

71 years have been too little a time for my will to communicate – an interview with Pedro Ernesto Stilpen, “Stil”

“71 anos foram muito poucos pra minha vontade de comunicar” – Entrevista com Pedro Ernesto Stilpen, o Stil

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The year was 2014, on June 25th. Stil welcomed us at his old house, on Rua Real Grandeza, Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro. The proposal was to conduct an interview with the aim of producing an animated documentary about his career.

Pedro Ernesto Stilpen, also known as Stil (Figure 1), is a great reference when it comes to Brazilian animation. He was one of the founders of *Grupo Fotograma*, in 1968, in Rio de Janeiro, which carried out several initiatives to promote animation with film shows and even a program specializing in animated cinema for the now extinct *TV Continental*. After the group’s dissolution in 1969, he later funded *Grupo NOS* alongside Rubens Siqueira and Antônio Moreno. In the following decades, in



Figure 1 - Pedro Ernesto Stilpen, Stil. Image captured from the film *Luz, Anima Ação* by Eduardo Calvet.

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addition to numerous short films such as *Batuque*, *ABC* and *O que é que há com seu Peru*, Stil worked with animation for several TV programs such as *Armação ilimitada*, *Satiricon*, *Domingão do Faustão*, among others. One of his last works was the feature film *As Aventuras do Pequeno Colombo*, which had its premiere at the Anima Mundo Festival in 2015, in which he was honored and applauded by everyone. Stil unfortunately passed away exactly 3 years after this interview kindly given to us, on June 25th, 2017.

The interview had been previously structured by researchers Gabriel Filipe Santiago Cruz and Luis Felipe Vasques. However, on the day it was held, the possibility of taking Carlos Eugênio Baptista along (Figure 2), known as Patati, a great reference in the world of national comics, was envisaged.

Therefore, in addition to the interview, the occasion also allowed a great exchange between Stil and Patati. It was the first time they met. Stil made a point of showing some original art from comic projects he had worked on in partnership with Arturo Uranga¹, such as *Zeca Tatu* (Figure 3).



Figure 2 - Carlos Eugenio Baptista, known as Patati



Figure 3 - Art by Zeca Tatu, comic book character created by Stil in partnership with Arturo Uranga.

The documentary project is still looking for support and sponsorship, however, after listening again and rereading the transcript of those days, we felt it was important to publish the contents of that interview, one of the last with Stil talking

1 Arturo Uranga (1936–1985): born in Argentina. Visual artist and designer, set designer, theater and film director, art director and production designer, director of animated films and expert in Visual Effects.

about himself, his struggle and his legacy, which clearly show the truth of his statement after almost a decade: “71 years were too little” for the desire and will that this great artist had to communicate and express.

LFV: Stil, what are your artistic influences?

STIL: The first influence I was born under is Disney. But, as I researched and understood, European influences began to appear, especially from Czechoslovakia — the former Czechoslovakia —, from Poland, some Russian and French artists... in short, I am a mix of influences from everywhere. Including Brazilians, too, I was a collector of Monteiro Lobato’s books.

LFV: Speaking of Monteiro Lobato, can you tell us a little more about your literary references?

STIL: I am a passionate person! Very passionate! I also have a passion for collecting. So, I fell in love with Monteiro Lobato, for example. And I started buying everything from him, reading everything by Monteiro Lobato, including Monteiro Lobato’s letters, not only children’s literature, but also literature for adults, like *Negrinha*², for instance. Then I discovered Machado de Assis, I read everything by Machado de Assis. So we can say that I’m passionate, desperate for Brazilian things. I love Brazil. From the arrival of the first indigenous peoples to colonization. ‘Cause I’m also that, I’m a mixture of Germans, Italians, and Portuguese arriving here and being dazzled by the strength of this country, by the color of this country, by the intelligence of this country, by the power of this country. I also had foreign authors, I used to read a lot: Andersen, Grimm, etc. They influenced the things I wrote. In fact, everything is like that.

PATATI: You are a storyteller through images. Where did this desire come from? What stories do you want to tell the most? We know producing a cartoon is a handful. What was it that motivated you to say “I’m going to work hard, I’m going to make this film”?

STIL: The first time I sat down to make a cartoon, an animation, it was because of music, which I’m also passionate about. I make compositions, I’m Edmundo Souto’s³ partner. So I thought people needed to listen to *Batuque*, by Lourenço Fernandes⁴, and learn more about Brazilian dance⁵. In short, my first desire to make a cartoon was to spread to the general public the things that Brazil had in terms of music. Then I started to want to tell my own stories. And I started creating my characters: Antunes and Bandeira, which I turned into four short films; *Zeca Tatu*⁶, which I put in the newspapers (Figure 4); *Pinto*, which Ziraldo published... in other words, I myself became a source of ideas and literary production.

2 *Negrinha* (1920), novel by Monteiro Lobato.

3 Edmundo Rosa Souto: Brazilian composer, guitarist, and architect.

4 Oscar Lorenzo Fernández (1897-1948): Brazilian composer.

5 *Dança Brasileira*, by Camargo Guarnieri (1907-1993), Brazilian composer and conductor. In 1974, it served as the basis for the short *Reflexos*, by Stil and Antônio Moreno.

6 *Zeca Tatu*, by Pedro Ernesto Stilpen (writer) and Arturo Uranga (drawing). Published in strips in newspapers such as *O Globo* (RJ) and *Zero Hora* (MG), in the 1980s.

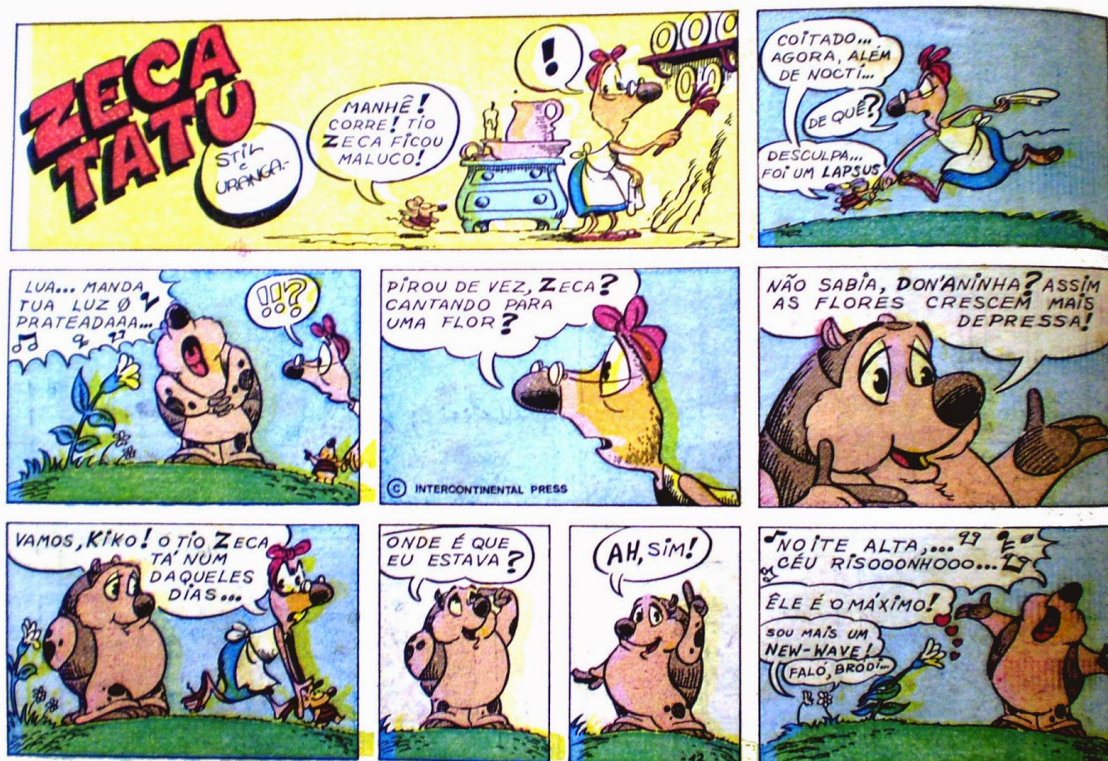


Figura 4 - Zeca Tatu – comic strip by Stil and Uranga Published in the weekly supplement of *Jornal o Globo*

LFV: But what does animation mean to you? The act, the technique, what is it, for you, to animate?

STIL: In theory, animating is exactly that: giving life. Bringing an idea to life, bringing a feeling to life. My films were very poorly behaved: In *Batuque*⁷, for example, what would I do? I'd give life to images that didn't behave properly, that is, they didn't conform to remaining static on the screen. So, they were truly anthropophagic: some swallowed others, some transformed into others. In fact, life is like that.

LFV: How did you plan your 1970s films? Who else did this type of animation?

STIL: I don't, I don't remember having seen anything done the way I used to do it. Let's say I animated "mediumistically", let's put it that way. I would sit down to do the animation and I knew nothing; I didn't have anything planned. I knew that that song would inspire me towards a certain model of things, a certain group of thoughts. But when I sat down at the animation table, I had no idea what would come out.

LFV: Did you use to effectively animate? Wouldn't you use keyframes, or something along those lines?

STIL: Yes, I'd use some keyframes, but these keyframes were also made during my animation process.

PATATI: How did this communicate with the budget issue? Did you have a budget? A deadline? How did the staff deal with that?

7 *Batuque* (1968).

STIL: Budget: this is where the dark side of Stil comes in. The side that Stil didn't learn. So, I started animating *O Batuque* and kept the animation drawings in a plastic bag until, one day, Luiz Fernando da Graça Melo⁸ said: "Let's film this". So he sponsored and filmed it. And the film was distributed, I guess, if I'm not mistaken, at the time, it was shown on every screen in the country.

LFV: And what about your "guerrilla animation", with markers and kraft paper? As drawing material. How was it?

STIL: It was the drawing material that I could buy. So it was wrapping paper, which I cut and then punched, I didn't even have the pattern...

LFV: ACME?

STIL: There wasn't an ACME drill, it was just a regular drill.

LFV: The office kind⁹.

STIL: That's right. And then I would place two pins in and film it. No fear of going off the record, or such. Fear is something I've never had, I'm not afraid, no. I do have a lot of hope.

LFV: You started your professional career as an architect. When did Architecture give way to animation?

STIL: When I was at *Colégio Brasil-América*, the subjects were divided into 4 groups: Medicine, Engineering, Architecture, and the X class. And what was the "X class"? It was the group that just wanted the diploma. It wasn't my case, because I was studying with a goal. Since I didn't know how to bandage a cut, I couldn't be a doctor. As I didn't have the mental structure to make a metal or concrete structure, I couldn't be an engineer. So, I was left with the art of Architecture. I loved forms so much, I admired what Oscar Niemeyer had just done with Brazilian Architecture, I found out about this subject and everything was fine. I ended up graduating in Architecture and Urban Planning. Oh! Urbanism for me are the trees that I planted here in Botafogo, they are full of babies. Stil offsprings through the corners. Before I move, I'm still gonna plant some more, there's a little space there in *Real Grandeza*¹⁰, I'll plant a little tree that I'll buy, as a thank you to the neighborhood of Botafogo.

LFV: And when did you leave Architecture to take up animation? When did you move from the architectural line to the animated line?

STIL: Actually, what happened was that as an architect, I was from the Department of Roads and Highways. Can I really tell my story here?

LFV: Yeah, yeah! That's the idea, sure.

STIL: Yeah, because I don't know...

LFV: No, yeah, do tell!

GC: If necessary, we can edit it later.

⁸ Cinema producer.

⁹ Stil refers to an office hole punch, a common substitute, if there is no professional ACME record at hand, to keep the sheets on which the drawing is animated in the same position.

¹⁰ Rua Real Grandeza, in Botafogo, a neighborhood in the south of the city of Rio de Janeiro, where the interviewee lived before moving.

STIL: Well then, I’ll tell you. Let it be on record then! I was from a group called *Fotograma*¹¹, a group considered subversive. OK? So, I was an architect at DER¹², I was making blueprints, etc., in the Urban Planning sector of the Department of Roads and Highways. Then I was summoned by my superior who was a military man, Doctor Oto. There was a security guard in the room, and I was fired... Go figure? For no reason, I was doing my job right. And this person, this angel, gave me the opportunity, pushed me towards the opportunity to make films, which was what I wanted to do. I was left without a job, without my steady income, and everything else, but on the path I must have chosen before I was born. I don’t resent him. The guy who fired me, no! I’m even beyond grateful.

LFV: What was the NOS Group like?

STIL: *Grupo Fotograma* had people from various areas. And NOS was a group that decided to make cartoons, within *Grupo Fotograma*. It was an animation group within *Grupo Fotograma*, as *Fotograma* also had people who didn’t do animations. As was the case with Sydney¹³. But others, like Zé Rubens Siqueira¹⁴, did animation, and then the NOS Group was born, which did very little, and was dissolved quickly.

LFV: Did you end up making short films?

STIL: Yes, of course. If I’m not mistaken, *Super-Tição*¹⁵ (Figure 5).

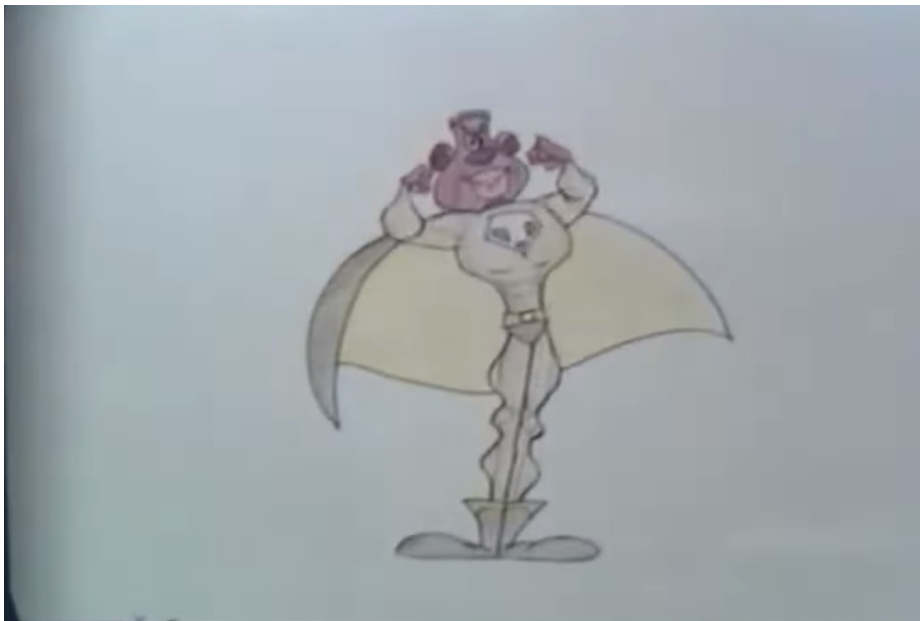


Figure 5 - Super Tição – Stil’s character in “Faz mal 2 – Introducing Super-Tição” from 1984.

Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NcWtpawXO8>. Accessed on: Oct. 08, 2023.

11 Group of filmmakers, animators and animation fans in general, which lasted between 1968 and 1969.

12 Department of Roads and Highways (Departamento de Estradas e Rodagem, in Portuguese).

13 Sydney Solis: filmmaker.

14 José Rubens Siqueira: author, translator, theater director, set designer, and costume designer.

15 *Super-Tição* (1986): winner of the Brasília Children’s Film Festival, with children’s voting, and the São Saruê Award, from Brazilian film clubs.

LFV: Oh, is *Super-Tição* by *Fotograma*? From Grupo NOS?

STIL: I think so. Zé Rubens' films, who was a wonderful illustrator, also included Antônio Moreno's films...¹⁶

LFV: And how about *Experiência 68*?

STIL: *Experiência 68* was a cartoon show that we put on TV. It was produced on *TV Continental*¹⁷, in Laranjeiras (Rio de Janeiro). We also did crazy things, like putting *Chico Batarde*, who would say "*ba' tarde*" ("good afternoon" with a country accent), up there, in *contra-plongée*, instead of straight on¹⁸. What really mattered were the cartoons that were presented. One fine day we arrived there to do the show and the TV had been closed. So, simple as that.

LFV: How long did the show last?

STIL: 68. Only 68. Even though *Experiência 69* is pornographic. (laughter)

LFV: What was the structure of *Experiência 68* like? Half an hour, an hour...?

STIL: It was a half-hour program, which had 4 girls presenting and talking about festivals and material that was borrowed from the MAM Cinemateca that we were putting on TV for the first time.

LFV: And where did this material come from?

STIL: Lots of European things! And material from the United States like *Felix the Cat*, the first Mickey films, *Betty Boop*, etc.

GC: How often was the show broadcast?

STIL: It was a weekly show. Live.

LFV: Stil, you have already had the opportunity to talk about your life, your career in different places, events, and even documentaries. What do you think remains to be said?

STIL: What remains to be said? That it's all about the short film! Pardon the pun, but I think life is short. Life is too short for everything we have to do. It's short for so much that we have accumulated in life. The Stil of comics, music, plays, shorts, and feature films hasn't even begun! Even the things I have saved that could become pieces of art are also very few compared to the things I can sit down and start writing about. Unfortunately, 71 years have been too little a time for my will to communicate the things I have to say. And even the things I said in 1968 are different from the things I would say now. Because I too am a changing being.

PATATI: What would you say to someone who wants to start drawing, to start dedicating themselves? After all, this is a calling, right? I would say cruelly, a *cachaça*¹⁹.

STILL: Yeah. It's a divine inspiration

PATATI: It is a divine inspiration. That's it!

STIL: For those who are starting out, my advice is: just start! Things will fall into place.

16 Antônio Moreno: animator and academic, author of one of the few books on the history of Brazilian animation: *A experiência brasileira no cinema de animação* (1978).

17 Extinct Rio TV channel (channel 9), between 1959 and 1972.

18 Stil refers to the group's inventiveness, which resulted, in this example, in shooting the show from a high point, instead of conventional framing at ground level. It is necessary to take into account the natural difficulty in doing so, with 1968 technology.

19 Popular Brazilian distilled spirit made from fermented sugarcane juice.

GC: Stil, one more question. In 1978 you released the book *Máquinas mágicas do desenho animado*²⁰. In it, you focused on a young audience, younger, I mean. Do you think animation is an experience that has everything to do with Education?

STIL: Well certainly yes! Animation is one of the paths of the 300 million branches of culture, and animation could indeed be taught, to anyone who wanted to do it. It's not for everyone. It's for anyone who wants to do it. Just as everyone sings, but some people dedicate themselves to music for real, professionally. So, animation could be taught to anyone who wanted to learn it. In schools, including public schools. This is my last fight, to make culture a subject from the first year until the end of primary school. Because then people already have the ability to choose their destiny. And culture is not just Art. Art is just an element for culture to be disseminated, for culture to disseminate. Culture comes before animation, it comes before Health, it comes before the Economy, it comes before everything; Culture is what makes Brazilians Brazilians, for example. May Brazilians understand who Monteiro Lobato was, whether they like Monteiro Lobato or not. Understand who Caetano Veloso is and whether you like Caetano Veloso or not. But it is necessary that all these artists are introduced to children so that they first know who they are, and that samba does not end up being suffocated by other artistic manifestations such as funk or rap.

PATATI: One attempt: you talked about samba, rap and funk, don't you think there is a lack of things that talk about these cultural manifestations of Brazilian origin?

STIL: I think that, for adults, for adults, the opportunity has been lost. I trust only the children.

GC: You have a recognized career as an authorial animator: your shorts, your independent work, and you also had your time working at Globo, working within the market, as an animator...

STIL: Animator and creator, too.

GC: Is there a difference between this creative author and the corporate animator, let's put it that way?

STIL: Can I compliment *Rede Globo*? Because I worked under the orders of the fantastic being called Augusto César Vanucci²¹. He, for some, was a tyrant, for others he was a father. For me he was a father. Just like Borjalo²² and Talma²³. I was lucky. To have people who listened to me. I would get there and say: “Talma, I have an idea”. He ordered everyone to leave the room to hear my idea! When on Earth will I have this again, Gosh? Globo, for me, was a paradise. They paid me well, they paid on time, and the things I suggested were done, the things I designed were published. And every moment in the official meetings, in the creative meetings, everyone could comment on the scripts. For example: when there were children's specials, which was the peak of

20 *Máquinas Mágicas do Desenho Animado*: book by Stil (1981) on how to assemble optical toys, cut, fold and paste style. Published by the extinct Editora Bloch.

21 Augusto César Vanucci (1934-1992): film actor, director and TV producer, having worked at *Rede Globo de Televisão*.

22 Mauro Borja Lopes (1925-2004): nicknamed Borjalo, was a cartoonist. He worked as a production assistant at *Rede Globo de Televisão*.

23 Roberto Talma (1949-2015): was a film producer and television director.

this creation, he was out of ideas for the title of one of the shows. Then I remembered a song called *Plink, Plank, Plunk*²⁴, which was a beautiful song all done in *pizzicato*. And the ship would have this *pizzicato* noise. Plic, plec, plac. Then Augusto said, laughing: “Stil, you’re getting old. This song is from 1930, 1920. But the name of the show will be ‘Pluft, Plact, Zuum!’”²⁵. And so, a name was born that represented this special for several years. From an old, silly idea, Augusto turned it into life! He gave it life. This extraordinary person is greatly missed. Extraordinary people like him do.

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24 Instrumental music from 1951, by American composer Leroy Anderson (1908-1975).

25 *Plunct, Plact, Zuum* (1983): children’s musical by Rede Globo de Televisão.

