

# Brazilian Furniture Design: Between Scandinavian Modernism and Italian Radical Design

An analysis of the chair designs by Sergio Rodrigues in the 1950's and 1960's

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**Abstract** - This paper aims to explore the ways in which the designs of Sergio Rodrigues can be comprehended within two European design movements: the Danish Modern, between 1940's and the 1960's, and the Italian Radical Design movement between 1966 and 1972. The research aims to answer the following question: 'How do the chairs designed by Sérgio Rodrigues in the 1950's and 1960's express *Brasilidade* [Brazilianness] while contributing to international furniture design?'. The goal is to provide new insights on the possible ways in which Rodrigues' production was influenced by Danish Modern design, through a case study on the *Chifruda* armchair (1962), and how it subsequently impacted Italian Radical Design, through a case study on the *Mole/Sheriff/Moleca* armchair (1957/61/63). The rhetorics of design defined by Buchanan<sup>1</sup>, which comprises technological reasoning, emotion, and character, is used as a framework to establish such comparisons. For each of the three aspects mentioned, one chair from the Danish Modern and the Radical Design are compared with the *Chifruda* and the *Mole* armchair, respectively. Apart from the case studies, the research methods include a document survey placed within the field of art and furniture design. The results show that Sergio Rodrigues did not only play a central role in shaping the national identity, also referred to as *Brasilidade*, in furniture design, but also contributed to the establishment of international furniture design trends.

*Brazilian furniture design, Sergio Rodrigues, Brasilidade, Mole armchair, Chifruda armchair, Scandinavian Modernism, Danish Modern, Italian Radical Design, Pop-Art*

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Buchanan, 'Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice', *The MIT Press* Vol. 2, no. No. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-22 (19 pages), <https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/1511524>.

## 01. Introduction

The chair can be described as the single most celebrated object of the modern era<sup>2</sup>. This thesis approaches the subject of furniture design by focussing on the chairs designed by Sérgio Rodrigues (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1927 - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2014) in the 1950's and 1960's, a period which is considered to be specially prolific for the designer in question. This same period is also interesting for analyzing the modernization and national reconstruction of Brazil reflected, for instance, by the project of the new capital Brasília, realized between 1957 and 1960. Besides the economic growth, the country also saw a period of cultural awakening, partly as a consequence of the technological developments at the time. In this sense, the furniture produced by Sérgio Rodrigues directly relates to the modernization of the country and a quest for national authenticity, which can be informally described as *Brasiliidade* [Brazilianness]. It is argued that, in the case of emerging economies such as Italy and Scandinavian countries, the relationship between craft and Modernism was instrumental in promoting the development of industrial design as well as the creation of modern design identities<sup>3</sup>. However, in the case of Brazil, the identity of national modern furniture design was defined in a scenario in which industrial modernization was still limited and did not proportionally parallel the innovation in architectural and design aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> Despite this fundamental difference, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which furniture designers around the world have influenced each other's work while contributing to national design agendas.

Among the relevant publications regarding Brazilian furniture design, Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos Santos distinguishes herself as a philosopher and an associate professor of Design at the School of Architecture and Urbanism, University of São Paulo who has published extensive work on the subject, including the book *Móvel Moderno no Brasil / Modern Furniture in Brazil*. Moreover, the non-profit organization *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues* [Sergio Rodrigues Institute] established in 2012 is responsible for the preservation of Rodrigues' collection and memory. The paper *Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis* [Sergio Rodrigues - Brazil at the Tip of the Pencil] and the book *Sergio Rodrigues / Designer* are the two main publications by the Rodrigues Institute. Consisting of one of the only issuance by international writers on the matter, the book *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture* by Aric Chen provides a complete overview of the national socio-economic context throughout the 20th century as well as detailed information on the production of furniture by several influential Brazilian designers, including Sergio Rodrigues. Nevertheless, current literature on the subject of furniture design tends to independently analyse furniture production in different continents. Even though the influence of Scandinavian design in Sergio Rodrigues' work<sup>5,6</sup> and the subsequent influence of Rodrigues' work in Italian Radical Design<sup>7,8</sup> is identified across a few papers, existing literature on the matter is missing a certain depth in order to explicitly identify such relations.

Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap in existing literature by placing the work of Sergio Rodrigues during the 1950's and 1960's in relation to European furniture design trends. By explicitly exploring similarities between national and international furniture designs, the research aims to provide new insights on the achievements of Sergio Rodrigues as a designer. The research focuses on answering the following main question: How do the chairs designed by Sérgio Rodrigues in the 1950's and 1960's express *Brasiliidade* while contributing to international furniture design? The research methods adopted include document survey and two case studies that aim to explore not only the technical aspects of chair manufacturing but also the socio-political context in which the chairs were designed. Both case studies tackled are analyzed through a

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<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Fiell et al., *1000 Chairs*, Revised and updated edition, Bibliotheca Universalis (Köln) ; [New York: Taschen, 2017].

<sup>3</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019). p. 365

<sup>4</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).p.7

<sup>5</sup> 'Side Gallery', n.d.

<sup>6</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Regina Zappa. p. 54

<sup>8</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

framework defined by Buchanan<sup>9</sup>, which determines the rhetorics of design through the following three aspects: technological reasoning, character, and emotion.

Firstly, the above mentioned framework of rhetorics of designs by Buchanan<sup>10</sup> is presented. Secondly, an analysis on the socio-political context of the modern furniture design in Brazil in the first half of the 20th century is conducted. Thereafter, the concept of *Brasilidade* [Brazilianness] is introduced and the importance of the designer Sergio Rodrigues for the development of the *Brasilidade* of the national furniture design is argued through the description of his trajectory. Next, two case studies regarding selected armchairs of Sergio Rodrigues are conducted: *Poltrona Chifruda* (1962) and *Mole* armchair (1957), considering also the two variations of this latter one: Sheriff armchair (1961) and *Moleca* armchair (1963). Each one of the selected case studies is analyzed through the framework of rhetorics of designs, encompassing their technological reasoning, emotion, and character.

On the one hand, the case study regarding the *Chifruda* armchair (1962) is chosen in order to clarify the Scandinavian influence in Rodrigue's work. On the other hand, the case study on the *Mole*/Sheriff/*Moleca* armchair (1957) is selected to illuminate how Rodrigues anticipated a few trends that were later incorporated by Radical Design in Italy. In each of these chapters, the link to Scandinavian Modernism and Italian Radical Design, respectively, are evidenced by three examples of chairs, one for each of the three aspects of Buchanan's framework: technological reasoning, emotion, and character. The research conducted on Scandinavian Modernism includes the Ox armchair (Hans Wegner, 1960-62), Pelican Chair (Finn Juhl, 1940), and Chieftain Chair (Finn Juhl, 1949), while the research on Italian Radical Design encompasses Tube Chair (Joe Colombo, 1969), Beanbag Chair (or *Sacco*) (Gatti, Paolini, and Teodoro, 1969), and the Blow Chair (De Pas, D'Urbino, Lomazzi, and Scolari, 1967), and (see figure 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Overview chairs

<sup>9</sup> Richard Buchanan, 'Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice', *The MIT Press* Vol. 2, no. No. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-22 (19 pages), <https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/1511524>.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Buchanan, 'Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice', *The MIT Press* Vol. 2, no. No. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-22 (19 pages), <https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/1511524>.



T - Technological Reasoning  
E - Emotion  
C - Character

Figure 2: Timeline of the chairs per country

## 02. Analytical Framework: Rhetorics of Design

The adopted analytical framework of rhetorics of design by Richard Buchanan<sup>11</sup> has been presented in the book *1000 chairs*, by Charlotte and Peter Fiell, as a basis for the comprehensible analysis and evaluation of a vast array of chair designs.<sup>12</sup> The relevance of this framework consists of the acknowledgment of the central role played by technology in design, being essential for the understanding of modern design language.<sup>13</sup> Persuasive design communication is based on the three following principles: technological reasoning, emotion or *pathos*, and character or *ethos*. Firstly, technological reasoning involves persuasion through practicality and is based on both knowledge on the constructive feasibility and regarding the attitudes and values of its potential users<sup>14</sup>. Secondly, emotion or *pathos* relates to the evoking of compassion by an artistic representation through active contemplation or by an experience, such as the physical contact with the art object.<sup>15</sup> Finally, character or *ethos* relates to one's guiding beliefs and values and can be understood as the way in which a designer chooses to express themselves through their design.<sup>16</sup> All in all, it can be said that technological reasoning is related to natural and social sciences, emotion is associated with aesthetics and the fine arts, and character is linked to ethics and politics.<sup>17</sup>

This framework is particularly appropriate when analyzing chairs in relation to its expression of a particular culture. First, in terms of technological reasoning, the innovation in terms of materials and assembly techniques consist of crucial elements that shape the language of a design. Secondly, in terms of the emotion, it is relevant to consider how the furniture design production was influenced by a specific political programme. Despite this relationship being rather tenuous in the case of Brazil, where other sectors of the artistic activity such as the cinema and the theater played a more crucial role<sup>18</sup>, in the case of Italy, as illustrated in chapter 7, this concern to political dimension becomes evident when considering the Radical Design furniture. Finally, in terms of the character, it is important to stress the importance of art to the expression of a particular culture and the important role played, for instance, by the use of vernacular materials to the expression of national identity.

## 03. Brazil: Socio-Political Context

In 1889, one year after the abolition of slavery in the country, the first Brazilian Republic was declared, with a civil-military coup that led to the abdication of the emperor Dom Pedro II. This period lasted until 1930 and is dubbed the Oligarch Republic since the land-owning elite of the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais had come to an agreement of intercalating themselves in the power. Such power-sharing conspiracy became known as *café com leite* [coffee and milk], as a reference to their respective most valuable commodity. Despite its political instability, due to several armed conflicts and two governmental overthrows, this period is characterized by an economical growth due to the increasing exportation. Furthermore, the boom of the coffee economy in São Paulo fostered advancements in the country's industrialization and infrastructural developments, such as the construction of railroads.<sup>19</sup>

It is broadly accepted that “the driving force behind the modernization of Brazilian culture and the definitive opening of the country to the 20th century, was, in the field of arts, without doubt, the holding of the

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Buchanan, ‘Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice’.

<sup>12</sup> Fiell et al., *1000 Chairs*.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Margolin, ed., *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Fiell et al., *1000 Chairs*, Revised and updated edition, Bibliotheca Universalis (Köln] ; [New York: Taschen, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Buchanan, ‘Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice’, *The MIT Press* Vol. 2, no. No. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-22 (19 pages), <https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/1511524>.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Buchanan, ‘Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice’, *The MIT Press* Vol. 2, no. No. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-22 (19 pages), <https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/1511524>.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Buchanan.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil =: Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

Modern Art Week in São Paulo”<sup>20</sup>. The incipient start of the modernist movement can be traced back to the start of the 20th century, through the return of Brazilians, mostly sons of immigrants, that had studied in Europe and made their way back to Brazil. Nevertheless, it was only in 1922, with the *Semana de Arte Moderna* [Modern Art Week] in São Paulo, that the advent of Modernism in Brazil was officialized, with the issuance of the first manifesto of modernist architecture, written by Russian architect Gregori Warchavchik.<sup>21</sup> In the aftermath of the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, several vanguard publications gave continuation for the debates regarding Brazil’s national identity, which had derived from the event<sup>22</sup>. As a form of post-colonial resistance and aiming for self-determination, Brazilian artists sought to establish a national style, distancing themselves from the until then predominant reiteration of the colonial tradition.

Throughout the 1920s, the modernist ideas remained restricted to a small vanguardist group, often considered as an intellectual elite. The publication of the Anthropophagy Manifest by the poet Oswald de Andrade in the first issue of the *Revista de Antropofagia* [Anthropophagy Magazine], in 1928 allowed for the broadening of literary and artistic practice in the practices 1930’s. Anthropophagy literally means “cannibalism” and the movement ironically refers to such practice among several indigenous tribes, as a way to subversively evidence the stigma of the colonizers towards cannibalism. The Anthropophagy Movement played an essential role in shaping the national identity and dismantling the colonial structure in Brazil, proclaiming that, in order to reach national cultural autonomy, Brazilians needed to, metaphorically speaking, ingest and metabolize European references.<sup>23</sup> In terms of the political context, 1930 marked a significant twist with a coup that led Getúlio Vargas to power. As a consequence of disagreements between the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais regarding the *café com leite* conspiracy for succession of power, Minas Gerais sided with the states of Paraíba and Rio Grande do Sul and supported Vargas. Marking the end of the Oligarch Republic, Vargas instauraed a dictatorship that would last until 1945, suspending the 1891 Constitution and instating provisional governments in each state, apart from Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul.

In 1937 Vargas effectively consolidated his power as a dictator, closing the National Congress and granting a new constitution that established the *Estado Novo* [New State] . Vargas, the “Father of the Poor”, as he came to be known, managed to establish a populist agenda that aimed to industrialize the national economy, create a more centralized state apparatus, and promote the idea of a Brazilian national identity in the arts<sup>24</sup>. Consisting of a turning point for the international recognition of modern architecture in Brazil, the exhibition *Brazil Builds*, held in 1943 in the New York Museum of Art (MoMA), was responsible, due to its significant repercussion in the national and international press, for evidencing the work of Brazilian pioneer modern architects<sup>25</sup>. In the same period, after World War II, several architects and artists that immigrated to Brazil in the pursuit of a new life - among whom Lina Bo Bardi, in 1946; Carlo Hauner, in 1948; Ernesto Hauner, 1949 - played a leading role in modernizing Brazilian furniture.<sup>26</sup> As stated by Chen, furniture design developed as an “ancillary outgrowth of architectural and artistic practices” rather than in parallel to them<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, the national motivations derived from the *Semana de Arte Moderna* in 1922 were only translated into furniture design two decades later.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1950’s, the national furniture design production started to slowly transition from an entirely artisanal production into a semi-industrial and industrial design. This development allowed for international

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<sup>20</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil* =: *Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015). p. 32

<sup>21</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p.26

<sup>27</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016). p. 32

<sup>28</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil* =: *Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015).

recognition of the national designs. The national design style that had matured in the previous decades was finally met by the modernization of the industry of the country, formally consolidating design language developed in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, by the 1950's, the country witnessed the development of the professional sphere of design institutions and organizations, essential, alongside the industrial development, for the maturing of the national modern furniture design industry.<sup>30</sup> When Juscelino Kubitschek was elected in 1955 Brazilians had high hopes regarding the country's development. Aiming to develop the national industry, infrastructure and energy sectors, Kubitschek managed to attract foreign investment to the country. His political discourse towards development became famous for the pledge "fifty years of progress in five". As a consequence to the economical growth, the middle class population expanded and so did the expenses in modern interior furnishings.<sup>31</sup>

A crucial achievement of Kubitschek was the construction of the new capital Brasília, inaugurated in 1960. The idea of building a new capital dated back from the eighteenth century and was envisioned to foster the exploration of the country's vast hinterland. Apart from Brasília, through music with the advent of bossa nova and through sports with Brazil's first World Cup win, the people experienced a boost of national identity, in a swell of optimism. Nevertheless, once Kubitschek finished his presidential mandate in 1961 the country once again dealt with rather complicated socio-political conjecture<sup>32</sup>. Just like it happened with many other Latin American countries, caught in the context of the Cold War and subjected to external American influence, a military dictatorship was established in Brazil in 1964. During the 1960s, essentially a counterculture decade, the country faced severe censorship which led to the exile of several artists. The dictatorship only came to an end in 1985.

#### **04. *Brasilidade***

The origin of the concept of *Brasilidade* is as old as Brazil itself and it describes the systematic strive to discover the country's roots, in a quest for national authenticity. *Brasilidade* involves both material and immaterial aspects and it can refer to some specific characteristic of the national culture or someone who was born in Brazil. Despite the controversies that surround such complex concept as *brasilidade*, there seems to be a consensus across existing literature about three aspects that define the national identity: ethnic and cultural diversity expressed in different regionalisms, the overall simplicity of the Brazilian lifestyle, and the exuberant biodiversity of fauna and flora<sup>33</sup>.

Firstly, the evident ethnic and cultural diversity in different regions of Brazil is one of the pillars of this national essence. Considering how extensive the country is, the particular geographic and historical specificities influence the local social, cultural and economic context, leading to an array of regionalism. Secondly, the simplicity of the Brazilian lifestyle. As a consequence of the country's limited industrial modernization, the Brazilian response to the machine aesthetics disseminated by international modernism remained more abstract. Instead of engaging with industrial production, designers tended to embody native cultural practices and vernacular material resources, such as wood and leather.<sup>34</sup> This leads to the third element mentioned, the exuberant biodiversity of fauna and flora, which also seems to play an important role and that has been a constant source of inspiration for national artistic production. In terms of the use of raw materials, Brazilian

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<sup>29</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil -: Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016). p. 20

<sup>31</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Marcia Elizabeth Mota Jordão, 'Sabores e saberes populares no design do móvel no Brasil: a compreensão de um caminho para brasilidade no design.' (TCC - Design, Campus Acadêmico do Agreste - Caruaru, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2017), <https://repositorio.ufpe.br/handle/123456789/31779>.

<sup>34</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

furniture design has been mainly characterized by the use of different fibers, leather, and wood<sup>35</sup>. The latter is essentially important due to the central role wood played in the colonial-era mercantile system. Among the different varieties of wood available, the redwood, also known as Brazilwood (*Pau-Brasil* in Portuguese) was the first to be explored and is the one that brought the most profit for the Portuguese colonizers. Apart from being used to build both furniture and instruments, the Redwood was also used to dye fabric, due to its red pigmentation, which also justifies the origin of its name.<sup>36</sup> Despite controversies regarding the origin of the name Brazilwood, there currently seems to be a consensus over the fact that “brasil” referred to the reddish tone of the wood’s resin<sup>37</sup>. This was the origin of the country’s name, which shows how inherent to the national identity is the wood itself as a material.

All in all, it can be concluded that *Brasilidade* is a concept that has as rhetorical means the function of unifying the multiplicity characteristic of the Brazilian national identity<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, due to a certain ambiguity regarding the concept and its application in different political and cultural perspectives, it is important to clarify that for the matter of this thesis, *Brasilidade* is approached

(...) not only Brazilian character in general, but Brazilian character in response to the forces of modernity and in contrast to North America, to Europe, and, as the only Portuguese-speaking nation on the continent, to the rest of South America. In that sense, the word can best be understood as an oppositional term, a concept shaped by all that it is not<sup>39</sup>

## 05. Sergio Rodrigues

Despite the previously mentioned controversies regarding the definition of *Brasilidade*, there seems to be a consensus over the fact that Sergio Rodrigues not only was the Brazilian designer who was the most compromised in expressing this idea of national identity in his works, but also the one who promoted the greatest development of the concept of *Brasilidade* itself, within furniture design.<sup>40</sup> *Brasilidade* provides a fundamental cultural groundwork for comprehending national furniture production, as it can be seen by the designs of Rodrigues, that aimed to match the cultural and artistic awakening that the country experienced in other artistic domains: in music through *bossa nova* and in architecture via the construction of the new capital, Brasília.<sup>41</sup> In furniture design, this so-called *Brasilidade* was expressed in Rodrigues’ design through the three aspects previously mentioned. In terms of the different regionalisms, and its intrinsic ethnic and cultural diversity, Rodrigues often designed furniture with shapes reminiscent of objects that are very present in the collective imagination, such as hammocks, typical from the indigenous tribes and very present in the North and Northeast regions in Brazil. all very present in the collective imagination.<sup>42</sup> In addition, as a way of expressing

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<sup>35</sup> Marcia Elizabeth Mota Jordão, ‘Sabores e saberes populares no design do móvel no Brasil: a compreensão de um caminho para brasilidade no design.’ (TCC - Design, Campus Acadêmico do Agreste - Caruaru, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2017), <https://repositorio.ufpe.br/handle/123456789/31779>.

<sup>36</sup> Marcia Elizabeth Mota Jordão, ‘Sabores e saberes populares no design do móvel no Brasil: a compreensão de um caminho para brasilidade no design.’ (TCC - Design, Campus Acadêmico do Agreste - Caruaru, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2017), <https://repositorio.ufpe.br/handle/123456789/31779>.

<sup>37</sup> Lilia Moritz Schwarcz and Heloisa Maria Murgel Starling, *Brasil: Uma Biografia* (São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Angela Starita, ‘Brasilidade in Built Form: Tracing National Identity in Modernist Architecture in Brazil, 1922–1968’ (New Jersey, Hillier College of Architecture and Design, 2020), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/d2c61582629d28c7abbed7fa91c78305/1?cbl=44156&parentSessionId=YMZxt5cXBv3hApKif4HTZF2UrBcSWOWjyqByXSjZ%2FYg%3D&pq-origsite=gscholar&parentSessionId=bPPd8igVpA%2BuuXHLdCm47Dw%2FmKDvbModUjeV1gOcWRU%3D.p.2>

<sup>40</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016); Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil =: Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015); Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÉ, 2017); Regina Zappa, ‘Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis’, *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Regina Zappa, ‘Portuguese’.

<sup>42</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil =: Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015).



the simplicity of the Brazilian lifestyle his designs conveyed a certain informal and laid-back lifestyle, for instance, through the relaxed seating position allowed by most of his chair designs.<sup>43</sup> Finally, the use of vernacular materials, such as wood and leather, served as a way of expressing the biodiversity in the country and drawing connections to the colonial past, through the use of native sensually textured hardwoods, and to the indigenous culture, through the use of crafts of woven leather.<sup>44</sup>

Sergio Rodrigues studied architecture in the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro between 1947 and 1952. Possibly influenced by his father, who was a designer, and his great-uncle, who was a woodwork affectionate and disposed of his own wood workshop in his backyard, Sergio's has since the start of his career been focused on architectural interiors and furniture design. In 1953, Rodrigues opened a furniture store in Curitiba called *Móveis Artesanal Paranaense*, alongside the brothers Carlo and Ernesto Hauner, who had migrated from Italy to Brazil in the late 1940's. Nevertheless, only 6 months after, in 1954, the store was forced to close, having sold only a single piece since its opening.<sup>45</sup> As a consequence, Rodrigues decided to move with his family, invited by his partners, to São Paulo to head the interior department of the newly-founded Forma store. In this context Rodrigues was not only exposed to international design trends - from the American Florence Knoll to Scandinavian design - but also had the opportunity to meet several Brazilian architects such as Lina Bo Bardi, João Vilanova Artigas, and Gregori Warchavchik.<sup>46</sup>

In 1955, Rodrigues moved back to Rio de Janeiro with his family and, alongside Leoni Paulo Grasselli and Theo Ramos Martha, founded the store and gallery *Oca*, which aimed to both sell furniture and hold visual arts exhibitions. The choice of the name *Oca*, which literally means "indigenous dwelling" in the *Tupi-Guarani* language, served as a reflection of Rodrigues' strive towards the development of the *Brasilidade* in his furniture design, characterized by "a formal elegance dictated by lifestyle".<sup>47</sup> *Oca* truly revolutionized the way furniture design was understood and how it was integrated into both architecture and culture. Moving away from the idea of a furniture storehouse, Rodrigues broke ground allowing architects, on the one hand, to display their interior settings and enabling customers, on the other hand, to experience furniture design in a holistic way.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, through the organization of exhibitions, such as *O Móvel como Objeto de Arte* [Furniture as an Object of Art] held in *Oca* in 1958 and 1962. Rodrigues was also responsible for incorporating interior design into the realm of culture.<sup>49</sup> A year after launching *Oca*, in 1956, Rodrigues founded the *Taba* factory to manufacture his furniture designs (see figure 3). Even though in the beginning, *Oca* sold selected pieces of furniture from other designers, the store started to exclusively sell pieces from Sergio Rodrigues already in 1958<sup>50</sup>.



Figure 3: from left to right: event outside *Oca* in the 1960's, interior setting of *Oca*; *Oca* furniture factory in 1965

<sup>43</sup> Chen, *Brazil Modern*. p. 8

<sup>44</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Santos, Santos, and Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil* =.

<sup>46</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Santos, Santos, and Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil* =. p. 182

<sup>48</sup> Santos, Santos, and Santos.

<sup>49</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

Before gaining appraisal in the domestic environment, the furniture sold by Rodrigues in Oca was initially used in the interiors of public or institutional buildings.<sup>51</sup> During the late 1950's Rodrigues had the chance, having received an invitation by Oscar Niemeyer himself, to participate in the national project of the construction of the new capital, Brasília.<sup>52</sup> Rodrigues is among the main designers responsible for providing the furniture for several governmental buildings of the new capital<sup>53</sup>, among which the Itamaraty Palace, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Alvorada Palace, the official residence of the president.<sup>54</sup> Rodrigues' strived not only to reflect the national history and culture through his furniture design but also to match the Niemeyer's modernist architecture style. This is most expressively seen in the design of the Leve Jockey Chair, most popularly known as Oscar Chair, designed by Rodrigues in 1956. The chair is made out of use of a solid wood structure with milled fittings and has a cane seat and back, which serves as a reference to the Brazilian indigenous culture.<sup>55</sup> The curvilinear shape of the wooden piece of the backrest of the chair serves as a direct reference to the shape of the concrete columns in front of the Alvorada Palace, inaugurated in 1958 (see figure 4).<sup>56</sup>



Figure 4: Similar shape of the concrete columns of the Alvorada Palace (XXXX, left) and the wooden backrest of the Oscar Chair (1956, right)

Later on, in 1963, Rodrigues opened the Meia Pataca store, which aimed to sell lower-priced furniture produced in series using alternative raw materials. This initiative marked an important milestone in the transition from artisanal to industrial furniture manufacturing in Brazil.<sup>57</sup> However, 5 years later, in 1968, the store closed since the market did not respond as expected, in face of the complex political and economic situation derived from the military dictatorship that started in the country in 1964 and would last until 1985.<sup>58</sup> In the same year, after a dispute with Theo Ramos Martha, one of his partners, who had supposedly been dishonest and had malconducted the store's business, Oca gallery went bankrupt and was forced to close.<sup>59</sup> Despite that, Rodrigues continued to design award-winning interiors and furniture later in his life.

In the following sections, two case studies are conducted on the *Mole* armchair (1957) and *Chifruda* armchair (1962), respectively (see figure 5) the chair that marked each of his exhibitions *O Móvel como Objeto de Arte* [Furniture as an Object of Art] held in Oca in 1958 and 1962. On the one hand, *Chifruda* armchair was selected as a case study since it does not only illustrate the Scandinavian influence in Rodrigues' work but also because it is considered to be a milestone in Rodrigues' journey of promoting furniture as an object of art.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, *Mole* armchair was chosen as a case study to speculate on the influence Rodrigues's had on

<sup>51</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil -: Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Cristina Garcia Ortega, 'Lina Bo Bardi: móveis e interiores (1947-1968) - interlocuções entre moderno e local' (Doutorado em Design e Arquitetura, São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.11606/T.16.2008.tde-20092010-092353>.

<sup>57</sup> Santos, Santos, and Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil* =. p.186

<sup>58</sup> Vacaro, Mendes, and Rodrigues, *Sergio Rodrigues, designer*. p.96

<sup>59</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Portuguese'.

the Radical Design movement in Italy. The *Mole* armchair is considered to be the pioneer of the true Brazilian modern design, as stated by Adélia Borges<sup>61</sup> and, according to Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho, probably the single most famous Brazilian piece of furniture.<sup>62</sup>



Figure 5: Sergio Rodrigues sitting on *Chifruda* armchair (1957, left) and on *Mole* armchair (1962, right)

## 06. Danish Modern and its influence on *Chifruda* armchair (1962)

### 06.1. Danish Modern (1940's-1960's)

Danish Modern should be comprehended within the definition of Scandinavian Modern, also known as Scandinavian Organicism due to the prevalent use of soft, organic forms and natural materials.<sup>63</sup> Besides Denmark, Scandinavian Modern includes the design products of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland in the 20th century.<sup>64</sup> In contrast with other countries in Europe, where Modernism led to a rupture with the history of design, the first modernists in Scandinavia attempted to reinterpret traditional pieces through the lenses of modern design languages and techniques.<sup>65</sup> The uniformization of the Modern movement among these countries was only made possible due to the circumstances during the Second World War, which led architects and designers who had fled to Sweden, to form a Scandinavian design nucleus.<sup>66</sup> Scandinavian Modern is inherently influenced by the strong craftsmanship tradition of the Nordic countries<sup>67</sup>, which can partly be explained by their relatively late urbanization and industrialization in comparison to other places in Europe.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the artisanry and handicrafts traditions, originally associated with rural values, were incorporated in the development of Scandinavian industrial societies, changing the way in which the quality of native raw materials was approached by the industry.<sup>69</sup>

The movement reached its apex between the 1940's and 1960's and even though each country played a part in defining the movement, Denmark had a defining role due to its prolific designs.<sup>70</sup> This is a consequence of the establishment of both the Cabinetmakers' Guild in the sixteenth century and the Royal Danish Academy of Arts in the eighteenth century, institutions that further solidified the craftsmanship

<sup>61</sup> Regina Zappa..

<sup>62</sup> Regina Zappa.

<sup>63</sup> Otakar Máčel, Sander Woertman, and Charlotte van Wijk, *Chairs: The Delft Collection* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2008). p. 94

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design : The Dream Is Still Alive*, Viewpoint Sweden, no. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Swedish Information Service, 1996), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=50EoAQAAAMAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=pt>.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design : The Dream Is Still Alive*, Viewpoint Sweden, no. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Swedish Information Service, 1996), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=50EoAQAAAMAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=pt>.

<sup>69</sup> Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design : The Dream Is Still Alive*, Viewpoint Sweden, no. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Swedish Information Service, 1996), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=50EoAQAAAMAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=pt>.

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

tradition in the country<sup>71</sup>. In the twentieth century, in face of the imminent need to foster innovation in furniture design and to attract the public's awareness as well as demand for quality furniture, the Copenhagen Cabinet-Makers Guild, countering the new furniture industry, started an annual sales exhibition in 1927.<sup>72</sup> The exhibition occurred every year between 1927 and 1966, and it played a central role not only in setting the standard for national commercial furniture but also in developing the Danish Modern Movement.<sup>73</sup> Apart from fostering creativity and stimulating partnerships between architects and cabinetmakers, the Cabinetmakers' Guild exhibitions brought attention to emerging prominent national designers.<sup>74</sup>

Kaare Klint (1888-1954) is considered to have been the most influential Modern Danish furniture designer, having inspired a whole generation of great Danish designers, among them Arne Jacobsen (1902-1971) and Hans J. Wegner (1914-2007). Klint was a furniture professor in the Royal Academy's School of Architecture and in his classes he stimulated students to study old furniture designs, mostly English furniture out of the 18th century, as a way to learn about the craftsmanship and the properties of wood as a material.<sup>75</sup> In contrast with Klint, stood the architect Finn Juhl (1912-1989), who saw furniture as an object of art and who, in opposition to the 'anonymous' designs featuring traditional lines by the Klint school, designed very sculptural pieces. Nevertheless, it can be argued that even Juhl was indirectly influenced by the quality and homogeneity Klint was able to set within Danish furniture.<sup>76</sup>

On what concerns Scandinavian Modernism, this research focuses on establishing connections between Rodrigues's design of the *Chifruda* armchair and the influence of several Danish architects: Ox armchair by Hans Wegner (1960-62), Pelican Chair by Finn Juhl (1940), and Chieftain chair by Finn Juhl (1949). The case studies are approached in terms of the previously mentioned framework of technology reasoning, emotion or *pathos*, and character or *ethos*, respectively (see figure 6).

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<sup>71</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>72</sup> Esbjørn Hiort, *Modern Danish Furniture. L'art Mobilier Moderne Danois. Moderne Dänische Möbelkunst. Moderne Danske Mobler*. (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc. A. Zwemmer Ltd., London / Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart / Arthur Niggli und Willy Verkauf, Teufen Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, København, 1956).

<sup>73</sup> Esbjørn Hiort, *Modern Danish Furniture. L'art Mobilier Moderne Danois. Moderne Dänische Möbelkunst. Moderne Danske Mobler*. (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc. A. Zwemmer Ltd., London / Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart / Arthur Niggli und Willy Verkauf, Teufen Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, København, 1956).

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> Esbjørn Hiort, *Modern Danish Furniture. L'art Mobilier Moderne Danois. Moderne Dänische Möbelkunst. Moderne Danske Mobler*. (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc. A. Zwemmer Ltd., London / Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart / Arthur Niggli und Willy Verkauf, Teufen Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, København, 1956).

<sup>76</sup> Esbjørn Hiort, *Modern Danish Furniture. L'art Mobilier Moderne Danois. Moderne Dänische Möbelkunst. Moderne Danske Mobler*. (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc. A. Zwemmer Ltd., London / Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart / Arthur Niggli und Willy Verkauf, Teufen Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, København, 1956).



Figure 6: Overview of the ways in which three Danish Modern chair have possibly inspired the Chifruda armchair by Sergio Rodrigues

## 06.2. Chifruda armchair by Sergio Rodrigues (1962)

*Aspas* or *Chifruda* armchair (see figure 7), as it became most famously known, was designed and launched in 1962 as part of the second edition of the exhibition *O Móvel como Objeto de Arte* [Furniture as an Object of Art], held in the Oca gallery store. The exhibition is considered to be a milestone towards the recognition of authorship in furniture design and anticipated the international contemporary trend of approaching design as art. Unlike in the plastic arts in which the authorship of artists was traditionally recognized, furniture designers were not always acknowledged for their productions. Aiming to evidence different designers and promote their public recognition, Rodrigues invited several architects, among them Lucio Costa, Alcides Costa Miranda, Marcos Vasconcelos, and Bernardo Figueiredo, to design their own chairs - which would be manufactured by Oca - and display them in the exhibition.



Figure 7: *Chifruda* armchair by Sergio Rodrigues (1962)

*Technological reasoning* - Rodrigues himself took the opportunity to design a chair that was extravagant and that illustrated the supreme manufacturing quality offered by Oca, exploring the properties of wood and

leather<sup>77</sup>. Rodrigues himself described the chair as a game, in which playfulness is translated into exuberant shapes. The original name of the chair *Aspas*, which literally means “quotation marks” was inspired by the cut out shapes on the leather backrest.<sup>78</sup> The chair’s extravagances are revealed in its technical details such as the perfect stitching of the leather upholstery of the buoy-shaped seat and the notably complex elliptical sections of the wooden rear cross-piece, which ended up inspiring the chair’s most popular name: *Chifruda*, which literally means “with horns”<sup>79</sup>. Partly because of its complex and demanding manufacturing process, which involved completely hand-shaping the elliptical headrest,<sup>80</sup> *Chifruda* was never mass-produced and records show that only 42 pieces were ever made, and its value surpasses \$8700.<sup>81</sup>

*Emotion/Pathos* - The fact that all few manufactured editions of the chairs were slightly different as a consequence of the manual production, served as an argument for Rodrigues to instigate the discussion regarding the status of furniture as an object of art. In the discussion of design as art, Rodrigues stated, “Real creation, with love, is art”.<sup>82</sup> His goal was to design a playful chair that did not align with the current modern furniture trends of the time such as those praised by Bauhaus. Therefore, in contrast with the other chairs in the exhibition, which were mostly in accordance with the modernist trends, *Chifruda* was essentially anti-functional and, therefore, is considered to have anticipated postmodernist ideas that would consolidate only a decade later in Brazil.<sup>83</sup> *Chifruda* was not well received by the public since it was considered a rather scandalous design. In disregard to public criticism, Rodrigues explained: “People found it very strange. It was very funny. But, at the time, the puritans thought it was a little strange. A lack of taste. I have nothing to do with that, right?! Whether or not they liked it was not my problem.”<sup>84</sup>

*Character/Ethos* - Supposedly due to a personal interest for the Vikings, Rodrigues decided to give the headrest a horn shape, which originated the name *Chifruda*<sup>85</sup>. Furthermore, the unusual shape of the chair instigated public curiosity and Rodrigues himself spread humorous stories about the chair, suggesting that whale or dinosaur bones were used in its fabrication. The use of vernacular materials and sculptural shapes give way to an expressive style, in which the woodwork allows for both strength and plasticity.<sup>86</sup>

### 06.3. Technological Reasoning: Ox armchair by Hans Wegner (1960)

Trained first as a cabinet-maker and later on graduated from the School of Applied Arts, Hans J. Wegner was one of the greatest Danish furniture designers. His designs were featured by an imaginative spirit, which translated into many unusual sculptural forms, often reproduced by later generations of designers. The extravagance and assertiveness of Wegner’s work is derived from his profound knowledge of materials, which enabled him to explore their respective structural possibilities to the fullest.<sup>87</sup>

The Ox armchair (see figure 8), launched in 1960, is an iconic example of the bold and sculptural designs by Wegner. However, only after two years of its launching, in 1962, the manufacturing of the Ox armchair by A.P. Stolen was interrupted due to technical challenges and market problems. Nearly three decades later, as a result of the innovative solution found by Erik Jørgensen, who was working alongside Wegner, the Ox-chair was reintroduced in the market.<sup>88</sup> When the Ox chair was re-launched in 1989, it was provided with a inner solid wood frame combined with a trim molded polyurethane foam in high density,

<sup>77</sup> Regina Zappa, ‘Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis’, *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p.41

<sup>78</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

<sup>80</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p. 82

<sup>81</sup> Gustavo Ravaglio, ‘Móveis com Nome e Sobrenome: Transfigurações Identitárias da Autoria no Design’ (Curitiba, Universidade Federal do Paraná - Setor de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes, 2015), <https://acervodigital.ufpr.br/bitstream/handle/1884/41759/R%20-%20D%20-%20GUSTAVO%20RAVAGLIO.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> Regina Zappa, ‘Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis’, *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p. 76

<sup>83</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p.82

<sup>84</sup> Regina Zappa, ‘Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis’, *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p.43

<sup>85</sup> Regina Zappa, ‘Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis’, *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p.43

<sup>86</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>87</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>88</sup> ‘Wegner Ox Chair by Hans J. Wegner’, accessed 12 April 2022,

<https://www.fredericia.com/products/by-collection-lounge-chairs/wegner-ox-chair.aspx?PID=63&catid=&catid=19404>.

inspired by the products of the tyre manufacturer Pirelli.<sup>89</sup> Since 2003 the Ox armchair has been produced by the manufacturer Modernica, through a demanding handcrafting process, specially due to the process of applying the leather upholstery, which is fixed with leather piping.<sup>90</sup> According to the manufacturer's website<sup>91</sup> the market price of the chair is around \$2995.



Figure 8: Ox armchair by Hans Wegner (1960)

Both the Ox armchair and the *Chifruda* are sculptural-like pieces of furniture that rely on a demanding and sophisticated manufacturing process which includes, for instance, the handcrafting of the leather upholstery (see figure 9).<sup>92</sup> The chairs have a strikingly different character despite having relatively similar shapes due to the different materials that are used. On the one hand, the Ox chair has a tubular steel underlying supporting structure, which gives a certain lightness to the chair, contrasting with its bold voluminous body. On the other hand, the use of choice for a thick wooden frame and the absence of a foam filling for the elliptical shape of the headrest, give the *Chifruda* armchair a rather old-fashioned, perhaps even more primitive character, when compared to the Ox armchair.



Figure 9: Manufacturing of the Ox armchair by Modernica (left); Manufacturing of the *Chifruda* armchair (right)

#### 06.4. Emotion/*Pathos*: Pelican chair by Finn Juhl (1940)

The first design phase of the architect Finn Juhl, during the late 1930's and early 1940's, is mostly characterized by upholstered volumes, which have been humorously described by a reviewer for *Arkitekten* as "sleepy

<sup>89</sup> 'Wegner Ox Chair by Hans J. Wegner', accessed 12 April 2022,

<https://www.fredericia.com/products/by-collection-lounge-chairs/wegner-ox-chair.aspx?PID=63&catid=&catid=19404>.

<sup>90</sup> 'Wegner Ox Chair', Film and Furniture, accessed 12 April 2022, <https://filmandfurniture.com/product/wegner-ox-chair/>.

<sup>91</sup> 'Ox Chair', Modernica Inc, accessed 13 April 2022, <https://modernica.net/products/ox-chair>.

<sup>92</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÏ, 2017). p.82

walruses”<sup>93</sup>. The Pelican Chair (see figure 10), launched in the Cabinetmaker’s Exhibition of 1940, illustrates the affinity of Juhl to Surrealism<sup>94</sup>. The rather clumsy character of his early designs was a consequence of his attempt to create a new aesthetic tendency in Modern Danish design, opposing the purely social and rational motivations that defined the “anonymous” character of the furniture from the traditional Klint school.<sup>95</sup>



Figure 10: Pelican Chair by Finn Juhl (1940)

Similar to the *Chifruda* armchair, the Pelican chair by Finn Juhl has a humorous and ironic connotation, which is further reinforced by the choice for a relatively thick wooden underlying supporting structure. This can be explained by the fact that both Rodrigues and Juhl regarded furniture as an object of art, being a statement on its own and not inconspicuously blending in with the architectural interiors. In their respective launching exhibitions these chairs were displayed as objects of art (see figure 11). The direct influence of modern art in Juhl’s work differentiates him among Danish designers. This appeal to art is further illustrated by the fact that he often displayed his designs alongside a sculpture from the artist Erik Thommesen, aiming to instigate a reflection upon the relationship between the different forms of art.<sup>96</sup>



Figure 11: Pelican chair next to a sculptural piece by Thommesen in the Cabinetmakers’ Guild exhibition 1940 (left); *Chifruda* armchair at the exhibition Furniture as an Object of Art in 1962 (right)

### 06.5. Character/*Ethos*: Chieftain chair by Finn Juhl (1949)

In the mid 1940’s Finn Juhl pivoted his designs, developing his aesthetic language within sculptured wooden structures, establishing a new path for Danish furniture design.<sup>97</sup> This second design phase is a consequence of Juhl’s realization that the overstuffed style of furniture offered restricted sculptural freedom considering the

<sup>93</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019). p.406

<sup>94</sup> ‘Pelican Chair by Finn Juhl | House of Finn Juhl’, accessed 13 April 2022, <https://finnjuhl.com/collection/pelican-chair>.

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>97</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019). p. 392



upholstery conceals the wooden frame.<sup>98</sup> From this point on his furniture was characterized by a finely shaped wooden structure, featuring graceful curves and crisp lines<sup>99</sup>, with an upholstery seat<sup>100</sup>. The NV-49A, mostly known as the Chieftain chair (see figure 12), was designed in 1949 by the Dane designer Finn Juhl and presented during the Copenhagen Cabinetmakers' Guild exhibition, marking Juhl's breakthrough on the international market.<sup>101</sup> It is interesting to highlight the fact that national recognition for Juhl came only after his productions were acknowledged abroad, which reinforces how influential the Klint school was in Denmark.<sup>102</sup>



Figure 12: Chieftain chair by Finn Juhl (1949)

Both the *Chifruda* armchair and the Chieftain chair are essentially sculptural and express a certain masculine character, being considered as modern interpretations of a throne<sup>103</sup>. The similarity between Juhl's and Rodrigues' works could possibly be explained by the fact that Rodrigues was constantly drawing inspiration from indigenous artifacts while Juhl's inspiration to his designs were often drawn from Surrealist sculptures and tribal artefacts<sup>104</sup>. Despite being manufactured with different wood thicknesses, both chairs present a curvature in their resting frame that resembles a hunter's bow<sup>105</sup> (see figure 13).



Figure 12: Both the curvature of the Chieftain chair (left) and the Chifruda armchair (right) present a curvature that alludes to hunter's bow

<sup>98</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>99</sup> Charlotte Fiell et al., *1000 Chairs*, Revised and updated edition, Bibliotheca Universalis (Köln) ; [New York: Taschen, 2017]. p.266

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>102</sup> Andrew Hollingsworth, *Danish Modern*, 1st ed (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>103</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019). p.406

<sup>104</sup> 'Side Gallery', n.d.; Esbjørn Hiort, *Modern Danish Furniture. L'art Mobilier Moderne Danois. Moderne Dänische Möbelkunst. Moderne Danske Mobler*. (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc. A. Zwemmer Ltd., London / Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart / Arthur Niggli und Willy Verkauf, Teufen Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, København, 1956).

<sup>105</sup> Esbjørn Hiort, *Modern Danish Furniture. L'art Mobilier Moderne Danois. Moderne Dänische Möbelkunst. Moderne Danske Mobler*. (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc. A. Zwemmer Ltd., London / Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart / Arthur Niggli und Willy Verkauf, Teufen Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, København, 1956).

Furthermore, the *Chifruda* armchair shares a trait that is characteristic of structural rationalism<sup>106</sup> and present in most of Juhl's designs<sup>107</sup>. Juhl usually implemented a visual and constructive separation of the underlying supporting structure and the supported structure itself (e.g., backrest and seat), in contact with the body of the person using the chair. In both chairs, the seat is fixed on a crossbar rather than being fixed directly against a structural frame. This causes the seat to be slightly raised above the main structure, granting a certain lightness and sculptural elegance to the character of the chair<sup>108</sup> (see figure 14).



Figure 14: Constructive separation of underlying supporting structure and seat of the Chieftain chair (left) and Chifruda armchair (right)

## 06.6. Conclusion

All in all, not only the sculptural qualities, but also the emphasis giving the craftsmanship and the respect to the inherent qualities of raw materials, are few of the general similarities between Danish Modern and Rodrigues' designs. Rodrigues himself acknowledged the influence of Scandinavian furniture in his work by stating that "[it had] more to do with our way of being (...). They were purer, not falling into superfluous fads".<sup>109</sup>

Oriented by his easy and fluid gestures, Rodrigues worked on original solutions for fittings, curved lines that sought comfort and recurring shapes (...). The beauty of his furniture comes from the harmony between the construction quality, its shape and use. These features can be compared to those of the Scandinavian furniture of the modernist period. A skillful, respectful use of wood and leather, and simple constructions in which structural elements are the image of the tensions they resolved. Form plus function complete the set.<sup>110</sup>

## 07. *Mole/Sheriff/Moleca* armchair (1957/61/63) and its influence on Italian Radical Design

### 07.1. Italian Radical Design (1966-1972)

Already towards the end of the 1950's, Scandinavian Design, after the 1955 Hälsingborg Exhibition (H55), which is considered to be the highpoint of the movement, was being overshadowed by the developments of Italian furniture, which had been successfully launched in the US<sup>111</sup>. This success can be partly explained due to the

<sup>106</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017).

<sup>107</sup> Esbjørn Hiort, *Modern Danish Furniture. L'art Mobilier Moderne Danois. Moderne Dänische Möbelkunst. Moderne Danske Mobler*. (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc. A. Zwemmer Ltd., London / Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart / Arthur Niggli und Willy Verkauf, Teufen Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, København, 1956).

<sup>108</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019). p.406

<sup>109</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015., p. 79

<sup>110</sup> Claudia Moreir Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p.127

<sup>111</sup> Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design : The Dream Is Still Alive*, Viewpoint Sweden, no. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Swedish Information Service, 1996), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=50EoAQAMAAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=pt>.

exponential development experienced by the synthetic industry in Italy, as a consequence of a governmental restriction upon import products during the interbellum period. With the end of the war, the national material production became popular among the consumer industry, acquiring a glamorous appeal<sup>112</sup>. Despite the fact that at the first moment after the end of the war Scandinavian design had been praised by its minimalistic and sparse aesthetics, soon the spirit of the Italian furniture design proved to be a better fit to the booming economy<sup>113</sup>. As the war gradually faded to a memory, the Scandinavian design felt rather subdued and stagnant, and did not correspond to the need of people to experience provocative aesthetic stimulation, for instance through colorful designs<sup>114</sup>

The start of the Radical Design movement is marked by the *Superarchitettura* manifesto and exhibition in Pistoia, in 1966.<sup>115</sup> It consists of one of the most important avant-garde movements in the history of design, in which young protagonists were questioning the modernist architectural principles that were consolidated in the previous decades.<sup>116</sup> The movement was originated in metropolitan cities in Italy and was triggered by a series of eminent economic and social problems, such as the social housing crisis, that followed Italy's Economic Miracle<sup>117</sup>. Including architects, artists, and designers, the artistic production of the movement consisted, apart from performances, mostly of drawings, photomontages, and object designs<sup>118</sup>. The latter were especially important, since objects themselves were seen as a new language of expression, serving mainly as means of communication and reflection, in a sort of irreverence to the industry and sales in general<sup>119</sup>.

The central role given to the message conveyed through object design combined with the breakthrough of new materials facilitated the establishment of interdisciplinary working methods, such as the merging of design and art<sup>120</sup>. In terms of the aesthetic influences that influenced Radical Design, Pop Art has played an important role.<sup>121</sup> Such is the relevance of the Pop Art aesthetic for the Radical Design movement that nearly every member of the Radical movement cites the first exhibitions of American Pop Art in Italy, among which the 1964 Venice Biennale, as defining moments.<sup>122</sup> Radical Design is so intrinsically related to Pop Art that, according to the designer Andrea Branzi, the manifesto for *Superarchitettura* itself can be considered a Pop manifesto.<sup>123</sup>

Pop is a buzzword that is often associated with various superficial aspects of society. The aesthetics of Pop-Art is inherently a counter-culture aesthetic, which can be characterized as both cheerful and critical. This becomes evident from the Osterwold saying that "Pop Art performs a balancing act between the more euphoric, progress-orientated prospects of the epoch on the one hand, and its pessimistic, catastrophic outlook on the other".<sup>124</sup> Moreover, Pop-Art is essentially ironic and aims to unorthodoxly portray matters of everyday life, breaking taboos, instigating people to question the status quo (e.g. consumerism) and reflect upon cultural change, specially among the youth<sup>125</sup>. In aesthetic terms, Pop-Art has influenced Radical Design

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<sup>112</sup> Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design : The Dream Is Still Alive*, Viewpoint Sweden, no. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Swedish Information Service, 1996), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=50EoAQAAAMAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=pt>.

<sup>113</sup> Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design : The Dream Is Still Alive*, Viewpoint Sweden, no. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Swedish Information Service, 1996), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=50EoAQAAAMAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=pt>.

<sup>114</sup> Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design : The Dream Is Still Alive*, Viewpoint Sweden, no. 16 (New York, N.Y.: Swedish Information Service, 1996), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=50EoAQAAAMAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=pt>.

<sup>115</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020).

<sup>116</sup> 'Radical Design', accessed 11 April 2022, <https://www.design-museum.de/en/exhibitions/detailpages/radical-design.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020).

<sup>118</sup> 'Radical Design', accessed 11 April 2022, <https://www.design-museum.de/en/exhibitions/detailpages/radical-design.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020).

<sup>120</sup> 'Radical Design', accessed 11 April 2022, <https://www.design-museum.de/en/exhibitions/detailpages/radical-design.html>.

<sup>121</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020). p.26

<sup>122</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020). p.26

<sup>123</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020). p.26

<sup>124</sup> Tilman Osterwold, *Pop art* (K??In: Taschen, 2007).

<sup>125</sup> Tilman Osterwold, *Pop art* (K??In: Taschen, 2007). p.6

not only through the use of synthetic materials, but also through the use of color and extraordinary shapes that reveal an irreverence towards scale and that aim to question function<sup>126</sup>.

The unconventional design vocabulary and utopian design ideas of the Radical Design were only made possible through the new aesthetics of transience that arose from experiments with a series of new synthetic materials, such as ABS and PVC plastics, polyethylene nylon, fiberglass, polyurethane foams, and latex rubber coating<sup>127</sup>. Giving way to lightweight, practical, inexpensive, disposable, and versatile furniture design that matched the new aspirations and nomadic lifestyle of this new age of consumers, the designs from Radical Design were a reflection of the properties of plastics, revealing its inherent malleability, flexibility, and softness<sup>128</sup>.

Much Italian furniture and this is typical for the progress in the sixties, has become idealistic, culturally oriented visions which were previously unimaginable and infeasible. Towards the end of sixties the situation in furniture design become a societal utopia and a fiery display of bold ideas<sup>129</sup>.

The Radical Design movement came to an end, roughly, in 1972 with the seminal show *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at New York's Museum of Modern Art<sup>130</sup>. During this same period, the use of synthetic materials decreased as a consequence of the development of environmental awareness among consumers<sup>131</sup>. This research focuses on exploring not only the Pop Art ethos present in Italian Radical furnish design, but also the possible impact of Rodrigues's design of the *Mole* armchair had on the following Italian chair designs: Tube Chair by Joe Colombo (1969), Beanbag Chair (or *Sacco*) by Gatti, Paolini, and Teodoro (1969), and Blow chair by De Pas, D'Urbino, Lomazzi, and Scolari (1967). The case studies are approached in terms of the previously mentioned framework of technology reasoning, emotion or *pathos*, and character or *ethos*, respectively (see figure 15).



Figure 15: Overview of the ways in which the *Mole* armchair by Sergio Rodrigues has possibly inspired three Italian Radical chair designs

<sup>126</sup> Tilman Osterwold, *Pop art* (K??In: Taschen, 2007).

<sup>127</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020).

<sup>128</sup> Otakar Máčel, Sander Woertman, and Charlotte van Wijk, *Chairs: The Delft Collection* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2008). p. 94

<sup>129</sup> Bangert, 1988, p. 50 cited in Sedef Aksoy, 'Italian Furniture Design after 1945' (Thesis, Ankara, Turkey, Bilkent University, 1992), <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/17405>. <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/17405>. p.27

<sup>130</sup> Germano Celant, Cindi Strauss, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Radical: Italian Design 1965-1985: The Dennis Freedman Collection* (New Haven : [Houston]: Yale University Press ; in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2020).

<sup>131</sup> Otakar Máčel, Sander Woertman, and Charlotte van Wijk, *Chairs: The Delft Collection* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2008). p. 94

## 07.2. *Mole*/Sheriff/*Moleca* armchair by Sergio Rodrigues (1957/1961/1963)

The *Mole* armchair (see figure 16) is considered to be the first object of art which is irreducibly Brazilian expressing national motives and consisting of an artistic emancipation in the post-colonial context.<sup>132</sup> *Mole* - literally 'soft' - was originally designed by Sergio Rodrigues in 1957 and launched in 1958, during Oca's first exhibition, *O Móvel como Objeto de Arte* [Furniture as an Object of Art]. The international reach of Brazilian furniture can be illustrated by the fact that in 1961, when Rodrigues, encouraged by the then governor Carlos Lacerda, submitted his 1957 drawings of *poltrona Mole* to the *IV Concorso Internazionale Del Mobile* [IV International Furniture Design Contest], in Cantù, Italy, his design was not accepted because it was already known. In a statement to *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper, in February 2006, Rodrigues revealed that: "To me, in and of itself, that was already a diploma, since I was not aware of the fact that the chair was already known in Europe."<sup>133</sup>



Figure 16 - Poltrona Mole, 1957

A plausible explanation for why his design was already known then is the fact that Rodrigues had been to Italy in 1958 and 1959, alongside his Italian-immigrant friend Carlo Hauner. In one of these trips, Rodrigues met Gio Ponti, who besides being a designer, architect, contributed to the organization of the *Selettiva del Mobile de Cantù*. Furthermore, Ponti was the founder of the *Domus* magazine (1928), which played an important role in promoting artists' works in the realms of design, architecture, and the decorative arts, and which, in 1959, published a selection of Rodrigues's designs in the column "Rassegna" (issue 354) (see figure 17).<sup>134</sup>



Figure 17: Domus magazine issue 354 (left) and project notebook prepared by Sergio Rodrigues for the Cantù contest (right).

After slightly altering his design and submitting his entry again (see figure 17), Sergio was awarded first place in the competition, which included a total of 27 countries and 438 competitors.<sup>135</sup> Rodrigues was the first Brazilian to win an international design competition and the result contributed to Brazil's design reputation around the globe<sup>136</sup>. The *Mole* armchair was thereafter manufactured - by the company Isa, in Bergamo - and successfully commercialized internationally under the name Sheriff chair (see figure 18). The success of *Mole* armchair can be explained by the fact that the chair is intrinsically connected to its place of origin in both material and

<sup>132</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p.53

<sup>134</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p.70

<sup>135</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>136</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

immaterial ways<sup>137</sup>. Besides the use of wood, the leather upholstery thrown on top of the chair's wooden structure relates to the *agreste sertão*, a landscape in the Northeast of Brazil, in which raw leather is used as a protection against the arid climate.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the leather straps that support the cushions resemble the traditional hammocks, an archetypal element in Brazilian culture<sup>139</sup> and allow for the ergonomic molding of the body in the voluminous upholsteries, which serve as an expression of both indolence and sensuality.<sup>140</sup>



Figure 18 - Sheriff Chair, 1961

*Technological reasoning* - Motivated by the national and international recognition the *Mole* armchair had achieved, Rodrigues decided to create a disassembled version, which could be easily exported, reducing packaging and transportation costs.<sup>141</sup> The new variation of the chair was named *Mole-ex*, short for *Mole for export*. However, the pronunciation of the word in Portuguese was responsible for renaming the chair *Moleca* (see figure 19), a slang mostly used to describe a mischievous girl.<sup>142</sup> This chair resulted from the rationalization of the manufacturing process, which revealed the approximation of Rodrigues to the international trends of Modernism. *Moleca* was the first of a series of furniture that were produced with wedges, a piece very present in colonial furniture that was reappropriated and resignified by Rodrigues.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, the wedges allowed for a very simple assembly method, which did not require any tools.<sup>144</sup>



Figure 19 - Moleca, 1963

*Emotion/Pathos* - Initially, *Mole* was not well-received by the customers since, according to Sergio Rodrigues, "If my drawings were considered 'futuristic,' well then that one could not be qualified at all. A piece of leather on those pieces of wood was just too much. Onlookers standing at the display window would say that it was very expensive even for a dog bed!!!"<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the choice of the thick wooden feet of the chair opposed

<sup>137</sup> Richard Buchanan, 'Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice', *The MIT Press* Vol. 2, no. No. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-22 (19 pages), <https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/1511524>.

<sup>138</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>139</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil =: Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015). p.183

<sup>140</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>141</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015.

<sup>142</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p. 71

<sup>143</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p. 142

<sup>144</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEÍ, 2017). p. 71

<sup>145</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p. 53

the trend of slim feet, which was prevalent in international Modernism. According to Maria Cecília Loschiavo, *Mole* is a counter-art since it opposed excessive formalism and the international modernistic trend of delicate stick feet by giving way to the expression of the truly national through the use of the robust Brazilian wood, *Jacarandá*.<sup>146</sup> This conscious material choice served as an innovative and original expression of the strength and robustness of the Brazilian wood *Jacarandá*, which expresses the richness of the Brazilian flora.

*Character/Ethos* - The character of the chair is largely given through its unique expression of the informal and laid-back Brazilian demeanor that was especially eminent among the *cariocas*, inhabitants from Rio de Janeiro, and that Rodrigues was uncannily able to express through its furniture design. According to the jury of the competition in Cantù, the chair won first place because its form was outspoken of its function, comfort, which was remarkably rare in modern language.<sup>147</sup> Regarding the aspect of regionalism, the final report of the award stated: “[...] the only model with current character, despite the structure having conventional treatment, not influenced by fads and absolutely representative of its region and origin”.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, Clement Meadmore<sup>149</sup> included *Mole* as one of 30 most representative seats of the 20th century’s ,acknowledging it as “one of the few modern chairs to have a completely informal appearance; it looks large and important but slouchingly casual, like a millionaire who wears faded Levis”<sup>150</sup>.

### 07.3. Technological Reasoning: Tube Chair by Joe Colombo (1969)

Joe Colombo’s (1930-1971) design distinguishes itself due to its simple geometry, allowing for a striking versatility.<sup>151</sup> Most of Colombo’s works has never been taken out of production and is still available today, being classified as timeless icons of the Italian Radical Design<sup>152</sup>. His work distincts itself due to the unprecedented elegance with which he was able to bridge the gap between utopic furniture and industrial design<sup>153</sup>, exploring the possibilities of the then new plastics material, such as PVC, polyurethane, ABS plastic, fiberglass, etc.<sup>154</sup> Being considered one of the most radical expressions of the multifunctionality and modularity characteristic from Colombo’s designs specially towards the mid-1060s, the Tube Chair (see figure 20) design is derived from such experiments. in which PVC is used to shape four tubes of different diameters (49, 40, 30, and 17 cm).<sup>155</sup> The tubes are padded with polyurethane foam and upholstered with a (plasticized or stretch) fabric and can be combined through several rubber and metal clamp components in a series of different ways, analogous to a lounge chair or a chaise lounge for example.<sup>156</sup>



Figure 20: Tube Chair by Joe Colombo (1969)

<sup>146</sup> Regina Zappa, ‘Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis’, *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p. 35

<sup>147</sup> Baba Vacaro, Fernando Mendes, and Sergio Rodrigues, eds., *Sergio Rodrigues, designer* (São Paulo: BEI, 2017). p.70

<sup>148</sup> Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, and Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, *Móvel moderno no Brasil =: Modern furniture in Brazil*, 2a edição revisada e ampliada (São Paulo: Olhares, 2015). p.184

<sup>149</sup> Clement Meadmore, *The Modern Chair: Classic Designs by Thonet, Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames, and Others* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1997).

<sup>150</sup> Clement Meadmore, *The Modern Chair: Classic Designs by Thonet, Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames, and Others* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1997). p.127

<sup>151</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>152</sup> Sedef Aksoy, ‘Italian Furniture Design after 1945’ (Thesis, Ankara, Turkey, Bilkent University, 1992), <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/17405>.

<sup>153</sup> Sedef Aksoy, ‘Italian Furniture Design after 1945’ (Thesis, Ankara, Turkey, Bilkent University, 1992), <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/17405>.

<sup>154</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>155</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>156</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

The Moleca armchair and the Tube Chair are comparable since they are both easy to assemble and disassemble (see figure 21). The popularization of versatile furniture in the 1960s is linked not only to the socio-economic shifts that altered the domestic life, but also to the industry's interest in expanding their consumer market.<sup>157</sup> In the case of the *Moleca* armchair, its disassembly technology was mostly developed having in mind its transportation, facilitating exportation, as previously mentioned. In the case of the Tube Chair, this is taken a step further considering it is a modular furniture design, which means it can be assembled in different ways, being extremely versatile. In terms of its transportation, the Tube Chair proves to be extremely practical, since one tube can be inserted into one another<sup>158</sup>.



Figure 21: Modular furniture design - Moleca armchair (left) and Tube chair (right)

#### 07.4. Emotion/*Pathos* - Beanbag Chair (or *Sacco*) by Gatti, Paolini, and Teodoro (1968)

The Beanbag chair, originally named *Sacco* (see figure 22), was designed by Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini, and Franco Teodoro in 1968. Being manufactured by Zanotta for the first time a year after, *Sacco* is eminently versatile and essentially reflected the new trends in Italian design dictated by Pop-Art.<sup>159</sup> The acclaimed exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* held in MoMA attracted a lot of attention to the Beanbag chair, which eventually became a great international success.<sup>160</sup> The initial inspiration for the design were primitive peasant mattresses, which consisted of coarse fabric envelope filled with dried organic materials.<sup>161</sup> A series of experiments with materials were conducted before the final decision for a synthetic fabric covering and soft polystyrene beads was made. At first, a transparent electro-welded vinyl bag was proposed as the envelope and the water was considered as a filling. The final choice for synthetic materials enabled the design to be much lighter, translating the versatility that was inherent to Radical Design, influenced by the Pop-Art aesthetics.<sup>162</sup>



Figure 22: Beanbag Chair (or *Sacco*) by Gatti, Paolini, and Teodoro (1969)

<sup>157</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>158</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>159</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>160</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>161</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>162</sup> Charlotte Fiell et al., *1000 Chairs*, Revised and updated edition, Bibliotheca Universalis (Köln) ; [New York: Taschen, 2017]. p. 4



According to Chen<sup>163</sup>, Rodrigues' design for the *Mole* chair places him in the avant-garde of what would later on be denoted as the “fat” furniture trend in Italy during the 1970s, and that is illustrated, for example, by the *Sacco* design. Derived from this trend is the eminent emphasis given to comfort in both cases (see figure 23). On the one hand, *Sacco* is notably ergonomic due to the fact envelope is only two-thirds filled, allowing the beads to mold according to one’s body shape<sup>164</sup>. On the other hand *Mole* is often described as one of the few modern chair that actually looks comfortable: “While many modern chairs are in fact very comfortable, few of them give any visual value to this, because their support systems are cleverly concealed, and their contact surfaces are usually pristine”<sup>165</sup>. Besides this, the design language of the chairs can also be linked to the desire to express affinity with the popular taste, typical of Pop-Art.<sup>166</sup> In the case of the *Mole* armchair the strive to comfort was used as means to express Brasilidade, while in the case of *Sacco* Radical Italian designers aimed to mock the economic and cultural status quo, in an attempt to improve the quality of life by designing versatile and accessible furniture<sup>167</sup>.

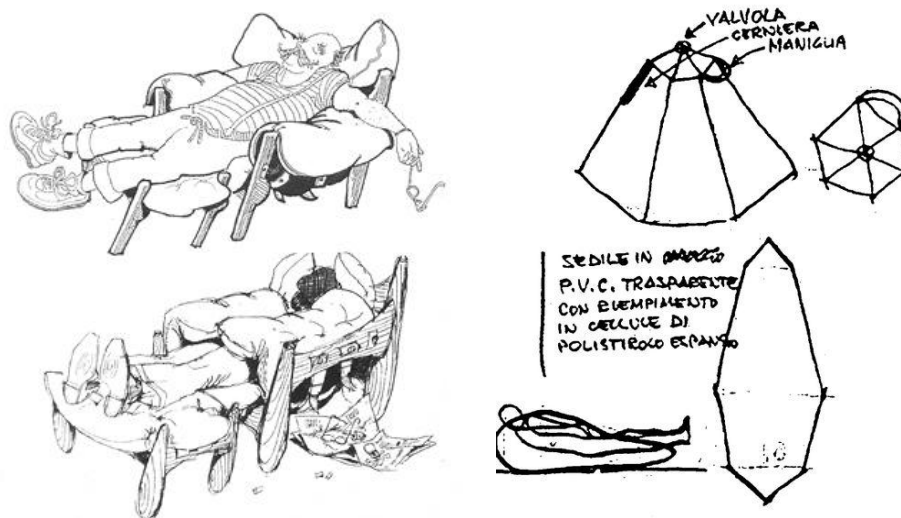


Figure 23: Emphasis in comfort and creation of appeal for the popular taste illustrated in design drawings of *Mole* (left) and *Sacco* (right)

### 07.5. Character/Ethos - Blow chair by De Pas, D’Urbino, Lomazzi, and Scolari (1967)

The Blow chair (see figure 24), made out of PVS, is an icon of Italian Radical Design in the 1960’s because it translates the radical social change at the time, reflecting a shift towards informal, versatile, and dynamic lifestyles. The chair embodied the essence of the counter-culture of Radical Design, since it inherently incorporated mass production and mechanical manufacturing, challenging the common sense that furniture is high cost and implies permanence.<sup>168,169</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>164</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019).

<sup>165</sup> Clement Meadmore, *The Modern Chair: Classic Designs by Thonet, Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames, and Others* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1997). p.127

<sup>166</sup> Sedef Aksoy, ‘Italian Furniture Design after 1945’ (Thesis, Ankara, Turkey, Bilkent University, 1992), <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/17405>.

<sup>167</sup> Sedef Aksoy, ‘Italian Furniture Design after 1945’ (Thesis, Ankara, Turkey, Bilkent University, 1992), <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/17405>.

<sup>168</sup> Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Bronwen Saunders, eds., *Atlas of Furniture Design* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2019). p. 486

<sup>169</sup> Charlotte Fiell et al., *1000 Chairs*, Revised and updated edition, Bibliotheca Universalis (Köln) ; [New York: Taschen, 2017]. p. 473



Figure 24: Blow chair by De Pas, D'Urbino, Lomazzi, and Scolari (1967)

The character of Blow chair and that of the *Mole* armchair are comparable since both trigger a sense of unpretentiousness and informality. In the 1960's the furniture industry took advantage of the developments in the communication media to promote their designs, mostly by trying to associate them to a specific behavior and lifestyle aspired by the consumer<sup>170</sup>. The resemblance among the chairs is further supported by their advertisements, strikingly similar, with the chairs being displayed by the beach, in accordance with the unpretentious aesthetics praised by their designs. According to a statement given to *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper, in February 2006, Sergio Rodrigues reveals that:

[The photoshoot at the Leblon beach, in Rio de Janeiro] was very funny. We put the piece on the sand, at the end of Leblon, which was quiet at that time, three o'clock in the afternoon, it was deserted. There was a flat, even surface, an infinite, wonderful background, since he [Otto] had neither an infinite background nor a specialized studio. But there came a naughty wave and all of the furniture got wet. It was funny, because at the time there was a lot of anxiety. But the next day, the exhibition with the *Mole* armchair was inaugurated with remarks in the press that stated that we had thrown the furniture to the sea, as if it were a kind of black magic<sup>171</sup>.

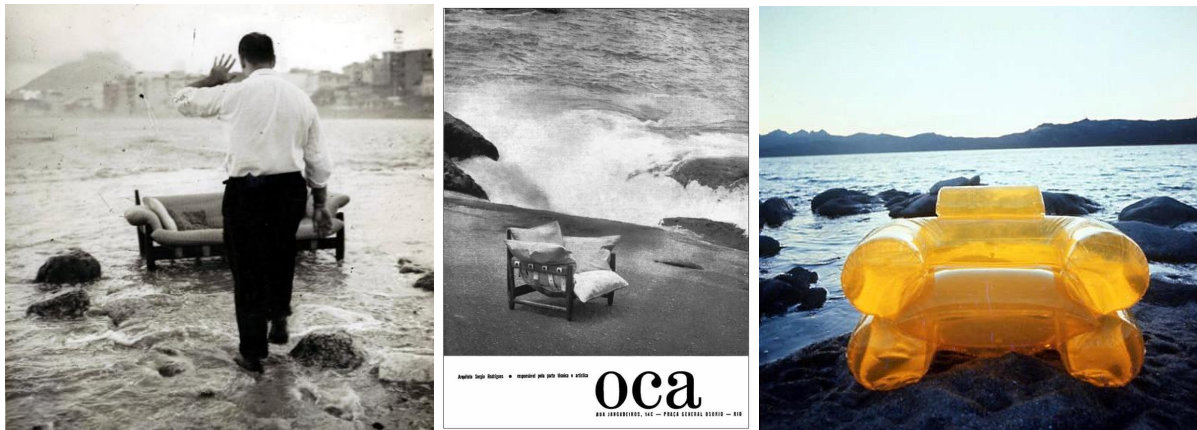


Figure 25: Photoshoot of the Mole couch at the Leblon beach in Rio de Janeiro by Otto Stupakoff in 1958 (left); Oca's ad for *Módulo* magazine, n. 24 and 26, August and December 1961 (middle); Advertisement for the Blow chair in 1967 (right)

## 07.6. Conclusion

Overall, it can be argued that the cartoonish character of Rodrigues furniture matches with the Pop-Art aesthetics depicted through Radical Design furniture. Because of this, all the chairs analyzed in this chapter have a rather humorous connotation, which is illustrated by the recurrence of the "fat" furniture trend, as

<sup>170</sup> Sedef Aksoy, 'Italian Furniture Design after 1945' (Thesis, Ankara, Turkey, Bilkent University, 1992), <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/17405>.

<sup>171</sup> Regina Zappa, 'Sergio Rodrigues - O Brasil Na Ponta Do Lápis', *Instituto Sergio Rodrigues*, January 2015. p. 35

identified by Chen.<sup>172</sup> Nevertheless, the works of Rodrigues essentially differ from the Radical Design furniture due to the different materials that are used. On the one hand, the use of vernacular materials such as wood and leather in the case of Rodrigues' designs give way to an authentic expression of *Brasilidade*. On the other hand, the use of plastics in the Radical Design furniture matches the spirit of mass production of the time while at the same time proposing a reflection upon the consumerism culture.

## 08. Conclusion

Taking into consideration the cross examination of Brazilian, Danish and Italian chair designs, it becomes clear how furniture design in one country should not be independently understood from another. Understanding the different ways in which different design aesthetics and movements adapt themselves to address a particular socio-political and cultural agenda of a specific country at a specific time is primordial in acquiring an overarching perspective on design production. Furthermore, furniture design, as art itself, is an activity that, consciously or not, revolves around a reinterpretation of previous works. As any other type of art, furniture design constantly seeks to engage politically. Nevertheless, furniture is an inherently trivial kind of art due to its essentially functional role in one's daily life. For this reason, it is interesting to think about the reason why over the years not only designers but also architects have so actively engaged with chair design. This is possibly due to the fact that, as George Nelson stated in 1953, "Every truly original idea - every important innovation in design, every new application of materials, every technical invention for furniture - seems to find its most important expression in a chair".<sup>173</sup> This is further illustrated by Buchanan's<sup>174</sup> rhetorics of design framework, in which only the emotion and character associated with chair design play an important role, but also its technological reasoning. As a consequence, when it comes to discussion of approaching furniture as an object of art, it is important to realize that the crucial role played by technological reasoning in the expression of a chair essentially differentiates it from other types of art.

Concerning the vast interdependence between the productions of different designers, there is a multiplicity of parallels that can be established across different designs in different countries. This research focussed on providing new insights on the possible ways in which Rodrigues' *Chifruda* armchair (1962) was influenced by Danish Modern design, and how his design of the *Mole* armchair - and its variations Sheriff (1961) and *Moleca* armchair (1963) - subsequently impacted Italian Radical Design. The rhetorics of design defined by Buchanan<sup>175</sup>, considering technological reasoning, character, and emotion, served as a framework to outline the chairs for a cross examination. This framework was chosen in order to allow for a relatively broad range of analyzed chairs while still trying to keep some level of clarity. The results show that the similarities of Rodrigues' designs in relation to Danish Modern mainly regard the attention given to craftsmanship and the vernacular materials used. In terms of the overall similarities identified in relation to the productions of the Radical Design movement, it can be said that in both cases the designs are characterized by the "fat" furniture trend<sup>176</sup> and, therefore, share a humorous overtone despite its significant differences in materials.

In conclusion, both the explicit endeavor of furniture design to engage with the socio-political context and the affinity among different designs across different countries should not be underestimated. This paper aimed to shed light to the outstanding quality of Brazilian furniture, focusing on placing Sergio Rodrigues' production in between European design movements. Hopefully, this paper will give insight for further research on establishing explicit parallels between furniture productions worldwide, evidencing other design productions that have until now remained isolated.

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<sup>172</sup> Aric Chen, *Brazil Modern: The Rediscovery of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Furniture*, First American edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016).

<sup>173</sup> Fiell et al. p.6

<sup>174</sup> Richard Buchanan, 'Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice', *The MIT Press* Vol. 2, no. No. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-22 (19 pages), <https://doi-org.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/1511524>.

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