

# Cultural territories: textile constructions in the work of the stylist André Lima

O. Maneschky

*Federal University of Pará, Faculty of Visual Arts, FAV / UFPA, Brazil*

Y. Maia

*University of the Amazon, Center of Humanities and Social Sciences, CCHS, Brazil*

**ABSTRACT:** Among fabrics, embroidery and stamping, the designer André Lima transits between diverse cultural territories, in an anthropophagic movement, resulting in collections that feature a profusion of colors, textures and models, all of which were researched and created by him. This article aims to reflect on the concepts of culture, issues of cultural identity and complex processes in the construction of own fabrics of the stylist's work.

The stylist André Lima, born in Belém, Pará, Amazonia, Brazil, developed a fruitful creative process, establishing creative paths in which issues of identity, material culture and textile research gained unique space and projection in the Brazilian scenario, where the most varied techniques of composition and textile printing played a fundamental role. Rare artist, his first collection in a national fashion week took place in 1999, in the Casa de Criadores<sup>1</sup> project, São Paulo. Since this "first" collection, located in the "center" of Brazilian fashion, the stylist focused all the creative development using fabrics brought with him to São Paulo. His family had an intimate relationship with textiles, his father's fabric trade in the Amazonian interior of fine stores like Paris N'América<sup>2</sup>, as well as embroidery and brocades for various uses, and even for decoration.



Figure 1. Untitled, editorial made for André Lima at the Museum of Zoology of the University of São Paulo, photo: Orlando Maneschky, 19991.

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<sup>1</sup> Casa de Criadores and a fashion week held in the capital São Paulo dedicated to show the work of young stylist. In 1999, André Lima parades his own brand for the first time in this event. In 2007, the event celebrated 10 years of history and

<sup>2</sup> Built at the height of the Belle Époque with materials from Europe inspired by the Galeries Lafayette in Paris. Its outer shell with stones from Portugal, steel structure from Scotland, and tiles from Germany.

This universe, along with embroidered quilts by his grandmother, among other rarities of the time, were brought with him to São Paulo, as references

which ended up becoming the exhibited collection there by the designer. Wild, the characters of Lima, whose faces were covered by hair, first appeared with a mixed soundtrack with spoken words and music by the Brazilian singer Maria Bethânia, and with the tinkling of gypsy gold bracelets worn on the feet. They wore unique clothes, with embroidery, applications, etc. His creations had begun with hybrid cultural references, soon transformed into objects of desire and receiving a good critique.

For that matter, this article points to the relationships present in the work of the stylist between material culture, issues of cultural identity and complex processes in the construction of his own fabrics for his collections, as well as exclusive textile printings. Images of the history of art, ethnic photographs, divas of Brazilian popular music and aesthetic references of several decades feed the universe of André Lima. In addition, the stylist always, when traveling, acquires ethnic fabrics, as well as clothing from thrift shops for research and studies, observation of details, which also feeds his development of surface design in his unique constructions.

## 1 ANDRÉ LIMA: TEXTILES AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

On one hand, clothing is linked to the information possibilities that the object carries with it, to its aesthetic principles that guide the stylist's choice, its various uses, its materials, the confection techniques, its social relations, its history, and, on the other hand, they are visual trails that carry the moment of creation and the clues to the interconnections of this information with the sociocultural interactions that involve the creator.

According to Santos (2000, p. 135), "cultural identities are neither rigid nor even immutable. They are always transient and fleeting results of identification processes. (...) Identities are, therefore, identifications in progress." From this point of view, we can understand that a fashion collection carries both records storing the creator's time memory as it is traversed by other discourses and by a network of memories and identities constituted by the encounters that the stylist establishes in order to create new meanings for its projects.

If identity is a social construction and not a given, if it is within the scope of representation, this does not mean that it is an illusion that would depend on the subjectivity of the social agents. The construction of identity is done within social contexts that determine the position of agents and therefore guide their representations and their choices. (CUCHE, 2002, p. 182)

Thus, André Lima (2012) tells about the social and family context in which he was inserted. He says that he was a very curious child in relation to time, other worlds, other times. He would go to the library to research and discover, from a young age, cultural connections from one subject to another. He fiddled with his aunts' wardrobe. He watched his grandmother sew. He had an extreme curiosity since childhood.

There [at his house] had at the same time [the successful records of Brazilian Popular Music] the *Gal Tropical*, by Gal; *Alibi*, by Maria Bethânia; and *Alerta Geral*, Alcione. And we heard these songs. So obviously, listening to these women, who were the biggest expression of MPB, and then Fafa de Belém among so many there, as a soundtrack of course was already an edited mixtape. (...) I found Gal a solar person, and I as a child identified myself a lot. This record is what she is on the cover with flowers on her head, one red and one yellow, two roses. It's something that came in and then I used it in a parade, I used it at my first *Fashion Week*, then at the gypsy parade, then we used a flower made out of straw. This thing of the flower in the hair, surely comes from the Gal, and from the *Gal Tropical*. The record was the great moment of her career, in which she consecrated herself as a diva. She had costumes made by Guilherme Guimarães [successful Brazilian stylist between the 1960s and 1980s in Rio de Janeiro]. She was a star. I find this fundamental in my language. Exactly this clipping. Obviously parallel to this is the cut of Bethânia that is less image and more density and that was stronger, even because the immersing and identification were much deeper. The things she said, the things she believed. From a mystical relationship with things, a relationship with nature, half animal, half wild, which I then boarded. (LIMA, 2012)

We understand that identities are not capable of totalization or centralization in a single individual. It is in circulation with social assemblages and is assumed by individuals in their particular existences. Therefore, this type of cut, where cultural references are activated, materializes in the partnerships developed with special weaving, in which diverse materials are used in the weave of the fabrics.

more directed by the creator. Thus, unique fabrics appeared in his creations. As much in textile printing as in the applications, embroidery, knitting, etc., cultural references that are mixed as if their characters were sometimes beings of a lost tribe, and at others time a princess of a mystical world.



Figure 2. Untitled, Summer Collection 2002/2003 (fashion show photo), André Lima.

We can present, as an example, a summer collection of 2002/2003 (Figure 2), in which the designer worked with crochet weaves, fringes, metals, lace, feathers, mandalas, starting from reference images that punctuated the creation of the collection, in a visual relation between images and what is part of his identity construction, in this case, based on the reference of the singer Maria Bethânia and her relation with nature and mysticism (Figure 3, image of the book of the stylist with an illustration of Maria Bethânia), as well as images of the group Dry and Wet (lysergic band from the 1970s). Wings present in an engraving in which the singer is portrayed, result in fringes that guarantee the symbolic atmosphere evidenced by the styling developed for the fashion



Figure 2. Untitled, Summer Collection 2006/2007 (fashion show photo), André Lima.



Figure 1. Untitled, page 46, from the book Coleção Moda Brasileira André Lima, 2008.

Therefore, a significant part of the images that compose its collection, reveals the exuberant and hybrid nature of the Amazonian visuals, mixing cultures of this vast region. We can see these relationships in the 2006/07 Collection in which André Lima sought references in the Kuna Indians (Figure 4) – living in Colombia and Panama – with resigned geometric prints and construction of silhouettes that refer to the typical costumes of this culture.

This transit through different cultures leads us to realize that André Lima, in his creative process, works with one of the most important concepts to think Brazilian culture: Anthropophagy, as the curator Paulo Herkenhoff points out in the catalog text of the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo, of 1988, recognized, internationally, as one of the most important occurred in the country.

"Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts." Seven times the word "Roteiros" is repeated in Oswald de Andrade's "Cannibalist Manifesto". It is found between the paragraph "Against the reversible world and the objectified ideas" and "The carahiba instinct". "Scripts..." is a presence between the mechanics of "deadened" ideas and cannibalism, etymologically originated in Carahiba. Africa, Latin America, Asia, Canada and the United States, Europe, Oceania and the Middle East are our "Scripts...", defined without a single criterion, as a continent, economic bloc or regions. It is not an expanded species of allegories of the four continents, developed by European art of the seventeenth century. The plural noun "Scripts" connotes multiple points of view. (HERKENHOFF, 1998, p. 24).

In figure 4 we can see how Lima establishes this mechanics between the ideas of his visual researches, in anthropophagic process cannibalizing references, swallowing cultures; Transforms them, re-signifying them, into fabrics and modelings that transit through different repertoires, as in the example presented below, in which part of the Kuna universe is activated in their creations.

For the paraense stylist, there is no creation if it is not through desire, since looking at the world and separating what it likes is already a personal edition that starts from the creator filter. For him what matters is to put together things, mix cultural references, edit and feel the clipping that is there, but that mixes several references in the same collection.

Part of this "memory" stored by Lima is made of clothes, which for him are important for the mixture of times and places, and this materializes in clothing and images that there, in his studio, compose a fragment of fashion classics of the 20th century, as well as urban landscapes, everyday details, femininity, and his multiverse Amazon, in other words, affective cuts and their cultural identities guide the development of his projects.

It is important to understand the role of memory in the construction of other realities. According to Halbwachs (2006), individual memory is the result of a complexity of combinations, images, thoughts that come from the experience of various scenarios and that lead to a new particular order, in that sense the individual memory carries a collective memory.

In the research on these recollections of André Lima, we can begin to understand his passion for diffe-

rent cultures, strong women, for the profusion of references and colors, for the sensual female body.

In the 2006 winter collection, his research brings together Nepal, India, China, Africa and Brazil, in a profusion of references collected, translated into flowing silhouettes, such as princesses from distant times, who can inhabit the Forbidden City (Beijing). In addition to the images in the fabrics and textile printings, hair intertwines in delicate work, as we can see in the figure, in which braids are mixed with earrings that fall over the clothes.

Therefore, to develop a fashion collection is, above all, a manifestation of the desire to express itself through clothing, but that begins by looking at these open, interstitial and cultural spaces and discover new possibilities, and the individual view depends on the cultural identities that mould the creator, since they guide his visual choices.

The culture of a given social group is never its essence. It is a self-creation, a negotiation of meanings that occurs in the world system and which, as such, is not understandable without the analysis of the historical trajectory and the position of this group in the world system (SANTOS 2000, p. 148)



Figure 4. Untitled, winter 2006 (backstage photo), André Lima.

Santos (2000) helps us to understand fashion creations and dressing act as spaces of exchange, where clothing assume a mediating role in the construction of cultural identities between society, the stylist and those directly involved in the fashion industry, by interacting with cultures and each other through clothing.

André Lima and his collections go through an identity universe in metamorphosis, constituted within the space-time displacements of the stylist. Through his life narrative and his reflections on multiple cultures, we note details of these existential territories: his predilection for ethnic references, the 1970s and 1980s; a predilection for fashion classics, for Brazilian Popular Music divas, concern for the perfection of the textile finishing, experimentation in fabric, and extremes.

## 2 CONCLUSION

In 2014, with the massive arrival of international brands, which impaired the production of fabrics of various weavings, and the production costs of an item with rich details, the stylist decided to diversify his production, expanding his operation area, consulting and developing specific collections for other brands. In this context, Lima, based on invitations from renowned institutions, made a plan to distribute his *acquis* in several important collections, which are present in four Brazilian institutions: Anhembi Morumbi University (UAM), Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation (FAAP), Museum of Art of Rio (MAR) and Federal University of Pará (UFPA).

However, most of his collection of clothing and accessories of fashion shows, in addition to the documents of the creation process, clippings, photographs of fashion shows, etc., were integrated into the Amazonian Collection of Art of UFPA<sup>3</sup> in a section called Fashion. This collection is now in the Technical Reserve of Museology of UFPA. In the collection donated by André Lima, 775 objects have already been enrolled<sup>4</sup>: 237 pieces of clothing, 184 accessories, 220 paper documents, 78 drawings and 56 samples of fabric and textile printings.

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<sup>3</sup> The Amazonian Art Collection is the result of the research, articulation and perception of the curator Orlando Maneschy, of this delicate relationship between Amazon and Brazil, the Amazon and current art, the Amazon and the world. The *acquis* is deposited together with the contemporary collection of the UFPA Museum and brings together works by artists who traverse the region at different times, the Technical Reserve of Museology of UFPA brings together these works as well.

<sup>4</sup> Enrollment "is the act by which all objects belonging to the museum are counted, creating a numbered list to the control and general identification of the museum collection" (PADILHA, 2014, p.46)

When entering a museological space, other places and other meanings came to those objects and images: from the continuous and non-linear flow of a contemporary fashion studio, whose relation is from object-consumption to a signification in objects-documents belonging, now in a museological *acquis*.

Thus, we understand that this network formed by the imaginary, wearable and textile territories of the stylist are accomplices of his ways of being and doing; And they point to his processes of subjectivation, since they affected the creator's look and perception and traverse more or less his creation projects and clothing. Textile objects become objects to reflect and to signify, turning into a record of the collective and personal memory of the stylist.

We understand that "identities" are not capable of totalizing or centralizing the individual, since they engender, at each moment, new subjective processes. They circulate in social assemblages and are assumed by individuals in their particular existences. André Lima is a stylist of the superlatives, free imaginary transit, far from seeking fixed and shallow territories, the stylist seeks contrasts, investigations and experimentation, being taken by a wild force in his creative processes.

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