

Craftwork in authorial fashion of Pernambuco: a case study about the production of leather shoes

O trabalho artesanal na moda autoral de Pernambuco: um estudo de caso sobre produção de sapatos de couro

Manuela Correia¹ , Virgínia Pereira Cavalcanti¹ 

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the state of Pernambuco has presented an increasing number of small businesses focused on authorial fashion, with the majority of them concentrated in the Metropolitan Region of Recife. Many of these companies have craftwork as the major feature of their brand identity. This article presented the results of a case study about the artisanal production present in an authorial fashion brand whose main products are leather shoes. The main result of this study was the observation of the creator as an artist-craftsman, whose manual skills and creative freedom are central elements for the construction of the brand.

Keywords: Authorial fashion. Artisanal production. Creative process.

RESUMO

Nos últimos anos, o estado de Pernambuco tem apresentado um número crescente de pequenos negócios voltados à moda autoral, com maior concentração na região metropolitana do Recife. Muitas dessas empresas possuem o fazer artesanal como um forte traço de sua identidade de marca. O presente artigo expõe os resultados de um estudo de caso acerca da produção artesanal existente em uma marca de moda autoral cujos principais produtos são sapatos de couro animal. O principal resultado do estudo foi a observação do criador como um artista-artífice, cujas destrezas manual e liberdade criativa são elementos centrais na construção da marca.

Palavras-chave: Moda autoral. Produção artesanal. Processo criativo.

¹Universidade Federal de Pernambuco – Recife (PE), Brazil. E-mails: manu.correia@live.com; virginia.cavalcanti@ufpe.br
Received on: 12/27/2022. Accepted on: 02/11/2023

INTRODUCTION

Clothing is one of the artifacts that have been part of human material culture since the dawn of civilizations, however fashion, as a social phenomenon of worship of constant novelties (LIPOVETSKY, 2009), was born only at the end of the Middle Ages, in a Europe still governed by craftwork.

Even with all the technological advances since the first Industrial Revolution, it can be seen that craftsmanship still permeates part of clothing production in some territories. Artisanal and industrial production are not mutually exclusive when Borges (2011, p. 206) highlights the fact that, today, craftsman's work includes processes in which machines are used, while in luxury segment industries the finishing of products is handcrafted by highly skilled craftsmen.

It is important to emphasize the difference between craftwork and artisanal production, for a better understanding of this article. According to the Brazilian Craftwork Program (*Programa do Artesanato Brasileiro*) (BRASIL, 2018), crafts are understood as all production that results from the transformation of raw materials, through the use of knowledge and practices, and that expresses creativity, skill, quality, and artistic, historical and cultural values. The craftsman's manual dexterity gives the object its unique characteristics.

However, when talking about craftsmanship, this article refers to artisanal production, that is, a way of making products following a manual logic that can also be inserted in a context of serial production and division of labor. This logic makes room for the rescue of crafts and manual skills of creators, who work as craftsmen, in direct contact with materials and processes, seeking to meet not only the needs of the consumer, but also their own creative needs.

All this can be observed in the authorial fashion market in the metropolitan region of Recife. In addition to the use of manual techniques in the manufacture of pieces, authorial fashion brands are also characterized by production on a smaller scale, at a slower pace, in addition to not usually following fashion trends.

The purpose of this article was to present an excerpt from the master's research entitled *O fazer artesanal no design de moda pernambucana: uma investigação sobre o processo de produção em marcas autorais* (Craftsmanship in Pernambuco fashion design: an investigation into the production process in authorial brands), as a requirement for completion of the Graduate Program in Design at *Universidade Federal de Pernambuco*. Such research consists of a study of multiple cases, and this article is an extract of one of the cases studied, aimed to understand how artisanal work influences the process of creation and production of authorial fashion products.

This article is founded on the theories of Mills (2009) and Sennett (2009) regarding artisanal work. As for authorial fashion, Valle Noronha (2017) and Sohn, Laste and Rios (2017) were cited, in addition to Crane's (2011) notions about stylists as artists and artisans.

This article is basically divided into: explanation of the theoretical foundation, in addition to a brief contextualization of the field of study; description of the methodology used in the case study; and report of the investigated case, parallel to the analysis and followed by the conclusions.

THE CRAFTSMAN

To begin to understand this article, it is important to know what crafts it refers to. For this, the views of sociologists Mills (2009)¹ and Sennett (2009)² are used. The first considers craftwork to be not only a work model, but also a lifestyle and a way of acting and thinking in the world, which should serve as a reference for the designers' work. For the author, craftsmanship is the "common denominator of art, science, and knowledge and also the very root of human development" (MILLS, 2009, p. 76).

As an ideal, craftsmanship represents the creative nature of work, and the central place of that work in human development as a whole. As a practice, handicrafts play the classic role of the independent craftsman who does his work in close interaction with the public, who in turn takes part in it (MILLS, 2009, p. 76).

Following a similar line of thought, Sennett (2009) brings the figure of the craftsman, who for him "represents a broader category than the artisan; it symbolizes in each one of us the desire to do a job well, concretely, for the pleasure of a job well done" (SENNETT, 2009, p. 164). The craftsman is a curious worker interested in what can be improved in his craft, his tools, and his work.

Sennett (2016) also raises the discussion about the opposition craftsman *versus* artist. According to him, the 19th century thought of worshiping the artist as someone who creates something on their own comes from a context in which the artist is the craftsman who has moved away from the workshop. Today this translates into the cult of innovation, which must be constant, fast-paced and of quick disposal, as happens in the logic of fast fashion³.

THE FASHION CREATOR AS ARTIST-ARTISAN

According to Valle Noronha (2017), the term authorial fashion (as well as authorial design) is restricted to Latin languages, being increasingly used in Portuguese and Spanish, and is still not so explored in the academic literature. Despite this, it is possible to raise a reflection based on the concepts of Sohn, Laste and Rios (2017) and Valle Noronha (2017):

An authorial fashion has its main foundation in the image of the authors who dialogue with the created piece. Author and user write, in co-authorship, new meanings for bodies and objects through the experience of dressing. [...] In this way of doing things, there is no intention of produc-

1 Charles W. Mills was an American sociologist of the 20th century, creator of the concept of sociological imagination. His ideas are still current and raise questions that remain in the practice of designers until today. This can be observed in the text of his lecture *O homem no centro: o designer*, from 1958.

2 Richard Sennett's theories revolve around the configurations of contemporary work. In his book *O artifice* (2009), he discusses how manual work influences intellectual work and the dialectical relationship between the material world and the craftsman.

3 The authors Fletcher and Grose (2011) state that the predominant business model in current fashion is fast fashion, a model based on speed, which focuses on the production and sale of cheap and homogenized clothes, in ever-increasing quantities, generating several negative socio-environmental impacts.

tion on large scales and trends in shapes, colors, and styles do not direct the work of the creator. Instead, small scales are prioritized and productions are motivated by expressive questions that reflect the author's own individuality (VALLE NORONHA, 2017, p. 69).

It can be said that authorial design meets a more innovative and sustainable perspective in relation to the supply and consumption of products and services. Being linked to exclusive production, close to the characteristics of artistic work. The authorial designer can be considered an artist who constantly seeks innovation and usually produces in small quantities, focusing on a specific market niche (SOHN; LASTE; RIOS, 2017, p. 102).

That is, the authorial quality that is conferred on the fashion brand is directly related to the creative expression of its author and its sustainability actions. With this, it is possible to extract two important characteristics of authorial fashion: the operation in slow fashion, as opposed to the consumption of mass-produced clothing; and the appreciation of the creator, who is elevated to the status of an artist.

Regarding the first aspect, Fletcher and Grose (2011) define slow fashion as a movement in the fashion world that is not just about slowing down production; it is about a different worldview, about various activities across the fashion chain that promote cultural diversity and ethical values in fashion. Since this desire for a more conscious, democratic, and small-scale fashion tries to rescue artisanal production models, manuality becomes an important factor of differentiation of the authorial fashion product.

Regarding the second aspect, when considering the theories of Mills (2009) and Sennett (2009; 2016), would it be possible for the creator artist to also be a craftsman? Crane (2011), based on Howard Becker's 1982 book entitled *Art Worlds*, brings some contributions to this reflection. The author relates the concepts of artist and craftsman with the different types of fashion creation professionals. According to her, the craftsman and the artist-craftsman produce on demand for clients or employers, while the artist produces unique works, with greater creative freedom. She also states that "Artists-craftsmen are likely to maintain small businesses that serve an elite clientele" (CRANE, 2011, p. 212).

Another important aspect of this category is the close relationship with the clientele. Crane (2011) states that the success of these creators depends on being "especially adept at establishing and maintaining relationships with their upper-class clients, understanding their lifestyle and social environment" (CRANE, 2011, p. 213).

CONTEXTUALIZING THE FIELD OF STUDY

According to data from the Brazilian Textile and Apparel Industry Association, in 2021 Brazil had 24,600 formal companies in the textile and apparel chain. In the state of Pernambuco there are about a thousand manufacturing units, mostly micro and small enterprises operating in various segments, especially in the manufacture of jeans, which represents more than 10% of national production in volume (ROCHA; BARROCAS; MARINHO, 2018, p. 4).

Currently, the textile and apparel chain in Pernambuco is made up of two poles: the Agreste pole and the metropolitan region of Recife. The former emerged

in the 1970s and is consisted of the cities of Toritama, Caruaru, and Santa Cruz do Capibaribe, in addition to neighboring municipalities. It is where most of the state's clothing production is concentrated.

The latter, according to the Brazilian Support Service for Micro and Small Companies (*Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio a Micro e Pequenas Empresas – SEBRAE, 2014*), is characterized by micro and small companies, including authorial fashion brands led by creative professionals trained in Fashion or Design courses at the universities of Recife. This is due to the lack of medium and large clothing companies in the metropolitan region, which makes many fashion professionals see entrepreneurship as their best alternative, according to studies by Sebrae (2014). In this context, this pole emerges as one of the centers of innovation and creativity in the state, bringing together urban and contemporary references with traditional aspects of popular culture.

Among the cities in the metropolitan region of Recife, two of them stand out for hosting two initiatives to promote Pernambuco's authorial fashion, with state incentives: Recife, which now has the Pernambuco Author's Fashion Store (*Loja de Moda Autoral de Pernambuco – Mape*); and its neighbor Olinda, where *Marco Pernambucano da Moda* is located.

Mape was inaugurated in 2021 and is located in the Recife neighborhood, next to the *Centro de Artesanato de Pernambuco*, being a strategic space for tourists to discover the products of authorial fashion creators in the state. The store sells pieces from 50 brands from different locations in the state, most of which are in the metropolitan area of Recife.

Marco Pernambucano da Moda proposes to be an environment for strengthening the identity of local fashion. In addition to events and courses, it offers an incubation program aimed at new businesses in the sector. According to Leite and Rocha (2019), among those incubated in the program between 2017 and 2018, more than half have the artisanal practice of products as their brand identity, an indication that crafts are in fact an alternative way to the construction of fashion in the state.

THE CASE STUDY

This study seeks to shed light on the processes of an authorial fashion brand, in view of its relationship with craft work. Because it is a qualitative research, the case study strategy was chosen, whose objective, according to Yin (2001), is to understand contemporary and complex social phenomena inserted in a real-life context.

First, an exploratory research was carried out on theories about craftsmanship and authorial fashion, theories that served as the basis for the development of the research protocol and data analysis.

A field survey was also carried out and, consequently, an exploratory research on the authorial fashion scene in the metropolitan region of Recife, in order to discover fashion brands that have the artisanal production process as part of their identity. This survey was carried out in catalogues, websites, and social networks, in addition to a visit to Mape, located in the Recife neighborhood. 14 brands were found, distributed in the cities of Olinda and Recife.

Initially, the search was focused on brands that had designers and artisans, in order to observe the relationship between them and the work of each one. It was also decided not to stick to the idea of a formal design professional, since many of the observed creators are “designers, not specialists”, coming from other areas of training, but who have mastery of both the project and the making.

Based on this survey, ten brands were contacted, in order to apply a preliminary survey, whose objective was to acquire more information about the companies, in order to define the sample for this case study. Data were collected through a short and simple questionnaire, applied via email, text messages or phone calls.

The questions sought to gather information such as: company size and number of employees; who participates in creation and who participates in production; where creation takes place; where and in what kind of environment production takes place; training and possible craft skills of the designer or creator.

It was not possible to obtain a response from all ten contacted brands, but this preliminary mapping allowed the researcher to know a little about the profile of each representative of the sample group and to verify that:

- not all brands have a formally trained designer;
- not all brands have both designer and craftsman working in the same space, as some have outsourced production to other locations.

Through the initial observation of the samples, it was then possible to identify a particular characteristic in authorial fashion in the metropolitan region of Recife, a characteristic that appears as an alternative to the fashion scene in the region: the presence of the creator-craftsman at the head of the brand. In authorial brands where conception and production take place in the same space, there is no clear separation between the two processes, and the designer or stylist is also an artisan, as pointed out by Sennett (2009). In some brands, this creator-craftsman works individually in their home/studio. In others, they have the help of employees who can also be craftsmen.

A research pilot was then carried out with one of the mapped brands, which was chosen taking into account the following criteria: the person at the head of the company is also responsible for creation and production, what we call here creator-craftsman; this person has employees, craftsmen who help in production; the entire creation and production process takes place in the same workshop; and, finally, the ease of communication with the brand.

A visit was made to the workshop of the company selected as a case, in order to carry out data collection in person. Adapting to the context of this study, semi-structured interview and direct observation techniques were chosen. Observing the space and the agents in their work environment facilitated the collection and recording of information, as well as a better understanding of the context of the studied phenomena.

To guide data collection, a research protocol was developed (Chart 1), in which four thematic axes and the respective question topics related to them are distinguished. Such categories were elaborated based on the exploratory research of the

Chart 1. Protocol for data collection and processing.

Axis	Topics
The brand	Technical data Company history Product mix Target audience
The craftsman	Professionals responsible for creation Professionals responsible for production Creators' craft skills
The product	Seasonality of collections Materials Relationship with fashion trends Audience influence
The workshop	Workspace Creation process Production process Tools and machinery

universe of copyright brands. Based on the studied theory and on the preliminary research with the brands, it was possible to observe some intersections that allowed reaching such categories.

The axis "The brand" seeks to draw an overview of the brand, with regard to the identity and nature of the company, since first of all it is necessary to understand its position in the market, its history, and its elements of authenticity.

"The Craftsman" axis, on the other hand, seeks to outline a profile of who is behind the brand, as a creator and producer. This is the central figure in the work of Sennett (2009), which also discusses craftsmanship, the expertise. Also, according to Valle Noronha (2017), the individuality of the creator is one of the characteristics of authorial fashion. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the cultural and historical background, as well as the skills of creators, in order to understand their creative process.

The axis "The product" deals with the elements that guide craftsmen in the conception of their pieces, including materials, sources of inspiration, and even the public itself. That is, the language of the product and what distinguishes it from mass products.

Finally, the axis "The workshop" seeks to understand the work environment and organization, which for Sennett (2009) interfere not only with the performance of the work activity, but also with the feelings related to it.

After data collection, it was possible to carry out the analysis of the case and the crossing of the obtained data. According to Yin (2001), data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating or recombining evidence in order to draw conclusions regarding the research objectives and problem. In this sense, in order to expose the collected information in a more structured way, they were organized in the four axes formulated in the research protocol: the brand, the craftsman, the product, and the workshop.

The Fernando Viana case

The brand

The Fernando Viana brand, named after its creator, has its atelier in Bairro Novo, in the city of Olinda, and makes shoes from animal leather (Figure 1). The product mix includes shoes for men and women in different models, such as flats, clogs, and boots (Figure 2). Prices for the final consumer vary between R\$ 130 and R\$ 200.



Source: Guimarães (2019).

Figure 1. Fernando Viana in his workshop.

The company's customers are retailers and individual consumers, who buy through the Instagram and WhatsApp apps. It has already sold to several states in Brazil, but with the Covid-19 pandemic, customers have decreased, and today the company focuses its sales on Pernambuco. It has also already had a point of sale in a collaborative store in a mall in the region. Currently, its products can also be found at Mape.

The brand does not have a very defined public profile, but Fernando Viana (2022) describes its public as "alternative and who value craftsmanship". Still according to him, this clientele is quite varied in terms of age range.

The craftsman

Fernando's story with shoes began in 1988, when he received a pair of moccasin shoes that he liked so much that he decided to take them apart to make a replica. He has no training in design, nor has he ever taken a technical course in



Source: available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGNhXD1neK6/>. Accessed on: Feb. 22, 2022.
Figure 2. Fernando Viana sandals.

shoe production. Therefore, his training as a shoemaker is completely self-taught, having perfected the technique over the years and also having passed it on to other people: he has trained several young people in social projects, a way of giving back to society by generating opportunities within the community itself. Some ended up becoming his helpers at certain times (Figure 3).

Fernando knows how to make a shoe from start to finish: from creating the model, going through cutting and assembly, to finishing. Despite this, he is not responsible for the entire process, and today he has two helpers, who he himself trained in workshops given through the city hall of Olinda. One of the helpers has been working with him for 18 years and is already able to do the entire sewing process. The tasks are divided between the three of them "to have a greater production, and one helps the other", says Fernando (VIANA, 2022).

In addition, Fernando is responsible for purchasing materials and tools, as well as selling products and negotiating with shopkeepers. There is also a fourth person, who does not work in production, but in promoting the products on Instagram and WhatsApp.

The product

The company does not work with individual orders, as it follows a production line. Two or three collections are produced per year, with an average of ten to 15 models per collection. The main materials worked on the pieces are animal leather, which comes from Caruaru, in the wild of Pernambuco, and mulungu wood, which comes from Timbaúba, also in the interior of the state.



Figure 3. Collage with photos from Fernando Viana's workshop.

At first, Fernando (VIANA, 2022) states that his creative process does not include research on trends to develop products, that he follows his own taste and thus has managed to please his clientele. There are models that are better accepted than others and, therefore, are produced in greater quantity. He also says that he is not interested in fashion, in what is in fashion. So, he does not research trends and manufactures what he likes, what he thinks will work. However, in a second moment, he says that he conducts research on sites like Pinterest, to look for things from outside and get inspiration and ideas for new models, but he does not look at the trends of the moment, the fads.

The workshop

The studio works only as a production space; sales take place over the internet or at third-party physical points of sale. Upon arriving at the site, it is possible to observe a backyard and a large, covered space, where most of the tools and machines are located, as well as a room where more materials and some sewing machines are stored.

The product development process takes place as follows: first, Fernando creates a prototype by visualizing the product in his mind. He does not have the ability to draw, so he cuts and molds paper into shoe shapes, until he reaches the desired shape for the model. After that, he cuts the pattern into the leather. In his own

words, he does it “from the mind straight to the leather” (VIANA, 2022). This is a clear example of what Sennett (2009) calls material consciousness, how the material world and the world of ideas are interconnected and influence each other.

After making the prototype, Fernando shows it to some people he trusts and then gives the go-ahead for the production of a pair of each new model in the collection, increasing production or not according to public reception. So, although market research is not part of the creative process, consumer feedback becomes important, which is endorsed by Mills’ (2009) theory: the independent craftsman needs the support of an audience that defines what excellence is.

The production process is basically divided into six stages: molding, cutting, sewing, assembly, application of the sole, and finishing. Tasks are divided between three artisans, including Fernando, following a small production line scheme. When asked about production time, he states that it would take one hour for one person to produce a single pair of single-model shoes from start to finish.

The workshop has several machines that help and accelerate production. The machines observed in the workshop are: industrial sewing machines, logo stamping machine, insole pouring machine, hydraulic press (rocker), seven instrument sander, strip cutting machine, and eyelet machine, among many other tools, such as, for example, wooden and metal shoe molds for cutting insoles and soles.

Fernando explains that when he started making shoes, he did not have so much machinery and he did everything by hand. The cut, for example, was done with scissors. Today, he has a hydraulic press, which cuts the insole and outsole molds in seconds. “The time it takes to make 10, 20 pairs, the machine makes 60”, says Fernando (VIANA, 2022), but the presence of machines does not mean automated production. More meticulous processes, finishing and gluing, for example, are still done by hand. Therefore, even with serial and optimized production, know-how and technical quality, both characteristics of artisanal production, are preserved.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study, it was observed how some aspects of artisanal work are present in the creative and productive process of an authorial fashion brand in the metropolitan region of Recife. The methodology for data collection sought to investigate relevant aspects for an authorial fashion brand of handmade production. The case study made it possible to understand how the work environment, materials and tools, the organization of tasks and even the brand’s audience influence the development of its products.

In the analysis of the interview, it became clear that a strong element of the brand resides in its author, who, following the concept of Crane (2011), can be called an artist-artisan, or even, relating to Sennett’s theory (2009), artist-craftsman. An artist, because there is a certain creative freedom and the adoption of one’s own taste and method, even if at the mercy of the market. A craftsman, because the expertise and material awareness of tools and raw materials guide the creation and production processes, and plan and execution are unified.

Unlike fashion companies that rely on the work of designers, the studied brand does not follow the methodology of researching trends or public research. By working on a slow fashion model, on a small scale and without a defined collection calendar, it is noted that the creator has greater freedom to develop products based solely on his artistic taste. For him, it is possible to create something new without taking too many risks, as his relationship with the public through social networks makes it possible to predict, to a certain extent, the success of a new product.

Other important issues observed concern the organization of work in the workshop and the presence of machines in artisanal production. Although the brand has a production line model and machines that streamline the process, both aspects linked to industrial logic, it can be said that this does not mischaracterize it as hand-crafted. This is due to the integration between hand and mind being still present. Everyone who works in the atelier has a deep understanding of the product and the ways to make it. Manual dexterity can be replaced by the machine at times, but it is still necessary in order to arrive at the end result of a well-made product.

Although the academy still does not have a vast literature on authorial fashion, this article is expected to contribute to the construction of more knowledge about this field, by shedding light on the points of intersection with artisanal work, since this has great economic and cultural value for the state of Pernambuco. It is also expected to open up new study possibilities to enhance these small businesses, whose production style has high sustainable potential.

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About the authors

Manuela Beatriz Pedrosa Correia: Master's degree by Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.
Virginia Pereira Cavalcanti: PhD in Environmental and Urban Structures by Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo.

Conflict of interests: nothing to declare – **Financial support**: Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior — Financing Code 001.

Authors' contributions: Correia, M.: Investigation, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing — original draft. Cavalcanti, V.: Supervision, Validation, Writing — Review & Editing.

