

Graphic memory and design training: local culture in design practice in basic disciplines

Memória gráfica e a formação em Design: cultura local na prática projetual em disciplinas de base

Memoria gráfica y entrenamiento en diseño: cultura local en la práctica del diseño en disciplinas básicas

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Abstract

Some design programs in Brazil still follow rationalist pedagogical methodologies, fostering a technocratic view of the relationship between designer and artifact. Seeking ways to subvert the purely functionalist view of higher education in design, some undergraduate design courses at the Federal University of Sergipe have incorporated content about the production of local prints. In this scenario, this text aims to reflect on how graphic memory can play a role in valuing local sociocultural and political contexts in teaching. Actively and critically integrated into the syllabus of courses that make up the structure of design education in Sergipe, graphic memory contributes to the development of open-minded professionals and the recognition of a design practice that is attentive to the cultural diversity of its surroundings. To support this assertion, the following were conducted: a theoretical review of the concept of graphic memory combined with a conception of design teaching; an analysis of teaching experiences that value local visual and cultural repertoires as a basis for practical projects; and the proposal of pedagogical strategies that articulate graphic memory and design practice. As a result, we hope to contribute to strengthening teaching methodologies that not only value technique, but also recognize memory as an essential formative tool, which enables the construction of a critical and multiple perspective on cultural artifacts, popular writing, historical archives and peripheral aesthetics as sources of learning and resistance in Design teaching.

Keywords: Graphic memory. Teaching methodologies. Design.

Resumo

Para superar a abordagem funcionalista e eurocentrada no ensino de Design Gráfico, disciplinas da Graduação em Design na Universidade Federal de Sergipe passaram a incluir conteúdos sobre impressos locais. O foco, descrito nesse texto, foi propiciar a experiência em atividades práticas de estudantes de História do Design a partir do estudo da memória gráfica, valorizando os contextos socioculturais e políticos locais no ensino. Para fundamentar essa experiência em sala de aula, realizaram-se: a revisão teórica do conceito de memória gráfica de Sergipe aliada a uma concepção de ensino de Design no Brasil; a análise de experiências didáticas que valorizam repertórios visuais e culturais locais como base em projetos práticos, a partir dos resultados dos estudos locais obtidos pelo Grupo de Pesquisa Design, Cultura e Sociedade – CNPq/UFS. Ressalta-se que houve a elaboração de estratégias pedagógicas que articulem a memória gráfica local e a prática do Design por intermédio de atividades que utilizaram fundamentalmente impressos de Sergipe do século XX. Como resultado, compreendeu-se que a integração ativa e crítica da memória gráfica nas disciplinas de Design em Sergipe contribui para formar profissionais atentos à diversidade cultural local. Espera-se colaborar para o fortalecimento de metodologias de ensino que não apenas prezem pela técnica, mas também reconheçam a memória gráfica como ferramenta formativa essencial, que possibilita a construção de um olhar crítico e múltiplo acerca dos artefatos culturais locais, das grafias populares, dos arquivos históricos e das estéticas periféricas como fontes de aprendizado e resistência no ensino da história do Design no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Memória gráfica. Metodologias de ensino. Design.

Resumen

Algunos programas de diseño en Brasil aún siguen metodologías pedagógicas racionalistas, fomentando una visión tecnocrática de la relación entre el diseñador y el artefacto. Buscando maneras de subvertir la visión puramente funcionalista de la educación superior en diseño, algunos cursos de diseño de grado en la Universidad Federal de Sergipe incorporaron contenidos sobre la producción de grabados locales. En este escenario, este texto busca reflexionar sobre cómo la memoria gráfica puede contribuir a la valoración

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de los contextos socioculturales y políticos locales en la enseñanza. Integrada activa y críticamente en el programa de estudios de los cursos que conforman la estructura de la formación en diseño en Sergipe, la memoria gráfica contribuye al desarrollo de profesionales de mentalidad abierta y al reconocimiento de una práctica del diseño atenta a la diversidad cultural de su entorno. Para sustentar esta afirmación, se realizó una revisión teórica del concepto de memoria gráfica, combinada con una concepción de la enseñanza del diseño; un análisis de experiencias docentes que valoran los repertorios visuales y culturales locales como base para proyectos prácticos; y la propuesta de estrategias pedagógicas que articulan la memoria gráfica y la práctica del diseño. Como resultado, esperamos contribuir al fortalecimiento de metodologías de enseñanza que no sólo valoren la técnica, sino que también reconozcan la memoria como una herramienta formativa esencial, que posibilita la construcción de una mirada crítica y múltiple sobre los artefactos culturales, la escritura popular, los archivos históricos y las estéticas periféricas como fuentes de aprendizaje y resistencia en la enseñanza del Diseño.

Palabras clave: Memoria gráfica. Metodologías de enseñanza. Diseño.

1 Introduction

The way of thinking and practicing Design is anchored in discourses developed within specific urban centers, which, in the classical literature of the field, are legitimized as the historical foundations of industrialization. These discourses, embedded in the ontology of Design – that is, in the set of concepts that structure knowledge about the field – are present in professional training, whether through the recurring discourse of professors or through widely available readings, regardless of the location in which those individuals are situated.

The issue becomes even more problematic when one attempts to shift these discourses to understand aspects of the history of a given place, which has not been contemplated by the structural elaborations of social progress based on the logic of industrialization – especially if it is considered peripheral. As Batista and Carvalho (2022) point out, it is uncommon for professionals in the field of Design to “critically address historical issues such as social inequality, racial discrimination, violence, environmental degradation, and other constitutive aspects of coloniality” (Batista & Carvalho, 2022, p. 8). Supporting this idea, Okabayashi (2021) asserts that “a design education centered on the Industrial Revolution” disables or consistently fails to engage with political, economic, and cultural issues, and as a result, “design will continue to serve, first and foremost, the groups that perpetuate colonial violence” (Okabayashi, 2021, p. 21).

From this perspective, this article stems from reflections made possible through the dedication of a research group to the graphic memory of Sergipe. Despite being Brazil's smallest state and absent from the industrialized centers that dominate design history literature, Sergipe possesses its own narratives. These narratives, in turn, contribute to the national history of printed production. These printed materials have been responsible for communication in the country since the first half of the nineteenth century. In this sense, we believe that the study of graphic memory enables design professionals in training to associate production processes not only with technological aspects but also with political and sociocultural dimensions.

Farias and Braga (2018), in the introduction to *Ten Essays on Graphic Memory*, explain that the term “graphic memory” acquires specific contours in Brazil, as well as in some Spanish-speaking countries. In these contexts, graphic memory refers to studies concerning the national graphic history, “aiming to recover or establish a sense of local identity” (Farias & Braga, 2018, p. 10). The authors note that there has been, in Brazil since the 1990s, a local tendency to understand the existing means of production within its own history³. Conversely, Farias and Braga (2018) observed that searches for the term in other languages, both in English (“graphic memory”) and in French (“mémoire graphique”), returned results associated mainly with “data storage related to images” (Farias & Braga, 2018, p. 10).

Beyond the technical knowledge of current production methods, such as preparing a digital file for printing, the historical understanding of, for instance, the technological relationship between the old lithography (19th and early 20th centuries) and modern offset printing is fundamental for making certain design decisions. These two are planographic printing processes: in the first, called “direct,” the printing matrix makes direct contact with the substrate; in the second, “indirect,” the inked matrix transfers pigment to the blanket cylinder, which then comes into contact with the paper to produce the printed color. In direct processes such as lithography, the creation of printing matrices requires an artist to draw on the limestone slab for each print run, as repeated contact gradually wears down the image matrix. This technique demands physical energy from the craftsman to maintain the matrix’s integrity and, consequently, the quality of the print. In offset printing, however, the artist creates the artwork only once, transferring it photographically or digitally to an aluminum plate. Because the matrix does not undergo mechanical pressure during printing, it remains undamaged and can be used repeatedly.

This historical account, which may seem like a simple explanation of two printing processes in a graphic production class, illustrates how studying past means of production is crucial for engaging consciously with contemporary techniques. In other words, whether they are aiming for conventional or experimental outcomes through

³ In Brazil, that year coincides with the start of a research project that brought together researchers from universities in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Pernambuco and with the launch of a related website, both named “Memória Gráfica Brasileira” (Brazilian Graphic Memory). From that point on, the growth in the number of studies on topics related to this field of research has been evident (Farias; Braga, 2018, p. 11).

industrial processes such as offset printing, designers can better understand the mechanisms that shape visual language. These visual expressions are intrinsically linked to the material and visual culture of the places we inhabit. As Farias and Braga (2018, p. 11) affirm:

Graphic memory shares, as we shall see, interests and methods with more well-known fields of study such as visual culture, print culture, material culture, the history of graphic design, and collective memory. These shared aspects help guide reflections on its main characteristics and issues, as well as on how studies of graphic memory can contribute to building local histories of design and the graphic arts in Latin America (Farias; Braga, 2018, p. 11).

Given the above, the purpose of this article is to present a classroom experience developed from the understanding that studies of graphic memory offer benefits that go beyond collecting visual and technological references. They generate knowledge about the sociocultural history of one's surroundings, which is central to the formation of designers in training, in the professional field, or in academia.

The classroom experiences presented in this article were systematized based on the results and publications of exploratory research on Sergipe's graphic memory developed by the research group *Design, Culture, and Society* (CNPq/UFS)⁴.

2 Reflections on Graphic Memory and Design Education

We understand that graphic memory stems from the recognition of cultural identity, technical knowledge, and social contexts within the practice of producing graphic artifacts. Furthermore, the relationship between graphic production and culture is essential for understanding the values, symbols, and collective discourses expressed in visual composition.

In cultural studies, we highlight the perspective of the Brazilian historian and literary critic Alfredo Bosi (1936–2021), for whom the term *cultural system* refers to a set of elements that make up a group's culture: shared values, practices, symbols, and beliefs. When transmitted and reinterpreted over time, these elements shape both individual and collective identity and behavior. As the author states, "if by the term culture we understand a heritage of values and objects shared by a relatively cohesive human

⁴ Available at: <https://designecultura.com>

group” (Bosi, 1992, p. 308), culture can be seen as a historical, social, political, and economic fabric that grounds the production of meaning and discourse.

Through graphic production itself, the designer or design student decodes signs and produces discourse within such a cultural system. In this sense, within the fields of graphic design and graphic memory, culture is not merely a backdrop but an active agent in understanding how artifacts are constructed. Through this lens, one can identify how cultural contexts influence both the articulation of image-discourses and their interpretation by society. Reflecting on graphic memory, therefore, also means rethinking the ways of teaching and learning Design, considering culture as a constitutive element of design practice.

Understanding graphic production as a form of cultural expression challenges the traditional model of design education, which has historically privileged rationalist and universalist approaches at the expense of local knowledge. Although this statement does not apply universally – especially today – to all undergraduate design programs in Brazil, it is necessary to reflect on the origins of design education in the country, which are deeply marked by the influence of European modernist schools and the paradigms of rationalist design. This assessment draws on the work of classical authors of Brazilian design history who have established canonical references, such as Leon (2014a, 2014b) and Mello (2006, 2012).

However, the purpose of this text is not to conduct an in-depth study of design education in Brazil, but to reflect on an experience that legitimizes the relevance of pedagogical practices that foreground local craftsmanship and culture in contrast to what is usually found in textbooks. As Araujo (2022, p. 121) expresses: “Remaining immersed in hegemonic references is a political position, and certainly one of continuous power.”

From the recurrent literature, it is understood that design education in Brazil began under strong modernist influence, inherited from European schools such as Bauhaus and Ulm, which shaped the structure of the country’s first programs. Professionals with experience in these institutions brought pedagogical methodologies based on rationalism, emphasizing objectivity, functionality, and the hierarchy of visual perception, thus establishing a training model that privileged binary solutions and creative processes detached from local cultural dynamics.

According to anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2018), rationalism molds both the thought and behavior of designers and humanity as a whole; it limits understanding of the world's sociocultural complexity by viewing it as "an objective world made up of entities that can be known and therefore manipulated and ordered" (Escobar, 2018, p. 112). Pujol Romero (2011, p. 19) notes that "ontological assumptions encourage the belief in the possibility of a design discipline that is socially objective and value-free, in which the designer stands apart from the scene being analyzed through the rigor and technique of the design method." This conception raises questions about design education that prioritizes "the dualist pedagogical visions of the two legendary schools" (Lima & Martins, 2011, p. 115) and the modernist paradigms mentioned earlier. As a counterpoint, one can draw connections between teaching graphic memory and seeking paths beyond rationalism – paths that value and investigate social, cultural, political, and economic relations in design production.

In rationalist processes, design tools are highlighted as a means to systematize project development and thus generate a sense of completeness. The issue that must be problematized is that certain forms of ordering can overlook the complexity of local production relations. Pujol Romero (2011) argues that to understand and interact with specific contexts, designers must engage with the perspectives of those who construct reality. Within this framework, immersive study of Sergipe's graphic memory has allowed design students in the state to build narratives from a local historical viewpoint. This experience drew inspiration from approaches that blend global and local perspectives within design education at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE).

The design program at UFPE, particularly at the Agreste Academic Center (CAA) in Caruaru, demonstrates how education can combine a solid historical and conceptual foundation with practices that foster critical reflection, thus creating a direct link with the experience developed in Sergipe. In UFPE's curriculum (UFPE, 2025), cultural education is promoted through required components such as "Design, Society, and Culture" and electives such as "Experiential Design," which encourage the analysis of material culture and interaction with local contexts.

A comparison with the experience in Sergipe shows that while UFPE's CAA program begins with an international framework before opening space for the local, the

Sergipe approach, through its engagement with studies of graphic memory, creates a counterpoint to rationalist and modernist hegemony, emphasizing the graphic and cultural expressions of its own territory. This difference in approach enables dialogue: UFPE's model provides a broad historical and conceptual repertoire, while the Sergipe model strengthens the construction of narratives and methodologies grounded in local experience and production.

The construction of narratives that bring local history to the surface can certainly be understood as a decolonial approach to Design. The notion of *decoloniality* has gained wide use across multiple directions and dimensions; it is therefore important to clarify the sense in which this term is used here. We align with Batista and Carvalho (2022) in their article *Design and Decoloniality: Foundations, Debates, and Ruptures*:

Here, we understand decoloniality as a set of interrelated processes of identifying, questioning, and confronting the structures of oppression established by the capitalist system through the dissemination of Western bourgeois culture (Batista; Carvalho, 2022, p. 8).

The authors explain that capitalist structures operate through four interrelated domains that constitute what Mignolo (2017) calls the *colonial matrix of power*: the control of the economy, authority, gender and sexuality, and subjectivity and knowledge. These domains provide a framework to examine how design education and research on graphic memory intersect—a relationship summarized in Table 1.:

Table 1 – Colonial Matrix of Power and the Relationship Between Design Education and Research on Graphic Memory

Colonial Matrix of Power (Mignolo, 2017 apud Batista & Carvalho, 2020, p. 8)	Design Education (Rationalist Conception)	Graphic Memory (Studies on Local Print Production)
Control of the economy	In classical design literature, the field's origins, tied to industrial modes of production, emphasize economically hegemonic centers, usually European countries and the United States.	Eurocentric parameters of production form the basis of design history in conventional education, rendering other territories invisible. The labor force at the base of production systems are marginalized groups and therefore absent from official narratives. For example, Sergipe's first school of typographers, established in 1926, trained boys aged 10 to 16, mostly Black and mixed-

		race sons of laborers ⁵ .
Control of authority	Economic hegemony generates control of authority, determining who holds cultural dominance.	Research on local production challenges the notion that only hegemonic centers validate narratives. Although Sergipe is rarely mentioned in works on Brazil's print history, it had significant production since the second half of the 19th century.
Control of gender and sexuality	Patriarchal authority in society is dominated by men, leading to oppression and violence against other groups, such as women and LGBTQIA+ individuals.	The official history portrays the print production universe as male. In reality, women have always worked in printing houses, though often having been relegated to secondary or invisible roles within an economic system that used their labor as a backdrop for its formation.
Control of subjectivity and knowledge	This control shapes reality from the moment one culture dominates another. "Coloniality, as a constituent of the global capitalist order, introduced as its specific feature the racial/ethnic classification of populations and established whiteness and European ways of life as standards of superiority" (Batista & Carvalho, 2020, p. 11). Coloniality reproduces Eurocentric epistemologies that violently reduce other possibilities of knowledge.	Studies of local print production counteract this control by acknowledging diverse epistemologies, material practices, and cultural expressions as valid sources of knowledge in Design.

Source: The authors.

Batista and Carvalho (2022) emphasize that the concept of *decoloniality*⁶ emerged from the articulation of knowledge and practices developed by individuals involved in Latin American social movements, both within and outside academia.

According to Mignolo (2017), the concept of *coloniality* can be understood as "the darker side of modernity": "Coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation

⁵ RESEARCH, DESIGN, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY GROUP. Graphic Memory of Sergipe. São Cristóvão: Federal University of Sergipe, 2020. Research report (printed).

⁶ "The term decoloniality is sometimes confused with the concept of decolonization, which derives from the legal and political processes of countries formerly linked to colonial metropolises" (Batista; Carvalho, 2022, p. 9). According to the authors, the process of decolonization does not interrupt the practices of coloniality.

and unfolding of Western civilization since the Renaissance to the present day; a logic of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, though often minimized, dimension” (Mignolo, 2017, p. 2). This understanding involves what Mota Neto (2016 apud Batista & Carvalho, 2022, p. 9) refers to as *epistemic practices* – activities of producing, communicating, and generating knowledge rooted in concrete realities. While these practices do not entirely dismiss the thinking of societies that sustain the domains presented in Table 1, they offer a critical stance toward Eurocentrism (Batista & Carvalho, 2022).

In this article, the concept of decoloniality serves to stimulate reflection on the possibility of transcending the historically entrenched power structures embedded in design education. The interconnection between modernity, rationalism, and coloniality results in structures that perpetuate inequality and violence, such as “capitalism, racism, patriarchy, intolerance toward minority religions and repressed sexualities, and prejudice against subjects, knowledge, and cultures that deviate from the hegemonic way of being, thinking, feeling, and acting” (Mota Neto, 2016, p. 18 apud Batista & Carvalho, 2022, p. 9).

Modern rationality, “inevitably devouring of tradition” (Batista & Carvalho, 2022, p. 13), often relegates local narratives to hidden or nonexistent histories. This occurs naturally, as dominant discourses continue to value the Eurocentric, capitalist, modern colonial project as the sovereign perspective over the Global South.

In the field of Design, rationalism shapes both methods and content, reinforcing an educational model grounded in the homogenization of knowledge and the predominance of Eurocentric narratives. Within this framework, design practice and teaching reproduce a colonial logic in which local and peripheral repertoires are silenced. The result is a design education often detached from the daily lives, memories, and ways of being of local communities. British anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that academia still tends to discredit popular knowledge, treating the understandings of these communities merely as “ethnographic evidence of what [that knowledge] says about them” (Ingold, 2020, p. 2 apud Andrade & Ibarra, 2021, p. 158).

Thus, it becomes evident how the epistemological hegemony that underlies both academia and the field of Design influences the way design methods are taught and

perpetuated. It often excludes sociocultural and political diversity from practice. Within this educational context, graphic memory provides a new lens for engaging with local knowledge, treating it not merely as illustrative or ethnographic data but as valid and complex modes of understanding and acting in the world. The valorization of artifacts and graphic practices often overlooked by official design historiography is therefore essential to the study of graphic memory and, consequently, to design education.

Cultural relationships are vital to any work on graphic memory, as this field observes and preserves history, interpersonal relations, traditions, and the visual production of living communities. Memory creates pathways for preserving these connections between culture and artifact production, fostering discussions about plurality that are invaluable to design education. Graphic artifacts are “cultural products that mediate socially shared practices and values” (Santos, 2005, p. 13). This perspective deepens the idea that incorporating graphic memory into pedagogical practice enables the construction of repertoires sensitive to local realities, expanding awareness of Brazil’s diverse and often marginalized graphic manifestations—those silenced by curricula centered on rationalist thought. This debate reinforces the notion of autonomy in Design “as a possible way out of Euro-modernity toward a relational pluriversality” (Okabayashi, 2021, p. 23).

By analyzing ephemeral artifacts such as local signage or product labels, design students can expand their visual repertoires and reinterpret everyday visuality, exercising critical reflection about design practice itself. Moreover, because graphic memory shares interests and methods with various other fields, such as visual culture, print culture, material culture, graphic design history, and collective memory (Farias & Braga, 2018, p. 11), it offers a methodological and conceptual bridge for expanding classroom discussions on graphic production. This approach disrupts monocultures of knowledge and values plural, culturally situated ways of knowing.

3 The Graphic Memory of Sergipe in Undergraduate Graphic Design Courses

With the aim of broadening the range of narratives about the history of Brazilian print production, local graphic memory was incorporated into the curriculum of the

undergraduate Graphic Design program at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS). This integration stemmed from research carried out by undergraduate students through scientific initiation projects within the study *Graphic Memory of Sergipe*, developed by the research group **Design, Culture, and Society – CNPq/UFS**.

In addition to research reports, the group has been dedicated to producing articles and books that disseminate the historical aspects positioning Sergipe within the history of Brazilian print industries, and, through such publications, within the broader literature on the subject.

Below, we present the components of the research on Sergipe's graphic memory that currently form part of the program's institutionalized curriculum and indicate the moments in which the local production approach becomes meaningful in classroom practice. Table 2 summarizes the pedagogical strategy aimed at dismantling Eurocentric authority in design education.

Table 2 – Inclusion of Content on the Graphic Memory of Sergipe in the General Curriculum of the UFS Undergraduate Graphic Design Program

Knowledge Areas	Curricular Components that Include Content on the Graphic Memory of Sergipe	Type of content about Sergipe's Graphic Memory	Results
Basic Content	- History of Design - History of Design in Brazil - History of Typography	Production of local printed matters before and after the installation of the first printing press in Sergipe (19th and 20th centuries).	Situate Sergipe in relation to graphic production in the world and in Brazil. Understand the material culture, technologies used, and cultural characteristics in the visual aspects of local printed materials.
	- Contemporary Design - Design and Culture - Visual Anthropology	Who were the craftsmen and tradespeople. What are the characteristics of design professionals working in Sergipe.	Get to know and appreciate local production, generate references for the culture that is being experienced.
	- Layout - Graphic Experimentation - Graphic Production	What technologies were part of Sergipe's printing production reality. What relationships exist between printing techniques and the visual appearance of a newspaper page.	Bring students closer to materiality through the practice of matrix printing. Enable the creation of a page based on historical data.
Specific Content	- Packaging Design - Book Design	History of ephemeral prints	Learn production methods based on local history

	- Digital Typography Design	and books in Sergipe. Typographic recovery.	(cultural, technological, etc.).
Theoretical- Practical Content	- Scientific Initiation (PIBIC) - Final Graduation Project (TCC) - Professional Activities (Internships) - Extension Activities	Newspapers, magazines, and books produced in Sergipe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Relationship between local economic history and the production of ephemeral printed matter. Study of the training of master printers in Sergipe.	Learn how to conduct research in public archives. Practice letter design (fonts) based on existing typographies in local printed materials. Gain insight into fundamentals that are not found in standard books on the history of Design in Brazil.

Source: The authors, based on UFS data (2025b).

Three examples were selected to illustrate how content on Sergipe's graphic memory has been integrated into undergraduate courses at UFS.

The first example is the course *History of Design in Brazil*, organized around thematic units that combine classical references in Brazilian design historiography with contemporary debates on identity, territory, and plurality. The second unit of the course focuses on contextualizing Design in the Brazilian Northeast and includes the study of Pernambuco-based movements such as *O Gráfico Amador* and the *Armorial Movement*, as well as Sergipe's own graphic experiences, which form part of the broader repertoire of Northeastern graphic memory.

In this space, students are encouraged to investigate artifacts produced within their communities (such as flyers, labels, graffiti, street art, and crafts), thus recovering visualities often neglected by traditional curricula.

The final seminar of this course invites students to conduct a small study on graphic memory. They engage in an investigative process involving artifacts of visual, print, and material culture from the Northeast and present analyses of these visualities in order to expand collective understanding of their local production contexts. Additionally, during the two semesters in which the course adopted this methodology, guest lectures were held with researchers from the *Graphic Memory of Sergipe* project, allowing students to witness in practice the outcomes of university research.

Figure 1: Slides produced by students for a seminar on graphic memory in the History of Design in Brazil course, analyzing newspapers that reported attacks on Brazilian ships by German submarines during World War II. The seminar explored relationships between the memory of the event and print culture in 1942.



Source: Course Archive, History of Design in Brazil.

The cohorts – 45 students in the 2024.1 semester and 36 in 2024.2 – were encouraged to create visual compositions inspired by local professionals and print production. The process involved presenting the theory of graphic memory, addressing visual, graphic, and material culture in the local context.

This type of investigation immerses students in visual material that originates from latitudes different from those of the canonical figures typically emphasized in colonial frameworks. It represents a deconstruction of the paradigms of industrial society and the authority of established canons.

When understood as a field of investigation into visual production, graphic memory contributes to building cultural identity. This, in turn, makes design practice multifaceted. One example comes from a group project in the *History of Design in Brazil* course, which focused on the visuality of *Louça Morena*, a traditional pottery craft from Sergipe's countryside. Immersion in this local cultural universe allowed students to rediscover something that, though part of their environment, had been unfamiliar to them, breaking hierarchical notions of knowledge and the limiting conceptions of rationalist thought. This illustrates the relevance of the proposed experience.

Figure 2: Slides produced by students for a seminar on graphic memory in the History of Design in Brazil course, focused on Louça Morena, a ceramic craft tradition from the Poxica community in Itabaianinha, Sergipe.



Source: Course Archive.

Another example demonstrating the relevance of integrating local print production research into the curriculum comes from the *Layout* course. There, students examine compositions from Sergipean newspapers of the late 19th and 20th centuries to better understand the techniques and aesthetics tied to local culture. This technical knowledge shows students that page layout proposals – whether for a poster or a book – must transcend mere technical skill. A successful layout involves effectively arranging verbal and nonverbal content along both vertical and horizontal axes.

A third example refers to final graduation projects (TCCs) that originated from scientific initiation research on Sergipe's graphic memory. These projects adopted typographic revival methodologies to transpose typefaces used in early 20th-century printed materials into digital form. Throughout this process, students interacted with

institutions preserving historical print archives in the state and learned to conduct documentary research. This experience transformed the role of the designer from a professional focused primarily on contemporary projects into a researcher capable of engaging with historical materiality as a way to reflect on sociocultural aspects of the present.

Figure 3: Student research into a type specimen catalog from the Sergipean works collection at the Epifânio Dória Municipal Library, Aracaju/SE.



Source: Research Group *Design, Culture, and Society* – CNPq/UFS.

The impact of introducing local graphic memory into the curriculum is evident in the students' own reflections. They recognize the theme not only as a subject of study but also as a space of belonging and expression that strengthens the connection between identity, territory, and design practice. Therefore, teaching graphic memory combined with methodological practices grounded in attentive listening, contextual awareness, and the valorization of local knowledge, constitutes an important act of transformation within rationalist frameworks of design curricula. It positions students as active agents in both the history and the everyday life of local graphic production.

4 Final Considerations

By highlighting local production, design education forges a perspective that, at the very least, chips away at the structures of formal knowledge in the field. This is what Batista and Carvalho (2022) define as the *overcoming of patterns*, a conception formulated by the authors when discussing the idea of *decoloniality*.

Therefore, what matters here is the formulation that enables narratives to be constructed from knowledge about diverse territories – especially those considered

peripheral – in opposition to the Eurocentric history established as the only, or the main, possible perspective. Against formulations of erasure, it is a way of countering the idea that modern European society is superior to others; an idea that has become a kind of “moral justification for developing so-called primitive societies” (Batista & Carvalho, 2022, p. 11).

The print production of Sergipe rarely appears in works on the history of Brazilian Design. This relates to the fact that the concept of “good design” is commonly associated with modernist-capitalist aesthetics and discourses that value hegemonic references. The problem with maintaining the perspective of “good design” lies in the fact that design students outside hegemonic centers have access only to references distant from their reality. They remain subordinate to the so-called official history institutionalized by Eurocentric authors.

This issue, which has been a recurring subject of reflection in the classroom, becomes even more critical when aspects such as gender and race are brought into discussion. The distant reference, in reality, constitutes a civilizing process that can hinder the very notion of protagonism for these design students, especially for those from peripheral origins.

It is important to note that, according to the *Enrollment Report of UFS (2025a)*, in the semesters when studies on graphic memory were incorporated into the courses *History of Design in Brazil* and *Layout*, out of 240 students enrolled in 2024.1, 116 were admitted through the quota system; and in 2024.2, among 223 students, 101 also used this modality.

Unfortunately, even with so many social issues discussed in classrooms today, the perception that the history of Design was built only in the countries of the Northern Hemisphere continues to prevail. Thus, the formulation of Batista and Carvalho (2022, p. 12) is reaffirmed:

[...] Mignolo develops the notion of a geopolitics of knowledge, which highlights the importance of the geopolitical location where discourse is produced—as well as the biographical configuration of gender, religion, class, ethnicity, and language, constituting the *body-politic*. It favors the overcoming of the universality of Western knowledge by recognizing other epistemic places, where discourses are elaborated based on their own histories, memories, struggles, and languages.

With the inclusion of content on local graphic memory in the courses, students were confronted with questions rooted in their own reality (Table 3). By analyzing graphic artifacts from their daily lives, they were able to reflect on their cultural function, their context of production, the subjects involved, and the symbolisms mobilized, thus activating a design practice connected to the concepts of *ecology of knowledges* (Santos, 2007) and *sentipensar* (Escobar, 2016), as ways of breaking with the monoculture of knowledge and the reason/emotion dichotomy.

Table 3 – Systematization of the Empirical Findings from the Research on Graphic Memory in Courses and Activities of the UFS Undergraduate Graphic Design Program

Courses and Activities	Number of Students	Main Results Observed
Course content: “History of Design in Brazil”	First-year students (one class of 50 students)	Expansion of visual repertoire through local artifacts; development of critical analysis of printed matter produced in the Northeast; appreciation of peripheral cultural identities.
Course content: “Layout”	4th semester students (two classes of 25 students)	Practical engagement with Sergipean graphic materialities; experimentation with layouts inspired by local periodicals; re-signification of layout techniques beyond the modernist model.
Thematic seminars in “History of Design in Brazil”	Students from different semesters enrolled in “History of Design in Brazil,” “Layout,” and “Final Graduation Project”	Production of case studies on graphic memory (e.g., World War II newspapers, <i>Louça Morena</i> ceramics); collective research and analysis of local visual culture.
Final Graduation Projects (TCC)	3 projects directly supervised by the research (2019–2024)	Typographic recovery of early 20th-century printed matter; digitization of historical typefaces; training of students as design researchers.
Scientific Initiation (PIBIC)	12 scholarship students (2017–2024)	Student engagement in documentary research; contact with historical archives; production of articles, reports, and workshops based on Sergipe’s graphic memory.
University Extension (workshops, lectures)	Diverse audiences (50 participants)	Dissemination of the theme beyond undergraduate education; awareness of different audiences about the importance of graphic memory; encouragement of cultural belonging.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Research Group Design, Culture, and Society (2017–2025).

It is worth emphasizing that the reflection proposed in this article—initiated through the incorporation of research results on graphic memory into classroom practice, raises a fundamental question about design education centered on local history.

We argue that studying history from the point of view of others, or from a perspective that excludes one's lived reality, hinders individuals from developing human, sociocultural, and political interests related to society. Therefore, we believe that orienting the design student's sensitivity toward their surroundings can foster social awareness.

To more effectively understand the impact of the proposal reported in this article – that is, to measure the effects of incorporating content on local production –, it would be necessary to carry out a process of evaluation of its influence on students' work at other stages of their education.

However, preliminary observations indicate that students who chose aspects of graphic memory to develop in their final graduation projects or other practical activities demonstrate traces of transformation.

The introduction of research results into classroom activities, derived from the university's scientific initiation programs, contributes to connecting teaching and research and expanding opportunities for studies related to professional practice. In addition to encouraging students to participate in research under faculty supervision, *PIBIC* activities enable engagement with scientific techniques, the development of critical and creative thinking, the deepening of knowledge, and preparation for graduate studies and scientific careers.

Since 2017, the Research Group Design, Culture, and Society (Design/UFS/CNPq) has developed studies on the graphic memory of Sergipe. This research aims to explore aspects of the history of local print communication and, through information management and knowledge generation, to insert new narratives into the history of Brazilian Design.

To mitigate the limitations of access to information about local history, the group's research results have been disseminated in various formats: books, scientific

articles, lectures, and workshops⁷. Bringing this content into the classroom has encouraged debate about local graphic history and highlighted its importance in the face of the predominance of external narratives⁸.

⁷ Available at: <https://www.designecultura.com>

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Supplemental material

All data necessary to reproduce the results are included within the article itself.

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