic has affected and will affect ways of thinking and designing. We chose to focus on auto-raised products, those with a strong relationship with the origin territory.

Our method was a literature review in the fields of social sciences, geography, and design. We performed a narrative review, as defined by Cordeiro et al. (2007). We also included case studies (Meirinhos and Osório 2010). The selected cases present a brief clipping that allows us to visualize concepts and thoughts. They also register some of recent design production. We selected the ones that are related to the pandemic moment and the changes that occurred due to new production and work dynamics.

> The silent city was no more than an assemblage of huge, inert cubes, between which only the mute effigies of great men, carapaced in bronze, with their blank stone or metal faces, conjured up a sorry semblance of what the man had been. In lifeless squares and avenues these tawdry idols lorded it under the lowering

sky; stolid monsters that might have personified the rule of immobility imposed on us, or, anyhow, its final aspect, that of a defunct city in which plague, stone, and darkness had effectively silenced every voice.

Excerpt from the book A Plague, by Albert Camus, 1947. (Camus 1960:84)

The world described in Camus' book happened in 2020. It lasts until now. Activities were suspended, the months were ruled by another time and #stay at home and away from others# was what could be done. The ones that could stay, stayed inside. We learned to filter the agenda, to move away from the world dispersion, and to do what was necessary to be safe. Meetings were punctual, with distance and protective barriers. Virtual meetings' invitations became common: people and dialogue reduced to small squares.

We learned to recognize the surrounding environment. We looked with other eyes at our existing and lived intimacy. We mapped the whole house, reviewed our nest. We moved furniture around, adapted living rooms and bedrooms. We greened every corner with countless plants and home gardens. We wanted to bring nature closer, inside. Our contact with the outside world was limited to windows, to the views that we had from home. Territories that were once close, have become distant, intangible.

Considering this context, we share some questions: Which new aesthetic and world-perceiving is emerging? What does a displaced look, caused by this pandemic time, allow us to see differently from before?

Let us begin reflecting with Vilém Flusser:

Habit is like a cotton blanket. It covers up all the sharp edges, and it dampens all noises. It is unaesthetic (from *aisthesthai* = perception), because it prevents bits of information from being perceived, as edges or noises. Because habit screens perceptions, because it *anaesthitizes*, it is considered comfortable. As comfy. Habit makes everything nice and quiet. Every comfortable surrounding is pretty, and this prettiness is one of the sources of love of the fatherland. (Which, indeed, confuses prettiness with beauty.) If the cotton blanket of habit is pulled back, one discovers things. Everything becomes unusual, monstrous, in the true sense of the word unsettling. To understand this, it is quite enough to look at one's right hand with all its finger movements from the perspective of a Martian: an octopus-like monstrosity. The Greeks called this "discovering" of the covered-up *aletheia*, a word that we translate as "truth". (Flusser 1984:2)

We "exiled ourselves" at home. At the same time, the city revealed itself as a foreigner. Flusser also said that we could feel like exiled in our own country. He seemed to refer to the fact that we must refuse to get used to uninhabitable situations, such as politic ones. The exiles, in this sense, refers to whom want to break vicious cycles of society and want to see beyond the conditions that an oppressive context imposes.

But lets us bring back the moment we live currently: it is fundamental to think about the pandemic broadly. There are several prisms: the frightening numbers of dead; the feeling of deep social sadness; the psychological disturbances that arise as an effect of fear; its consequences in the way people interact and inhabit cities; the uncertainty about future socioeconomical stability; the unacceptable financial and social imbalance that

opens up like an abyss between people who have economic security and those who do not. Or even between those who have access to the internet and can continue to study or work from home, and those who do not have this option.

There were so many changes underway and more to come. Other questions arise: How has the pandemic changed our view and our actions? How did the confinement influence our future production? Or even the way we design and create things? What are the essential items that we want to have? What is the influence of the pandemic on our material and immaterial culture?

2 The Pandemic and "Intra-territorialization"

The compulsory distance and isolation offered us a chance to think about our visions of the world and reality. It is a chance to think on what is going one in the present, how we arrived here and how we proceed. We are living a new present, based on the complex changes in the way of living, communicating, relating, and collaborating. As well as the changes noted in designing, the way we express and built things are also changing. Our relationship with objects have been transformed. We can now imagine other possibilities. As Krenak said (2020):

> There are new questions for the world that we will have to deal with from now on. We are living in this time of total imprecision. A time where art [or design] is the most potent and most likely place to constitute new answers. (...) Art as a possibility to create new worlds, [to] invent worlds for us to exist.

In the book 'Is there a world to come? In an essay on fears and ends', Castro and Danowski claim that the worst of all worlds does not exist. "There is only one best possible world: ours" (2014:61). These authors inspired us. We highlight the importance of creating objects and spaces where imagination and diversity are welcomed. Or, even better, that welcomes us all in ours diversities.

We reviewed some references about places, spaces, and territories. We studied Norberg-Schulz (1980), Holanda (1995), Haesbaert (1999), Santos (2000), Crapanzano (2003), Massey (2008), Ingold (2010), and Cançado (2019). The theme was also investigated by the authors, Krucken (2009, 2017, 2021) and Paoliello (2016a). We can consider a territory as a space to design together with the territory itself. To understand the inter-related dynamics of doing design in a diffuse perspective is a great challenge.

Paoliello (2016b) proposes consider territory into three dimensions:

– as a perception or everyday way of life;
– as memory or remembrance; and
– as a material dimension of things that happen there.

Artifacts are a regional record or a historical narrative or technique. But they are not restricted to them. The products are also based on experience and on the relationship between those who made them and of those who will use them (Paoliello and Machado 2018).

The landscape is impacted by the designing act and, for that, it is necessary to look carefully. We must take some time to observe it with discretion. That way, we learn to decode the beauty that everyday places hide. We renew the surrounding territory. Or, as Cançado (2019:16) wrote when quoting Robert MacFarlane, we can "force yourself to look deeper". We must go deeper into the space recognition. This way, we will embrace its histories, qualities, communities, materials and intangible heritage. We must also develop our ability to see everyone that is involved in the territorial production.

As Freire explained to us:

> it is not enough to know how to read mechanically that 'Eva saw the grape'. It is necessary to understand what position Eva occupies in her social context. Or who works to produce grapes and who profits from this work. (Freire 1991:74)

We understand the concept of territory, as explained by Haesbaert (1999): it is not only a mediator of power relations (political and economic); it composes each person of a social group. Massey (2008) explained it as a space of processes. The one built by the insertion of people and their interrelationships. We see the territory as an infinite possibility of encounters and disagreements.

These concepts contain the term multiterritoriality. It is an answer to the idea of an immaterial, spaceless, globalized, cosmopolitan, and cybernetic life. As if we were able to live without territory. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1995) would say that (as Brazilians) "we were exiled in our own land". Is that even possible? Wouldn't we be able to always build new lands or new spatial relations? To embrace other territories? In the pandemic case of the objects' production, which were the territories involved?

Let us introduce the term intra-territoriality. Intra is in the sense of being inside, at home, with a window to outside landscape. It names this configuration of a 'controlled' space. The one that we have been experiencing in the last year. For some, it is the outline defined by their house and its interior. For others, it extends to some external areas. The path to the supermarket, pharmacy, or other nearby open spaces which were used in the hygiene tours. It is a boundary territory, internal, personal, and closed in a specific context. At the same time, for many people who work using the internet, it virtually opens to the world.

If the world was without borders, today it is limited to our homes. We confined. We internalized. We delimited the invisible and physical boundaries between our personal world and the outside. For Crapanzano (2003:14), today every place is a frontier, that is, an edge or limit that cannot be crossed. We are in a finite territory. We live in a state of emergency that suspended our comings and goings, our being in the city. It brought us to the inside.

We also approached the definition "the territory is the basis of work, residence, material, and spiritual exchanges and life, which it influences" (Santos 2000:96). We incorporated our home into the territory. We took on our private and domestic world,

the one that Cearteu *et al*. (1998:145) described as "where basic gestures of ways of operating are deployed and repeated from day to day".

Which are the forces that we recognize in the intra-territory? Which are capable of activating the designers' actions? What are the results of this being-place-doing integration? And how did they materialize in the last year?

The concept of *terroir* refers to the interaction between territory, resources, and products. The new production should reflect the limits described above. It will emerge from the new and complex relationships between our intra environment and its ecological, social, and economic elements.

3   Re-imagining Ways to Do It

If you can look, see. If you can see, observe.

In Blindness, by Saramago (2015)

We have observed that a more artisanal design has been emerging in some contexts. It is a production that explores tacit knowledge and intimate perceptions. Imaginative creation has also been used to expand the existing limit and spatial discontinuity. It created new arrangements. We explored the space in which we lingered, the sensitive dimension of our houses. It was a haven. But it also became dynamic, changeable, and adapted to new needs and ways of living. For many people, the outside world had become almost a fantasy. One that we accessed through the memory of an unrestrained, virus-free life. They dreamed of a post-pandemic world. Imagination and memory transported us to others symbolic spaces. "Imagination effects, filters, and shapes our perception of life" (Silva 2006: 55). It helps us to imagine other ways to do things.

According to Haesbaert and Limonad (2007:39), a "man is born with a territory". In the pandemic scenario, the objects were born from the consciousness of our indoor space. A territory appropriate from everyday life lived in every minute inside our homes. These new artifacts were products of the intra-territorial experience. They were the appropriation of this time.

The idea of globalization referred to the image of sociocultural and spatial homogenization. The idea of an intra-territory presents the opposite, a personalized, referenced local space. From the square of our house windows, we now see the world. We observe it with a distance and imagine another world. We went through a process of territorial reconstruction and rediscovered relationships. It is through our houses that the bonds of involvement occur. It is where we create spatial links and place values.

How can we imagine and create other ways to dwell, and design objects and artifacts? How to collaborate with an imaginary, critical, poetic, and abstract collective construction about dwelling? The change emerges from insisting, questioning, dreaming, and experiencing other ways of being and living. We need actions that take us out of the sleep state; and that give us the courage to break previous cycles in search of strengthening the narratives to come.

From this domestication process, there is the opposite sentiment: we nurtured the desire to go out and live the city again. Isolation became a latent affliction for freedom. "Can we change [experiment] the world from our home/window/screen?" is the question that Linke (2020:22) asked and that many of us have also thought about. Dreams of a possible occupation portrayed in imagined maps. We want to extrapolate borders, inhabit other daily lives. While this was not possible, we invented other territories.

Could we travel without leaving home? In Haesbaert's (2001) multiterritoriality, there is a loosening of borders that become more permeable. In our intra-territoriality, canvas helped to break our borders. The internet provided a basis for the network territories with its countless social networks. We contacted places virtually. We exchanged experiences and the appropriation of other territories through the internet. And our inter-territoriality changed as a result of these encounters. We bought productions because their symbolic values, and they are made by distant hands. It was like an interchangeable process created by intersection and interculturality worlds that collapsed. The intra-territory manifested these relationships where personal daily life bumped into others. Mental and imaginary constructions collided to complete the qualities of different territories.

What are the design tools that will help us to visualize these new arrangements of living, working, and relating? How can we map other ways of living with distance? Or to cocreate a design project in different parts of the world? What are the mechanisms used in the management of time, resources, or in know-how exchange? How can we reveal ourselves to others?

We needed to invent tools and technologies that support the understanding and re-signification of distant relations, and devices that support us and allay our fears. Maybe this sad experience of a pandemic can foster transformations that help us recreate better territories and co-invent plural and diverse visions of the world?

How can our practice contribute to strengthening (and not weakening) and valuing diversity? How can we value subjectivities and plural histories?

4   Thinking with Objects

"Life is open-ended: its impulse is not to reach a terminus but to keep on going. The plant, the musician or the painter, in keeping going, 'hazards an improvisation'" (Ingold 2010:5, quoting Deleuze and Guattari 2004:343)

What are the objects created in this dense fog that we are going through? What are their characteristics, proposals, or visions? How did the year of 2020/21 influence our design process?

We have chosen some objects that (re)present the intra-territory concept. They recognize the existence of the limit experienced. They were born in the isolated space of the house. And they rethink this territory that they have lived exhaustively over a year. Some began and contributed to the invention of other places. Others came from abstract memories or told stories of a tomorrow. Some carried the information about the process of doing, about inspiration and origin. And finally, some translated a joint action built from a distance. They valued this new collective action and new technologies.

As states Ingold (2010: 10), "the artist – as also the artisan – is an itinerant, and his work is consubstantial with the trajectory of his or her own life. Moreover, the creativity of the work lies in the forward movement that gives rise to things." He completes this thought saying: "To read things 'forwards' entails a focus not on abduction but on improvisation (Ingold and Hallam 2007, apud Ingold 2010:10).

We have observed several objects over this time. For this first reflection, we selected the works of designers and artists Nicole Tomazi; Bernadette Martins; Paula Dib; Nara Guichon; Jayne Armstrong; and Domingos Tótora.

Nicole Tomazi classifies her work as territorial. She observes local tradition and uses it as a design tool. She produced her pieces together with Sérgio Cabral and Ian Diesendruck. It is the Cavaco Machê collection that references the hand rammed earth. It is a vernacular constructive system in which clay intertwines a wooden structure. During 8 months, they studied its possibilities. They invented a new material with lathe residue and wire (see Fig. 1). We can see the result in the 18 pieces of Condomínio Alado (see Fig. 2). It is a collection born from the knowledge transfer and exchange between the three designers. It comes from tradition incorporation and its fusion with an environmental issue. It reveals itself in an abstract and open form of the intimate cocoons.

Fig. 1. Cavaco Machê by Tomazi, Cabral, and Diesendruck. Source: the designers, 2020[1].

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[1] https://www.instagram.com/nicoletomazi/?hl=en.

Fig. 2. Condomínio Alado Collection by Tomazi, Cabral, and Diesendruck. Source: the designers, 2020.

In the inventing new worlds process, we bring the ceramist and designer Bernadette Martins. She applied the delicacy of the sea to her pieces. It is a collection that recreates corals, not only for the similar formal elements that trigger the vases, but for the existing texture that resembles sand (see Fig. 3). She brought the outdoors to our residential world and exposed us to her imaginary relationships.

Paula Dib develops an investigation related to the territory and her current work has been developed when she was living in the interior of São Paulo, Brazil. She started a distance collaborative production with the NGO Mulheres do Jequitinhonha that were based in Minas Gerais, another Brazilian state. They were miles away, but the internet had brought them together. The screen (through photos and video calls) brought worlds and voices together. The designer learned about the organic cotton planting process, harvesting, beating, and spinning without living her sofa. They experimented new pigments and achieved new colors to create other possibilities (see Fig. 4). Far and near, at the same time: inventing new spaces.

Fig. 3. Corals in Emerald and Rose Collection by Martins. Source: the author, 2020[2].

Another special initiative using similar techniques has been developed by designer Nara Guichon. Since 2020 she has been offering virtual course of natural dying, inviting the participants to identify and use local resources. Ecoprint, according to Guichon (2020), is a printing technique that makes use of fresh plants, "preferably of our surroundings", and some dry plants, which can be compressed and sewn into natural fiber fabrics, such as cotton, linen, silk, ramie, hemp, wool among others. The technique can be used for the creation of fashion, decoration and accessories products, without artificial chemical substances (Fig. 5). Guichon has also a second line of products, obtained from recycling fishing nets that were threw away in Florianópolis island, where she

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[2] https://bernadettemartins.com/portfolio/emerald-and-rose-corals.

Fig. 4. Virtual process for natural physical dyeing by Dib and the artisans from the NGO Mulheres do Jequitinhonha. Source: the designer, 2020[3].

lives. "Project clean waters" received many important prizes and is a great example of transforming residues in innovative raw material for new products.

The online workshop of ecoprint is also relevant because it fosters a collective and do-it-yourself practice of product ideation and development, which is strongly connected to the territory and its features.

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[3] https://www.instagram.com/pauladib/

Fig. 5. Ecoprint technique and results by Guichon. Source: the designer, 2020[4].

We also present the artisan designer Jayne Armstrong action-image work "Think, Feel and Sculpt with Fire" (See Fig. 6). It was a way that she found to express her contradictory feelings. She wanted to understand emotions that emerged from Covid-19. The fire was the tool used in exploring the space between presence and destruction. As in the moment we live, nothing in these objects could be pre-meditated or predetermined. From the fire also came the energy to continue, to change and renew.

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4 https://www.naraguichon.org.

Fig. 6. "Think, Feel and Sculpt with Fire" Collection by Armstrong. Source: the designer, 2020[5].

Following the design-craftsman proposal, we share a work by Domingos Tótora. From Minas Gerais (see Fig. 7), the artist envisioned new possibilities for using local and nearby resources and waste, working specially with discarded cardboard. After being crushed and mixed with water and glue, it became the material for his objects. Natural earth pigments dyed the mass and brought color and the surrounding humanity to his artifacts. He explored deconstructions, rearrangements, and textures (see Fig. 8).

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[5] https://www.instagram.com/jayne_againstthegrain/

Fig. 7. Landscapes surrounding Tótora's studio. Source: the author, 2020[6].

Fig. 8. Examples of Domingos Tótora's work. Source: the author, 2020.

5   Some Considerations

In times of pandemic, the house (and the space that defines itself) became the core reference. Several artifacts that surround us now have their meaning redrawn. They are in a new spatial relationship that we experienced in 2020/2021. Some elements had other meanings because we built a different and affective relationship with space and everyday objects.

The objects presented here identified paths in the production of an authorial design. They are intra-objects resulting from our learning to the new rules and behaviors, and also to the new daily routines and new ways of being intensively using our homes. These "object attempts" broke enclosures. If confinement established an inside presence, these objects brought intimacy.

Meanwhile, intra-objects were also the manifesto that we can be better together. They express the longing for encounters and contact with nature. They brought the outside to our domestic lives.

We should also include other issues in this reflection. Many people do not have the security of a home or live in complex situations. The confinement has aggravated a precarious situation. There is an urgent need to rethink the logic of the new production, use, commercialization, and product consumption. There are relevant examples of products designed to address pandemic constraints, but we will leave this discussion to another paper.

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[6] https://www.instagram.com/domingostotora/?hl=en,

In this essay, we wanted to share the concept of intra-territory and start a reflection. It's too early to see the echoes of the present time in design. Confinement, sanitary distance, and profound changes and uncertainties in daily life are still on going. Let's hope that it will also bring good transformations for all of us.

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