

# Object of memory as an analytical category of album covers

## *Objeto de memória como categoria de análise de capas de disco*

HEROM VARGAS<sup>a</sup>

Research Productivity Scholarship, grade 2, CNPq, Vice-president of the Latin American section of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM-AL)

### RESUMO

A partir de autores ligados aos estudos de memória, comunicação e cultura, este artigo discute a noção de *objeto de memória* como categoria na análise de capas de disco *long playing* (vinil), no contexto das relações que envolvem práticas culturais, música e materialidades. Como representações culturais partilhadas por artistas, gravadoras e fãs, as capas articulam memórias visuais acionadas no tempo, do passado ao presente, pelos sentidos a elas atribuídos, sua presença e materialidade (desgastes, imperfeições etc.). Observa-se como alguns autores tratam o termo objeto de memória, ou circundam a noção para, ao longo desse diálogo, refletir sobre a efetividade da categoria na análise das capas de disco.

**Palavras-chave:** Capa de disco, objeto de memória, memória

<sup>a</sup> Doctoral degree in Communication and Semiotics from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). Research Productivity Scholarship, grade 2, CNPq. Vice-president of the Latin American section of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM-AL). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7837-6740>. Email: [heromvargas50@gmail.com](mailto:heromvargas50@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Based on authors related to memory, communication and culture studies, this article discusses the concept of object of memory as a category in the analysis of long-playing record (vinyl) covers, in the context of relationships involving cultural practices, music and materialities. As cultural representations shared by artists, record companies and fans, covers articulate visual memories triggered over time, from the past to the present by meanings attributed to them their presence and materiality (wear, imperfections etc.). The article examines how some authors treat the term object of memory, or surround the concept, in order to reflect on the effectiveness of the category in analyzing album covers.

**Keywords:** Album cover, object of memory, memory



# A

<sup>1</sup> Released in the United States in 1948 by Columbia, the long-playing record (LP) holds a different recording format. It has 10 or 12 inches in diameter, smaller grooves than 78 rotations per minute (rpm) records, and rotated at a slower speed, 33 1/3 rpm. All of this meant longer recording time, hence the name.

THERE ARE TWO IMPORTANT ASPECTS as we talk about vinyl records nowadays. The emergence and popularization of the compact disc (CD) between the 1980s and 1990s caused long-playing records (LP or vinyl, as they are currently called)<sup>1</sup> to become less sought after, so that their production was greatly reduced or discontinued. However, a record factory went against the tide in Brazil: in 1999, two phonographic professionals created Polysom, in Rio de Janeiro, with the aim of continuing to produce and offer records. This dream only lasted until 2007: unable to cope with the costs and the ever-decreasing demand, the business was shut down. Then, in 2009 other entrepreneurs bought Polysom's machinery and facility and resumed activities, already targeting a new type of consumer market: adults, with greater purchasing power, who treat the LP as a cult object, and young people who are learning about this recording medium (*A fantástica fábrica de vinil*, n.d.). One of the interests of this audience is the triple aesthetic experience that records and their covers provide: handling and tactility, the images on covers and the acoustic product of the recording. Many artists have responded to this market interest, albeit very small, and released their work in three different media: CD, streaming platforms and vinyl. In this case, even if the product is a new release, the LP points to an old technology that requires little-used hardware (record players) and builds an aesthetic and media experience that is no longer the current hegemonic form of the music market. Coexisting with other recording media, consumption and listening practices in the field of Media Culture, even a new LP carries out a communicational process that is distinct from more contemporary practices. Vinyl record causes the cultural history of the media to rewind itself, which ceases to be a linear, unidirectional and evolutionary process, presenting itself as a mesh woven into different levels of uses and meanings, innovations and reappropriations.

A second aspect is related to LPs as collectors' items that circulate in a lesser-known market: the so-called vinyl fairs that take place particularly in large urban centers. In these places, exchanges and enchantment mark their operating logic:

The fair space is full of stalls with covers on display and accessible for handling by interested parties, just like in the old music stores. One may see many people arriving eagerly to find what they are looking for or be surprised by a rare piece. The enchantment is visible on the faces of most visitors: firstly, the sellers, who are proud to have the sought-after copy; then, the buyers, who are delighted; and finally, the general public, who are looking for leisure and entertainment

around this object that is once again on the cultural itineraries of cities. (Vargas, 2020, p. 639, free translation)

Entertainment, enchantment, aesthetic experience and symbolic consumption are features of this market founded on the semiotic and affective power of these objects that combine the LP records and their covers. At vinyl fairs, records are thought of as collectors' items, but not exactly as inert objects, without their original function<sup>2</sup>.

A subtle paradox lies here. On the one hand, according to Benjamin (2009, p. 239), it is "imperative in the art of collecting that the object be disconnected from all its primitive functions in order to establish the most intimate imaginable relation with which is similar to it." Baudrillard (2008, p. 95) treats collecting as a "passionate enterprise of possession," in which "the everyday prose of objects becomes poetry, unconscious and triumphant discourse." Collectors want to own a particular piece, revere it for its rarity, for completing a space in the syntagm of their collections. To satisfy such passion, they remove the item from its everyday functions and denotative meanings and places it in a new poetic construction defined by subjectivity or an idiosyncratic notion of order. However, in the case of records, the preservation of these objects are also linked to its their founding and original property of playing music. Housed in a package (the cover), their everyday functions are maintained. The subjective and passionate bonds with objects in collections are linked to maintaining its integrity, so that they continue to function as their protocols of existence, even though they are apparently attached to social and media practices that still exist, although they are no longer hegemonic.

Even though it is linked to this paradox, the piece used and kept in a collection takes on other meanings in its materiality, highlights in its life journey, the product of handling by the subjects with whom it has been related over time. It has a history, physical marks and is linked to different contexts, a profile observed and studied by collectors:

The most profound enchantment for the collector is locking of individual item within a magic circle in which they are frozen as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector, the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia, whose quintessence is the fate of his object. In this circumscribed area, then, it may be surmised how

<sup>2</sup>It is always important to remember that the current cult of vinyl records and the aesthetic, cultural, and consumer experiences they entail consider both this complex object, which combines hearing, touch, and vision, and a larger system that makes it work, i.e., the record itself and the record player. Thus, the aim here is to emphasize the visual and tactile aspects of the product packaging of this system, thereby expanding the limits of the observation of researcher Simone Pereira de Sá (2009), who focuses the experience on the record/record player pair. According to the author, "what is at stake in this practice and how its advocates justify their passion . . . is that the material characteristics of vinyl and record players constitute central elements of the discourse. And it is only through them that informants culturally legitimize this form of listening" (Sá, 2009, p. 53, free translation). In other words, the issue is that covers cannot be taken out of the experience that the long-playing record, conceived as a device within a system, provides.



the great physiognomists—and collectors are the physiognomists of the world of things—turn into interpreters of fate. (Benjamin, 1999, p. 487)

Conceiving that objects have a history, framing them in their contexts and interpreting their destinies are practices that place them as points of memory. Whether they are anchors, articulators or material starting points for the construction of memory, there are objects that are not restricted to their immediate functionalities or to the limits of present time. Although they exist in the present, their marks point to possible pasts that partly can be reconstructed today. They are “singular, baroque, folkloric, exotic, ancient” objects. They seem to contradict the demands of functional calculus to respond to a purpose of another order: testimony, remembrance, nostalgia, evasion” (Baudrillard, 2008, p. 81). They are objects of reasonable use that comprise a type of memory-document: “a time compressed into the object and which becomes an index of a certain context and a starting point for other relationships” (Vargas, 2020, p. 662, free translation). These are what I seek to define in this article as *objects of memory*, artifacts that grow over time and unfold with it, wear down and articulate themselves in experiences of remembrance, framing and oblivion as they are seen, handled and questioned by individuals, even if worn by time and use, becoming ruins.

Based on authors who study Memory in the Media and Media Culture, this article aims to reflect on the concept of an object of memory as a category to analyze LP album covers. Covers are considered as one of the active elements in the processes of constructing a materialized memory, through which the past is reconstructed in successive presents. This object is part of the relations involving cultural practices, music, materiality, symbolic consumption and subjects. As they are shared cultural representations (Hall, 2016) by artists, record companies and fans in society and culture, covers produce visual memories activated over time, from the past to the present.

In this endeavor, we will look at how some authors treat the term object of memory or surround the concept in order to reflect on this category in the analysis of album covers.

### **ALBUM COVER AS AN OBJECT OF MEMORY**

One of the first mentions of the term object of memory, albeit not very in-depth, appeared in the classic work of Maurice Halbwachs (1990). According to the author, memory has a social and collective meaning that overrides the

individual. It is a collective construction and represents the identity of a given social group. As Elsa Peralta (2007, p. 5, free translation) explains, for the author,

the primary function of memory, as a shared image of the past, is to promote a bond of affiliation between the members of a group based on their collective past, giving it an illusion of immutability, while at the same time crystallizing the prevailing values and perceptions of the group to which the memories refer.

Without considering any tensions or contradictions between collective and individual manifestations, for Halbwachs memory is a set of relatively stable ideas, values, representations, and tastes that marks memories of a group or society, defining this collective in a way that produces identity points. In this approach, objects are understood as material representations of these mnemonic manifestations and of the society's own characterization. For example, by citing descriptions of spaces by Balzac and Dickens, Halbwachs indicated the strength of representation of social positions provided by objects and their arrangements in the scenic space:

. . . each object appropriately placed in the whole recalls a way of life common to many men. To analyze its various facets is like dissecting a thought compounded of the contributions of many groups.

Thus, even in their apparent inertia, the symbolic character and the power of representation of collective identity are the aspects that define objects of memory, their configurations, and places:

Indeed, the forms of surrounding objects certainly possess such a significance. They do stand about us a mute and motionless society. While they do not speak, we nevertheless understand them, because they have a meaning easily interpreted. . . . However, the permanence and interior appearance of a home impose on the group a comforting image of its own continuity. (Halbwachs, 1990, p. 132)

However, as is known, memory is not only a collective representation but also a product of tensions between the social and a range of subjective and individual demands. Thus, when dealing with objects of memory, this dialectic must be kept in mind. Considering the individual pole, Ecléa Bosi (2003) introduced the concept of "biographical objects." According to the author, it is common for us to create our own spaces with our objects arranged in a way that composes a



particular expression, faced with the increasing standardization, impersonality, and mobility of the cities we live in.

As mobility and contingency accompany our relations, there is something we wish to remain immobile, at least in old age: the set of objects that surrounds us. In this set, we love the tacit but eloquent arrangement. More than an aesthetic or utility sensation, they give us an affirmation of our position in the world, our identity; and those that have always been with us speak to our soul in its native language. (Bosi, 2003, pp. 25–26, free translation)

Here, such objects are approached more for the particular and personal bond they create with us than for representing a collective identity. In fact, the collective and individual vectors coexist in objects, including their materialities: on one hand, they are products of an era, of production technologies, and usage patterns; on the other hand, their long-term use has made them elements of particular characterization and expression. “The more oriented to everyday use, the more expressive the objects become: metals round off, become oval, wooden handles shine from contact with hands, everything loses its edges and softens” (Bosi, 2003, p. 26).

By citing Violette Morin, Bosi (2003, p. 26, free translation) indicates that biographical objects

... age with their owner and become incorporated into their life: the family clock, the photo album, the athlete’s medal, the ethnologist’s mask, the traveler’s world map. . . Each of these objects represents a lived experience, an affective adventure of the owner.

Album covers are part of this set of objects that, even though produced industrially, carry within the dimensions of memory, tactility and handling, the links of particular objects. On the one hand, they constitute visual indices of songs, artists, or certain cultural contexts; on the other hand, they are linked to their owners, are part of their record collection, occupy a specific position on the shelf, and bear marks of time and use: yellowing, worn edges, some tear or imperfection, etc. Thus, album covers as objects of memory can tell both collective and personal stories.

Album covers serve two seemingly opposing logics: they belong to both realms of consumption and industrial production, and the personal and affective sphere. According to Igor Kopytoff (2021), objects are divided into two types: at one end one can find commodities, subject to exchange and defined by their

common and usual nature; at the other end there are unique, uncommon things, related to culture, difficult to exchange for other things or money as they do not easily conform to market demands and categorizations and do not align with the idea of measurable value as in commercial exchanges. The logics of commodity and singularization, far from being static and exclusive, are gradients that characterize objects in society and are found in varying degrees in almost everything. Covers, as considered here, are productive examples of this bivalent and tense dynamic. On one hand, initially, they are packaging devices and base their existence and meanings on physical and symbolic contact with the consumer. On the other hand, at the same time, covers undergo processes of singularization and move away from commoditization by constituting value in the cultural field, in uses, and in appreciation based on criteria that prioritize the symbolic, memory, and aesthetic experience. Therefore, they are outside the submission to the homogenization of exchange values of commodities.

In the sense that commoditization homogenizes values, while the essence of culture is discrimination, excessive commoditization is anticultural—as indeed so many have perceived it or sensed it to be. And if . . . societies need to set apart a certain portion of their environment, marking it as “sacred,” singularization is one means to this end. Culture ensures that some things remain unambiguously singular, it resists the commodification of others. (Kopytoff, 2021, p. 93)

Notably, one should invoke this dialectic between commoditization and singularity to reflect on album covers. According to Kopytoff (2021, p. 95), “most consumer goods are, after all, destined to be terminal” as they limit their existence to a certain period until they become fragile or inefficient, to be replaced by newer ones. However, there are also durable goods that can remain effective and, more importantly, singularize by having passed through other hands and served former uses: in a word, they activate or build memory. This cultural aura of used objects (or antiques), created from the passage of time (distant or immediate), is what drives the market for used goods, in which records and their covers are the examples discussed. Generally speaking, when the market prioritizes new products, another field of interest opens up for older, used objects, which gain value according to the demand from specific communities. In this case, the passage of time regulates the process of singularization, under the generic denomination of *antique*. Obviously, they remain as commodities and constitute market value; however, the valuation criteria transform according to parameters related to culture, status, and rarity of the items. “This interpenetration within the same object of commodity principles and singularization principles”





(Kopytoff, 2021, p. 101) is a central point for considering album covers as objects of memory. Rarity, the marks it carries from a particular cultural movement, the importance in the musical context, design, and the appearance of integrity, or its physical imperfections increase its value for specific communities and are part of the singularization process given by the passage of time. This can be called *historical value*, as a documentary reference of a certain context, as a mark for building certain memories shared by these communities, and at the same time, extrapolating them in the dynamics of society.

Hence, it is also important to reflect on how materialities and presence shape memories. In this context, it is valid to address cover as objects of memory due to their tangibility. When dealing with *biographical objects*, Bosi (2003) identifies them not only by their symbolic relationship with their owners but also by their presence: the positions they occupy in domestic environments, the places they hold, the many presences of these objects throughout people lives. It is this force of meaning founded on materiality and space that Gumbrecht (2010, p. 13) refers to as the production of presence:

The word “presence” does not refer . . . to a temporal but to a spatial relationship to the world and its objects. Something that is “present” is supposed to be tangible for human hands, which implies that, conversely, it can have an immediate impact on human bodies. . . . Therefore, “production of presence” points to all kinds of events and processes in which the impact that “present” objects have on human bodies is being initiated or intensified.

To think of album covers through the category of objects of memory means to observe their configuration in matter and presence, covers only make sense if they are in front of us and within reach of hands and eyes. It is their physical constitution (density, texture, weight, size, tactility, etc.), their visual perception (shapes, colors, contrasts, figurativity, etc.), and their physical existence that affect us and produce certain perceptual and aesthetic experiences. Although we know that objects of memory have meanings assigned collectively and/or individually, as a result of experiences, knowledge, and traditions, there is a force of presence given by their materiality. This is revealed in their imperfections, wears and tears, and what has conformed through the passage of time, marks of use and constant handling throughout their lives<sup>3</sup>. Hence, it can also be said that covers as objects of memory have life<sup>4</sup> and a trajectory. Such paths have been constructed due to their active participation in our lives; in relationships each of us weaved and continues to weave with objects. Even if they are stored away for years, the seemingly slow and peaceful passage of time affects objects

<sup>3</sup>Based on responses in a series of interviews with LP collectors, researchers Yochim and Biddinger point to the presence of an intangible quality in records related to more human aspects of this industrial object. In it, memory stands out: “... some collectors discuss their records in terms of connection to the past. That is, they suggest that in both listening to and holding records they feel linked to people, places and times of the past” (Yochim & Biddinger, 2008, as cited in Sá, 2009, p. 62).

<sup>4</sup>On the life of objects and the affectation of the body, see Erick Felinto and Vinicius Andrade (2005).



and, when rediscovered, affects all of us. This power bears such an extent that we only perceive it when we lose one of these objects. Although this realization is obvious, it is in the absence that we feel the negative intensity of the former presence of what is no longer among us.

Objects of memory, as old and used items, have both the symbolic dimension of marks of meaning and the strong presence of worn material. Hence the need, as Gumbrecht (2010, p. 15) states, to build “. . . a relation to the things of the world that could oscillate between presence effects and meaning effects.”

If presence and materiality are important, the category of objects of memory applied to the understanding of album covers implies things that can be positioned prominently both in social life and in private spaces. As they are significant to society, they are commonly found in museums, on display within a space-time narrative with other objects, in a specific location, following organizational criteria (Rebesco & Crippa, 2013). Objects in museums are relics-like, cultural remnants of a past in ruins that, in its impossibility of being reconstituted, fragment into the materialities of these exhibited artifacts. Such objects are observed through the intentions of the present, and it is these intentions (or gazes) that give mobility and layers to these relics, despite their materialities point to the past.

Objects of the past have always been pulled into the present via the gaze that hit them, and the irritation, the seduction, the secret they may hold is never only on the side of the object in some state of purity. . . ; it is always intensely located on the side of the viewer and the present as well. It is the live gaze that endows the object with its aura, but this aura also depends on the object's materiality and opacity. (Huysen, 1995, p. 31)

The aura mentioned by the author is the possible meaning constructed in the exhibited piece. Part of it lies in the material from which it is made (its originality), while another part comes from the way it is positioned by the curatorial design of the exhibition. There is also a third part in the viewer's gaze that reconstructs it through subjective projections and other conditions and repertoires of the present and their life history. Although there is an attempt to show the reality of the displayed piece and to reposition it in its original context and function, both are dissipated in the museum's *mise-en-scène*. Contradictorily, the museum makes the reality of the object disappear and opens it to new dialogues. As Huyssen (1995, p. 33) notes,

. . . the point of exhibiting was quite frequently to forget the real, to lift the object out of its original everyday functional context, thereby enhancing its alterity,



and to open it up to a potential dialogue with other ages: the museum object as a historical hieroglyph rather than simply a banal piece of information; its reading an act of memory, its very materiality grounding its aura of historical distance and transcendence in time.

Artifacts placed in museums suffer from this double action: displaced from their original context, they carry in their materiality aspects that point to their past and, in another way, they are subjected to new readings both by the exhibition's *mise-en-scène* and by the viewer's gaze. As archaeological objects, they doubly point to the past and the present, a request that is somewhat similar to the issues surrounding album covers as objects of memory. In part, covers are out of their context because they are the product of a technology that is, shall we say, not hegemonic in today's music consumption, even though there are spaces built in a nostalgic way<sup>5</sup>, such as vinyl fairs and private nightclubs. In both places, covers are also placed according to certain presentation parameters. Fairs and nightclubs are not exactly museums, but they do have criteria in the organization of their displays, unfolding as space-time narratives, and always allowing for new interpretations by various spectators who look, touch, and engage with the covers, imprinting new meanings onto objects based on their experiences and repertoires.

If considered as materialities that endure over time in the form of languages, album covers as memory objects transport parts of the communicative act they once triggered from the past to the present (Barbosa, 2019), or they translate into the present fragments of the communicational process in which they initially participated. As this original process no longer exists, or is worn out and ineffective, these objects become traces of previous communication processes that are documented by them and reconnected to their own current existence and the memory work they conduct from the perspective of the present. These are distinct regimes of temporality: the one rooted in the origin, marks, and primary function of the object, and others that are constituted through various handlings and engagements in later present times. It is as if such objects carried condensed times from their origin to the present within their materiality (for example, the wear and imperfections generated by handling) and in the various meanings activated throughout their life cycle. However, the passage of time also reveals aspects of absence, of what no longer exists, of the relationships once established and now displaced, of the old uses and the work no longer conducted. Temporalities and absences can be rearticulated in various ways in the multiple presents in which the object is used. Hence, the importance of the

<sup>5</sup>Nostalgia here is defined according to Niemeyer (2018, p. 13): "... a desire for a return to a past time that has never been experienced by the yearning person or the missing regret for a past that never was, but that could have been. ..."

memory work that can be inferred from them and that is triggered by society each time such objects are reconstructed.

In the case of records, these contacts in time take place through the ritual of putting them on the record player, listening to them and seeing and manipulating covers. Through these actions, it is in part possible to understand the process that is built up in listening to music from the analog recording technology. Not only its materiality, but also the indices it contains, which redesign a social technology of listening and viewing. In other words, a particular way in which music is mediatized is documented and materialized there, in the grooves of records and the visuality of covers. These relationships among temporalities go beyond the time of the music or the spatial and temporal limits of listening and continue to produce meanings over other periods, short or long, and can always be revisited in different contexts. Similarly, the time of visual images on covers expand in this constant flow between past and present.

Another author who uses the term object of memory is Michael Pollak (1989), but in a different sense to what is being constructed in this reflection. For him, objects of memory are not necessarily old and used, but are characterized by being means of reorganizing memory today under a certain framework in the present. For Pollak, it is not old artifacts that document acts of the past in their meaning and materiality, but those constructed today to show us certain frameworks of memory, whether hegemonic or not, through artifices of a sensory nature, such as a film.

In the closest memories, those of which we keep personal recollections, the reference points generally presented in discussions are ... of a sensorial nature: noise, smells, colors. ... Although it is technically difficult or impossible to capture all these memories in memory objects made today, film is the best support for doing so: hence its increasing role in the formation and reorganization, and therefore in the framing of memory. (Pollak, 1989, p. 11, free translation)

For the purposes of this article, the concept of object of memory as a category for analyzing album covers has a different meaning. Created in the past and rearticulated in the present from various points of view, objects of memory are like cultural texts, in the sense indicated by cultural semiotician Iuri Lotman. A cultural text defines a sign system, with meaning and a communicative function, given in any language. Neither a closed statement in itself as a sign, nor reduced to an indivisible unit (Lotman, 1996), a text



has at least two codifications: one that defines the semiotic system in which it is inserted, and another that models the system as a specific whole. For example, respectively, the dance system (music, body, movement, volumes, etc.) and a specific choreography (Lotman, 1996, p. 79). Cultural text is a dynamic mechanism for generating meaning that both tends towards its internal unity of coherence (a choreography with its own movements and arrangements), and also opens up into various subtexts and into translations and contagions, through its borders, with systems external to it (music, costumes, the architecture of the space, etc.).

The concept is thought of dynamically – as a translator of culture, and systemically – as an articulating mechanism. Treating covers from the perspective of objects of memory means thinking of them as cultural texts and considering this mobile and translatable structure in the cultural context. It means conceiving objects as heterogeneous in its multiple internal and external relationships, in their folds, in what they translate and produce from outside and in what they export to the larger system that contain them. As intelligent devices, they are open to other readings and meanings according to the cultural dynamics they are inserted in. Album covers are mechanisms that translate past information, processed by designers, articulated with the music they pack, with the consumption of the musical genres and artists at issue. They are not closed statements, but relate to other languages (music and image), other contexts and other meanings.

According to Lotman, cultural texts have three basic functions:

- a. Communicative: in which information is transmitted from senders to receivers, the basic procedure of any communicative system.
- b. Meaning generator: also called creative function, it is the product of various possibilities of translating texts from one language to another, from one context to another, from a specific time to others. In translation operations, some elements are lost and others are created. This makes it possible to treat the translatability of texts as the creative power they contain. For Lotman (1990, p. 15), “... meaning is not only an invariant remnant which is preserved under all manner of transformational operations, but is also what is altered, we can claim that there is an accretion of meaning in the process of such transformations”.
- c. Mnemonic: related to the memory of culture, this function refers to texts’ ability to capture, conserve and produce information from previous systems that, at the same time, are resignified. “The text is not only the generator of new meanings, but also a condenser of cultural

memory. A text has the capacity to preserve the memory of its previous contexts”.

Album covers are objects of memory thought of as cultural texts, which articulate all three functions, especially conservation and memory production. They are old and used objects that bring with them latent possibilities for their reconstruction in the present, unfolded and translated into new configurations. Like archaeological pieces, they are articulated in layers of meaning, deep or superficial, which remain in potency for future translations. Obviously, these layers need to be reworked by new readers in new contexts and under new material and/or symbolic demands, they need to be discovered and activated, but the latency of the meanings is present in the materiality of these objects.

### **SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR REFLEXIONS**

This article did not intend to finish the subject or fully define the concept of object of memory as a category for analyzing long-playing album covers. The dialogues presented here with authors from memory studies and communication and culture opened up some points for further reflection on the concept and its application in the analysis of covers, in line with the objectives of this article. It was possible to identify seven points that summarize the proposed dialogues, leading the discussion into new fields and developments.

Album covers as objects of memory:

1. Translate and trigger affective relationships among listeners, music and image. Despite they are industrial artifacts and have a serial, non-auratic existence, album covers articulate close or distant memories, even in several copies of the same record, regardless of their integrity. Such memories lie in relationships mobilized by covers with listeners and in the affections given to them.
2. Manifest themselves through two major fields of meaning: a) part of the meaning lies in viewers, in the affective relationship they built with this object in the past. It still does in the present or with new conditions of existence for this object, such as belonging to a discotheque or being on sale at a vinyl fair. And b) another part lies in the materiality and presence of covers themselves, both as semiotic anchors defined by tangibility and circumscribing part of the relationship with these



objects, such as physical states and wears and tears seen as marks of use and the passage of time.

3. Are dynamic and powerful artifacts that unfold with the passage of time, accumulating and growing over time and with handling. As rarities, they are dynamic in their diachronic constitution.
4. Reveal powerful dialogues between someone in the past, in ancient material conditions of production and communication, and someone in the present in other situations. This dialog involves a process of translation of communicative processes (production, technology, language, context, reading, etc.), rather than mere information.
5. Intensely articulate relationships between different temporalities. The relationships established among artists, musical works, covers and viewers, initially given in the time-space of the original production, take place not only within the chronological limits of music and listening. They can also produce meanings over the course of certain periods, long or short, or even be resumed long after they have occurred, in new contexts. In the case of visual images on covers, their enjoyment amplifies in the flows unfolded between the past and multiple presents, without being limited to its original context or environment. Based on the relationship between music and image, memory allows this space to expand to any real or imagined situation in which both are recalled.
6. Are traces, vestiges and ruins, clear in the wears, tears, damages and material imperfections. They are tense memories because they are always reorganized in the present, under constantly updated demands as material documents of the past.
7. Are dynamic, heterogeneous and systemic like cultural texts, porous pieces in a border situation, always open to contagion and translation. They trigger memories of previous times and articulate other cultural texts in their images, such as fashion, body, design, behavior, artistic languages, etc.

Thinking of record covers in the category of object of memory means working with old and dormant material artifacts that preserve and/or trigger memories, which are in a position to produce relationships in time according to the viewer's investment. They are silent pieces that patiently await some handling or reading, relationship or conjunction that brings them out and gives them sound, movement and meaning, something that puts them through a process of semiosis.

They are like musical instruments at rest, waiting for hands to make them vibrate and sound: they have sound in their power, but they need to be activated. Because they are matter, they vibrate internally imperceptibly, at very low frequencies. A handling amplifies their vibration, changes their colors and gives them conditions to produce new meanings. Metaphorically, they are white objects that, on the one hand, contain in their materiality all the frequencies of the chromatic spectrum and, on the other hand, are receptive to any other tones. ■

## REFERENCES

- A fantástica fábrica de vinil... e cassete!* (n.d.). <http://polysom.com.br/site/a-fabrica/>
- Barbosa, M. C. (2019). Comunicação, história e memória: Diálogos possíveis. *MATRIZES*, 13(1), 13-25. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v13i1p13-25>
- Baudrillard, J. (2008). *O sistema dos objetos* (5a ed.) Perspectiva.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). *Selected writings* (M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, & G. Smith, Eds., Vol. 2, Part 2). Harvard University Press.
- Benjamin, W. (2009). *Passagens*. UFMG.
- Bosi, E. (2003). *O tempo vivo da memória: Ensaios de psicologia social*. Ateliê Editorial.
- Felinto, E., & Andrade, V. (2005). A vida dos objetos: Um diálogo com o pensamento da materialidade da comunicação. *Contemporanea*, 3(1), 75-94. <https://doi.org/10.9771/contemporanea.v3i1.3448>
- Gumbrecht, H. U. (2010). *Produção de presença: O que o sentido não consegue transmitir*. Contraponto; PUC Rio.
- Halbwachs, M. (1990). *A memória coletiva*. Vértice.
- Hall, S. (2016). *Cultura e representação*. Apicuri; PUC Rio.
- Huyssen, A. (1995). *Twilight memories: marking time in a culture of amnesi*. Routledge.
- Kopytoff, I. (2021). A biografia cultural das coisas: A mercantilização como processo. In A. Appadurai (Org.), *A vida social das coisas: As mercadorias sob uma perspectiva cultural* (2a ed., pp. 83-112). Eduff.
- Lotman, I. (1990). *The universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture*. Tauris.
- Lotman, I. (1996). *La semiosfera I: Semiótica de la cultura y del texto*. Ediciones Cátedra.
- Niemeyer, K. (2014). The power of nostalgia. In L. Santa Cruz, & T. Ferraz (Orgs), *Nostalgias e mídia: No caleidoscópio do tempo* (pp. 13-28). E-Papers.





- Peralta, E. (2007). Abordagens teóricas ao estudo da memória social: Uma resenha crítica. *Arquivos da Memória*, (2), 4-23.
- Pollak, M. (1989). Memória, esquecimento, silêncio. *Estudos Históricos*, 2(3), 3-15.
- Rebesco, V. L. A., & Crippa, G. (2013). A organização do museu de arte: Uma abordagem a partir dos princípios estéticos de Hegel. *Revista Museologia e Patrimônio*, 6(1), 39-56.
- Sá, S. P. (2009). O CD Morreu? Viva o vinil! In I. F. Perpetuo, & S. A. Silveira (Orgs), *O futuro da música depois da morte do CD* (pp. 49-73). Momento Editorial.
- Vargas, H. (2020). Capa de disco de rock: Mídia, texto cultural e objeto de memória. *Razón y Palabra*, 24(109), 636-667.

---

Article received in January, 16, 2023 and approved in June, 13, 2024.