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1, 2, 3 Playtime

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Mapping Traça, 2024. Visual diagram. Anabela Veloso

Mapping Traça

Anabela Veloso

Knitting is a tactile practice. A loop of yarn being shredded apart, pulling itself into a fabric, a form, a system. The act is deliberate, repetitive – each stitch carrying itself together. *três bichos-da-traça* and *ponto sem nó* aim to share the fragile, often painful, intertwining of economic success, family relations and decay.

The act of nibbling. Traça.¹

‘This is a letter to the 3 moths who, alongside my father, walk
the tightrope of our knitwear factory. (...) 3 clothes moths.
No greetings to you,’

- video-script excerpt from act 1: *opening scene*

I kept returning to the image of moths – small, insidious creatures that destroy natural fibres, and I found myself caught in the metaphor between them and the three business partners. For 27 years, their parasitical presence has been destroying my parents’ knitwear factory and, by extension, our family relationships. *três bichos-da-traça* began with the realisation that I needed to face my disillusionment and anger head-on. This video installation is structured as a personal letter, addressed to those business partners, the three clothes moths that have undermined the business. It’s a reflection on my childhood hopefulness, and a desire to crack criminal masterminds, plotting revenge for the injustice done to my family. *três bichos-da-traça* is a video installation that flickers in an unstable way – wings, or a mouth that insatiably bites, sharing images of a non-populated knitwear factory, that is at times ghostly activated.

¹ Insect. It may be related to the Latin *tractiare*, meaning ‘to quarter, to tear apart’. According to the Portuguese lexicographer António de Moraes, the use of the word dates back to the 16th century.

'It has been a while since I last received news about the factory. Since the divorce, or the year following it, news have decreased as have the more pessimistic and emotional messages.

I can't say I am sad about it.

Selfishly, I sometimes find relief in my ignorance. Yet, without realising, I've accumulated a constant, heavy buzz that is placed on top of my head. This isn't from the factory's machines, punch clock, or finishing department's radio—it's an internal noise, which I'm unsure if it's even audible or makes any sound. Do you make sounds?

I think I hear nibbling.'

- video-script excerpt from act 3: *the rupture and collapse*

I map this withering with a sense of mourning and active animosity. In *ponto sem nó*, I aim to make a counterpoint exploring how such fragmentation can be repurposed. Family businesses are complex; they mix personal and professional lives in ways that create deep emotional entanglements.

I wanted to create a game that reflects the social dynamics and subtle manipulations that happen in business partnerships – especially in family businesses where the lines between personal and professional blur. It's as though I wanted to give people, and myself, an opportunity to play through the hopelessness that portrays my family's struggle. In the same way, I keep trying to uncover the truth about the factory's downfall, players step into the family members' shoes, deciphering clues and navigating hidden strategies to uncover the financial crime. After the case is closed, players stitch the discovered clue onto the black scarf. Once the scarf is completed, there is hope that it will be sent to the family. Perhaps they – or even myself – will wear it, and in doing so, it may help us see the truth, heal and reclaim what has been lost.

As I clear my notes, failed prototypes, and conceptual experimentation, I begin to place these works within questions of familial obligations, cycles of exploitation, and the cost of mundane survival, beyond the commentary on a family's knitwear business. My personal discoveries throughout *1, 2, 3 Playtime* passed by examining systems of power, and how we are all enmeshed in games we didn't choose to play. What started as an exploration of game studies and game design evolved into a personal inquiry into concepts of ambition, relationality, and losing. I began to see how personal experiences effortlessly mirror structures of gameplay: strategy and deception. The moths, the play, the exploitation – one that ties the personal to the political, the individual to the collective. The artworks became my way of speaking back to those systems, of refusing to be silenced, even as I acknowledged the limits of that resistance.



três bichos-da-traça, 2024. Video, 9:11 min. Video stills. *Malmö Gallery Weekend*, 2024, IAC.
Anabela Veloso

I have also looked at academic articles on family business theory, focusing on those addressing the socioemotional wealth of such enterprises, particularly in the northern Portugal. In Portugal, family businesses make up a significant part of the economy, particularly in the northern region, form the backbone of the country's private sector, making up between 70 % and 80 % of all companies.² These companies are closely tied to the places they started, contributing to local development, but they often collapse due to internal conflicts and emotional strain. The emotional dissonance, the constant push and pull between love and resentment, between wanting to fix things and recognising they can't be fixed.

These works exist in a space of tension, between financial hope and familial care and hope to unveil hidden truths – both pieces resist closure, fraying at the edges, but still holding on (for now).

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² Nora, N. Caetano, and A. P. Marques. 'Family businesses: Challenges and dilemmas of a conceptualisation'. In *Proceedings of the XI Portuguese Congress of Sociology*, 2021. Portuguese Sociological Association.



ponto sem nó, 2024. Board game. 6 buttons, 10 character cards, 54 clue cards, 27 strategy cards, 12 scene cards, yarn and needle, woolen scarf, wooden box. *Malmö Gallery Weekend 2024*, IAC. Anabela Veloso