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# A Shirt: Domesticated Ingenuity

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## Abstract

A man's shirt, made during the mid 1950's, whose evidence of having existed is a family portrait is the trigger, in this very article, of observations about the ingenuity surrounding the daily and domestic production of those objects that result from and on the materiality of the common person history and, therefore, in the idea of the construction of thought in Design.

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*Index terms*— social history; design; fashion.

## 1 Introduction

When one speaks about Fashion, one reaches out to the fabulous, surrounding an impressive activity that is possible to document, made by great and eccentric creators that pursue creative processes that design intricate routes across the globe.

There is, also, another kind of Fashion that -for its simplicity and because it is so related to the daily life and the objectivity existent in just wearing clothes -is not even associated to the idea of fashionable. This daily construction of clothing artifacts is our point of interest to build this paper. We do mention this idea of Fashion that gets itself related to the concept of usage as the "constant and permanent habit that determines the behavior, the conduct, the way to be of a community, a social group" We define artifact, according to Coelho (2008), as the object produced by the human effort, brought to existence through a process that transforms idea into matter. In addition, according to the same author, the artifacts can be seen as "the most eloquent vestiges of our action as culture and species" (CALANCA, 2008, p.11), identifiable at a given time and place.

## 2 3

That is why we get ourselves close to this day-to-day Fashion usage and production, made out of products that speak of the History of societies and reinforce its role, defined by us in our thesis (BARBOSA RAMOS, 2019) as a dialogue area, a space where ideas" (COELHO, 2008, p. 22).

1 Translated by the Author 2 Translated by the Author 3 Translated by the Author are allowed to bloom and be discussed, just as the techniques and technologies surrounding the production of those things that are materialized in consequence of all of those factors, the product.

## 3 II.

### 4 Clothing as Artifacts

In our first paragraph, we mention the "document", that one thing that proves the truth of someone -researcher or journalist 4 So, we surround the history of common people, through their family pictures, taken by us as the valid registers of the artifacts. These registers evidentiate the quotidian solutions found, without the vigilance of the designer and that, yet, bring to the surface the profound knowledge of habits, desires and needs, both from users and target -that, a posteriori, feels like talking about the piece, artifact, collection, materials or technique. However, about those clothes seen as artifacts, the daily Fashion items, even though we may have abundance of records, they don't present the document qualities of the previous selection. 5 4 We nominate as journalists those who produce contents to newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs or videologs. We won't make any distinction on professional upbringing or vehicle of information. 5 User and target are treated by us as different players, and we will talk about it a little more later.

, besides the technical-technologic resources available at that moment and place in order to produce such range of artifacts.

45 Then, it is our starting point to discuss what is seen -or used to be seen -as ingenious and produced in the  
46 seclusion of the home.

### 47 5 ... a shirt.

48 There is an image that challenges me since I saw it conciously.

49 At first, I used to think, it was about understanding that my father, a fully grown up man since forever, once  
50 upon a time has been a boy. Wearing a bad hair cut, very thin, wide forehead, eyes narrowed because of the  
51 luminosity, a tear from the mouth that is neither serious nor smile, ears detached from the skull. Much like  
52 himself today. He was wearing short pants and a shirt. Doing some rough calculations, estimating age like that  
53 by a long way, we can say that the photo was taken in the mid-1950s. He was still a boy, it would still take a  
54 few years to be a teenager, a category that, at that time, was not even taken very seriously.

55 I only have a partial of this Picture. And this became something of importance, once I remember that I saw  
56 the whole of it, a real family portrait, at one of my older uncle's house.

57 In this Picture, you can identify my father and his Brothers. The five young men (my father's older brother is  
58 9 years older than him; father is the 5 th of nine children) wearing similar clothes. The shirt, my second source  
59 of amazement, was the same for all of them.

60 Of course, the size changed. As it used to be, the older ones probably were wearing undershirts. Again, it was  
61 the middle 1950's, and the only boys wandering around wearing white T-shirts and denim pants were Brando e  
62 Dean 6 , and those boys had no access to those movie pictures.

63 In the interior of the state of Espírito Santo, underwear would still remain under the clothes until those boys  
64 started to migrate to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as, in fact, it happened shortly afterwards. But those are  
65 the other stories. Let me show you the first picture: Now, on the second, I will count with the same kindness as  
66 the reader of ??arthes 7 6 Marlon Brando e James Dean. Actors that were from the United States of America,  
67 played the main characters of the movies "The Wild One" (1953) and "Rebel Without a Cause" (1955). 7 Roland  
68 Barthes (1915 -1980), French writer, sociologist, literary critic and philosopher. The piece we refer to is Camera  
69 lucida, originally published in Brazil in 1980.

70 he has with him when he describes, without showing us, the captured image of his mother as a young woman. I  
71 only count on you to believe me, and understand what is fascinating about these five shirts identical in materiality  
72 and manufacture, different only in scale.

### 73 6 III.

## 74 7 Domestic Ingenuity

75 These shirts were made by the same person, my grandmother.

76 Like the many Brazilian women born until approximately 1960, my grandmother (she was born in 1913) was  
77 trained in domestic trades, for which she would be responsible when, in due time, she would get married. In the  
78 meantime, she graduated as a teacher, an acceptable occupation for a girl, which she continued to exercise for  
79 many years, even after she was married.

80 My grandmother was not so fond of domesticities. I don't remember her involved with needlework. I must  
81 confess that what she did best in the kitchen was beans -and, certainly, that memory carries a huge touch of  
82 affection. The reality is that black beans, thick, beaten in a blender, tasted to me like vacation and it was neither  
83 good nor bad. It was just my grandmother's beans.

84 But, my grandmother sewed. And wrote letters. She never answered the letters we wrote, she wrote her  
85 own, with the subjects she wanted. She had a beautiful, precise, firm handwriting. A very honest text, without  
86 flourishes.

87 Just like the shirt worn by the boy that one day would be my father.

88 The shirt we see is made of plain fabric. Knitted fabrics were not yet popular in Espírito Santo, much less  
89 for use beyond what was more intimate, the so-called underwear or, white clothing. Namely, even though  
90 it operated in Brazil since the second half of the 19th century, the country's largest knitwear was Hering,  
91 headquartered in Blumenau -SC, and started to produce and sell white goods -shirts and underwearintensively  
92 and on a national scale only from the 1960s 8 In addition, sewing these pieces requires specific machinery .  
93 Therefore, it would still take a fair amount of years for them to have those pieces. 9 8 For more information:  
94 <https://www.ciahering.com.br/>, seen in November 26th, 2019, at 8:23 PM. 9 For example, overlock and coverstitch  
95 machinery.

96 , certainly no one had access to domestic production. Thus, everyone's clothing, for all uses, was produced in  
97 plain fabric, of greater or lesser quality, depending on the purpose and the family's possessions.

98 Continuing to observe the photograph, and I have done it many times, over the years, you don't see such a  
99 simple shirt. It is a garment made in many parts, with a cutout on the flap, which is double and the collar. The  
100 flap is pierced, creating a "V" neckline. What seems like a detail, an adornment, an aesthetic option, was what  
101 started to illuminate that point that always bothered me. Why would Joanna Maria choose that shirt to dress  
102 her boys?

103 Strictly speaking, plain fabrics are not elastic. Or at least they were not until the development and  
104 popularization of elastane 10 IV.

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## 105 8 Extrapolations

106 , in the 1970s. Thus, in order to better shape the body, one must consider cutouts and folds (called dents and  
107 pleats, used to build spaces that hold the organicity of human bodies and enable them to move more or less  
108 freely), and also openings and, therefore, the trims that, if necessary, will close them.

109 Thus, zippers, buttons, brackets and closing trims in all their variations come into the agenda.

110 Buttons. Six or seven for each shirt. At least five shirts. Nonsense. What are 30, 35 shirt buttons, in the  
111 interior of Espírito Santo, in the 1950s? Buttons that fall, that are lost, torn off. But we know that these are  
112 not just the buttons, because each boy needs to have more than one shirt -and their respective buttons.

113 Buttons that need to be bought in the "city", because there might be a haberdashery shop inside, but certainly  
114 not the hundreds of identical buttons that Joanna Maria would need.

115 The solution found, then, was not to use the buttons. And, to guarantee, by means of cuts and trespassing,  
116 that the garment could be dressed and undressed with ease. Thus, although she was probably not the author  
117 of the project, we found in that Joanna Maria the ability to make choices, manage a project and scale the grid  
118 and production, understanding above all consumer and user that, we observe in our professional practice as  
119 designers and project guiding teachers, sometimes it lacks to subjects with greater access to information and  
120 tools to execute their projects.

121 We differentiate here between user and target audience/consumer, since the user should wear piece as it was  
122 built, without much right of vote or veto on its realization. As for the second -the consumer -, it is the producer  
123 and caregiver of the piece, therefore, at the same time that he understands the user by his needs, it also has the  
124 experience of having to maintain the integrity of the garment and it is, in large part, the main goal that leads  
125 all it's choices. 10 About elastane, Felipe Guimarães, Design PhD student and whose research and professional  
126 performance is about Design and Textile Technology, informs that Elastane is a synthetic fiber based on segmented  
127 polyurethane, a chemical polymer, whose main characteristic is the high level of elasticity. Popularly known as  
128 Lycra (registered trademark) or Spandex, the fiber has properties similar to rubber, its main competitor, but  
129 has less durability. Researches for the development of Elastane began during World War II, when the supply  
130 of rubber was unavailable. The fiber was introduced by DuPont in 1959. (information provided by email, on  
131 February 27th, 2020).

132 We consider everything that circumscribes the making of this shirt, in addition to the result of the common  
133 practice of domestic clothing production, a reasonable illustration -in the sense that it is close to reason -of what  
134 Bonsiepe will call project humanism: "the exercise of design skills to interpret the needs of social groups and to  
135 develop viable, emancipatory proposals, in the form of instrumental artifacts and semiotic artifacts 11 V.

136 Final Thoughts " (2011, p. 21). Now, the person who produces and maintains the integrity of the pieces  
137 -in the case presented here, the same person -is emancipated from presumed later care and cost, because it is  
138 anticipated, at the moment simple change to the artifact is designed, still giving to it desirable attributes and  
139 meeting, if nothing else, the initial proposal.

140 We never cease to be surprised by what the attentive look during the act of designing can promote as  
141 improvements / innovation in what is produced, as a result of a process understood as from people, with people  
142 and for people (BARBOSA RAMOS, 2019).

143 The authors' experience, however, is about being in the place of those who design, or those who guide the  
144 processes of designing. For the present article, however, it was necessary to change the perspective: historically  
145 allocate it elsewhere.

146 When performing this movement, it was possible to read, from the image of an artifact, the contexts for its  
147 realization and, thus, to understand what some buttons, or rather, their absence, meant in terms of technical,  
148 aesthetic, technological, ergonomic solutions and economic and, in a way, choosing not to have them, ingeniously  
149 frees Joanna Maria It is also worth noting the Professor Felipe Guimarães valuable contribution, accepting to  
150 be an interlocutor and answer queries about textile technologies, as well as the history of the textile industry in  
151 Brazil, in addition to providing material on this subject, thus becoming a co-author of this article.



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Figure 1: Picture 1 :

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