

# UNPACKING MY COLLECTION

NUNO COELHO\*

**Abstract:** *Due to their ephemeral and disposable nature, product packaging and labels have never been the subject of exhaustive and continued safeguarding work throughout the twentieth century and rarely have been the focus of dedicated attention. However, these apparently neutral artefacts of material culture serve economic and political interests by conveying visual messages of cultural, emotional and psychological nature. By being ubiquitous, they reflect historical processes of ideas with implications for the formation and normalisation of certain ideological discourses. Therefore, the study of the impact of commercial imagery on society should not be neglected. This text documents several projects developed from the author's collection of product packaging and labels in which ways of transferring it into the public domain were tested, offering a possible contribution to the question «What are the existing private collections of graphic design in Portugal and what is their possible public contribution to the history of Portuguese design<sup>1</sup>?»*

**Keywords:** *graphic design history; material culture; packaging and labelling; private collection; research-production.*

**Resumo:** *Devido à sua natureza efémera e descartável, as embalagens e os rótulos de produtos de consumo nunca foram objeto de um trabalho exaustivo e contínuo de salvaguarda ao longo do século XX e, raramente, foram foco de atenção dedicada. No entanto, estes artefactos, aparentemente neutros, da cultura material servem interesses económicos e políticos ao transmitirem mensagens visuais de natureza cultural, emocional e psicológica. Por serem ubíquos, refletem processos históricos de ideias com implicações na formação e na normalização de certos discursos ideológicos. Portanto, o estudo do impacto da imagem comercial na sociedade não deve ser negligenciado. Este texto documenta vários projetos desenvolvidos a partir da coleção de embalagens e rótulos de produtos de consumo, do autor, em que foram testadas formas de a transferir para o domínio público, oferecendo um possível contributo para a pergunta: «Quais são as coleções particulares de design gráfico existentes em Portugal e qual o seu possível contributo público para a história do design português<sup>1</sup>?»*

**Palavras-chave:** *história do design gráfico; cultura material; embalagem e rotulagem; coleção privada; investigação-produção.*

## UNPACKING THIS TEXT (OR INTRODUCTION)

As artefacts of material culture, due to their ephemeral and disposable nature, product packaging and labels have never been the subject of exhaustive and continued safeguarding work throughout the twentieth century and have therefore rarely been the focus of exclusive and dedicated attention. Given the vastness of the material universe

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<sup>1</sup> SILVA, 2017: 16.

around us, the existing literature on the specific case of packaging and labelling over this period in Portugal is still limited and characterised by small samples included in catalogues of collections whose scientific value is of little significance.

My interest in this material graphic universe is linked to the fact that packaging and product labels, apparently neutral and innocuous elements, serve (and have always served) economic and political interests by conveying messages of a cultural, emotional and psychological nature. Due to their ubiquity, inserting themselves into the private sphere of consumers — their own homes — product packaging and labels carry visual messages that reflect historical processes of ideas and of discourse<sup>2</sup>. Due to their visual nature, often bold and telegraphic, images are easily absorbed by the public, with implications for the formation and normalisation of certain political and ideological discourse<sup>3</sup>. In this sense, design is naturally seen as a cultural product since «as social practices generate images, images generate social practices»<sup>4</sup>. Products, and so the images and the choice of brand names associated with them, seek to respond to the needs and desires of consumers (that are dictated by capitalist logics), who, in turn, see themselves reflected or represented in this particular visual graphic universe.



**Fig. 1.**

Viarco colouring pencils featuring a boy wearing a Mocidade Portuguesa uniform  
Source: Nuno Coelho

<sup>2</sup> VOS, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> PIETERSE, 1992: 10.

<sup>4</sup> CIARLO, 2011: 3.

As design objects, packaging and product labels are components that are often neglected compared to other artefacts of material and visual culture, such as postage stamps, paper currency or posters. Examples of packaging and labels included in publicly accessible collections are nearly non-existent, as it is still rare for the national industrial fabric to have a culture to preserve its memory through the constitution of its own museums. When they exist, these museums are rarely assembled through the formulation of scientific discourse, resembling more an accumulation of objects arranged in showcases.

However, this context has not prevented several studies from being developed in recent years. There has been greater academic interest in the subject and there are several private collectors in Portugal who, over the years, have gathered various artefacts related to Portugal's industrial past. Most of these collectors have a background in design, often focusing on a particular brand, or they may be simple enthusiasts with no personal or professional background in design. Rare exceptions aside, these collections do not guarantee access to an academic audience, thus making it impossible for knowledge to be produced from them, nor to a wider audience interested in historical issues, in particular by their not being lent to exhibitions or publications. It can be said that these initiatives are still sporadic, with little coordination among them and without great purpose to reach a wider audience, often enclosed in specialised scientific events.

From this perspective, the question «What are the existing private collections of graphic design in Portugal and what is their possible public contribution to the history of Portuguese design?», put forward by Sofia Rocha e Silva<sup>5</sup>, draws our attention to the need for systematic identification of these collections as a contribution to the history of design, making us question the implications of the transfer of a collection from the private sphere into the public domain.

Taking the opportunity to write this text as a contribution to this publication, as a result of my participation in the *Design Objects Conference*, I will document several practical projects developed from my collection of product packaging and labels. Therefore, ways of transferring a private collection into the public domain through the development of various cultural products carried out in different ways were tested. The description of each project is complemented by a brief description of contexts, purposes and methodologies applied. From the briefing of these projects, which I considered as case studies here, I will try to make a possible contribution to the question posed by Sofia Rocha e Silva.

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<sup>5</sup> SILVA, 2017: 16.

## A SHORT NOTE ABOUT THIS TEXT AND ITS TITLE

For this text, I decided to revisit sections of my PhD thesis titled *Packaging design in Portugal in the twentieth century* (abbreviated title)<sup>6</sup> and a text, also of my own, titled *An archaeology of design*<sup>7</sup>. The first document was concluded at the University of Coimbra and made public in 2013, while the second was published in the book *Sub 40 – Art and artists in Porto* published in 2015 as part of the homonymous exhibition curated by José Maia at the Porto Municipal Gallery. This text is therefore a revisited and edited version of both above-mentioned texts, complemented with the description of projects developed after 2015. The idea of revisiting these texts serves the dual purpose of updating existing ones with new information, since the most recent projects had not yet been reviewed, as well as inserting my research orientation into a broader context, since these texts are only available in Portuguese.

The title of this text is an appropriation of another titled *Unpacking my library: A speech on collecting* written in 1931 by Walter Benjamin<sup>8</sup> in which the author describes taking his approximately two thousand books out of various boxes, awaiting their placement onto bookshelves. In that particular moment, which summons chaos as well as order, books become objects with a second dimension — «immaterial, projected, historical, sentimental, evocative»<sup>9</sup>. If, in the author's understanding, a collection loses its meaning if it loses its personal nature (that of the collector), then I understand that a collection will necessarily undergo resignification processes when made publicly available. I was interested in exploring the concept of «unpacking» because the theme of this text is precisely «packaging». In turn, by using the singular first person throughout the text, rather than the majestic plural, I would like to reinforce my voice as a collector (as it was in this capacity that I participated in the *Design Objects Conference*), relegating my voice as an academic researcher to the background, while remaining determinant.

## PROTODESIGN REVALUATION CURRENTS

A possible definition of packaging is a container which contains or encloses a particular consumer product over its lifetime and is therefore used for its protection, transport, storage and handling. Packaging, in addition to its functional and economic dimensions, also operates at the level of its communicative dimension, contributing to social, cultural and psychological factors. In his book *The consumer society*, Baudrillard states that «the relation of the consumer to the object has consequently changed: the

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<sup>6</sup> COELHO, 2013a.

<sup>7</sup> COELHO, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> BENJAMIN, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> SILVA, 2017:17.



object is no longer referred to in relation to a specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning»<sup>10</sup>.

Consumer products are now valued not only for their use and functionality but, above all, for what they represent and symbolise, that is, a set of social and cultural codes transmitted visually by their packaging. The products are then evaluated by a dual system of factors — qualitative (functional) and quantitative (symbolic). The social relationship between individuals is, in many cases, mediated by objects since they are characterised by their communicative and symbolic dimension. This dimension is broadened by Debord's point that «the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images»<sup>11</sup>. Botton also reinforces this view by stating that the objects we own are the visible face of our social status — real or aspired — and that, therefore, they play a crucial role in giving that status<sup>12</sup>.

Literature has assumed that the genesis of graphic design as an autonomous discipline was largely a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, which in Portugal only occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. The twentieth century would consolidate the autonomy of this discipline, not only as a result of this industrial progress, but also as a set of political, economic, social, cultural and artistic changes. The history of the twentieth century directly influenced the conception of the material universe conceived by the designers, which include everyday consumer products that are now identified through their packaging and labelling. The exponential increase in private consumption at this time led the industry to place special emphasis on the presentation of its products, not only for purposes of information but also for promoting trade and consumption. To this end, graphic design is now seen as essential in the fabric of business and industry.

As noted in the introduction to this text, product packaging and labelling has never been the subject of exhaustive and continued safeguarding work throughout the twentieth century due to its ephemeral and disposable nature. However, since the turn of the millennium, we have witnessed a paradigm shift in design that has translated into a growing appreciation of this material graphic universe in order to provide a contribution to the history of the field. I've called these processes «proto-design revaluation currents»<sup>13</sup>.

By protodesign I mean the conception of artefacts of material culture found at a time before the formalisation of the term design which, in Portugal, only occurred in the early 1970s<sup>14</sup>. Obviously, I understand that symbolism is an inherent condition to

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<sup>10</sup> BAUDRILLARD, 2007: 1.

<sup>11</sup> DEBORD, 2012:10.

<sup>12</sup> BOTTON, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> COELHO, 2013a: 305-379.

<sup>14</sup> FRAGOSO, 2012: 66, 127-128.

objects, regardless of the context (temporal, geographical, political, economic, among many others) in which they are produced. However, I understand that, through «proto-design revaluation currents», certain objects that are still present with the very same formal configuration (from the moment they were created) go through a process of «resymbolisation», that is, the product is no longer essentially functional in nature but essentially symbolic. This revaluation of the industrial material universe of past decades is characterised by bringing graphic packaging imagery back to life that was present in the daily lives of previous generations.

### **SOME EXAMPLES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL «EXCAVATIONS»**

It was in the context of the constitution of my product packaging and label collection that I developed a research orientation which I called «A design archaeology»<sup>15</sup>. The motivation for this orientation came from the need to deepen my empirically identified theme in 1997 and since then it has been formalised on several different occasions through the presentation of exhibitions, publications and commercial projects. Examples are the exhibitions *Undesign* (2003), *Viarco* (2006) and *Portuguese notebook* (2009) and two projects developed for the project *A Vida Portuguesa* (2004 and 2008). Subsequently, this subject was studied in depth in the context of my PhD research, with the *Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory* being chosen as a case study (2013).

After the conclusion of this academic research, the project *Gorreana* (2015) and the exhibition and publication *5<sup>th</sup> notebook* (2017) were developed. *Confiança* has also been the focus of new revisits, resulting in the exhibitions *The face of Confiança* (2016) and *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)* (2017), exhibitions that functioned as a diptych, as well as the publication of the book *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)* launched during its namesake exhibition. I am currently developing a research on racist representations on packaging and labels produced in Portugal, from which the development of a cultural product is also expected.

#### **1. *Undesign* exhibition (2003)**

The *Undesign* exhibition took shape as my private collection of packaging from past decades was first publicly presented. I started this collection in 1997 and it was strongly inspired by one of the modules included in *Low budget: Everyday objects*, an exhibition by designers Matthias Dietz and Mats Theselius that took place at Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon in the same year<sup>16</sup>. My private collection was publicly presented for the first time in 2003 at Maus Hábitos gallery in Porto. The display device was relatively simple: the products were sorted into categories and placed on purpose-built shelves as if it were a shop window.

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<sup>15</sup> COELHO, 2013a: 329; COELHO, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> VILAR, *coord.*, 1997.



Fig. 2. *Undesign* exhibition (2003)

Source: Nuno Coelho

For its second presentation, in 2005, the collection/exhibition travelled to Germany where it was presented at the L71 Stadtgalerie gallery in Hannover. On this occasion, the exhibition occupied the shop window of a vacant shop located in the immediate vicinity of the gallery. The choice of this venue was deliberate in order to establish direct contact between the exhibition and the public space, enabling a distinct dialogue of its previous presentation by confronting the passers-by directly. Later the exhibition was presented four more times in Portugal, in Caldas da Rainha (2005), Lisbon (2006), Castelo Branco (2007) and Almada (2007).

## 2. *Viarco* exhibition (2006)

Based on the same objective of publicising industrial heritage via its products and following the same methodology applied in *Undesign*, I was invited to undertake an exhibition based on Viarco's graphic estate, the only pencil factory in Portugal<sup>17</sup> as part of the celebrations of the seventy years of its namesake brand. In the weeks leading up to the exhibition, various historical objects were collected at the company's facilities in São João da Madeira — packaging, labelling, graphic materials, original drawings and studies, prototypes, exhibitors, small production equipment, among other elements. These different objects were gathered in several window displays

<sup>17</sup> «VIARCO» [s.d.]. Available at <from <http://www.viarco.pt>>.



Fig. 3. Detail of Viarco exhibition (2006)

Source: Nuno Coelho

arranged in a single room, allowing dialogue between objects of different typologies. The exhibition, co-organised with Daniel Pires, artistic director of Maus Hábitos, was presented at the gallery in Porto in 2006.

### 3. Portuguese notebook exhibition (2009)

*Portuguese notebook* was the designation chosen for my participation in *Timeless: Less is Better*, an exhibition at Museu do Oriente, in Lisbon, as part of the EXD 2009 Biennial programme, organised by Experimenta Design<sup>18</sup>. The curators of the «Timeless Portugal» section, Rita João and Pedro Ferreira (from the Pedrita collective) and Frederico Duarte, chose the theme «Added values» and challenged seven national designers to reflect on the concepts of «quality», «longevity» and «Portugality». To this end, each participant would have to choose a product, service or message designed in Portugal in the twentieth century that would be synonymous with the three mentioned concepts, formulating a contemporary reinterpretation of the chosen «object» that should have the same typology or seek inspiration either in its material nature, function or associated patterns of use.

<sup>18</sup> *Timeless*, 2009.



In this exhibition, my proposal reflected on the notebooks of the producers Firmo, in Porto, and Emílio Braga, in Lisbon. A collection of notebooks from each of the producers was placed on a plinth, allowing visitors to handle the objects. One of the collections was placed on each side, while the two objects of reinterpretation were placed in the centre.

#### 4. «Vintage Confiança» and «Portugueses confiantes» product collections for A Vida Portuguesa (2004 and 2008)

Two projects were developed for the market in collaboration with the project A Vida Portuguesa (The Portuguese Life)<sup>19</sup> and Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory. In the first, original labels from past decades that were deposited in the warehouses of Confiança factory were used to produce soaps wrapped in labels that were decades old. We called this the «Vintage Confiança» soap collection (2004). In the second, we developed facsimile versions of a total of fifteen labels from the first half of the twentieth century, in collaboration with Nuno Zeferino, to create the «Portugueses confiantes» («Trustful Portuguese») collection (2008). With these two commercial projects, I intended to recover and to reactivate images and graphic motifs of the Portuguese industrial past, in an exercise of their maintenance in the present time.



Fig. 4.  
«Vintage Confiança» product collection for  
A Vida Portuguesa (2004)  
Source: A Vida Portuguesa

<sup>19</sup> «A VIDA PORTUGUESA» [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.avidaportuguesa.com>>.



Fig. 5. «Portugueses confiantes» product collection for A Vida Portuguesa (2008)  
Source: A Vida Portuguesa

### 5. Archive of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory installation (2013) and «Cento & vinte» product (2013)

My PhD thesis, titled *Packaging design in Portugal in the twentieth century, from the functional to the symbolic: the case study of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory*<sup>20</sup>, was the result of an academic research into this factory, founded in 1894 in Braga<sup>21</sup>. As a justification for the choice, I took into account its unique characteristics in the Portuguese industrial landscape, since Confiança packaging and labelling highlight the direct influence of the Portuguese political, social, economic, cultural and artistic history of the twentieth century in the graphic design of consumer products.

<sup>20</sup> COELHO, 2013a.

<sup>21</sup> «CONFIANÇA» [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.confiancasoaps.com>>.

Complementing and articulating with my theoretical research and fieldwork, I decided to develop a design project component materialised in the «research-production» modality<sup>22</sup> in two distinct periods, which I called «observation» and «contamination», respectively; the first was characterised by the creation of an exhibition discourse and the second by the conception and development of a product. I understood this design project component as the result of a creative methodology, as it was constantly reformulated throughout the development of the research, it having been noticed that the information found did not always translate into what was expected to be found; and interventionist, viewing the designer as a producer of meaning and as a non-neutral subject. With this design project component, the main objective was to be able to contribute to the preservation of graphic memory and technical knowledge of the past as factors of industrial competitiveness.

With the «observation» exercise — which resulted in the creation of the installation *Archive of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory* — it was my intention to move away



Fig. 6. View of the *Archive of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory* installation (2013)  
Source: Nuno Coelho

<sup>22</sup> MOREIRA, ed., 2013.





Fig. 7. Detail of the *Archive of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory* installation (2013)

Source: Nuno Coelho

from taxonomic exhibition models, assuming a more exploratory and experimental character. I moved away from conventional or scientific exhibition models, namely those based on archival and documentary methodologies characteristic of industrial archaeology, in order to approach a more artistic and creative practice.

As a methodology for my research, given the fact that archives at Confiança were non-existent, I've created my own collection of packaging and labels related to this factory, with about one thousand distinct objects. As a display device, the installation consisted of two large plinths where the labels and packaging were arranged on their surface by colour, making up a chromatic gradient. It was possible to show a large part of the private archive of inventoried labels (around 660 different ones), in an attempt to show its size in terms of quantity of entries.

The collection was presented as a visual narrative of an aesthetic order, making it somewhat unreadable, since all the scientific keys to its understanding had been omitted. The constitution of the colour gradient on the surface of the volumes allowed the creation of an «object» with two possible readings: at a distance the visitor could perceive the colour graphic element (the chromatic gradient as an optical illusion); when closer the visitor could focus on the labels individually, being able to read their graphic elements (illustrations and typography).

At the same time, the installation *Archive of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory*<sup>23</sup> was commissioned by curators Inês Moreira and Aneta Szyłak to be part of the exhibition *Buildings & remnants: Essay-project on post-industrial spaces* presented at Guimarães 2012 European Capital of Culture<sup>24</sup>. The installation responded to the curators' challenge considering the need for dialogue of my intervention with the others commissioned for the event from areas as distinct as art, architecture, photography, design, sound, cinema, engineering, history, archaeology, anthropology and restoration, with visual and methodological contributions from artists and researchers. The dialogue of the installation with other interventions present in the exhibition allowed the possibility of different readings from different perspectives, which would not have happened so markedly if the installation had been presented publicly solo.

*Archive of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory* intended to promote a reflection on the (albeit partial) abandonment of industry in Portugal at a time when, in the current economic situation, a reindustrialisation plan is being discussed. The installation therefore constituted an invitation to memory through the tangible. I was interested in exploring and working with the notion of the past in a practical exercise of recovery, reconstruction, and reinvention of image and identity processes.

With the «contamination» exercise — which resulted in the creation of the product label «Cento & vinte» («One hundred & twenty») — it was my intention to recover composition and printing processes through the manual nature of the letterpress process, nowadays widely understood as an obsolete system, without any use of digital editing processes. Working from concrete heritage, in this case the internal letterpress workshop and all the typographic elements available at Confiança factory premises, it was my intention to reinvent the memory of the namesake brand in contemporary times. With the clear objective of preserving this graphic memory and its material heritage, I was interested in preserving work processes stemming from the objects with a great focus on the manual aspect of human gestures. The product name was chosen to celebrate the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the brand, following a similar rationale developed by the factory in previous years.

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<sup>23</sup> COELHO, 2013b.

<sup>24</sup> MOREIRA, ed., 2013.

## 6. Gorreana products (2015)

By invitation of the *Walk&Talk* festival on the island of São Miguel in the Azores<sup>25</sup>, in 2015 I was invited to develop an artistic residency to explore the images produced by the Gorreana tea factory and plantation<sup>26</sup> throughout its history. Like *Confiança*, Gorreana once had an in-house letterpress workshop that produced the packaging and labels of its own products. Following a similar rationale to that of the *Cento & vinte* project, this exercise was also based on the reutilisation and reactivation of composition and printing processes through the letterpress process. For this, the typographic characters, engravings and printing presses of Tipografia Micaelense<sup>27</sup> were used, the only one on the island of São Miguel that still retains this type of materiality.

In a process of memory preservation and an exercise of printing recovery, four new samples of packaging for Gorreana's product range were created, as well as a limited series of two engravings. Over the two weeks of the artistic residency that was developed with Nuno Neves from the *Serrote* project<sup>28</sup>, free access to the workshop was given to visitors to be able to follow the various stages of the production of the artefacts.

## 7. *The face of Confiança* exhibition (2016)

I was invited in 2016 by the municipality of Braga to coordinate the content production for the exhibition *The face of Confiança* at the Casa dos Crivos gallery in Braga. In this relatively small space, divided into two floors, the two plinths of the *Archive of Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory* were placed in central positions relative to each floor. Around it, covering the walls of the gallery, about two hundred photographs were placed, picturing social life inside the factory — official visits by state figures, annual Christmas parties, as well as other moments of gatherings. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to identify people portrayed in the photographs using sticky notes. In this way, I sought to gather more information about the visual documents in an attempt to foster the research for the subsequent production of the following exhibition, which took place a year later, as well as for the book about the history of the factory that was being developed.

The exhibition was complemented by the organisation in the same space of two gatherings with current and former workers and descendants of the founding families of the factory. As the word «face» in the title sought to indicate, this first moment of a diptych had its focus on the human dimension of *Confiança*.

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<sup>25</sup> *Walk&Talk* [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.walktalkazores.org>>.

<sup>26</sup> «GORREANA» [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.gorreana.pt>>.

<sup>27</sup> «TIPOGRAFIA MICAELENSE» [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.facebook.com/tipografiamicaelense>>.

<sup>28</sup> «SERROTE» [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.serrote.com>>.



Fig. 8. Detail of *The face of Confiança* exhibition (2016)

Source: Nuno Coelho

### 8. A *(hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)* exhibition and book (2017)

A year later, in 2017, I coordinated the content production for a second exhibition in the same space, titled *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)*. This second moment responded in a more pragmatic and institutional way to the challenge launched a year earlier. The exhibition was divided into two phases: on the ground floor, scientific contents were shown in a more concentrated arrangement; while on the upper floor artistic contents were displayed in a layout with greater space between the four works.

As scientific content, various objects created or recreated on purpose were presented. On the first wall, the most visible from the outside, a series of large-scale soap and perfume labels was reproduced as posters. Due to the visual impact of their shapes and colours, this was the appealing element to encourage visitors to enter the gallery. On the opposite wall, a three-level historical chronology was created, creating a parallel between historical events in the world, in Portugal and in Confiança. Throughout this chronology, various objects (products, documents and publications) were arranged in window displays to illustrate the historical chronology. In the centre of the gallery a plinth was created displaying various objects: a television set where one could watch a movie recovered by the Portuguese Cinematheque showing the Confiança car at the National Labour Party in 1934 (the only known moving images



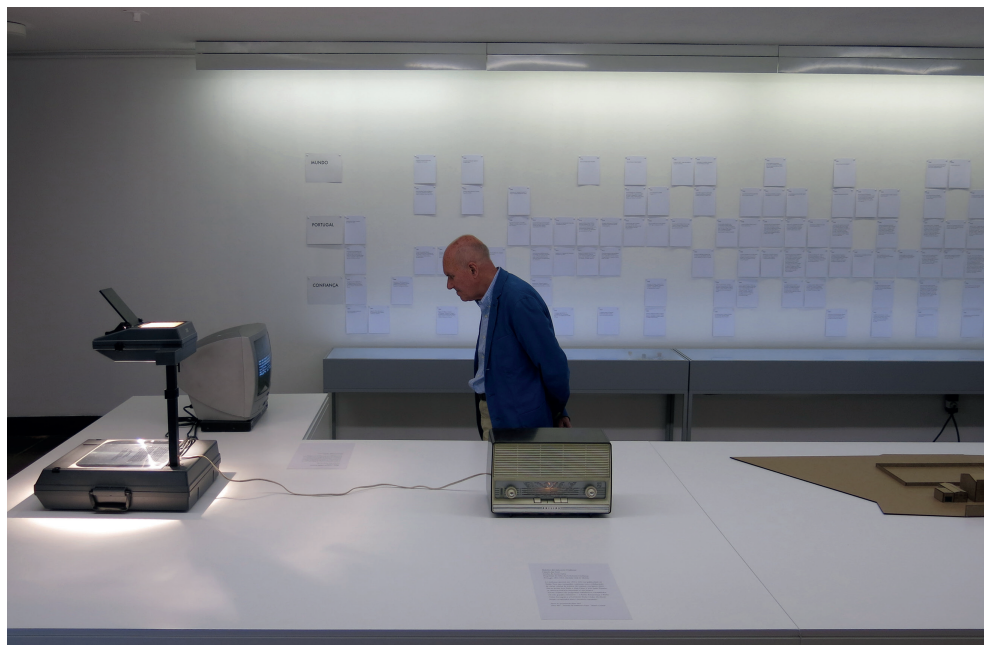


Fig. 9. Detail of *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)* exhibition (2017)

Source: Nuno Coelho



Fig. 10. Detail of *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)* exhibition (2017)

Source: Nuno Coelho



Fig. 11. Detail of *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)* exhibition (2017)

Source: Nuno Coelho

of the twentieth century related to the factory)<sup>29</sup>; a radio set broadcasted *Confiança* sponsored radio shows of 1952/53, recovered by the Institute of Ethnomusicology (INET-md); and a re-creation of a model of the factory at its height (1950s), strongly inspired by the existence in 1944 of a similar model.

As artistic content, four works were presented, two of them created for the purpose of being presented for the first time in this exhibition. On one of the walls on the top floor, a series of photographs of the interior of the factory produced by photographer Mariano Piçarra for *Encontros da Imagem* (an international photography and visual arts festival in Braga)<sup>30</sup> in 1999 was presented. On the opposite wall, a photograph of the exterior of the factory produced by photographer Paulo Catrica for the same event the next year was presented. From one corner of the room it was possible to hear musician Manuel Dordio's interpretation of a song titled «Morna do Minho» composed by Alberto Pimenta for *Confiança* possibly in the 1930s, recovered after the discovery of the original musical sheet<sup>31</sup>. Finally, in the gallery's auditorium, a

<sup>29</sup> «CINEMATECA DIGITAL» [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.cinematca.pt/Cinematca-Digital/Ficha.aspx?obraid=2504&type=Video>>.

<sup>30</sup> «ENCONTROS DA IMAGEM» [s.d.]. Available at <<http://www.encontrosdaimagem.com>>.

<sup>31</sup> COELHO, 2017a: 238.



Fig. 12. View of *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)* exhibition (2017)

Source: Nuno Coelho

video by artist Luciana Fina showed the factory in operation, in what was the only known moving images of Confiança, was presented.

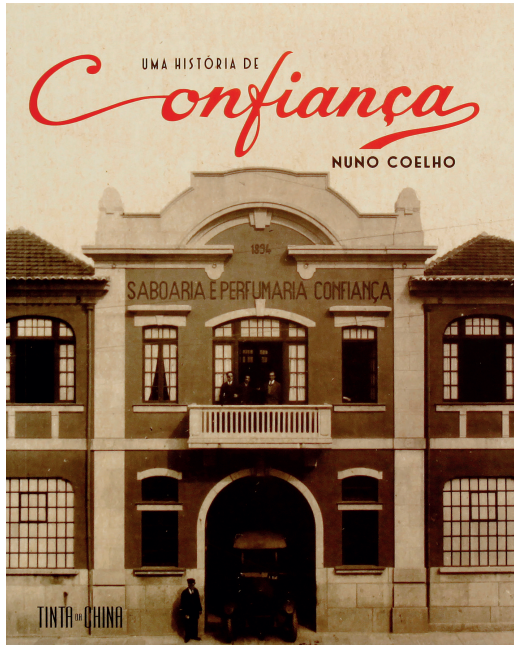
In this exhibition, as in the previous one, the private collection of packaging and labels served as a motto for the production of knowledge, seeking to establish a dialogue with objects of another nature, from archives or expressly produced for the purpose, as a way of demonstrating the discourse potential present in the collections.

During the exhibition *A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)*, the namesake book was launched<sup>32</sup>. Its presentation served as the theme for one of the regular sessions titled *Local history sessions* organised by the municipality of Braga. The book reproduces the history of Confiança, profusely illustrated with graphic motifs from the packaging and labels produced by Confiança Soap and Perfume Factory since its foundation in 1894. The book, with a preface by José Manuel Lopes Cordeiro and published by the publisher Tinta da China, was supported by the Braga City Council, Confiança and the A Vida Portuguesa project.

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<sup>32</sup> COELHO, 2017a.





**Fig. 13.**

*A (hi)story of Confiança (Confidence)*  
book (2017)

Source: Nuno Coelho

### **9. 5<sup>th</sup> notebook – Essay on Rivoli archives exhibition and publication (2017)**

The methodologies tested and applied in previous projects related to the industrial fabric were first applied to another type of institution when I was commissioned to explore the archives of Rivoli – Municipal Theatre of Porto. For its 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the exhibition *5<sup>th</sup> notebook – Essay on Rivoli archives* was developed, as well as a publication of the same name. The project set out to look for the physical traces of the activity of this cultural facility — posters, programmes, photographs, press releases, activity reports, video records of cultural activities, among many others. Even though this project was not developed from a private collection but rather from an institutional archive, I tried to implement the same concepts of research and methodologies as undertaken in the previous projects. In the same way, the intention was to draw narratives from the material culture, transporting what had been «silenced» into a position of centrality, emphasising narratives normally invisible to the general public. A single exhibition device was created, bringing together objects of different typologies in order to explore the concept of the archive as a case study. In turn, in the namesake publication launched within the scope of the exhibition<sup>33</sup>,

<sup>33</sup> COELHO, 2017b.

it was possible to explore the concept of retrieving a past memory, by publishing a part of the archive, thus enabling an act of remembrance and regeneration.

## **10. Untitled (ongoing)**

I am currently developing a research on racist representations on packaging and labels produced in Portugal throughout the twentieth century to this date; the development of a cultural product is also expected from this research. The research for this project is based on the observation of the choice of brand names (words) and their associated images (pictorial elements) that were registered from the late nineteenth century by consulting the Industrial Property Bulletins stored at the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI)<sup>34</sup>. This research aims to better understand designers as image creators in the process of identity construction in the Portuguese colonial era and its legacies in present times.

## **THE NEED FOR A DESIGN ARCHAEOLOGY**

Following the formalisation of the enlarged internal market of the European Economic Community in 1986, although Portuguese companies were now able to reach a size that the limited Portuguese market could not assure them, on the other hand they were faced with increased difficulties in maintaining competitiveness. The illusion of national production being able to reach a geographically wider market actually was translated into an opposite reality. Portuguese companies were not prepared to compete with foreign multinationals, whose products invaded our country and won the preference of consumers. With the arrival of a «brave new world», Portuguese historical trademarks began to be connoted with an archaic, retrograde and anachronistic past. Not only did Portuguese companies fail to succeed in the European common market, but they also lost significant domestic shares. Portuguese industry declined in the 1990s, and many manufacturers went through painful insolvency proceedings or subsisted poorly in the ensuing decades.

This ongoing struggle for survival in a globalised market has led companies to focus their energies and efforts on those aspects considered most critical for their maintenance, relegating the organisation and maintenance of their archives, records and files to a secondary or even non-existent plane. This reality, coupled with the fact that there is no specific legislation in Portugal regulating the preservation of this type of industrial memory, has the consequence of the current practice not systematising the documentation produced and not safeguarding their archives, in particular with regard to graphic archives and their related documentation.

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<sup>34</sup> COELHO, 2016.

As a reflection of this legal vacuum, it is common practice when companies go bankrupt or even face less prosperous times for their archives to be destroyed. In the constant struggle for survival and permanence in the market, there are few companies that concentrate their efforts on safeguarding their archives and even in companies that do not go through periods of economic difficulties, there is no culture of preservation, documentation and recording of their memory.

I recognise that the physical traces of industrial activity are an important contribution to the writing of our collective history. I refer not only to the architectural remnants, which are gradually disappearing from our landscape or being converted into other types of spaces, but also from the graphic remnants. This dramatic situation needs to be urgently and strongly counteracted through a systematic safeguarding effort. Therefore, a widespread intervention to preserve and research this heritage, which is crucial for the knowledge and understanding of collective history and memory, becomes urgent. It is precisely in this context that I have set my most recent work.

The fact that there are few industrial museums in Portugal, and these are essentially of municipal agency, having no national scope, demonstrates precisely this deficit, and it is necessary and urgent to redefine the concepts of industrial museology in Portugal. In addition to industrial historians and archaeologists, researchers and practitioners from other disciplines such as artists and designers should be called upon to play an active role in these processes.

Fortunately, there is currently growing academic interest in this subject, as is the case with the increasing amount of research developed in this area. In the commercial area, we can notice this rescue process through projects such as *A Vida Portuguesa* and the growing number of initiatives that it has been inspiring and stimulating. This revaluation of the industrial material universe produced before the formalisation of the concept of design privileges the symbolic character of the products, giving it a value that goes far beyond its functional aspect. These academic and commercial projects broaden audiences by «digging up» a significant portion of artefacts from our collective history, in line with the process of «rediscovering» the recent past and, to some extent, the loss of our «fear of existing»<sup>35</sup>. If it can be concluded from my research that the business and the industrial fabric only values its history, artefacts or archives if it recognises commercial value in them, then it is most useful to exploit this economic potential of memory.

## WRAPPING UP (OR CONCLUSION)

Since my research orientation focuses on memory issues of different natures (historical, industrial, collective and individual, among others), I believe it is

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<sup>35</sup> GIL, 2008.

essential to establish a cross reading between the discipline of design and other areas of knowledge, namely art, history, industrial archaeology, semiotics, ethnography, economics and sociology, since the intersection of different areas of knowledge is an intrinsic feature of the discipline of design. «Therefore, a contaminated narrative construction was assumed, since interdisciplinarity also belongs to the genetic code of design. Design understood here not only as a profession, but also as a cultural and configurative activity»<sup>36</sup>. Nevertheless, despite the essential contributions of different areas of knowledge used in my research, I favour the perspective of design in reading the various information collected and in the subsequent production of meaning from it.

I understand design as a discipline based on the binomial science/art, where the former is widely preferred and valued in academia. In an attempt to counteract the tendency of this discipline to be regarded essentially as a factor of commercial purpose, having been constantly treated as a minor art<sup>37</sup>, I have recurrently decided to explore the artistic component of design, a field in which I have developed much of my recent production as a «designer-author».

In his 1934 essay *The author as a producer*, Walter Benjamin<sup>38</sup> defended the blurring of boundaries between artistic genres, between writing and reading, creation and editing. Within the discipline of design in recent decades, his ideas have been explored around expanding the role of the designer beyond that of just a service provider. In turn, Lupton points out that at the root of the designation «designer as author» lies the desire to encourage «designers to initiate content, to work in an entrepreneurial way rather than simply reacting to problems and tasks placed before them by clients. The word author suggests agency, intention, and creation, as opposed to the more passive functions of consulting, styling, and formatting. Authorship is a provocative model for rethinking the role of the graphic designer at the start of the millennium; it hinges, however, on a nostalgic ideal of the writer or artist as a singular point of origin»<sup>39</sup>.

Through the study and analysis of artefacts of material culture, my research orientation seeks, in a broad sense, to develop mechanisms for the preservation of our identity and memory as a collective. Assuming that «the contribution of collectors to the history of Portuguese design is the safeguarding of artefacts»<sup>40</sup>, I tried to enumerate possible contributions of transferring a private collection into the public

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<sup>36</sup> BARBOSA, 2011: 5.

<sup>37</sup> DUARTE, FERREIRA, JOÃO, 2009: 2.

<sup>38</sup> BENJAMIN, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> LUPTON, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> SILVA, 2017: 155.

domain from scientific knowledge as an academic researcher, from my practice as a designer, and from my subjectivity as a collector.

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