

EXTENDED PRINTMAKING: (IM)PURE PRINT PRACTICES

GRAVURA PROLONGADA:
PRÁTICAS IMPURAS

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to reveal how the *Pure Print International Printmaking Meeting* may contribute with new insights towards the current quest for a relevant printmaking practice. The meeting was converted into a research platform, allowing a compilation and experiment with our desire for a full printmaking experience. Refusing a linear technological progression and rigid research plans, we moved into an impure practice seen as a transition into an intermedia experience. Slowly, we embarked on a series of experiments to pursue processes that have the potential of a photographic reproduction and looked back at a past where terms as “chemical printing” referred to the print capacity to literally transfer a drawing as first found in stone lithography. In the end, multiple technological incursions and cross academic contributions confirmed how printing research may be used to make the production of contemporary artistic printing practices easier and expand their aesthetic possibilities. Moreover, the modes of production employed reinforce perceptions of how context, conditions, and processes must be set up for a creative, resolute, and innovative research to take place. By emphasizing the use of local resources, aligning craft and practice, and selecting connections between printmaking and creative practices at large, we shed new light on how printmakers may construct knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Creative surfaces. Extended printmaking. Intermedia experience.

RESUMO

Este artigo procura demonstrar como o Encontro Internacional de Gravura Pure Print pode contribuir com novas compreensões na atual procura por uma prática de gravura relevante. O Encontro Internacional de Gravura Pure Print converteu-se numa plataforma de pesquisa que permite reunir e testar ainda mais o desejo por uma experiência completa em gravura. Recusando uma progressão tecnológica linear e planos de pesquisa rígidos, passou-se para uma prática impura vista como uma transição para uma experiência intermedial. Lentamente, embarcou-se em uma série de pesquisas na procura de processos que têm o potencial de reprodução fotográfica, olhando-se para um passado em que a impressão química capacita a transferência de um desenho inaugurado pela litografia. No final, múltiplas incursões tecnológicas e contribuições cruzadas de acadêmicos confirmaram a maneira pela qual a investigação sobre a impressão pode ser usada para expandir as possibilidades estéticas e aumentar a facilidade de produção na prática artística contemporânea. Adicionalmente, os modos de produção utilizados reforçam a percepção de como o contexto, as condições e os processos necessitam estar implementados para uma investigação criativa plena de suporte a soluções e inovações. Para tanto, não se pode esquecer, porém, o que pode ser usado a partir de recursos locais, alinhando artesanaria e prática, selecionando ligações entre a gravura e a prática criativa em geral e lançando luz sobre como os gravadores podem construir conhecimento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Superfícies criativas. Gravura prolongada. Experiência intermedial.

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, teaching printmaking within a Drawing department at *Faculdade de Belas Artes of Universidade do Porto* (FBAUP, Faculty of Fine Arts University of Porto) meant entering a no man's land: an optional and ambiguous scientific discipline disputed between the established territories — departments — of Painting and Drawing.

Then, as today, one had to understand how to “transport in all its purity” a printmaking concept found elsewhere, between Bavarian stones, to a fully integrated printmaking studio, The Slade School of Fine Art¹. As a former painter and reluctant printmaker, the researcher collected experiences and conflicts in printmaking departments and studios for years, but nothing actually anticipated the ideal model to achieve such an ambitious aim: building a printmaking studio where an extended concept of Printmaking can blossom.

Each studio space has its own history and is built according to a model that never finds an exact match. In our case, looking at the The Slade School of Fine Art in London, community-run Art Studio Itsukaichi in Japan, Franz Masereel Centrum in Belgium, and the Icelandic University of the Arts, gave us a few hints on how to build a printmaking studio in Porto. In Iceland, the printmaking area surrounded by a volcanic landscape (Figure 1) was built in 2008, on the principles of a non-toxic studio in a small-scale academy that considered, additionally, how printing could be the epicentre of an arts academy. Whereas the students' private studio borders were defined each year, the printmaking studio was a permanent structure. It resisted change even as it presented a bright and clear vision of printmaking. There, a consensus among professors was that keeping a printmaking studio meant protecting both historical and new

¹ As in the first news published in Portugal by Cândido José Xavier, on the subject of the invention of lithography. See Cândido (1819).

Figure 1 — Reference image used in tests, original image made by Graciela Machado.

Search: Graciela Machado (2008).



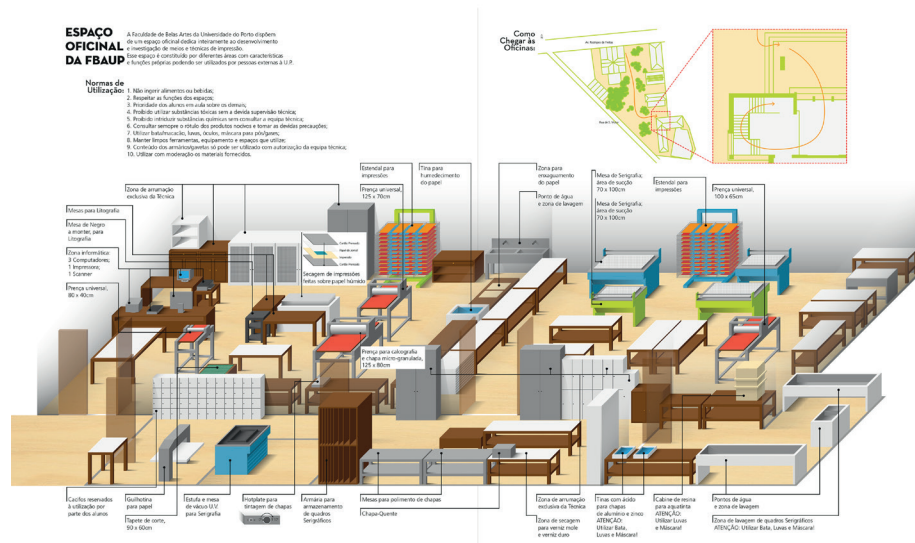
equipment side by side, as well as observing the basic health and safety concerns. Having this experience in mind, we saw a printmaking studio could be a solo project conducted by a professor who was a newcomer in the institution. Piecing together the circumstantial evidence found, we conceived a vision of a process of translating a contemporary printmaking culture to an academy where printmaking may always remain a marginal topic.

In the beginning, the main question was how to expand the visual ecology of the 21st century in a context where only more established forms of traditional processes were readily identified as printmaking. Where do values as expression and reproduction are cut short of their full use? Which activities and formats needed to be programmed and which provided transformational experiences? Which kinds of systematization and dissemination had to be performed as to gain competence for simply translating printmaking into a creative practice? How does one work with discourses and practices intimately connected and concerned with materiality, translation, and reproduction, however contradictorily blind to extend the scope of fine arts printing?

Proposals had to come fast, as one of the main problems was not only to secure the financial support to keep a workshop area, but to build it. Equipment was scarce, if not simply unavailable. We also quickly understood that eclectic formats, artist-led workshops, talks, seminars, cross-disciplinary events, and open demonstrations were the only means to create the much-needed hybridity between an art practice and the technological consolidation that allowed creativity and expressive potential to happen. In line with this, outputs created upstairs, in the printmaking area, would be necessary: books, posters, books of specimens as documents, each testing how form, content, and different people, insiders and outsiders, may reflect on print. In an inverse logic, thematic workshops could force an artificial understanding of print. Such complementary programs helped support the investment in the most basic and essential components of Printmaking: tools, materials, equipment, and knowledge. We had to use everyone's input and energy as the local team had only one lecturer, one technician, and intermittent interns arriving and leaving fast. Hence, outsiders were permanent important collaborators: they could help identify local suppliers and give an initial reassessment based on the set of materials and equipment, offer valuable and complementary suggestions as to how to implement the range processes traditionally appropriated by artists to use them in a fine art context. Workshop proposals could be organised on a one-year basis by e-mail, with longer or shorter periods of preparation, producing heavier or lighter suitcases, with the desired specialised tools, as invited artists had to bring what was still missing. Moreover, since the first introductions, proofs that resulted in such short-term incursions were kept in the studio archives and exhibited, displaying the image quality that could be achieved when used in conjunction with the same

traditional, fine arts studio printing equipment (<https://gravura.fba.up.pt/home/oficinas/>) (Figure 2), everyone was using.

Figure 2 — Printmaking studio, infographic made by Ma student, *Faculdade de Belas Artes, Universidade do Porto*, 2016.
Search: Daniel Fonseca (2016).



METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The 2010 eruptions of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull caused enormous disruption to air travel in Western and Northern Europe. In Porto, Portugal, the burst in activity in the printmaking area echoed the eruptions and went on well beyond 2010, up until 2012, as our first visit to Iceland continued to have a strong impact in this *no man’s land* as it entered an intensive phase, resulting in:

² Between 2007 and 2011, six workshop cycles were organised dedicated to the artists’ editions, printing technology, design and drawing with guest artists and master printers Mami Higuchi, Endo Ryuta, Norimasa Mizutani, Hiroshi Maruyama, Bethania de Souza, Juan Carlos Ramos, António Coelho, Pedro Salgado, Catherine Brooks, Hiroshi Watanabe, Ryoji Ikeda, Xabier Idoate and Takayuki Shinohara.

³ The international one-week long meeting focused on artist books and art editions, included artists talks, workshops by Jim Butler, Marta Aguilar Moreno, Celina Szelejewska, exhibitions, editorial projects presentations, demonstrations. April 23rd to 27th, 2012.

- an overview of the development, techniques, and aesthetic characteristics of several printmaking processes, namely the most common versions of photomechanical reproduction;
- the use of this overview to re-establish and reassess practical working procedures for the production of artwork using these methods in the studio context;
- the exploration and reassessment of the creative potential of the combination of practical aspects of such variations with previously adopted versions;
- the evaluation of the research outcomes through a comparison of the aesthetic and practical aspects of print samples, and the dissemination of the results.

This first unusual activity², along with international meetings such as “*Da impressão ao livro de artista*”³ (From the imprinting to the artist’s book) demonstrated it was time to organise a disruptive set of new initiatives. A four-month program was organised to take place in 2013. It intended to give an overview of a non-limitable experimental field, where artists,

internationally renowned experts, professional printers, and professors could share their expertise, lifelong experience, present positions, and show how their innovative practices are based on traditional techniques.

In 2013, *Pure Print: Classical Printmaking in Contemporary Art — International Meeting* (<http://pureprint.fba.up.pt/2013/>), the first official meeting of its kind, reunited print practitioners from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Spain, UK, Turkey, Netherlands, Ireland, and Portugal. It set up a model and the tone for the Pure Print meetings that ensued: the transmission of a direct and practically oriented exchange, based on the presence of the invited artists in the workshops. It was eclectic enough to transmit how current approaches in printmaking freely experiment with technical limits, merge techniques, and go beyond ordinary dimensions. A six-month program was designed to introduce the formats to be favoured in the following editions: specialised workshops, demonstrations, open lectures, and exhibitions worked as showcases of how artists currently explore and use the tools, techniques available, and the myriad of opportunities to create unique objects.

In this first edition, the list of fully booked workshops by enthusiastic students included different techniques as woodcut, photo intaglio, mezzotint, intaglio printing techniques, photo-lithography, paper mounting techniques, computational intaglio, etching, engraving on glass, sandblasting, laser, decals. Furthermore, demonstrations were also conducted by a group of MA students, who, as a result of the printmaking studio's new dynamics, had researched specific technical problems within their practices. The atmosphere was of celebration and engagement with materials, procedures, spaces, in a direct access to prints in exhibitions and artist talks. In the end, a stronger knowledge of contemporary printmaking conception and execution was forged. We were also delighted by Sean Caulfield's surprisingly simple and straightforward method of gluing prints onto the wall, Peter Bosteels's complex and seductive tiny tobacco wood engraved papers, and we thought Pure Print had to continue.

Nothing could prepare us for the following editions — *Pure Print Elements* (<http://pureprint.fba.up.pt/2014/>), *Pure Print* (<http://pureprint.fba.up.pt/2015/>), *Pure Print Porto*, *Pure Print Brazil* —, for each year a new model had to be implemented. In *Porto* (<https://pureprint.fba.up.pt/>), Madrid in 2017 or in *Porto Alegre* in 2018, reflecting on printmaking implied on different models, questions, and needs. Whoever coordinated the next event was also quite simply translating printmaking across spaces and working within discourses and practices which lead to interpretations, fissures, and contradictions, all intimately connected with matters of intercultural translation. As it became clear, these issues required each team to think locally and work across their research topics, regardless of the nations, subjectivities, histories, politics, and ethics then organising Pure Print.

THE QUESTION NOW IS: CAN IT CONTINUE?

More than ten years have passed since our visit to Iceland. We still feel there is a volcanic scenario (Figure 3) waiting for new eruptions of printmaking, where print still scares us away simply because one does not understand the technological and mechanical processes involved. We continue to believe in a practice-based platform, claiming a direct and practically-oriented research where prints are exhibited, produced, and discussed. In terms of ethics, we trust the basic manual equipment and consider an art practice where one may move in between drawing and print based outputs, whenever prints are not boring or determined by complicated processes. Also, on the creative potential of image-making modes permeable to historical and material complexity, plastic wealth based on revised methods and basic protocols initially present in different kinds of printing contexts: artistic and commercial.

Figure 3 — Tests on transfer image and prepared surface papers conducted within *Pure Print*, 2018-2019.

Search: Developed by the authors (2018).



⁴ The MA in Drawing and Printmaking at FBAUP was closed in 2018, replaced by a MA in Plastic Arts. The scientific area of Printmaking is not recognised as part of the regular offers in this MA.

For this to happen, one would need a time the regular curricula dedicated to printmaking do not have. In fact, in 2018, research opportunities were cut down, making it more difficult to learn and to research printmaking⁴. Along the years, *Pure Print* became the platform that served all purposes and fulfilled the desire for keeping an experimental context. At the very least, it remained a space of artists, to which practitioners may turn when trying to see, make, and understand printing.

Within it, we embarked on a series of experiments to pursue processes, particularly those that have the potential of a photographic reproduction. From selected photomechanical printing techniques to a past where terms as “chemical printing” referred to the print’s ability to literally

transfer a drawing as found in stone lithography (SENEFELDER, 1820), such research pursued a series of interrelated tests where both photographic and non-photographic print transfers are used to expand aesthetic possibilities and make the production of contemporary artistic printing easier for current practitioners. In the meantime, implications for the making in its modes and means of operation place the question: to what extent does this change in media and processes affect and alter the perception of reproductive means and printmaking at large?

RESULTS

We currently intend to extend the scope of fine art printing and call attention to the lost histories, such as artificial stones or paper stone, *papyrography*, surface prepared papers (TWYMAN, 1970). No technique is out of limits, whether it has historical patina or is the most recent solution used in other printmaking departments (FRAIPONT, 1895). As the title of this paper suggests, there not only is increasing compelling evidence that many of the traditional printmaking methods still need further studies, but also our efforts as printmakers were well under way to study, recreate, and update some of the key processes barely introduced in a fine arts printmaking practice, starting with a contemporary outlook.

The printmakers that visited us may be a source, as are archives and professional printers. Increasingly printed artifacts, art objects created in commercial contexts, permanent or ephemeral, reproductive or considered inherently beautiful: that is where ideas come from, keeping curiosity alive⁵.

⁵ See *Pure Print. Madrid: Book Art Edition 2017*: <<https://www.ucm.es/encuentros/pure-print-madrid-2017>>. Cited: Mar. 12, 2019.

It should be mentioned that some — not many — are reluctant to recognize this research platform as scientific research. Research is extended long after the meeting and events, when increased activity based on local research topics takes place.

GRAPHIC REPRODUCTION: PIRACY, ORIGINALITY?

The desire, since London, to draw on stone grew into a specific reassessment of photomechanical printing techniques. It quickly awakened an interest in new lower-tech insights from various sources, such as the use of marbling techniques or the development of handmade lithographic transfer papers for ceramics, revising the soft ground up to find out how to make surface-prepared papers, previously used in obscure commercial techniques such as *gillotage* in a fine art printmaking studio (CHEFDEVILLE; HILL; RAWEN, 1893). Every new test becomes a quest for developing inter-related technologies and their conceptual apparatuses, be it in photography, photomechanical printing or drawing. Photomechanical printing techniques first allowed us to focus research; meanwhile, these techniques proposed a disruptive approach to the printed artefacts usually

created in a traditional printmaking studio and in the ocean of production and consumption of images in an academic environment. So, for years, we looked back at numerous workshop protocols to include the multiple variations in intaglio, lithography, relief, and silkscreen they contained. We sought to use materials imported from the printing industry in a fine arts context. Dissatisfied by the results, we developed the curiosity and confidence to look directly into other sources (GASCOIGNE, 2004). We were seduced by the way commercial printers and technicians believe in printmaking, remembering lost phrases and comments from the past. One of these, Stanley Jones⁶, in the Slade School of Fine Art, mentioned his role in creating an innovative commercial product for silkscreen — “true grain” —, based on the grained glass used in lithography. Our recent technological reconstruction on *procedé* Rodrigues⁷, using primary sources published by José Júlio Bettencourt Rodrigues — 1843-1893 — (RODRIGUES, 1879), a pioneer in the application of photomechanical processes to mapmaking in Portugal, brought that short sentence back to our minds: just a lithographer could think of a solution based on glass in terms of its application to plastic. Our piracy is different nowadays: we returned to a simple grained glass as a drawing surface for producing positives in the printmaking workshop.

⁶ Stanley Jones director of the Curwen Studio, UK.

⁷ Method based in the use of grained glass covered with sandaraca powder, allows to draw onto with mixture of china ink, sugar, water, and glycerin. Therefore, this positive can be exposed to photosensitive paper.

DISCUSSION

Based on the recognition of materials common in the 19th century, we concluded that the technological scope of such past methods shows affiliations with methods of duplication and reproduction later to be found in rather expensive commercial products. We ended up proposing that students partially replaced solutions such as the use of “true grain”. Moreover, we understand the need to address the technological heritage, maintaining the innovative character and spirit of procedures associated with reproductive uses, just as shown by José Júlio Rodrigues.

In repetitive production processes of printings, methods may be used as clever means to save time and create. The aforementioned cases highlight the technical dependence among printmaking modes: in several instances, it may be argued that mechanical and reproductive methods have a role in innovative approaches. Each new effort can be based on the original formulas described in manuals, technical books used in commercial contexts, or seldomly passed over by printmakers (BÉGUIN, 1981). In any case, what matters is the attitude that allows graphic reproduction processes to become independent works of art, experimental in highly imaginative ways only thought possible for manual techniques. In printmaking workshops, the daily routine was to approach prints being immediately aware of their materiality, engaging it, if only to challenge it; reconstructing the stages and processes towards their adaptation to printmaking workshop in a fine art context; recognizing and enriching a technological culture still to be formed; assuming prints are a collaborative

practice and the interference and mediation of technology between the idea and the final product is a part of it.

In brief, we believe a printmaking studio needs to collect technical capacity if it aims to offer much more than mere technical solutions. Having had contact with so many printmakers along Pure Print, we realised how much more is still to be used, known, discussed, tested, and adapted to our situation (BANKES, 1976). Techniques help to set up questions: drawing on stone may have the complexity of history and the ambition its inventor placed on it when developing transfers papers, paper stones, and producing such a variety of inks used for the several manners of lithography⁸ (SENEFELDER, 2005). Not everyone follows the same path, as each printmaking studio research needs to change and adapt to what is actually possible *in situ*.

⁸ Alois Senefelder, developed the first technique to transfer images into different surfaces while systematizing lithography and the use of prepared paper as an intermediate surface to multiply original drawings.

The most striking aspect of the many graphic incursions is the mobility in between spaces, time, and their tenacious connection to confront us with reproductions previously created by craftsmen, showing how the meanings of image-making may literally and metaphorically remind us of a especially rich and unknown past (VINE, 1895). Many of these techniques produced discrepant elements, as opposed to merely reproductive means. Take for instance, surface prepared papers. Originally used as a means to facilitate photomechanical reproduction, this function may not be relevant in contemporary practice. For the relative precision of what we identify as identical mechanical elements clearly functions as drawing or print surface.

Interesting, too, is past piracy — breeding rich possibilities of analogical manipulations that may help work our concepts of printmaking against rigidity, imitation, derivation, repetition, and the single criteria of fidelity. While maintaining a conflict over the print reproducibility, it is up to us to appropriate and redeploy visual material, if we aim to wake originality and to have a better understanding of printmaking (CAMINITZER, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Along these ten years, a sort of gymnastics was associated with the relocation of areas, promoted integration, collaboration, and sharing of equipment: stones can be used to grain surface prepared papers (Figures 4 and 5), metal plates can be coated with silkscreened hard ground varnish and etched as a relief. Drawing a plate can be done with an adapted metal point in plotter activated by a computer program as to achieve the complexity of lines from the past (Figure 3). Everywhere, the technical demands of each transfer process accounts for the appearance of the drawing: reticulated patterns reads grey, although constructed out of crossed lines, reticulated patterns or minute grains of black close in appearance to aquatint that can be produced by any means available on studio, as we are not technicians (PENNELL, 1912). Of course, such

Figure 4 — Tests on transfer image and prepared surface papers conducted within *Pure Print*, 2017.

Search: Developed by the authors (2017).

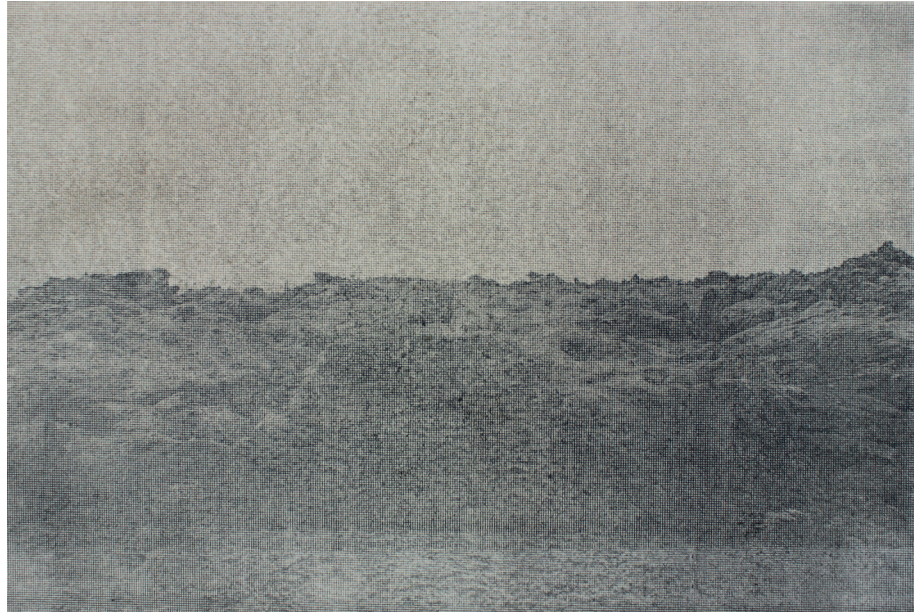


Figure 5 — Tests on transfer image and prepared surface papers conducted within *Pure Print*, 2017.

Search: Developed by the authors (2017).



resistance to printmaking as a research area has forced a flexibility and openness of ideas that attracts newcomers and forges strong links.

We may think as lithographers, etchers, or as painters, sculptors, designers, or illustrators. As much as we cultivate a much-neglected fact — namely, in contexts where classical printmaking tradition has no solid walls, although the institution where it had its origin has more than two hundred years — an extended definition of printmaking must burst and surpass individual concerns⁹. In this case, the use we give to each surface, medium, paper, material, may not allow effective reproduction. It may be used as a new drawing medium developed to think; it may or may not be a print.

⁹ One concludes, in spite of occupying a space, a printmaking studio has no established inherited borders, both between its techniques as much as with other disciplines: these must be constructed and destroyed each day.

At this point, printmaking, a contested territory, a dumping ground or a sleeping volcano, may be best described as an area of strong experimental potential in a contemporary art practice. In other words, printmaking helps us move into territories where reproductions were previously created by craftsmen (BENSON, 2008). There, where the means of image-making can literally and metaphorically remind us of how we need to work against rigidity, imitation, derivation, repetition. There is no return: only the possibility of making it happen as printmaking in situ and keeping crossing to “no man’s land”.

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How to cite this article/Como citar este artigo

MACHADO, G.; BELKOT, M. Extended printmaking: (Im)pure print practices. *Pós-Limiar*, v.2, n.1, p.39-50, 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24220/2595-9557v2n1a4515>

Received on 3/10/2019 and approved on 4/15/2019.