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## The Contribution of Anonymous Artefacts for the Development of Portuguese Design

### Introduction

This paper presents an ongoing PhD research in design which postulates that the values of longevity and identity contained in Portuguese anonymous artefacts are essential for the differentiation of Portuguese industrial products through the designers' approach to interdisciplinarity, identity and sustainability. By experimenting with them through a development model, we believe it will be possible to promote participation in these artefacts and enhance their revaluation.

The preoccupation with human and sustainability aspects in contemporary design has influenced some designers to analyse daily life artefacts, which they believe enclose a socio-cultural and human component essential to a balanced fitting of the artefact in society (Munari 1998: 113).

Those objects are called 'Anonymous' and belong to a group of utensils that are usually characterised for their usability and semantics, exempting in this way the necessity of knowing their author.

This research aspires to contribute to the promotion of a more humane and sustainable project culture that deals with issues of technological development in a more integrated way in the socio-cultural framework. Therefore, the intent is to observe the relevance of the 'Anonymous' artefacts to the development of products in society in an increasingly incorporated way.

Through different participants, such as design professionals and design students, we want to present a few approaches to this reinterpretation of modern artefacts. Different processes of creation are expected to support the inspiration for design development that this research attributes to 'Anonymous' artefacts, and demonstrate their applicability with regard to modern product development in Portuguese industry, aiming to develop distinctive and durable artefacts.

It is important to provide clusters of innovation and differentiation through material culture, associating a set of artefacts representing historical and national

identity with global requirements. Starting from this point, the interaction between the market, designers and the design academies will allow the enhancement of identity and the increase of self-esteem of the discipline and the industry.

### Anonymous artefacts

Those who create objects must know how to contribute with the appropriate instrumental response that each human collectivity requires. This consists in those things that society is willing to incorporate without questioning in their way of life (Ricard 2000: 60).

A vast number of authors, not only from the design area, have established their definition of anonymous artefacts. By combining all those definitions, it may be concluded that 'anonymous design objects are everyday objects that evolved throughout time becoming extremely functional and universal, making it irrelevant to know their authorship' (Afonso 2010: 35).

Although they answer to simple necessities, they acquire personal meaning for their user, conditioning their daily conduct (Norman 2004). According to Alberto Bassi, who has written about a collection of anonymous artefacts in Italy (2008: 7), the ordinary objects contain a timeless essence, creating some stability amongst fashion and technological novelties. In this way they contain their community characteristics, as they become implanted in the social memory due to their significance.

The study of design makes it possible to understand the range and multidisciplinary and also sets the study of anonymous artefacts in different areas. We conclude that key concepts such as memory, tradition, habit, identity and technology represent a thread that leads to a contemporary perception of the integration of these objects in daily life (Connerton 1999).

These items, which have become a part of our culture, carry affections and thus integrate our

unique identity, becoming humanising objects. They are important within our existence, as they connect us to the past, and convert into memories. According to the designer Francisco Providência (2001), their importance is determined neither by their material nor their functional value, but by their symbolic and affective value, because they exist within the base of our emotions.

It is possible to observe in emblematic design projects revaluations of common and Anonymous artefacts – projects that became referenced works not only by their utility and usability and by the skills they present but also by their innovation in the way they propose new solutions (Antonelli 2005: 3). However, they also become inescapable references for the meaning they acquire and for the metaphors they enclose, conjugating cohesively these two branches of the understanding of the artefact in a more integrated and sustainable final product.

The Italian designer Achille Castiglioni (2007) is the creator of a vast number of iconic works that reflect the inspiration of daily life, as it is possible to see in works like the Mezzadro stool (1957), applying a metal tractor seat used in early industrial agriculture in Italy; the Comodo support table (1988), inspired by the mechanics of a sewing box; or the Diabolo chandelier (1998), based on the toy with the same name.

With the perspective of enhancing a healthier relationship with daily artefacts, recognising the qualities and values of quotidian objects is essential to a new design paradigm (Munari 1993). Understanding the importance of the common, trivial, simple and almost omnipresent artefacts can

lead to new solutions integrated into socio-cultural involvement (Brandes et al. 2009: 10).

## Collecting Portuguese anonymous artefacts

The approach to the anonymous artefacts associated with national values and their analysis, retrieving the points of origin of their dissemination, intends to bring to awareness and promote the benefits of their study and reinterpretation.

In the current stage of the research we aim to establish the essential characteristics regarding the definition of these artefacts. We need to understand which variables will be useful to provide knowledge about Portuguese anonymous artefacts.

This process implies a previous definition of their cultural and developmental context. Considering the need to create a system to select and organise them, a number of criteria will be set in order to scrutinise them through a common analysis that will allow the recognition of different typologies, points of contact and points of difference.

Last year we had the chance to observe one example of an object organisation system in the exhibition *Treasures of Feira da Ladra: The beauty of anonymous design*, at the Design and Fashion Museum in Lisbon. In the exhibition we noticed how the curator David Usborne (2012) opted to arrange the objects in wide functional categories, emphasising mostly their aesthetic value. Although it represents a different approach from the purpose of this research, it constitutes a valid model for sorting these kinds of artefacts.



Figure 1. Group of artefacts collected in the Portuguese street market by collector David Usborne – presented in the exhibition *Treasures of Feira da Ladra: The beauty of anonymous design*, Lisbon, 2012. Photography by Ana Afonso, 2012.

Because this is an ongoing research, the data collection is still in progress. Since we are focusing on objects with significance from the viewpoint of Portuguese social behaviour, past or present, there are various sources for these artefacts, such as the national patent registry, or ethnographic museums (local and national), which also represent valuable resources of objects. These collections are scattered across the country and the selection of artefacts should consider their significance as a whole, but it is also necessary to regard specific regional meanings that may be important.

An artefact that represents this ongoing selection is the kitchen spatula, which became a part of our collective memory when it was associated with the Portuguese dictator Salazar.



Figure 2. Made out of wood and rubber, this kitchen utensil for scraping bowls is not a Portuguese exclusive. However, it achieved symbolic status in Portugal, where it received the nickname of *Salazar*, the dictator who ruled the country for 40 years and claimed the virtues of poverty. His propaganda machine insisted on using adjectives such as humble, frugal and economical to strengthen his image. But amongst the Portuguese people the Prime Minister was becoming more and more famous for his stinginess. The *Salazar* spatula is the best proof of this.

We hope this analysis will enlighten the intrinsic value of these objects within the community.

### Developing a revaluation process

Starting from the growing platform of Portuguese anonymous artefacts, the project will proceed with the development of a process of revaluation of the anonymous, suggesting a model for object creation. Therefore, this research will draw conclusions from a series of workshops conducted in three different environments.

1. The first workshop will be based on a personal approach in co-operation with a Portuguese company towards the revaluation of an anonymous artefact. We intend to determine a design framework for the market that would

be applied in the next two workshops. Known projects by influential designers such as Castiglioni or Munari, or selected projects by Naoto Fukasawa and Jasper Morrison in their *Super Normal* exhibition (2007), will be used as inspiration for the development of this artefact.

2. In the second workshop, at the territory level, there will be a reflection by other design professionals concerning this issue. There have always been several Portuguese approaches to the matter of reuse and revaluation of artefacts linked with our national identity and culture. Although they do not directly focus on anonymous artefacts, they will be valuable as a starting point for the perception of the profession. We want to envision approaches that gather cultures and allow social integration and the optimisation of national resources towards knowledge and sustainability (Branco et al. 2003).
3. Finally, at the design academies level, a learning programme on the valorisation of Anonymous design will be built, as academies can play an important role in this approach of interpretation of patrimony. Different programmes will be oriented in different ways, because for each one different results should occur, partly dependent on the student's age and understanding of the discipline.

The results of these workshops will be documented and examined in order to draft a possible development model for the revaluation of Anonymous Portuguese artefacts, aiming at their valorisation for the market.

### Final considerations

Castiglioni (2007) aimed to promote the designer's social responsibility. When one develops a new product, one has responsibility for analysing if it is truly needed and only afterwards research the means and resources available for design and production. This ethical and sustainable methodology seeks designers whose energy is invested in redefining new approaches on design, rather than simply looking for new styles.

The personal transformations of our modern times are relevant for the perception of the future challenges of the design discipline, as they can connect globalisation tendencies with daily life contexts (Giddens 1998). It is also important to understand how common objects can generate trust

between the users and their modern and global surroundings.

The appropriation of the identity of these artefacts is aimed at stopping the overwhelming process of creation, production, distribution, consumption and rejection of unnecessary objects, and thereby slowing the increase of waste in material culture (Providência 2001).

Throughout this project it has been possible to perceive the interest in this matter. Thus, it is expected that the workshops will result in a set of projects with the purpose of reusing meaningful forms and materials in order to create new artefacts. We will try to show the influence of objects in the user's universe, to understand their mechanisms of attribution of meaning and feeling and to understand the processes of development and evolution of artefacts.

The valorisation of cultural heritage as a differentiating factor that we hold in high regard will become fundamental to the affirmation of a community as unique and competitive in the global market (Almeida 2006: 45).

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