

*"It took me four years to paint like Raphael,
but a lifetime to paint like a child."*

Picasso

50 shades of coloring books for adults

The good, the bad and the beautiful

Every now and then some circumstantial and local event spreads itself, inexplicably, like fire and turns into a global phenomenon, bestseller and symbolic fact which deserves to be analyzed and deciphered to allow us to read the time and the world in which we live.

The most recent and curious of these might be that of the **coloring books for adults**.

Coloring books for children, as I searched on Google, were created in 1880 by the [McLoughlin Brothers](#), parents to the first of them: "The Little Folk's Painting Book."

Facilitate the artistic learning, develop the motor and cognitive awareness, potentialize the conceptual understanding of the tangible and develop the spirit are some of the qualities given to children's books. And what to say of the appearance and spread, in this exact moment, of the variation destined to adults?

"Relax and de-stress" is the first layer of explanation that was given by the market.

Looking at it, and searching for the bridges between what I see of the world according to my professional career, my curiosity about the mysteries of the human soul, my Designer perspective and my sensitivity of someone who has drawn and thought about the power and magic of this act his whole life, I've decided to risk three other interpretations: the good, the bad and the beautiful.

I'll start with the **bad**, in order to walk into the light.

The bad

If we look at the greater context of our society and how the world of communication (but not only) can translate and mirror what goes into our soul, what we see there is a series of faces and expressions of what might be called *message infantilization*. In advertising, one must only look with a little more attention to see that the messages destined to adults are filled with infantile content and language.

In the content, the promise that the long desired happiness (always it...) is the great goal of life, the "happy ending" of fairy tales, and that for that all you need is a

certain credit card, bag or car, is a symptom of how reductionist and simplistic, to say the least, is the platform of values that is promoted to the exhaustion, feeding the wheel of consumption that interests the model.

In form, quite a few messages come to us in the language of cartoon, with friendly and fun characters that sell you car insurance, telephony services or yoghurt as if they were popsicles or cotton candy.

Having debated about this symptom for a while now, in a philosophy study group, we've arrived at a possible and curious interpretation: when the world globalizes itself, and the messages of brands must reach audiences from different cultures, with different backgrounds, it is easier to find the necessary common ground in childhood, where the child hasn't yet been shaped and individualized by the cultural context, and keeps its universe of "original" values closer to the "natural" and "human": that of basic affects.

This new aspect of the Peter Pan syndrome can also be spotted in the infinite and growing digital game apps – "Candy Crush Saga", to mention just one – and its derivations to cinema: Spider Man, Iron Man, Superman, Batman, all the Marvel heroes are back...

The coloring books for adults might have arrived in this context as an editorial "artistic" version to recover or feed infantile affects, in a competitive and violent world, with the pragmatic and immediate benefit of de-stressing and relaxing.

The good

In this exact moment of our culture there comes, in the universe of Design and education for Corporate Management and Entrepreneurship, the interest on the way in which designers can "think out of the box" and be creative and innovative when solving complex problems. This new discipline has been baptized as "Design Thinking".

I have already dedicated a lot of attention into understanding it and in order to understand this interest in our "way of thinking", which has given me, from the start, certain discomfort and uneasiness. "Do we think differently"?

I replicate here the interesting part of an essay I've written about it, "Spring": (<http://www.designbrasil.org.br/entre-aspas/primavera-ou-o-que-eu-penso-do-design-thinking/#.VcjpgdUUQiTo>)

"The great question that provokes the interest for Design and for designers is not, in my point-of-view, in the "thinking" but in the "feeling". We designers do not think differently, we simply just don't think... we feel the world!

I would have named this discipline “Design Feeling”. Because this ability of feeling the world, using the right hemisphere of our brains, that which, by lack of exercise ended up atrophied in most men, is what differs the eye of the designer and provokes answers which are “out of the box”, “magical”, “creative”, “innovative” and all other qualities which are associated to the activity of the designer, and which have been interesting so many businessmen and managers in this moment.

“He who does not understand a look will least of all understand a long explanation.”

Arabian proverb

If it is all about inspiring non-designers to “think like designers” that the “Design Thinking” has been created and is being taught, then let us provoke the interested students not to think, but to feel, by reconnecting with the sensitive world, with the senses (observe the world, walk in(to) it) and by acting directly on the material (prototyping, tact, vision), which are all in the step-by-step of the methodology systematized as a process, but which need to be evidenced as a feeling, and not as a thinking, in order to address correctly to the challenges and results aimed at.”

The coloring books may be the good news, the most efficient one, which responds to this shortage: we must reconnect with the aesthetic world, with the capacity of using these hands and the sensitivity and act in the concrete world, with simple instruments, aiming at the ludic and serious activity of searching for harmony, and experimenting the sophisticated and essential plastic effect of color combination as an exercise of alphabetization to the beautiful. The complex beautiful.

“Painting is easy when you don't know how, but very difficult when you do.”

Degas

The beautiful

The beautiful in all this is that, like Guimarães Rosa would say,

*“The most important and beautiful, in the world, is this:
that the people are not always the same, they were not finished yet – but they
are always changing.*

They are in and out of tune...”

Guimarães Rosa

Let us start coloring again, like grown-ups.

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