

# The informational potential of typography in the dissemination of the Anthropophagic idea of cultural identity, as pictorially represented on the covers of São Paulo magazines (1928–1939)

*Potencial informacional da tipografia em relação à difusão da ideia antropofágica de identidade cultural nas capas de revistas paulistas (1928–1939)*

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Anthropophagy, typographic analysis, Brazilian cultural identity, history of graphic design

This paper presents a typographic analysis that aims to understand the informational potential of typography to disseminate the Anthropophagic idea of Brazilian cultural identity. This notion is exemplified on the covers of São Paulo's magazines dedicated to ideation and culture from 1928 to 1939. The lettering on the covers of four magazines was subjected to close analysis, with the study drawing upon the principles of pictorial graphic language and microhistory. The results suggest that, at the time, typography played a significant communicative role in representing Brazilian cultural identity as well as assimilating the ideas propagated by Oswaldian Anthropophagy.

*Antropofagia, análise tipográfica, identidade cultural brasileira, história do design gráfico*

*Este artigo apresenta uma análise tipográfica que busca compreender o potencial informacional da tipografia em relação à difusão da ideia antropofágica de identidade cultural brasileira, representada em capas de revistas de ideias e cultura paulistas entre 1928 e 1939. Foram analisados os letreiramentos das capas de quatro revistas, e a análise foi fundamentada na linguagem gráfica pictórica e na abordagem da micro-história. Os resultados sugerem que a tipografia desempenhou um papel comunicacional relevante nas representações da identidade cultural brasileira da época, além de assimilar as ideias propagadas pela Antropofagia oswaldiana.*

## 1 Introduction

Information design (Brazilian Society of Information Design [SBDI], 2020) is the process of expressing and communicating the content of a message to a given receiver. Information can be conveyed in various ways, and it is the designer's role to determine how a message will be visually represented. The context in which information is embedded and how it is conceived and presented influences how a recipient understands and interprets it (Shedroff, 1994). Therefore, it is inherent to the discipline of information

1 When we mention “Anthropophagic,” “Anthropophagy,” or terms derived from this root, we are referring to the metaphorical idea of *Antropofagia oswaldiana*. This notion is not linked to the concept of cannibalism, but rather to the understanding of the assimilation of other cultures, based on the metaphorical notion of the “deglutição” [deglutition/swallowing] of the other. This understanding is grounded in the principle that, within anthropophagic logic, the operator of a discourse – whether textual or visual – appropriates an imposed colonial cultural logic (European) and, through their own filter (as an operator), produces a new cultural manifestation, simultaneously marked by rupture and by the reassertion of local culture, in this case, Brazilian culture.

design to acknowledge the social function of information within a given society. As Redig (2004) noted, design plays a fundamental role in forming and circulating ideas within society. This study considers how Brazilian graphic design may have contributed to the circulation of Anthropophagic<sup>1</sup> ideas of cultural identity, specifically through typography. In this way, the study contributes to Brazil’s graphic memory and the historical study of Brazilian graphic design.

The study offers a semiotic analysis of the typography used in the letterings of São Paulo-based magazines of ideas and culture between 1928 and 1939, as cataloged by Siqueira (2023). The objective is to identify possible assimilations of typography into the cultural identity concepts articulated by Anthropophagy.

Anthropophagy was established in 1928 with the publication of the *Anthropophagic Manifesto* in the *Revista de Antropofagia* [Anthropophagy Magazine], written by Oswald de Andrade. As an ideology that broke with prevailing paradigms, Anthropophagy proposed reviving a native, local culture (Fabris, 1994).

Nunes (in Andrade, 1972) reflects on the philosophical, literary, and artistic ideas of Anthropophagy from Oswald de Andrade’s perspective. He highlights “digestion” as the main anthropophagic process. Cunha (2012) discusses digestion within Anthropophagy as well, aligning with Nunes’s viewpoint by placing it in a political sphere. For the Anthropophagous, digestion is an act of resistance against the dominant culture because the dominant culture is absorbed, digested, and transformed into new productions rich with local signs (Candido & Silvestre, 2016).

However, it is important to recognize that there was no singular national identity project in circulation during the 1920s and 1930s when considering the historical context in which this research is situated. Bresciani (in Hardman, 1998) argues that the identity projects of that period were forged with political interests and controlled by a Brazilian intellectual elite. This view contrasts with Ortiz’s (2012) understanding of Brazilian culture as a political process in which symbolic, intellectual mediators construct identity signs connected to collective and national memory. According to Ortiz, this process gives rise to the idea of “Brazilianness” (*brasildade*), grounded in the notion of belonging, and provides a way to consider regionalisms throughout the national territory.

## 2 Method and procedures

Building on the concepts of identity and the principles of Anthropophagy introduced earlier, this study aims to determine if the graphic representations on the covers of journals of ideas and culture mirrored elements of national identity promoted by the Anthropophagic movement, with an emphasis on typography. The selection of these journals is justified by their role as the primary means of communication in the 1920s and 1930s (Sobral, 2007). These publications covered a wide range of topics, requiring a specific focus for investigation. In this sense, the research aligns with De Luca’s (2022)

concept of magazines of ideation and culture (*revistas de ideias e cultura – RIC*), which analyzes Brazilian modernist periodicals.

We draw upon the microhistory approach to understand the context of the publications and their letterings (Barros, 2007). According to Barros (2007, p. 184, our translation), the “micro-historiographical perspective requires intensive, incisive analysis, attentive both to minor details and to larger connections.” This methodological choice aims to understand how graphic manifestations assimilated Anthropophagy during a period of intense cultural, economic, and political change. This approach aligns with Braga and Ferreira’s (2023, p. 127, our translation) observation that microhistory helps analyze Brazilian design, which “emerges and develops within specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts and unfolds in diverse temporalities.” The authors also emphasize the diversity of national design and the presence of regionalisms in Brazil. Thus, this study situates graphic manifestations within a circuit of ideas, associating them with artists, writers, international aesthetics, and visual representations of typographic usage on the analyzed covers.

We examined the typographic analysis of letterings according to Charles Morris’s syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, following the semiotic method for typography proposed by Farias (2016). However, we limited the pragmatic dimension to contexts measurable by prior research (Siqueira, 2023), since accessing the individuals responsible for creating the graphic representations is no longer possible. Farias (2016, p. 50) suggests integrating Morris’s three semiotic dimensions (1938) with five categories of typographic analysis: letter, word, text, page, and volume. Through this approach, the elements can be analyzed in various ways to understand the effects generated by their meanings (Farias, 2016, p. 49). This study’s analysis is restricted to micro- and meso-level typography, focusing exclusively on letterings. This involves observing letters and words and, where relevant, the interaction between textual and pictorial elements on the page.

The analysis of letterings will be conducted in dialogue with the elements of cultural identity associated with Anthropophagy that can be visually represented on the covers, as identified by Siqueira (2023). The analytical categories used to select the covers examined in this article are divided into four groups: (1) Race and ethnicity, (2) Tropicalism, fauna, and flora, (3) Festivities and national customs, and (4) Regionalisms, national legends, and folklore (Siqueira, 2023, p. 178). These categories emerged from an extensive survey and indexing process of 5,705 potentially representative terms of anthropophagic thought. These terms were filtered by relevance and representativeness and grouped by similarity. The terms were extracted from the *Revista de Antropofagia* to map possible textual elements amenable to visual representation.

Additionally, we employ Evelyn Goldsmith’s (1979) framework for pictorial graphic language to analyze the relationships between typography (as an image), illustrations, and context. Goldsmith defines four visual factors for analyzing pictorial graphic language: unity, location, emphasis, and parallel text. However, it is important to note that this article primarily focuses on typography rather than illustration.

2 The exact circulation period of the magazine cannot be determined, but the latest issue found (no. 79) references the year 1938. In this sense, we present the dating information based on what can be measured in the consulted collections.

Using this conceptual and methodological framework, we examined 23 issues of the following São Paulo-based magazines: *Ritmo* (1935), *Arlequim* (1927–1928), *A Cigarra* (1914–1975), and *Revista de São Paulo* (1932–1938<sup>2</sup>). These periodicals were selected from a pool of 270 publications based on the following criteria: (1) publication date between 1928 and 1939; (2) circulation in the state of São Paulo; (3) inclusion of elements associated with Anthropophagy; and (4) presence of illustrations on the cover. After applying these criteria, we analyzed 23 covers, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Covers selected for analysis. Source: Prepared by the author.

### 3 Discussion and results

We analyze the visual representations of the lettering on a selection of magazine covers from the period under study. Each periodical is presented with a brief contextualization followed by an analysis of the typography used on the cover.

#### 3.1 *Ritmo* (1935)

*Ritmo* magazine can be understood as a cultural publication that, in its time, stood out as a modernist vehicle in its time. Homem de Melo and Ramos (2011) emphasize its affiliation with modernist aesthetics and Art Deco.

The magazine's first issue features graphic elements influenced by European modernism, possibly making it the only edition published

(see Figure 2). The cover of *Ritmo* evokes the stylistic characteristics of the European Art Deco movement by incorporating gradients and shading – a technique widely explored in the posters of the renowned Franco-Ukrainian designer Adolphe Mouron Cassandre.



**Figure 2** Cover of *Ritmo* magazine. No. 1, Del Rio, 1935. Source: Homem de Melo & Ramos (2008).

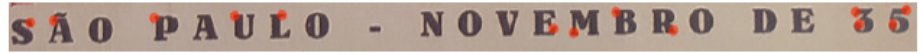
The appropriation of Art Deco styles is evident in the illustration and typography (see Figure 3). *Ritmo* employs a linear, sans-serif, geometric typeface, whose pointed, angular terminals reinforce a modernist aesthetic.

A notable feature is the construction of the letter “O,” divided into four quadrants forming a circle that harmonizes with the “R” and its negative space. Additionally, the letters “I” and “T” have more pronounced counters, while “R” and “M” have more filled areas, creating an alternation between positive and negative space. This arrangement creates a visual rhythm for the word “Ritmo” [“Rhythm”], reinforcing the relationship between the signifier and its meaning.



**Figure 3** Details of the typography used in “Ritmo” and “1.” Source: Prepared by the author.

The phrase “São Paulo – Novembro de 35” uses a Didone typeface, which is characterized by the vertical axis of the “O” being aligned at the twelve and six o’clock positions. It also has serifs and refined numerals “3” and “5,” as illustrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** Details of the typography used in “São Paulo - Novembro de 35.”  
Source: Prepared by the author.

The fusion of Art Deco elements and European modernist influences in the graphic composition of this issue – together with the motif of banana trees – approaches an Anthropophagic assimilation.

### 3.2 *Arlequim* (1927–1928)

*Arlequim* magazine is an example of a modernist publication that incorporated aspects of Brazilianness into its identity, achieving a distinctive graphic style inspired by the carnival character Harlequin, for whom the magazine is named. According to Silva and Wilke (2013), the magazine emerged during the rise of modernism. Building on Camargo (2003), they assert that the publication appeared during a period of press affirmation driven by modernism and Brazil’s intellectual ascent.

According to Cruz (1997, pp. 55–56), *Arlequim* was edited in São Paulo and published weekly. Under the direction of Sud Mennucci, Maurício Goulart, and Américo R. Netto, it circulated in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, Alagoas, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, and Pará. Silva and Wilke (2013) indicate that Jean Gabriel Villin designed the covers. However, they note that issues 13 and 14 were signed by José Maria dos Reis Júnior, as stated in a note on page 5 of issue 13 (Silva & Wilke, 2013, p. 5).

Although the magazine featured many contributors in its articles, this research focuses on the contributions of Raul Bopp and Guilherme de Almeida (Cruz, 1997, p. 55). Both collaborated with the magazine *Revista de Antropofagia* and played a significant role in developing Anthropophagic thought. Their presence on *Arlequim*’s staff indicates the magazine’s alignment with these ideas. Additionally, aesthetic features that began to distinguish themselves after the rise of Anthropophagy can be observed.

Regarding the elements highlighted on the covers, there is a prioritization of symbols of Brazilianness (Siqueira, 2023), such as the banana tree, the bonfire, the Saint John’s Day balloons, the coffee tree, and the harlequin himself (see Figure 5), which are depicted prominently.

There is an evident intention to create representative symbols for the magazine, as demonstrated by the consistent appearance of certain elements throughout multiple issues. For example, the Harlequin figure appears in



**Figure 5** Selected covers of *Arlequim* magazine. Source: Brasileira Library.

the first issue and continues to appear throughout. Villin uses this symbol to create relationships among the illustration, background, and text. All page elements harmonize, highlighting the Harlequin as the main feature. The same harmonious process applies to vegetation, such as banana trees and coffee plants, and Saint John's festival symbols, such as bonfires and balloons.

Although Silva and Wilke (2013) acknowledge a connection between *Arlequim* magazine and the anthropophagic context, they do not establish a direct link between the visual representations on its covers and this context. Nevertheless, they support the idea that Anthropophagy influenced Brazilian graphic design by incorporating national cultural elements into magazines intuitively and systematically.

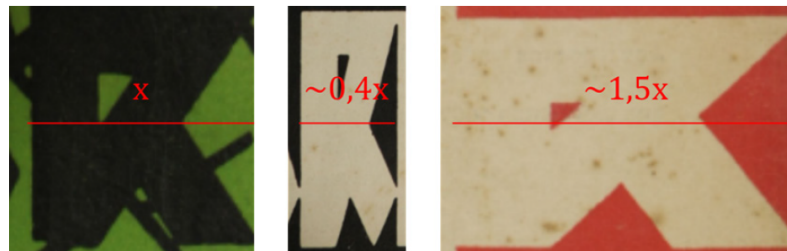
Regarding typography, *Arlequim* features a captivating symbol system, evident even in its logotype.<sup>3</sup> Reminiscent of the Harlequin's diamond pattern, angular terminals evoke European modernist geometrization. The strikingly close spacing between certain letter pairs, such as "EA," "AV," and "VI" (see Figure 6), alters the standard typographic configurations and overall layout density of the cover's visual composition.

<sup>3</sup> By "logotype," we mean the lettering that identifies the magazine.



**Figure 6** Detail of the lettering typography on the covers of *Arlequim* magazine. Source: Brasileira Library.

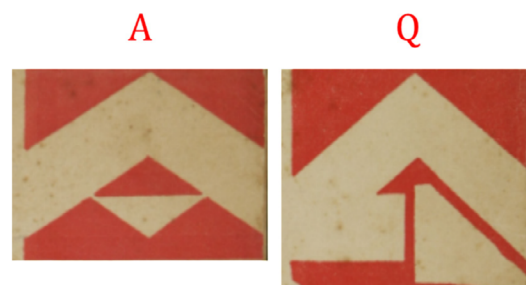
The logotype's custom typeface has different proportions in different issues. This phenomenon is also observed in other text blocks that undergo scaling, positioning, and framing adjustments in the analyzed images. Additionally, the flattening and stretching of letters, words, and blocks of text is explored. However, there is no evidence suggesting that these fluctuations result from reproduction errors or a deliberate attempt to justify these typographic variations. Figure 7 illustrates this by comparing the letter "R" in different issues.



**Figure 7** Compression and stretching of typographic forms.

Source: Prepared by the author.

Another noteworthy aspect is the flexibility of the "A" and "Q" forms in the magazine's logotype. Despite their unconventional features, these letters have a remarkably similar geometric design, suggesting that one was drawn based on the other's form, which is atypical for "A" and "Q" (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8** The letters "A" and "Q" are shown in detail.

Source: Prepared by the author.

In summary, the analysis of *Arlequim* magazine reveals that its visual and graphic configurations underwent transformations following the emergence of Anthropophagy. Technical and aesthetic changes marked this process. The magazine ceased focusing exclusively on the Harlequin motif and instead incorporated elements of national culture into its compositions while remaining aligned with European modernist aesthetics. These changes echo Oswald de Andrade's concept of digestion, aligning the magazine with Anthropophagic thought and signaling its contribution to developing a Brazilian cultural identity.

### 3.3 A Cigarra (1914–1975)

*A Cigarra* was one of São Paulo’s most prominent 20th-century publications. According to the Public State Archives of São Paulo, the magazine was published from 1914 to 1975 and chronicled the city’s social and cultural transformations. Initially, it circulated in São Paulo’s hinterlands before expanding to Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Paraná, Goiás, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul. The magazine had representatives in all these states and achieved international recognition in Europe, the United States, and Argentina.

Pimenta & Co. owned the magazine, which Gelásio Pimenta and Colonel Durval Vieira de Sousa directed. Pimenta remained at the helm until his death. After that, Luís Correia de Mello directed issues 239 to 400 (Cruz, 1997). Paulo Pinto de Carvalho took over issues 401 to 435, after which Menotti Del Picchia and Murilo B. Torres assumed leadership. They led the magazine until the end of the 1930s (*A Cigarra*, 1934, no. 8, p. 19). This change occurred after Assis Chateaubriand acquired the magazine in 1934 and integrated it into *Diários Associados* media conglomerate. At this point, the magazine circulated in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Bonadio & Boaventura, 2013).

Menotti Del Picchia’s connection to Anthropophagy is noteworthy. He was pivotal in establishing the magazine *Revista de Antropofagia* and collaborated closely with Oswald de Andrade during its early years. The managerial transition was also marked by significant graphic changes, including standardizing the magazine’s grid and visual language. For instance, the April 1934 issue was designed by J. Carlos, a renowned designer and illustrator from Rio de Janeiro.

The historical context of *A Cigarra* is relevant to this study, especially considering Oswald de Andrade’s contributions to the magazine. Other figures associated with the *Revista de Antropofagia* also collaborated with *A Cigarra*. They include Menotti Del Picchia, Monteiro Lobato,



**Figure 9** Selected covers of *A Cigarra* magazine. Source: Prepared by the author.

Vicente de Carvalho, and Guilherme de Almeida. In fact, the latter was highlighted in a magazine announcement as one of São Paulo's foremost literary figures at the time (*A Cigarra*, 1929, no. 353, p. 21).

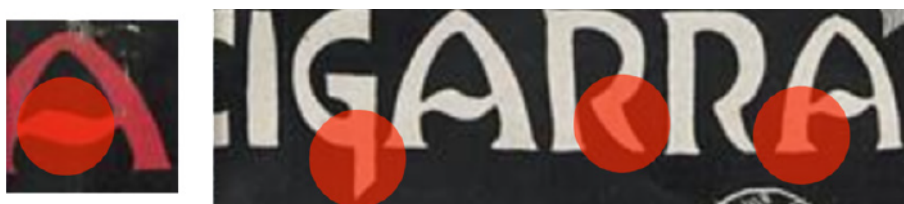
Issue 335 of the magazine blends organic Art Nouveau motifs with signs of Brazilianness, aligning with Oswaldian anthropophagic thought. This concept is reflected in the semantic dimension of the typography (see Figure 10).



**Figure 10** Lettering, *A Cigarra* magazine no. 335. Source: Prepared by the author.

The lettering in issue 335 absorbs the organic forms present in the illustration, suggesting a sense of unity among its elements. The typography employed exhibits characteristics of a humanist serif, as evidenced by the serifs and terminals of the letters “a” and “r.” However, when ornamentation is applied to the letters “A,” “C,” and the final “a,” the configuration resembles a hand-drawn typeface. This is because the logotype incorporates semantic traits of organic motifs, giving a sense of motion. In our interpretation, these traits evoke the vines and flora typical of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest.

Issue 402 of the magazine also features elements of Brazilian fauna, retaining organic motifs inherited from Art Nouveau (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11** Lettering, *A Cigarra* magazine no. 402. Source: Prepared by the author.

It is important to note that although the letters “C,” “I,” and “G” do not have serifs, the letters “A” and “R” have well-defined serifs. However, the terminal (or tail) of the “G” is characterized by rigid angles, contrasting with the organic embellishments on the “R” and “A,” which are found on either the stem or the tail. Nevertheless, the “G” design interacts with the “C” and “I,” which have more pronounced organic forms.

In issue 379 (see Figure 12), the lettering's typography resembles the letterforms in *Arlequim* magazine, with angular and rigid geometries.

This may indicate the adoption of European modernism, a style that valued such letterforms. The letter “A” displays irregularities not present in the letter “R,” which maintains a consistent pattern in both instances. Conversely, the “R” has an unconventional form that suggests it may have been constructed from the letter “D.”



**Figure 12** Lettering, *A Cigarra* magazine no. 379.  
Source: Prepared by the author.



Figure 13 shows the influence of Asian culture on the logotype of this magazine’s cover. The lettering incorporates classical features of the Japanese and Chinese alphabets, assimilating the context depicted in the image. The letterforms emphasize gesture, a characteristic strongly associated with Asian art. It is worth noting that *Revista de Antropofagia* discussed the fundamental role of Asian cultures in the formation of Brazilian culture in several texts.

Issue 384 of *A Cigarra* features a new typographic layout strongly influenced by the Art Deco style of the period. It includes a detail on the leg of the letter “R” that creates an organic quality. The typography’s weight reinforces the subtlety of the logotype, maintaining harmony between the heights of the “A” bars and the volumes of the letters “R,” “G,” and “C” (see Figure 14).

In contrast, issue 353 of the magazine features a classic geometric design. Its sharp angles highlight European modernist styles, complementing the illustration through the geometric treatment of shapes throughout the composition. The symmetrical interplay of the entire image results in a striking artifact produced by the fusion of Brazilianness, as seen on the cover, and modernist influence, as seen in Figure 15. This process can be examined from an Anthropophagic perspective, in which the European modernist style is absorbed, digested, and filtered through a Brazilian lens, yielding a new and unique outcome. This precisely mirrors the logic that Oswald de Andrade advocated in the *Anthropophagic Manifesto*: the assimilation of the “other” produces a novel cultural product. Similar processes occur in other magazine issues, as shown in Figure 16.

**Figure 13** Lettering, *A Cigarra* magazine no. 388.  
Source: Prepared by the author.



**Figure 14** Lettering, *A Cigarra* magazine no. 384. Source: Prepared by the author.



**Figure 15** Lettering, *A Cigarra* magazine no. 353. Source: Prepared by the author.



**Figure 16** Other typographic manifestations. Source: Prepared by the author.

### 3.4 *Revista de São Paulo* (1932–1938)

*Revista de São Paulo* is arguably one of the most prestigious publications produced in the city during the period under review (Homem de Melo & Ramos, 2011). Of the issues examined for this study, Antonio Halfeld de Andrade is listed as the director from 1932 to 1934, after which Victor Morse took over and led the magazine from at least 1935 to 1938 (see Figure 17). Unaccounted periods correspond to issues not addressed in this research. Between 1932 and 1934, the monthly periodical operated its own typographic workshop, “Officinas da Revista de São Paulo.” Typ printed issues 2 and 3. Paulista – J. Bignardi & Cia., and issues 4–6 by Rebello & Magalhães – which later became Printing House Commercial José Magalhães) and resumed printing the magazine from 1935 to 1938.

Three distinct typographic treatments on *Revista de São Paulo* covers merit attention (see Figure 18).



Figure 17 Selected covers of *Revista de São Paulo*. Source: Prepared by the author.



Figure 18 Letterings of *Revista de São Paulo*. Source: Prepared by the author.

The lettering and style of the first masthead in Figure 18 are reminiscent of the Art Deco style, as well as the other two. The typography of the second lettering aligns with the geometric forms of the image, and its design emphasizes geometry. The sharp angles of the terminals of the letters “R,” “V,” “T,” and “L” contrast with the fluidity of circular forms, such as the letters “A,” “O,” “P,” and “I.”

The visual style of the third lettering emphasizes the magazine’s connection to the Art Deco style. There is also movement between the text blocks “Revista de” and “S. Paulo,” which interlock in shape. The typeface’s angles in “S. Paulo,” the crossbar of the “A” positioned closer to the descender, and the axle-less “O” demonstrate a strong visual synthesis that stands out among contemporaneous designs. A band reading “Revista de” contrasts with the rest of the typographic composition, creating a dynamic interplay of forms. In this interplay, the band intrudes into the counters of the letters “P,” “A,” “U,” and “O,” generating a tunnel-like effect that may allude to São Paulo’s central role in the magazine’s discussions, both pictorially and textually.

#### 4 Concluding remarks

A thorough examination of the discussion presented in this study reveals that typography plays a pivotal role in shaping the overall image and contributes to constructing meanings that can also be applied to other visual elements.

As evidenced by the analyses presented in this article, a discernible synthesis emerges, wherein international typographic styles are amalgamated with cultural elements considered Brazilian by Anthropophagy. These elements manifest similarly in the pictorial imagery featured on the covers. This finding aligns with the anthropophagic perspective, in which foreign elements are absorbed and integrated alongside explorations of Brazilian cultural features. This assimilation can be regarded as an expression of a local aesthetic.

While it is impossible to prove a direct link between the illustrators, artists, and designers and Anthropophagy, it is evident that after the movement emerged, symbols significant to the Anthropophagy writers and thinkers began appearing more frequently, and new meanings were attributed to the typographic forms used in these visual manifestations.

This study posits that typography’s capacity to convey information should not be underestimated. The analysis demonstrates that aesthetic and formal decisions concerning the typographic treatment of a singular image have the potential to disseminate cultural concepts, foster a sense of belonging, and contribute to the development of Brazilian national and collective memory.

In conclusion, this article highlights the importance of typography in disseminating anthropophagic concepts through the analyzed periodicals, thereby accomplishing its objective.

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