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## **Trans(Formations) – The Collaborative Process of the CONTATO Festival**

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The communication and cultural scenes at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar) was, until 2002, not one of the most encouraging. With the degradation of the Public University during the years of the President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) administration, where among the administrative priorities the focus was on “making the classroom feasible”, these sectors became so orphaned that their structures in the Federal University of São Carlos were no more than a few employees and no audiovisual equipment. However, with the transformations, both in education as well as in culture, affected by the President Luiz Inácio da Silva (Lula) government and the initiatives of Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil, a feeling of new energy has begun to take hold of the University.

At first, two sectors are fundamental for the construction of the agenda for a policy of communication and culture at the University: the Pro-Rector of Extension (PROEx) and the Social Communication Coordinator (CCS). Both counted on the intense presence of students from the Audio Visual discipline which, even with professors from the area not so active in the administrative components of the institution, saw in these spaces a great opportunity for differentiated education. The first project to be constructed based on this new context was CineUFSCar<sup>1</sup>, organized essentially by students, revived the film club activity at the University, arising from a latent desire on the part of the community to return to the debate of films and their themes. Envisioned as an “extension project”, CineUFSCar gained strength, and from an

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <<http://www.cinema.ufscar.br>>.

institutional vision by the administration of the Federal University of São Carlos, was able to acquire structure and human resources, which made possible the implementation of one of the very few free 35 millimeter film clubs with continuous activity in the country. With a schedule of events focused on national cinema, seminal classics and independent film projects, CineUFSCar holds viewing sessions and debates in conjunction with its academic partners and the cultural community of São Carlos.

The same feeling of enthusiasm shown by the participants in CineUFSCar also contaminated CCS, which at that time had received the news that highly anticipated educational radio concession was about to be approved and that financial resources had also been obtained for the construction of the physical facilities of the future broadcaster. In this favorable context, the CCS proposed to the PROEx the creation of three work groups to debate what the broadcaster would become. The themes related to administration, technology and content were debated by students, professors, employees and members of the external community and gave birth to Radio UFSCar's editorial project<sup>2</sup>.

Diversity, independent music, the propagation of scientific information, social action and free technologies are the five pillars of Radio UFSCar<sup>3</sup>, which from its very beginning has been an important and powerful vehicle of communication and educational extension. Among its commitments, Radio UFSCar seeks to draw in and generate the participation of society through the education of people and through the production of knowledge committed to social demands and the ethical commitment to the agenda of social communication in Brazil. These highlights characterize the educational mission of Radio UFSCar and its guidelines of organizational, editorial and technological innovation, ideas that would come to materialize with the inauguration of the broadcaster in August of 2007.

Video 1: 1st Experimental Transmission of UFSCar Radio 95,3 FM. Source: Jovem Palerosi, 2007. Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4l43t2JnBWQ>>.

And since 2006, inspired by the debates over new formats of the propagation of scientific research and information and the presence of new media in artistic production and in the daily life of society, a group of recently-graduated students, artists, employees and professors has been creating the Open Interactivity Laboratory for the Dissemination of Scientific and Technological Knowledge, or LABI<sup>4</sup>. Performing research and development of interactive exhibits, virtual platforms, audiovisual content and spaces of integration spanning diverse areas of knowledge, LABI carries the mission of rethinking the sharing of knowledge produced within the University in an innovative and interactive way, proposing new products based on the integration of artistic experimentation and electronic art. For its accomplishment, the

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<sup>2</sup> Editorial Guidelines, UFSCar Radio. Available at: <[http://www.radio.ufscar.br/?page\\_id=441](http://www.radio.ufscar.br/?page_id=441)>.

<sup>3</sup> UFSCar Radio [website]. Available at: <<http://www.radio.ufscar.br>>.

<sup>4</sup> Open Interactivity Laboratory for the Dissemination of Scientific and Technological Knowledge, LABI [website]. Available at: <<http://www.labi.ufscar.br/>>.

incentives of The National Counsel of Technological and Scientific Development - CNPq and The State of São Paulo Research Foundation - FAPESP were fundamental.

The three projects highlighted – CineUFSCar, Radio UFSCar and LabI – create an environment of interaction unprecedented at the University and their extensional characteristics brought the Federal University of São Carlos much closer to the city of São Carlos and with the most innovative experiences that have been happening on the national scene. And it is with the structuring of these projects that there arises, in an organic way, the need for the creation of an annual time of reflection and perfection of the activities developed to promote the exchange of experiences and content. For these reasons, the CONTATO<sup>5</sup> Festival was created.

## **Coming into CONTACT<sup>6</sup>**

The CONTATO festival was conceived to play the role of articulator in putting people, projects, public and artists literally in contact. In its first edition, released in November 2007, the Festival had already designed the basic structure it uses even today – the premise of stimulating cultural initiatives of production, distribution and independent exhibition, bring to São Carlos representatives from all over Brazil who work in this field. The curatorship and planning of the festival follow this same logic of work with a focus on artists and independent productions, which seek to make innovative and contemporary interpretations in their fields through aesthetic and technological innovations, of the temerity in the proposition of new models of production, of experimentation in content.

In the first edition of the festival two activities are deserving of mention. The first is the organization of Sector Meetings in the audiovisual, music and electronic art areas, involving local and external agents, with the goal of updating the debate over public policies and the role of civil society in these particular areas, contextualizing local production and tuning it to national production for better understanding of its potential for development and articulation. The second is the presence of the North American multimedia artist Brian Kane<sup>7</sup>, pioneer in the art of VJing, who expanded the minds of all involved to new horizons, inspiring and influencing the editions that would come to follow.

## **Switch It Up**

Beginning with the second CONTATO in October 2008, the Festival began to have yearly themes. To start off this format, the expression “Switch It Up” was chosen as the guiding

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<sup>5</sup> CONTATO - Collaborative Multimedia Festival [website]. Available at: <<http://www.contato.ufscar.br/>>.

<sup>6</sup> The word CONTACT comes from the translation of the Portuguese's word CONTATO

<sup>7</sup> Brian Kane (website). Available at: <<http://blog.slashboing.com/bk/>>.

principle of the activities of that year. Switching up knowledge, ideas, points of view, art, culture and technology, the Festival achieved the status of one of the most representative from the interior of the state of São Paulo, fomenting the cultural scene in the region, integrating students, artists, producers, musicians, communicators, researchers and other professions involved in the Arts, Communication and Culture.

In the search for new forms of discussion for the integrated comprehension of the agenda, the *Debates Transversais* (Transversal Debates) were created, fundamental for the consolidation of the projects involved. Copyrights, Context Exchange and Economic Solidarity were the themes with which the debates opened and, once again, they directly influenced the shape of the festival.

Solidary Economy became the main agenda for the development of the cultural scenario around CONTATO, based on synergy between the production of academic knowledge and practice. In a crowded room, with more than 80 people, we introduced and learned more about the experiences of the Regional Incubator of Popular Cooperatives – Incoop UFSCar and about *Circuito Fora do Eixo*<sup>8</sup>, a social network that was in its first year of existence and that was already incorporating the practices and concepts of a solidary economy. This gathering directly influenced the design of the economic and structural organization of the festival, which still practices economic solidarity, and another result of this meeting was the creation of *Massa Coletiva*<sup>9</sup> – Cooperative Center for Communication and Culture, immediately after the festival ended.

Another highlight from the second edition was the presence of landmark artists in the works presented by the festival's producers – Panetone<sup>10</sup> brought their electronic toys and shared the experimental techniques of circuit bending, which accompanied the work in metarecycling that LABI had been researching, CineUFSCar immersed itself in the filmography of the São Carlos filmmaker Zé Pintor<sup>11</sup> and alongside the accompaniment of the UFSCar Experimental Orchestra held a live outdoor session in the Água Vermelha district. In music, Jards Mascalé and Mudhoney headlined – two artists who have both historically represented experimentation with content, format, and means of production across widely different contexts, but both independent.

## **1+1=3**

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<sup>8</sup> Out of Axis Circuit [website]. Available at: <<http://foradoeixo.org.br/institucional/>>.

<sup>9</sup> Collective Mass

<sup>10</sup> Panetone [website]. Available at: <<http://panetone.net/>>.

<sup>11</sup> Zé Pintor [website]. Available at: <<http://www.filmesparabailar.com/zepintor/>>.

The third edition of CONTATO was characterized by a greater relationship and involvement by the festival in the city of São Carlos, and marked the beginning of a process of appropriation and mutual belonging reflected in the fourth edition. The idea of strengthening by way of participation of networks began initiatives during the year which culminated in this event.

With the defiant “1+1=3” we sought to make explicit the synergistic relationship that propels the festival, we perceived that the sum of these productive motor forces was capable of generating something greater than any one of them alone, and that was the experience we wanted to share at that time, incorporating new agents into this being. This same defiance was the hook that elicited curiosity from all fields in search of new formats and aesthetics.

From this sum, we produced the first edition of Electronic CONTATO (*CONTATO Eletrônico*), a space dedicated to productions in the electronic arts and new medias, and Universitarian CONTATO (CONTATO Universitário), both dedicated to the fomentation of cutting edge production by artists in the beginnings of their careers and completing their educations. Spaces and initiatives dedicated to public education, sharing of knowledge and production incentives.

Another result we achieved was the holding of the CONTATO Festival Solidary Economy Exposition, with the participation of local enterprises and public institutions, in a combination of self-managing forces that directly influenced the advance of the 4th edition by proposing a collaborative production.

## **Or Collaborate or Evaporate**

We began the 4th edition with the entrance of the festival onto the municipal calendar of events by force of Municipal Law nº 15.320, authored by city councilor Lineu Navarro and with the affiliation to ABRAFIN – The Brazilian Association of Independent Festivals. The maturing of the team who had been producing the event for three years resulted in the opening of the management and in an update to the production model.

CONTATO no longer belonged to Radio UFSCar, to LAbI or to CineUFSCar. In order for it to continue making sense in this new context, the partners had to become co-producers and agenda proponents, sharing in the demand. Beginning with a call for collaborators, we structured a new team and reorganized the way we produce. New tools came into action and the openness and transparency of management were fundamental in order to complete the task – many emails, public records, production worksheets and budgets shared. Working a lot

and in a decentralized way demands greater discipline and this process became formative as well. We called this process *Gestão 2.0*<sup>12</sup> (Management 2.0).

In this evolving process, the emergence of the “social currency” (*moeda social*) of the festival was natural. CONTATO becomes part of the dynamic of management 2.0 with the role of giving autonomy to the producers and invitees, guaranteeing that part of the resources collected stay in São Carlos and consolidating the network of partners.

## **#MakeCONTATO**

The selection of the CONTATO Festival in the Petrobras Cultural Program was an acknowledgement that our model of production, organization and curatorship was going well, and we continued the call for new collaborators. The 5th edition, for us, was the consolidation of the festival as a program of training in culture and communication from São Carlos to everyone. The increasing local public presence strengthened the event like a landmark in the interior of the state of São Paulo, and the network of collaborators has also expanded the municipal frontiers, including over 60 people.

The hashtag *#FaçaCONTATO* (*#MakeCONTATO*) united the digital and organic experience of the production of this festival, a call for involvement at every step, as a producer, as an audience, in any way, but making contact. Even with the growth of the festival, it was able to maintain its proximity and its offer of involvement, and in exchange, of an ability to come into contact with people and it is that possibility that encourages us to keep doing CONTATO. And it was in that way that we were able to produce the most recent edition – through collaboration.

But nonetheless we ask ourselves if this is the best way to produce, if it is really sustainable, if we develop new strategies for growth or if we should work to maintain this size that allows for self-management, if the University must continue to hold the power of approval, if we were able to express all the festival’s objectives to the audience, among so many other questions along this line.

Regardless of the answers, the CONTATO Festival never sought to be a final, finished product, but rather the result of a continual and living experimentation and learning process and in all its environments, seeks to be a catalyzing space for action for all those involved democratically, collaboratively, transparently and emotionally. That many others come!

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<sup>12</sup> *Gestão 2.0*. CONTATO - Collaborative Multimedia Festival [website]. Available at: <<http://www.contato.ufscar.br/tec-sistema-de-informacao-colaborativo/>>.