

# Design In *and* From the Periphery: Building a Praxis *of* Resistance through Collective Investigations

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**Original Research Article**

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This article presents notes resulting from qualitative research with a participatory approach, carried out in person and remotely with a group of young people from the Terra Firme neighborhood, in Belém-Pará, northern Brazil. The aim was to analyze how the engagement of designers in emancipation processes managed by socially oppressed groups can promote transformations in the practices of designers in participatory projects. The theoretical foundation is based on the Latin American critical thinking of authors such as Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda, demonstrating how their legacy influenced designers in participatory projects. The theoretical framework and qualitative research allowed us to consider that the engagement of designers in popular struggles not only influences the change in the scope of projects, but also allows solidarity to emerge as their main element.

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**Keywords**

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Participatory research

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## **Design In and From the Periphery: Building a Praxis of Resistance through Collective Investigations**

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### **FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER: PRESENTING THE RESEARCH**

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Groups excluded from the hegemonic media have been building their narrative protagonism from the popularization of digital media, driven by access to social networks and the production and dissemination of artistic expressions by peripheral youth. As an example, I discuss the relationship developed between me—a designer and researcher—and a group of young people—known as Cine Club TF—to strengthen their capacity of self-affirmation through artistic languages. This protagonism is understood as a practice that problematizes reality and promotes dialogical interactions with different subjects.

Based on the young people's denouncement of the reality of oppression, I joined the group and participated in the promotion of collective actions to support the organization of their practices for confronting oppression. In the participatory research process, young people became co-researchers. Other collaboration experiences between vulnerable social groups and research designers are presented in the article. Then, the methodological aspects linked to Latin American critical thinking that promote the emergence of awareness of reality and solidarity as a design principle are demonstrated. These experiments were guided by the following questions: how can emancipation processes managed by socially oppressed groups influence transformations in designers' practices? How can the limiting situations experienced by marginalized groups be overcome through engaging designers? How can the design research space become a place where solidarity emerges?

Methodologically, the research sought not only to better understand the possibilities for transforming the relationship between designers and vulnerable groups, but also to generate spaces for dialogue between the young participants of the Cine Club TF collective; strengthen ties between coordinators and collective members; map the concrete needs of the group; identify themes that generate debates and critically analyze the themes; reflect on individual and collective responsibilities; and summarize the discoveries in a participatory manner. As a result, three arguments are presented, which can support the construction of a praxis of resistance based on the engagement of designers in the struggles of marginalized groups.

## TOGETHER AND APART: CONTEXTUALIZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

The massive use of devices with Internet access in Brazil has allowed the production and dissemination of artistic expressions by young people who live in areas excluded from urban projects in large cities (Brito et al., 2017). In Brazil, these areas are called ‘peripheries’ (Larrat, 2013), and have as a common trait the absence of essential public services to the population, such as sanitation, security, health, and other services.

In general, houses in these areas are small, and poorly built in areas such as the banks of rivers or hills. The absence of cultural spaces is also common, such as cinemas, art galleries, museums, and squares, which allow for meetings and exchanges between young people (Cavalcante, 2020). Thus, many of them fail to develop certain skills, and digital platforms are the outlet for their artistic expression (Brito et al., 2014). This is the case of a group of young people living in a marginalized neighborhood in the city of Belém, in northern Brazil. In 2018, around 400 young people from the outskirts of that city were able to go to the cinema at the shopping center to watch the movie ‘Black Panther’. For many of them, it was their first time to enter a luxury shopping location without being watched by security professionals, who usually discriminate poor and black teenagers. This visit was made possible thanks to a Facebook campaign carried out by a teacher at the school of these students (DOL, 2018), to raise funds and pay for their tickets.

In the teacher’s view, it was important that these young people discriminated due to their social situation could watch the film’s message of black empowerment and racial self-affirmation. The encouraging message was essential to compensate for the excessive violence suffered by them in their neighborhood. In the territory where they live, disputes between police and militias for control of drug trafficking result in armed confrontations. Death of innocent people is recurrent in many of these confrontations (Couto, 2017).



**Figure 4:** Young people from the Terra Firme neighborhood protesting against the extermination of peripheral youth (2018). Photograph: Harrison Lopes.

The youth group's trip to the cinema resulted in a series of meetings to discuss the film. Thus, the Cine Club TF project (TF is the abbreviation of Terra Firme, the name of the neighborhood) was born, in the garage of the teacher responsible for the fundraising campaign. The group met every week to discuss issues of marginalized youth from the periphery, after showing films with class, racial, and gender topics, and other social issues that affect their lives.

**Figure 2:** Weekly movie club set up in Professor Lilia's garage (2018). Source: Cine Club TF archive.



These meetings were also recorded by the young people through photographs, audio, and video. The first documentary produced by the Cine Club TF project was born from these records. The film 'It's Us for Us' portrays the young people's view of the reality of violence in the periphery, and denounces the stigmas spread by the hegemonic media about violence in the suburban areas of cities (Brito et al., 2017).

From then on, young people started to publicize the documentary in the neighborhood where they live, in places considered as dangerous by the media. The intention was to occupy these spaces with cultural activities. In addition to showing the film, the group started to hold cultural soirées, coordinated by six members, which included poetry recitation, dance presentations, drawing

and photography exhibitions, and workshops for children in the neighborhood, directly impacting an average of 50 young people, and many neighborhood residents indirectly. Thus, the streets of Terra Firme began to be occupied with art, culture, and leisure, ceasing to be a mere space for displacement and becoming a strong point of socialization among residents, mediated by the production of these young people, as protagonists of their narratives (Gouvêa & Miranda, 2021). For Albán Achinte (2007), the act of creating assumes the function of reaffirming the existence of those who have been deprived of their identities, and of resisting erasure. In this way, the creative act allows engendering liberations as to thinking, being, knowing, understanding, and living, generating spaces of re-existence, and building connections between people, causes, struggles, territories, and identities.



**Figure 3:** Public screening of the documentary 'It's Us for Us' in the Terra Firme neighborhood. Source: Cine Club TF archive.

In 2019, I was in Rio de Janeiro completing my Ph.D. credits, and I was invited by friends to watch the documentary 'It's Us for Us'. There, I got to know better the teacher who promoted cultural activities with the young people, Lilia Melo. Responding to her invitation, I became part of the project as a designer and academic researcher: like Professor Lilia, I am also from Belém, and I am a professor at the Faculty of Visual Arts at the Federal University of Pará. I intended to collaborate with the group's organization processes as soon as I returned to Belém, after completing the doctoral credits. In 2020, we were surprised by the coronavirus pandemic, and the continuity of academic research was compromised. In this way, the professor, the young people from Cine Club TF, and I were looking for ways to stay connected even remotely. That's how we decided to write proposals for cultural projects seeking sponsorship. The funds raised were used for various initiatives, such as new documentary films, graffiti painting at strategic points in the neighborhood, online artistic presentations, and remote workshops. Therefore, the artistic expressions of young people were not interrupted by mandatory social isolation (G1 PA, 2021).

**Figure 4:** Some of the cultural initiatives carried out by the group (2020/2024). Source: Cine Club TF archive.



After two years of social isolation, and with most of the Brazilian population vaccinated, it was possible to meet with young people in person. In resuming my academic research, due to my relationship with young people having strengthened despite the distance, my investigation became participatory research (Brandão, 1981). The goal was to analyze the reality of the project after the pandemic period, including some latent issues, such as communication problems, the entry of new members and the departure of others, and the autonomy of the six young coordinators in cultural actions, among other demands. In that context, the research was developed as a collective learning process, based on the knowledge we acquired in our remote coexistence.

The theoretical-methodological support for the investigations carried out with the collective was based on the legacy of Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda, who developed libertarian research processes, such as Cultural Circles and Participatory Action-Research. Both processes feed the methods known as participatory research. Based on these references, we converted academic research into a libertarian project experience. In the following lines, I present the theoretical framework that supported the processes of participatory investigation and the application of the methodology known as participatory research with young people from Cine Club TF.

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#### **LATIN AMERICAN CRITICAL THINKING IN THE RESEARCH OF OPPRESSION**

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In design, the project space can be converted into an investigative process mediated by participatory and emancipatory approaches, which lead the group to carry

out a reading of the concrete reality, aiming at the collective perception of the oppressions that limit them in their capacities. This premise is inspired by the thinking of pedagogue Paulo Freire (1981) and sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1981).

For Freire (1981), the reality is composed of the researcher's perception of the data and facts associated with an apparent problem, added to the perception of the population involved, which, in a libertarian research process, becomes a co-researcher. Fals Borda (1981), in turn, sought to recognize the knowledge produced autonomously by popular groups in their relationship with reality. For him, this knowledge also has a scientific character: it is science produced by the people and for the people, surpassing the hegemony of classical science in the construction of knowledge.

The reading of concrete reality highlighted by Freire, and the recognition of a science of popular character pointed out by Fals Borda, are based on research of a dialogic nature. In many aspects, these conceptions are convergent and share the intention of transforming reality, advancing over the oppressions established by the mechanisms of domination of the capitalist system (Bringel & Maldonado, 2016). In the dialogical interactions proposed by these lines of research, the researcher-object dichotomy is overcome, and all subjects investigate reality and critically analyze it, culminating in the proposal of paths to liberation (Neto, 2020, p. 325).

Motivated by the need to understand the limitations faced by the group, we applied an investigation inspired by alternative methods of problematizing the conditions of oppression that these young people experience. For Dalaqua (2020), an oppressive world is one where people have their humanity stolen through the loss of freedom, emphasizing aspects of social hierarchization, epistemic injustice, aesthetic injustice, and subjection to arbitrary power. In this context, research is understood as a collective process of building knowledge and transforming reality, using participatory research as a method. For Adams and Streck (2020), participatory research can be understood as the dialectical unity between practice and theory, whose exercise determines interactions that both enrich and stimulate the production of new knowledge. According to the authors, the shared practice of research has been demonstrated in historical processes of 'epistemological reconstruction' from the South.

The methodological body of participatory research emerged in Brazil and Latin America between the 1960s and 1980s, "amid social modernization processes, and inserted in the context of social and educational planning micro-processes" (Gajardo, 1986, p. 11), including a variety of initiatives aimed at strengthening popular sectors in their processes of organization, mobilization, and social participation. This spectrum includes community development actions, adult education, improvement of health systems, organization of cultural



sectors, trade unions, and the transformation of traditional education systems. This exercise allowed the generation of means to critically question reality and seek ways in which the popular sectors could reach and build historically denied spaces of protagonism.

Participatory research approaches respond to practical and collective questions, becoming a means of knowledge of social issues to be worked on collectively. Participatory research has an educational vocation and is politically formative. Its dialogical and pedagogical instruments provide shared learning. This type of research envisions the constitution of broader and more continuous processes of knowledge construction, closely linked to the origins of popular knowledge, seeking to strengthen popular movements and their members, and aiming at community action (Brandão & Borges, 2007).

This theoretical and practical framework developed along with popular movements has inspired participatory perspectives in design for decades (Ehn, 1988). In the next section, I present some of the theoretical elaborations of designers who have been problematizing hegemonic practices in the field of design through engagement in the struggles of vulnerable groups.

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### **APPLYING LATIN AMERICAN CRITICAL THINKING IN DESIGN PRACTICE**

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When a designer works in a collective context, issues arise that go beyond the solution of specific problems (Serpa et al., 2020) which are supposedly solved by creating a new product or service. The solution of personal needs through consumption is the vocation of most design investigations, and even of some research with an academic vocation. These surveys often generate data for public or private organizations, deeming 'users' as data sources. In this context, participants in participatory design processes seek to have their immediate needs met, and designers investigate design opportunities that may arise from these encounters. On the other hand, designers who work within realities where inequalities are shocking have conceived original perceptions about the autonomy of project agents. Their work is based on the philosophical and epistemological construction of authors whose objects of investigation were the struggles of popular movements against the capitalist appropriation of life.

This is the case of Leal et al. (2021), who defend the narrative protagonism of groups excluded from the hegemonic media. These groups have been using digital technologies to influence society's perception of Colombian ex-combatants, by strengthening the social capital of these groups. This social capital is enriched with exchanges and collective actions carried out by agents internal or external to the community, and through the expansion of their networks beyond the former guerrilla groups. The reconnection with family members of

former combatants is also an important factor contributing to changing the perception of these groups as well as their interactions in social networks. The autonomous use of digital tools has contributed to remarkable transformations inside and outside these territories.

Another conception of autonomous design practice has been developed by Ibarra (2021, p. 334), who proposes a ‘feel-thinking design’. Inspired by the thinking of Orlando Fals Borda and the neologism *sentipensar* (feel + think), Ibarra proposes an exercise to reflect on the way that design that aims to overcome the dichotomies established by Euromodernity, such as mind/body, subject/object, reason/emotion, and nature/culture, would look like. For Ibarra, a feel-thinking design develops its practices through non-rationalist perspectives, allowing an opening to sensitive aspects, based on worldviews originating in the territories that constitute Latin America today. In this respect, ‘feel-thinking design’ is established from a decolonial vocation, as it questions the methods of the Global North. Ibarra has been trying to experiment with ways of ‘feeling and thinking’ in design, adopting the concept as a philosophy of life, in addition to a research methodology, as defended by Colombian scholar Orlando Fals Borda.

Mazzarotto (2020) refers to the project that incorporates the methodological and philosophical principles of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire as emancipatory. He borrows his concept of culture and compares its philosophical underpinnings and methods of uncovering concrete reality to participatory approaches to design. He concludes that emancipatory design is carried out in a dialogical, horizontal, and collaborative way, and its results are not designed *for* people, but *with* people, in favor of the liberation of all those involved. As design is the result of the ability to transform reality to satisfy human needs, the author proposes other ways of looking at the field, in addition to interpretations that link it only to the aesthetic and commercial nature of products and processes.

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### **READING OPPRESSIONS THROUGH DESIGN-MEDIATED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH**

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From the existential transformations experienced during the pandemic, and inspired by insurgent visions of research and design work, my doctoral research was radically transformed. When I finally realized that it made no sense to analyze the organizational and communicational relationships and processes of the group of young people without inviting them to do the same, I became, as a researcher, a participant, and the young people became co-researchers. We met again at the school where the Cine Club TF project was created to conduct participatory research. In March 2022, we put the investigation into practice on the current situation of the youth collective, their main challenges, and the future they envision for the group based on their artistic activism.



**Figure 5:** Brand of the Cine Club TF project. Source: Cine Club TF archive.

We started the research through a ‘thematic investigation’, in a participatory way, counting with six coordinators of work groups linked to the artistic languages of the collective (audiovisual, visual arts, literature, music, dance, and theater), in addition to the general coordinators (teacher Lilia), the person in charge of communications (Keila) and the producer (Kleidiane). Freire (2005) teaches that the investigation of generative themes is a fundamental instrument to conduct collective problematization. As a resource to open space for dialogue, I proposed everyone to analyze the project’s logo, which was created by the group when the project was officialized (2018).

Logos are codes constructed to emanate a speech (Cardoso, 2013). According to Freire (2005), the reading of a coded message begins with its description, and then becomes more complex with its problematization. In this way, the dialogue about the elements that inspired the creation of the logo became a decoding process, inspired by Freire’s awareness methodology (2005). Decoding facilitates the survey of generating themes, through the reading of a code (visual, sound, tactile) initially abstract and later concrete, allowing the group to express their thoughts and opinions on the reality that surrounds them.

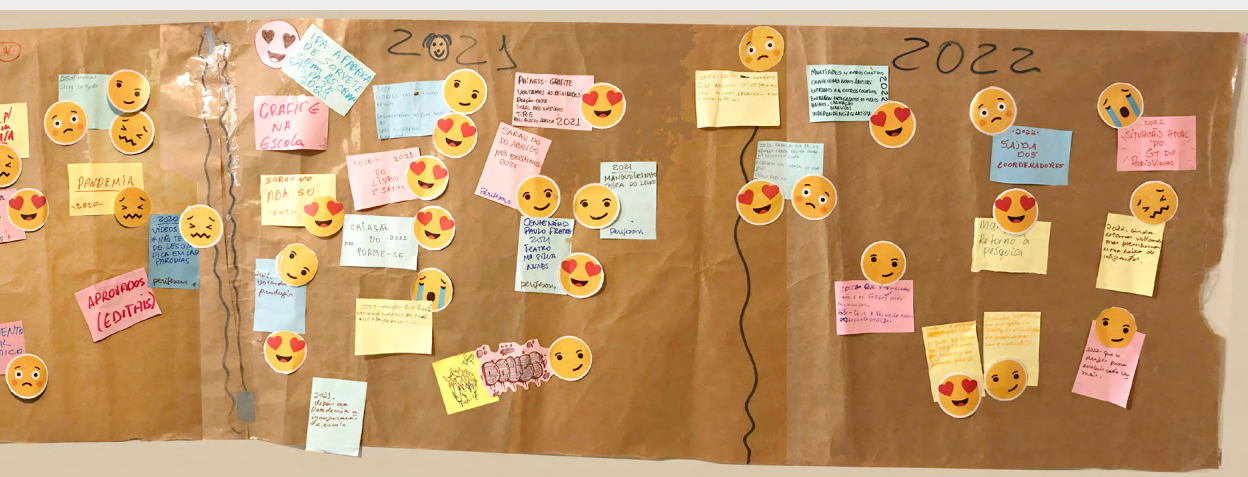
When I asked the co-researchers if that graphic composition represented them, testimonies related to the origin of the project emerged. It is important to remember that memory is not static, on the contrary, it is constructed, and it is controversial, especially when they are a collective (Cardoso, 2013). The sewing of memories was being updated by the younger members, who joined the group in recent years, as the actions reverberated and the Cine Club TF project’s relationship networks expanded.

Several oppressions arose from these memories, such as class inequalities perceived in the speech of Klebson, the dance coordinator, who understood the logo as a representation of “a boy from the favela who has no recognition, but when he takes a camera, a stage to dance, or a wall to paint, he can change the world.” The performing arts coordinator, Natali, associates the logo with the function of “marking the moment, filming it so that it is not forgotten.” Natasha, coordinator of the literature group, highlighted issues of gender and race and stated “before my hair was more afro, in my head it was a woman. The camera is in her eyes, I want to say: I want to talk about how I see the world, it’s my vision.” Maria Eduarda, from the musical group, stated that “the color represents its color, its vision (...) as if the periphery had several colors, several visions.” The logo also represents a projector, that is, it has to do with what young people ‘project’ to the public, regarding the importance of the messages they narrate and their responsibility for these contents.

In a second stage, already with the presence of 30 participants, we were able to create a timeline of the project, using emojis. Griggio, McGrenere, and

Mackay (2019) state that the use of emojis, stickers, and gifs are means of expression that, in addition to enriching and personalizing text-based communication, demonstrate that technologies promote more individualized and personal forms of expression, overcoming limitations through the customization of elements and the combination of different visual characteristics of image resources.

Figure 6: Timeline assembled by the group. Source: The author.



Some of the participants created their own emojis during the timeline assembly, by drawing them on colored paper. This visual resource was chosen to generate identification with young people, who constantly use these elements to reinforce or subvert expressions while communicating in messaging apps. The objective of the timeline was to understand the historical dimension of the project through the rescue of collective memory. For Brandão and Borges (2007), the historical dimension is a fundamental aspect of participatory research, through which it is possible to understand the links between the past and future. In this way, historical reconstruction allows recognizing the struggles of popular groups and, at the same time, envisioning the transformation

of scenarios, albeit occasionally, through social action. To transform, one must know. In the Cine Club TF project case, the presentation of remarkable episodes experienced by young people favored reflection on the experiences of collective engagement. In addition, it allowed sharing the knowledge accumulated by the group with the most recent members of the project.

In a third stage, we gathered the generating themes raised by the group and carried out a collective critical analysis of the selected words. The objective was to reflect on the structural issues behind apparent problems, trying to generate syntheses about the 'limiting situations' (Freire, 2005) that arise as obstacles for the collective. We call this resource *Ciranda Pedagógica* (Pedagogical Circle), where each subgroup analyzed the challenges and suggested possible ways to solve them. The activity resulted in four markers for the project: communication, mobilization, training, and infrastructure. From there, we developed hypotheses about such challenges being the most evident, and how they were linked to structural processes that needed to be overcome. Understanding that this overcoming needed to follow a long-term strategy, we considered it appropriate to transform the categories developed into working groups, so that they could continuously dedicate themselves to defining strategies to solve problems associated with these categories.

Finally, in the last moment of our participatory investigation, we tried to problematize questions related to the organization of the group, the objective of the project, and the values shared by young people about their collective experience. In this conversation, we arrived at the following synthesis: the Cine Club TF project exists to promote the autonomy of peripheral youth through artistic expressions in multiple languages, and to disseminate narratives of resistance from the peripheries to the world. From this collectively drawn conclusion, the project intends to continue being a space for welcoming and valuing the creativity of peripheral youth, having creativity, solidarity, respect, responsibility, and organization as principles.

It is important to mention that the participatory research did not end with this circle of dialogue. Now, we are committed to organizing new working groups and planning the continuity of this process, which from now on will be part of the methodologies used by the young people of the Cine Club TF project. I present three arguments that emerged as a synthesis of the described process in the following section.

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#### **OUTCOMES: SOLIDARITY ENGAGEMENT AS A PROJECT PURPOSE**

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From the reported experiment, I highlight the ethical-political imperative that should guide the positioning of designers in participatory processes, considering participants as co-researchers and not as mere data sources (Calderon Salazar &

Huybrechts, 2020). The proposal in this research exercise is not only to reaffirm my position as a designer who fights against oppression, but also to point out the transitory aspect of my perception and practice as a designer. From this relationship with the youngsters of the Cine Club TF project, some partial impressions can be pointed out. First, the way I position myself concerning socially oppressed groups. In theory, my training as a designer positions me as capable of producing 'good design'. At the beginning of the research, around 2018, my vision of how I could work on projects with marginalized groups made me think that it was necessary to 'improve' the design produced autonomously by these groups. I considered the promotional materials made by them to be weak and of low quality. During the research, there were many transformations in my identity as a designer, and one of them was giving up on 'evaluating' the quality of the group's graphic production, since it was not aimed at me as an audience.

These definitions go through the feeling of otherness that, according to Freire (2005), occurs in the dialogical relationship with the other, and without which the constitution of the self is not possible. When the other is accepted as a subject-person, both people in the relationship fulfill the ontological vocation to overcome the aspects that limit the exercise of their freedom. As designers, we need to perceive differences more broadly, since they can often result in the dehumanization of others, through the strengthening of class dominance practices (Serpa et al., 2022).

The fact that the group resolves their communication needs autonomously, based on the codes they handle and the languages they operate through mobile devices, defines them as authors who practice design endogenously, and whose visual rules are far from being referenced by the canons of design taught at the university. But this does not mean that the design practiced by young people in the periphery does not fulfill the role for which it is intended. Graphic design is just another language appropriated by young people who do not have access to canonical design teaching, and neither to music, visual arts, and body expressions, among other cultural manifestations that were demarcated as productive by capitalism. It is up to us, designers, to join them in questioning these statutes and seeking ways to generate autonomous design processes that prioritize collectivity and strengthen the struggle for the humanization of the world.

Escobar (2016, 2018) considers design as a tool to reimagine and rebuild local worlds. Collaborative practices with an emphasis on territory allow the transformation of realities, and design does not abstain from this fact. Autonomous, communal design emerges when people turn to what brings them together, as opposed to what separates them. Self-determination is a practice of resistance that must be encouraged in design projects. It is essential to consider the application of collective investigations that understand heterogeneity and

differences as inherent to groups so that they do not impede the creativity necessary to reframe definitions and processes previously harmful to communities. It is from the plurality of voices that other perspectives of intervention on reality are constructed.

That said, and as a second argument resulting from our collective action, this change in perception resulted from the change in the scope of the project. In my master's research, I reported the participatory design process that I developed during a visual identity project for a group of herbal sellers, essentially comprised by women. They preserve traditional knowledge associated with botanical diversity in the Amazon region. At the time, my team and I considered it inappropriate to produce a visual identity without their participation, as we could not be faithful to the aesthetic universe in which they were inserted. Thus, we subverted the logo creation process and made it participatory, using the briefing as a self-knowledge tool. Thus, the project became a playful space for graphic expression and iconographic survey, and the presentation became an opportunity to promote agreements between the group. The result was embraced by the group, which later attested that they felt represented by the visual solution and were confident of their positioning in the market based on their new visual identity (Silva, 2012).

More than 10 years later, my view on the role of design when reflecting on cultural identity has changed radically. During the undertaking with the herbal sellers, I understood that the design project could serve as a space to reaffirm the cultural identity of marginalized groups; today, I understand this space as an opportunity to question the marginalization of groups subjected to poverty. However, the structural issues that make it difficult to overcome poverty do not only require new approaches in design projects, even if they rely on participatory methodologies. Commitment to the groups worked on and engagement in issues involving them go beyond temporary engagements. They require the third aspect that I deem as an element of the transformation of design practices: the flourishing of solidarity in the face of the need to organize popular struggles (Serpa & Silva, 2021).

A few years ago, design was widely used as a management tool, acting at the strategic, functional, and operational levels of organizations (Mozota et al., 2011). Due to its interdisciplinary character, the design applied to management favors the transformation of organizations that follow hierarchical and linear processes, towards flexible and informal models, which favor participation, co-creation, and innovation. While capitalist production is favored by management processes facilitated by design, here we refer to the organizational processes that allow the liberation of oppressions. Marginalized groups also need liberating techniques and processes that can be developed with the designer, in horizontal and

respectful relationships, where the project space intends to dissolve any type of oppression since all knowledge is valid for the construction of knowledge. Although the engagement of designers with socially vulnerable groups is recurrent, these meetings often focus on the participatory search for solutions to problems linked to the market. Here, I argue that the collective research should be directed toward the design of strategies to overcome structural oppression, such as social inequality, racism, sexism, and other aspects that limit the exercise of freedom by peripheral youth.

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### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The experience presented in this report shows that collective action and reflection allow the construction of a praxis of resistance. It has been forged in the struggles of an autonomous social movement, still informal, but already raising alternative processes of autonomy construction, based on daily confrontations. Creative expression and the possibility of planning a better life for all are also acts of renunciation of 'destiny' for young people in the periphery. Reaffirming their existence is a way to prove that their lives are not disposable in the face of necropolitical power. The creative propositions of the young people of Cine Club TF, and countless other resistance movements, allow them to break the silence imposed on the peripheral youth, overcome the erasure of their identities, and glimpse alternative ways of existence. Thus, to create is to re-exist. And, as Mignolo and Walsh (2018) state, we need to investigate how those who experience colonial difference think theory and theorize practice; how they create, transform, construct, and enact concrete processes, struggles, and practices of action that demonstrate insurgent thinking on all spheres of knowledge, territory, forms of re-existence, and life itself.

Thus, this article presents not only a participatory research experience with young people, but also an attempt to understand how design is expressed as an emancipatory instrument. In this context, design has been understood as a device that can generate engagement as a coding and decoding instrument, as referenced by Freire (2005). Through the collective analysis of the media produced by the Cine Club TF project's young people as endogenous designers, the visual identity acted as a facilitator of dialogue, generating a space to welcome the speeches and prompt deep reflections on memory, the objectives of the organization, and the reality of the Brazilian economic, political, and social structure in which they are inserted.

After this investigation, my perception of the design project broadened decisively. Currently, I understand the design project as a space for pedagogical mediation, based on a radical ethical option in favor of the oppressed. In this way, our shared project aimed at collective organization to confront the oppressions that young people experience, differently from the collective mobilization triggered



by participatory design processes that aim to solve a project question (Serpa et al., 2020). The project here is the transformation of the reality of oppression, from our position as designers, teachers, students, and Latin Americans. Thus, I end up positioning myself as a designer in the process of construction, who practices a design that influences reality, understanding that this same reality is also procedural and subject to transformation.

As van Amstel (in press) states, decolonizing design research means fighting together against all hegemonic forms of subjugating the other. And as Freire also reminds us:

It will be in living with the oppressed, knowing himself to be one of them—only at a different level of reality—that he will be able to understand the oppressed ways of being and behaving, which reflect, at different moments, the structure of domination. (2005, p. 54)

For the Brazilian pedagogue, the encounter is an opportunity for the liberation of subjects, through critical engagement in reality. This is what we have tried to do in this joint trajectory. With this experience, I hope to contribute to this struggle, and to the formation of a corpus under construction by Latin American designers committed to creating spaces of solidarity between designers and the popular classes. For some of us, these spaces are already woven into our research, through which we seek to demonstrate that the research space and the design project space are not just samples of reality, but micro-spaces of disputes and differences, where oppressions operate structures that demand a position from the professionals (and citizens) involved. In these contexts, there is no way to be neutral, or not understand oneself as part of a larger problem, often hidden by systems of oppression. **D**

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