

theme 3
identity

strand 1
design process and practice

author(s)



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abstract

The symbology of Portuguese national identity results from an evolutionary process founded in a long-term historical development of autonomy. It is a source of images that, in connection with the Design process, produces an elastic interpretation of identity.

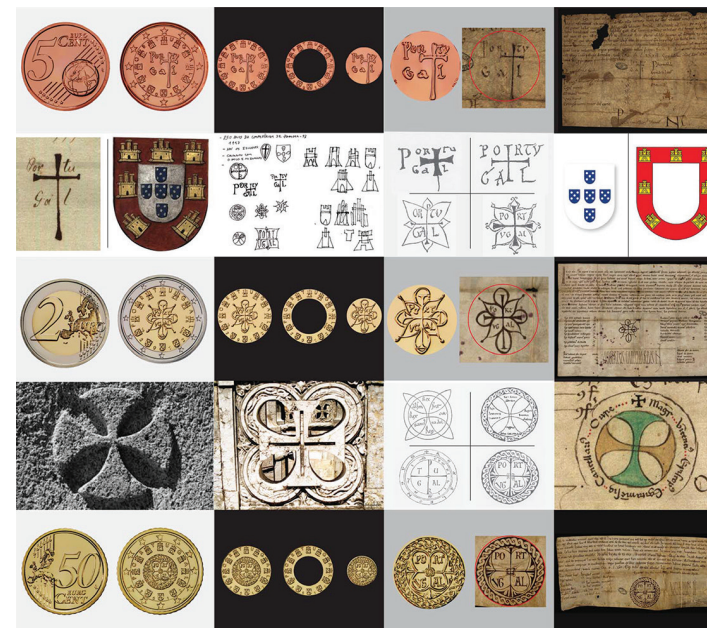
We seek to emphasize its importance as a raw material for the creative process, basing our research work on the production of interfaces to access this knowledge on the telematic network in which the creative process develops itself.

keywords

design process, portuguese national identity, symbolics imagery, visual design.

Doctoral study on the interfaces of symbolic culture.

From the Portuguese visual heritage to Design process.



Introduction

The micro-entrepreneurs who are focused on the world of design, meeting the competitiveness required by the market and the demands for innovation, defy a sort of time and space management schizophrenia, which enables the manufacture of products and services, but becomes restrictive when applied to the research work that is necessary to carry out in order to generate a valid dialogue between “technique and culture”. This affects the performance of the designers who, by interacting with the creative process, complicate both the research work and the validation of knowledge, which are intrinsic and essential to the culture of Design as a *segno nobili*.

We intend to analyse the environment in which the designer operates, defining opportunities for Design research channels that might promote the access to knowledge throughout the design concept stage and the challenge of a cultured dialogue between “technique and territory” (Faldini, 2004).

Time and space are currently entangled with the web culture. It's appropriate to refer the impact of this dimension on the makers, including the designers who establish relationships with the network itself. For Chris Anderson (2012), they are actors who represent a new order. These Simbiontes (Longo, 2003) are creative network forces that exist in a new geography – the internet – and, in the near future, will dominate the productive processes of their projects. These are the sources for the dissertation “Graphic Design: a key for reading the Portuguese identity. From the Portuguese visual and cultural heritage to graphic design”, in which design and the need to synthesize the knowledge that is diluted in the country's cultural history become fluid access tools to the world of the Portuguese national identity symbols.

Symbols, National Identity and Design as a process

The symbols of the Portuguese national identity result from a process of synthesis and assimilation. This is a reservoir with an artistic potential that has been facing different interpretations over time, in different identity stages.

Any visual design project based on a given national identity

requires combining, on the one hand, a (globalized) contemporary nature and, on the other, a national symbology that is contaminated by the multifaceted culture of different nations.

A design project that integrates a given national identity implies a subtle and intelligent dilution of the national symbols during the creation process, which requires specific information about the different national symbols, including the Portuguese national flag; the meaning of the green-red binomial; the mysterious five “quinas” (shape and content) from the coat of arms, and the curious and meaningful clichés that have become commonplaces, such as the Barcelos Cock or the Carnations of the April Revolution. Therefore, learning the origin and the secrets of the various Portuguese national identity symbols is essential to allow designers, illustrators, architects, artists, amongst others, to create something unique.

We have a tangible example of the use of imagery that shows a complex integration of national identity symbols: “The Euro in Portugal” by Vitor Santos, (figure 1 - A symbolic universe: synthesis map (2013), author's dissertation.).

The national project for the eight Portuguese Euro coins was designed by the sculptor Vitor Santos who chose, as a central theme, the symbols of the first king of Portugal. The author considered that was essential to create an “unequivocal and strong presence of the national identity”, because it was a European coin with a Portuguese origin. So, he used three national identity symbols: the symbol of Portugal that was used in 12th-century royal documents by Afonso Henriques, which was placed in the middle of the coin; the castles, and the “quinas” of the Portuguese coat of arms, which were redistributed along the periphery of the circle, in a dialogue with the twelve EU stars. By analysing his creative process, we may see that the author tried, on the one hand, to recall the traditional Portuguese coin (Escudo), thus creating a sensory link with an ancient symbol of national sovereignty. On the other hand, by using Afonso Henriques's graphic symbols, he brings back to the collective memory an essential moment in Portuguese history - the foundation of the kingdom. Only by having a deep knowledge about their meaning and implications it is possible to interact and explore the symbolic power that the association between these

myths and symbols has in the collective unconscious of the Portuguese nation.

National Identity

According to Smith (1997), national identity provides the “civic” model for the nation (nation-state): a territory or homeland, common myths and memories, a common public mass culture, common legal rights and obligations and a common economy that ensures territorial mobility for all. These assumptions reveal the complex and abstract nature of national identity that, for Smith, is multidimensional and can neither be reduced to a single element or nationalist factions, nor be artificially induced into people. National identities are formed and transformed through representation, turning a nation into a “political entity” and producing meaning – a “system of cultural representation” (Hall, 2001). According to Hall, when national cultures produce meanings that actually belong to the “nation” with which they can identify themselves, they are building identities. These meanings are contained in history; they are memories from the past that connect us to it. For Anderson (2005), the modern nation is an “imagined political community” and our ability to imagine it only became possible in 19th-century Europe. For Gellner (1998), the concept of nation is a cognitive construction meant to establish connections between different social contexts.

It was necessary for the development and support of a process of social homogenization that occurred during the advent of the industrial society for which cultural systems are essential.

Thiesse (2001) referred the need to make a national heritage inventory and, currently, we are able to identify the symbolic elements and materials that a modern nation should have: national heroes, a language, monuments, typical landscapes, folklore, sacred places, gastronomy, distinctive animals, official representations and a specific way of thinking.

Research Opportunities

The role of the designer becomes evident in the interaction and manipulation of national identity symbols throughout the creative process which, in turn, is also an

evolutionary driving force of national identity. It is a new challenge that involves the concepts of time and space within the web, a reality that demands the use of new tools to access information, which are useful to carry out research works in the Design area and for Design itself.

We aim to provide a fluid access to the world of Portuguese national symbols by indexing information that is useful for the project and challenges associated with the web. With the anticipated limitations and boundaries of a Ph.D. process, this research work is intended to be the start a long path to open a field of analysis and, during its journey, to fill a lack of transdisciplinary knowledge that is essential to Design as a process.

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