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Entre Letras e Imagens: A Tipografia Como Elemento Estético nas Revistas de Moda

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# Interwoven Letters and Images: Typography as an Aesthetic Element in Fashion Magazines

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This article examines the intersections between fashion and typography through an investigation of the graphic design of specialised fashion magazines, both historical and contemporary. It first explores the relationship between fashion and modern serif typefaces, highlighting the significance and predominance of typographic style in the communicative and aesthetic processes of these publications. The discussion then turns to the imagery of typography in magazines, arguing that words acquire a distinct iconographic and visual value in their graphic design, transcending their purely verbal function. Through iconographic, documentary, and historical research, this article explores aspects such as the morphology and composition of typefaces, demonstrating how these elements sustain the visual identity and reinforce the graphic and editorial positioning of fashion periodicals. Adopting a qualitative approach that combines synchronic and diachronic analyses, the article analyses sample pages from Brazilian and international publications whose editorial scope encompasses conceptual fashion as well as fashion and luxury, including *V Magazine*, *Interview*, *Dazed & Confused*, *Numéro*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *L'Officiel* and *Harper's Bazaar*. In the context of fashion, typography cannot be regarded as a neutral or merely functional element; rather, by breaking conventional standards of legibility and readability, it plays an active role in the construction of narratives, communication, and visual identities.

**Keywords:** fashion, typography, fashion magazines, editorial design, image

***Entre Letras e Imagens: A Tipografia Como Elemento Estético nas Revistas de Moda***

*O artigo analisa interseções entre a moda e a tipografia, a partir da investigação e da análise do projeto gráfico de revistas especializadas do segmento de moda, publicadas ao longo da história e na atualidade. Inicialmente, o texto explora a relação entre a moda e os tipos serifados modernos, destacando a relevância e a preponderância do estilo tipográfico nos processos comunicacionais e estéticos relacionados às publicações. Em seguida, o artigo analisa o caráter imagético da tipografia nas revistas, assumindo que as palavras adquirem um valor iconográfico e visual de destaque no seu projeto gráfico, transcendendo a sua função verbal. A partir das pesquisas iconográfica, documental e histórica, são examinados aspectos como a morfologia e a composição dos caracteres tipográficos, demonstrando como esses elementos contribuem para a manutenção da identidade visual e para o posicionamento gráfico e editorial dos periódicos. Adotando uma abordagem qualitativa, que combina análises sincrônicas e diacrônicas, o artigo analisa páginas exemplares de publicações brasileiras e internacionais, cujo escopo editorial refere-se à moda conceitual e à moda e ao luxo, tais como V Magazine, Interview, Dazed & Confused, Numéro, Elle, Vogue, L'Officiel e Harper's Bazaar, por exemplo. No contexto da moda, a tipografia não pode ser considerada um elemento neutro ou apenas funcional; ao contrário, ao romper com padrões de legibilidade e leiturabilidade, desempenha um papel ativo na construção das narrativas, da comunicação e das identidades visuais.*

**Palavras-chave:** moda, tipografia, revistas de moda, design editorial, imagem

## **Starting Point: Reflections on Fashion and Typography**

This paper<sup>1</sup> investigates the relationship between fashion and typography, particularly through the analysis of the graphic design<sup>2</sup> of historical and contemporary

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<sup>1</sup>This paper draws on a selection and revision of concepts discussed in the thesis *A Identidade Visual no Projeto Gráfico das Revistas de Moda* (Visual Identity in the Graphic Design of Fashion Magazines), presented by the author at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Graphic design operates within the material and physical dimensions of a publication (Gruszynski & Calza, 2013), encompassing “everything from selecting the appropriate medium, imposing and printing the pages, applying coatings, trimming, collating the booklets, assembling the core, to binding and distributing the magazines” (p. 210). Moreover, its layout “entails the composition of various elements which, at a macro and structural level, relate to the graphic space and its components, constrained by the medium, binding, and format; and, at a micro and visual level, refer to typography, image, colour, and other graphic resources, whose content aligns with the theme developed by the publication” (Calza, 2015, p. 168). Graphic design reflects “the editorial project, the publication’s editorial direction that articulates a series of decisions related to its journalistic focus and topics of interest, its commercial strategies, its positioning in the market and among its recipients, its identity, periodicity, materiality, and production” (Gruszynski & Calza, 2013, pp. 208–209).

publications associated with editorial design and visual communication, such as specialised fashion magazines. It first explores the connection between modern serif typefaces and fashion within these periodicals, considering how certain typographic families and fonts have become reference points in their communicative processes. The discussion then shifts to the typographic and lettering production in fashion magazines, highlighting the visual and imagistic qualities that typography assumes beyond its verbal function. This analysis takes into account not only the morphology and structure of letterforms but also their graphic-visual composition.

This discussion is based on theoretical, iconographic, and documentary research. It employs two complementary approaches: a diachronic perspective, which examines the history of communication (and its products) in relation to fashion, and a synchronic perspective, which considers contemporary editorial products within the same field. By adopting a qualitative approach, the article references exemplary covers and pages from the graphic design of fashion magazines, treating them as units of analysis and visual arguments that illustrate the themes explored here. The corpus consists of both international and Brazilian women’s fashion magazines, classified within the categories of *conceptual fashion* and *fashion* and *luxury*, as proposed by Calza (2015)<sup>3</sup>: *V Magazine*, *Interview*, *Dazed & Confused*, *Numéro*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *L’Officiel* and *Harper’s Bazaar*.

The premise of this study is that typography — particularly in editorial products related to fashion — has never been a neutral or merely background element, either historically or in contemporary contexts. While typographic and verbal signs are often regarded as neutral in relation to images and content, as argued by Beatrice Warde (2010)<sup>4</sup> and in functional design<sup>5</sup>, such principles cannot be taken as universal when considering fashion and its diverse modes of communication.

Furthermore, as Calza (2015) argues, typography plays a crucial role in establishing the visual identity<sup>6</sup> of fashion periodicals, “contributing to the hierarchical

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<sup>3</sup>Calza (2015) classifies fashion magazines into six categories: (a) those focused on publicising raw materials, suppliers, and trends; (b) those covering fashion shows and product launches; (c) conceptual fashion magazines; (d) fashion and luxury publications; (e) service guides; and (f) magazines dedicated to the manual production of clothing.

<sup>4</sup>Beatrice Warde was a prominent 20th-century typographer and writer best known for her essay “The Crystal Goblet” (1930), which became a landmark in typographic theory. In her essay, Warde employs the metaphor of the “crystal goblet” to illustrate the ideal role of typography as a transparent and neutral medium.

<sup>5</sup>In short, functional design is an approach that prioritises utility, clarity, and efficiency, ensuring that form directly serves function and the user’s needs.

<sup>6</sup>From a graphic design perspective, identity can be examined through its visual dimension, “manifesting itself in magazines primarily through their most immediate and fundamental expression: their brand” (Calza, 2015, p. 159). Moreover, within this framework, the concept of “identity” can also be linked to corporate identities, considering its connections with marketing, branding, and the reader/consumer market. Wheeler (2006/2008) defines visual identity as the “visual and verbal expression of a brand”, which “supports, expresses, communicates” its essence (p. 14). However, from a broader perspective, visual identity can be understood as “an element of visual singularisation” (Peón, 2009, p. 10), not necessarily tied to a specific object. As Calza (2015) further suggests, “in a broader sense, the scope and field of action of a

structuring of texts and other graphic elements within the layout, while helping to maintain unity and visual coherence across different editions of the same publication” (p. 194). As Gruszynski and Calza (2013) suggest, “typography, as a complex system, encompasses a range of attributes and variations unique to typefaces” (pp. 213–214), including aspects related to their anatomy, structure, and style.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that the text begins with an introduction before examining the relationship between modern serif typefaces and fashion. It then moves on to a second axis of discussion, focusing on the visual qualities of characters, lettering, and typefaces used in specialised fashion magazines, considering their anatomy, composition, and arrangement. Finally, the text explores how typographic expressions, both diachronically and synchronically linked to fashion, often defy the principles of legibility and readability<sup>7</sup>, prioritising form over functionality.

## The Sovereignty of Modern Type in Fashion

Often referred to as “Bodonian” (Novarese, 1957, as cited in Rossi, 2017), “modern” (Clair & Busic-Snyder, 1999/2009; Meggs & Purvis, 2007/2009), “Didones” (Niemeyer, 2006), or “romantic” (Brighurst, 2004/2008), the serif typefaces designed by Françoise Ambroise Didot in France and Giambattista Bodoni in Italy between the 18th and 19th centuries featured a vertical emphasis and unbracketed serifs that were “clean and crisp, with right angles” (Clair & Busic-Snyder, 1999/2009, p. 182). Influenced by contemporary technological advancements, particularly the adoption of steel and copper engraving, these typefaces were also characterised by strokes produced using the engraving tool for printing matrices — a thin, pointed stylus used to incise metal plates (Clair & Busic-Snyder, 1999/2009).

As Clair and Busic-Snyder (1999/2009) explain, typographers and printers of the time “further rejected the classic Old Style tradition of pen-inspired letters and continued to refine the notion of the perfect letterform” (p. 182). The authors also note that “while perhaps not the most readable of styles, modern typefaces are the most visually distinct” (Clair & Busic-Snyder, 1999/2009, p. 182).

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given visual identity would encompass any elements or objects that represent an idea, concept, product, or service — being identifiable and perceptible as a whole or in part. Their formation and composition would be characterised by principles of harmony, coherence, repetition, and unity” (p. 160).

<sup>7</sup>According to Buggy (2018), “legibility, also known as discriminability, pertains to the shape of characters and the ability to recognise individual letters. It is the quality that enables a character or ‘symbol’ to be distinguished from others. Readability, on the other hand, concerns both the form of characters and their arrangement — how easily a text can be read. It is the quality that facilitates the recognition of information through the structured grouping of characters into words, phrases, and sentences” (p. 183). Unger (2006/2016), in a complementary manner, suggests that “legibility refers to the ease with which letters can be distinguished from one another”, while “readability is a broader term that refers to comfort” (pp. 18–19).

As Meggs and Purvis (2007/2009) emphasise, “around 1790, Bodoni [for example] redesigned roman letterforms to give them a more mathematical, geometric, and mechanical appearance” (p. 164), as illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

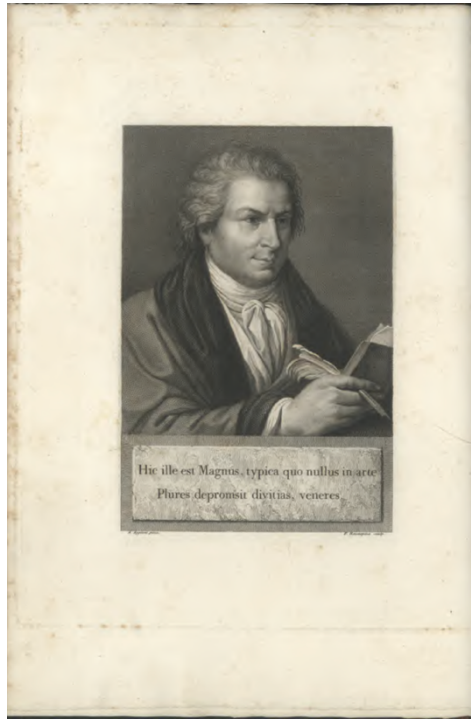


Figure 1. *Giambattista Bodoni, pages of the Manuale Tipografico (1788)*  
Source. *Manuale Tipografico*, by Giambattista Bodoni, 1788. © Public domain.

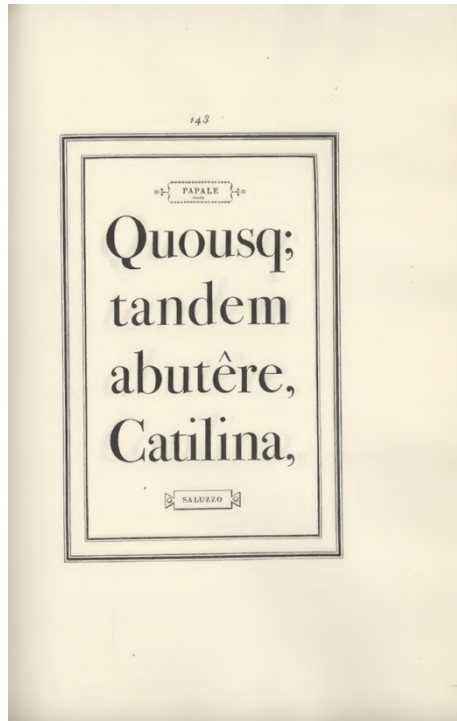


Figure 2. *Giambattista Bodoni, pages of the Manuale Tipografico (1788)*  
 Source. *Manuale Tipografico*, by Giambattista Bodoni, 1788, p. 143 © Public domain.

The Italian printer and typographer, as Meggs and Purvis (2007/2009) explain, reinvented the serifs by making them hairlines that formed sharp right angles with the upright strokes, eliminating the tapered flow of the serif into the upright stroke in Old Style roman. The thin strokes of his letterforms were trimmed to the same weight as the hairline serifs, creating a brilliant sharpness and a dazzling contrast not seen before. (p. 164)

According to Clair and Busic-Snyder (1999/2009), despite the influence of technological advances on letter design, the modern style represented “the first movement toward visual expression in type” (p. 182). In addition, “the geometric precision” of this face would impart “a *classical* feel [emphasis added]” due to “its vertical stress and small x-height in proportion to the capital letter height, as well as in the details seen in the sharp right angles of the serifs and the ascenders that are the same height as the capital letters” (Clair & Busic-Snyder, 1999/2009, p. 75).

If, due to the characteristics attributed to their anatomy and structure, the

characters can be considered classic, one could argue for their relative “autonomy” from fashion, that is, from its influences and processes. As Simmel (2008) suggests in his essay “Die Mode” (Fashion)<sup>8</sup>, translated by Santos, “everything that may be termed ‘classic’ is comparatively far removed from fashion and alien to it, although occasionally, of course, the classic also falls under the sway of fashion” (p. 186).

Bodoni (1788) also recognised the superiority of type over fashion in the Preface to his *Manuale Tipografico* (Manual of Typography; Parma, 1788). According to the Italian typographer and printer, the beauty of the typeface would emanate from four aspects: the regularity of the design, achieved through the repetition of structures; the sharpness and polish, “derived from the perfection of the burin and the perfect casting of the characters”; the grace; and the “choice of the best forms, in keeping with good taste, the spirit of the nation, and the spirit of the century” (Heitlinger, 2006, p. 107). For Bodoni (1788, as cited in Heitlinger, 2006),

fashion governs writing as it does all things, imposing rules upon it, whether reasonable or not. However, in the absence of a better rationale and when fashion allows for freedom, good taste should be guided by *simplicity* — not a crude simplicity that manifests in uniformly thick strokes, but rather an elegant simplicity of high quality, as seen in the harmonious contrast of light and dark in all calligraphy executed with a finely pointed and firm quill. (p. 107)

Sovereign and resistant to passing trends (except for micro-typographic variations and contemporary reinterpretations), modern serif typefaces cannot, therefore, be considered *fashionable*. As *classics of fashion*, they establish a paradoxical relationship with it. While these typefaces appear to transcend trends and time, they have nonetheless become almost synonymous with a specific category or segment due to the historically established association between such typefaces and fashion magazines<sup>9</sup>.

A closer examination of the history of specialised publications suggests that outlets such as *Vogue America*, *Elle France*, and *Harper’s Bazaar America* have, at various points, adopted modern typefaces in their branding and logos. *Harper’s Bazaar America*, for instance, first introduced serif letterforms on its cover in February 1939, under the direction of Alexey Brodovitch — the photographer and designer then responsible for the magazine’s visual identity — using typefaces created by Didot (Bailey, 2017; cover available at <https://www.oldfloridabookshop.com/product/sku/6898>). *Vogue America* followed

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<sup>8</sup>According to Santos, the text “Die Mode” by Georg Simmel (Berlin, 1858–Strasbourg, 1918) was first published in *Philosophische Kultur* (Philosophical Culture), Leipzig, Kroner, 1911.

<sup>9</sup>It is important to note that the use of this typographic style extends beyond specialised fashion magazines, as it is also employed by other brands within the segment, particularly Italian and French ones.



suit, albeit tentatively<sup>10</sup>, in its August 1, 1940 issue (see Vogue Archive; <https://archive.vogue.com>). *Elle France*, in turn, embraced the style from its very first cover, published on November 21, 1945 (cover available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark%3A/12148/bpt6k3047318k?utm>).

From the 1940s onwards, the use of the modern serif style became recurrent on the covers of international fashion publications, aligning with the (editorial) strategy of prioritising principles such as repetition, unity, and visual coherence between editions published by each title. Furthermore, this same phenomenon can also be observed in Brazil, where national magazines adopted the typeface style historically used in their international counterparts, incorporating it into their logos and headlines from the outset (in the case of *Harper's Bazaar Brasil*; see the cover of *Vogue Brasil* at <https://vogue.globo.com/moda/moda-news/fotos/2020/03/vogue-brasil-500-1975-ate-1985.html>; see the cover of *Elle Brasil* at <https://www.estadao.com.br/emails/moda-e-beleza/luto-fashionistas-comentam-o-fim-da-publicacao-da-elle-no-brasil/>; see the cover of *Harper's Bazaar Brasil* at <https://harpersbazaar.uol.com.br/moda/12-capas-para-os-12-anos-de-harpers-bazaar-brasil/>).

Throughout history, the covers of both international and Brazilian publications have appropriated modern serif typefaces to define their title or name. As Calza (2015) explains, drawing on Mouillaud and Porto (2002), this statement “is both minimal and dominant in publications: minimal because it represents the journalistic product, its concept, values, and conceptions; dominant because it permeates all its contents, at the centre” (p. 198).

Thus, when considering the prevalence of the *names* and the modern serif typefaces in the internal content of these periodicals, we observe the recurring use of Didonian or Bodonian letterforms not only in titles and subtitles but also in body text, captions, and highlights within journalistic articles. These compositions draw attention not merely due to the repeated presence of logos but also because of the way the typography is arranged on the pages. In the January 2025 issue of *Harper's Bazaar France*, for example, modern serif typefaces run throughout the publication, gaining prominence in the titles due to their size but also because of the generous line spacing. As for the body text, the low contrast between thick and thin strokes affects readability and the individual recognition of each letter, while the displacement of lines and columns serves as a graphic-visual strategy to orient the reader in relation to the beginning of the content and the interlocutors of the published interview (see the magazine cover at <https://www.harpersbazaar.fr/culture/harper-s-bazaar-n20-en-kiosque-ce->

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<sup>10</sup>According to Angeletti and Oliva (2006), Vogue America magazine can be divided into four main phases in terms of its graphic design and history: the *Initial Phase* (1892–1907), the *Modernisation and Typographic Unification Phase* (1907–1909), the *Illustration Era* (1909–1940), and the *Continuity Phase* (1940 onwards). While serif typefaces were already in use during the first two phases, they were more closely associated with the *Old Style* category rather than the modern or Bodonian style. Furthermore, although the first cover to adopt the modern style with greater precision was published on August 1, 1940, its recurrence became particularly evident from late 1941 onwards.

jeudi-23-janvier-2025-charlotte-gainsbourg-en-couverture\_4558; see some pages at [https://www.instagram.com/p/DGNVZTzqnix/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/DGNVZTzqnix/?img_index=1)).

On the other hand, *Harper's Bazaar Brazil*, in its November 2024 issue (cover available at <https://harpersbazaar.uol.com.br/estilo-de-vida/patricia-carta-fala-sobre-a-edicao-de-novembro-de-2024-da-harpers-bazaar/>), uses these typefaces in a similar manner, emphasising titles with wide letter spacing and uppercase arrangement. The typefaces are also notable for their frequent use in columns or blocks, where their size and prominence stand out on the page. Additionally, the relationship between light and dark in the text is crucial: due to variations in stroke thickness and pronounced modulation, the thinnest parts of the typefaces almost vanish when placed over photographic images, posing a challenge to the engaged reader.

In *L'Officiel Brasil*, the use of modern serif typefaces<sup>11</sup> is prominently evident, particularly in their size on the page, where they frame the text, in the repeated use of the logo or its monogram, and the titles of trend articles (Joffily, 1991) or fashion editorials. The shapes of these typefaces, with their airy composition, create a sharp contrast and an oppositional relationship to the accompanying images. This contrast, alongside the typographic prominence amidst the visual elements, enhances the publication's refined and sophisticated aesthetic, aligning with its established identity (cover available at <https://www.revistalofficiel.com.br/moda/l-officiel-118-tudo-sobre-a-edicao-de-dezembro-janeiro>).

The examples analysed — representative clippings from various periods of fashion publishing — demonstrate the dominance and authority that modern typefaces hold within the fashion world, particularly in visual communication and editorial processes. These typefaces are frequently linked to elegance, sophistication, and geometric precision, traits that have led to their widespread use in graphic materials associated with the fashion industry and its imagery. The latter is often connected to concepts such as luxury, exclusivity, tradition, and refined aesthetics, among others.

## Type as *Image* in Fashion Magazine

Typography plays a crucial role in the visual composition of the graphic design of publications, directly influencing the reading and interpretation of the message. It is not merely a textual element but rather a component that dynamically interacts with other visual elements, such as images and colours, for example. The impact of typography, therefore, is determined not only by its content but also by its form and the way the characters are arranged in the layout. In this regard, Calza (2015) connects typography to the images within the composition

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<sup>11</sup>In the Brazilian publication, we observe an example of the (sometimes subtle) changes that certain contemporary fonts and typefaces associated with the modern serif style undergo regarding their anatomy. While the strong contrasts in thickness and the vertical axis are maintained, the serifs feature small curved joints where they connect to the stems — elements that are characteristic of the transitional serif style rather than the modern one.

through the constitution and reading of structural, stylistic, and/or compositional elements. These aspects range from the anatomy, weight, thickness, and slope of the letters to their size, alignment, balance, and overlap, creating a visual harmony that reinforces the (verbal-visual) message.

The concept of typography as an image<sup>12</sup>, discussed by authors such as Ambrose and Harris (2003/2009), provides a broader understanding of its function, extending beyond its traditional role in conveying specific verbal content. According to the authors, typography is not merely the graphic representation of letters and words but also involves the visual and emotional communication it creates with the reader. In this sense, the type can be perceived as an image because it transcends the mere reading of the content; it carries an emotional and symbolic charge communicated through its anatomy, formatting, and style. “Type as image”, the authors explain, “is powerful because it harnesses the emotion, energy, and meaning that we associate with a given style or graphic, with the added element of communication of what the type says or represents” (Ambrose & Harris, 2003/2009, p. 91).

In the history of specialised fashion magazines, particularly *Vogue America*, the expressive and visual nature of typography is most evident during the *illustration era* (1909-1940), as Angeletti and Oliva (2006) suggest. In this context, as Calza (2015) explains, “the illustration (figurative and/or typographic)” became the most significant element of magazine covers, “suggesting how the logo was constructed, flexible and changeable, adapting to the various graphic languages and trends proposed by illustrators in each era” (p. 144)<sup>13</sup>. In the Vogue Archive (<https://archive.vogue.com>) we can find the covers produced in the period, many of them in their aesthetics and language, display a selection of covers from this period, whose aesthetics and language reference various artistic movements, such as art deco and surrealism. Additionally, we observe the adoption of compositional and graphic strategies that involved not only the deconstruction of the magazine’s title but also its manipulation through techniques like cut-outs, overlaps, the use of contours, different fillings, and the emphasis on the initial letter “V”.

As Calza (2015) explains, during this phase, “the identity of Vogue magazine fragmented” due to the production of “covers characterised by the inclusion of various typefaces from one issue to the next, introducing a sense of novelty not only through the main image but also through distinct designs for the

<sup>12</sup>Tubaro (2012) discusses the concept of *tipogramma* (or word-image), emphasising how simple alphabetic writing may not be sufficient to convey strong and original communication. According to the author, the careful selection of a suitable typeface, even if it aligns with the meaning of the word, may not be sufficient to express the message clearly. In *tipogramma*, words are not only read but also interpreted as images.

<sup>13</sup>The following illustrators stand out: Helen Dryden, George Wolf Plank, Georges Lepape, and J. C. Leyendecker, along with European artists Eduardo Benito, Charles Martin, Pierre Brissaud, André Marty, and Mario Simon, as well as Romain de Tiroff (Erté), Christian Bérard, and George Barbier. Additionally, designers such as Paul Poiret, whose sketches were often incorporated into the editorial content of the magazines, are also noteworthy (Blackman, 2007/2007; Calza, 2015; Kazanjian, 2011).

verbal message” (p. 144). It should be emphasised, however, that most of the time, the characters were not necessarily typefaces but letterings<sup>14</sup>, that is, hand-drawn designs created by the illustrators themselves — thus adopting their line, technique, and language, which originally formed part of the illustrations. Moreover, in many cases, as can be seen in the repository available from American *Vogue*, the theme of the issue often served as an element or thread that not only influenced the figurative elements but also shaped the verbal ones.

The editorial strategy adopted by Condé Nast at the time was to turn the pages of *Vogue America* “into a continuous display of artists’ and illustrators’ creativity” (Calza, 2015, p. 143), as “every cover had to be in colour” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006, p. 99). However, while the aim was to set the publication apart from its competitors, the same artists often contributed to other magazines and advertisements, resulting in similar compositions. This, in turn, reinforced the graphic-visual identity of the individual creators rather than that of the magazine itself, sometimes overshadowing its editorial identity (Calza, 2015).

On the other hand, in contemporary fashion magazines, visual typographic interventions are primarily found on the inside pages. Typography takes centre stage in trend articles and fashion editorials, often equated with images — whether due to its scale, decorative or customised style, or compositions that challenge principles of legibility and readability. In these cases, the emphasis shifts from content to form, drawing attention to typography as a visual element in its own right. This approach reflects an aesthetic in which graphic design seamlessly integrates visual and verbal content to create an immediate impact.

In issue V151 (Winter 2024) of *V Magazine*, featuring Naomi Campbell on the cover (available at <https://shop.vmagazine.com/products/v151>), typography takes centre stage through various graphic and visual strategies. In the news article “Nailed It”, the text follows the contours of the central image, adopting different orientations and column arrangements to integrate with the photograph visually. Meanwhile, the titles of the fashion editorials stand out primarily due to their enlarged size, as well as their use of colour. This creates a dynamic interplay of symmetry and asymmetry between text and image across mirrored pages; additionally, in other pages dedicated to behavioural articles (Joffily, 1991), a column-based grid structures the composition, though the text layout alternates between two and three rigid typographic structures.

In its 557th issue (Autumn 2024; cover available at <https://interviewmag.mys-hopify.com/products/interview-557-jennifer-lopez-fall-2024-55th-anniversary-issue>), *Interview* pushes the boundaries of legibility and readability, transforming text into rigid blocks that nearly fill entire pages with verbal content. The

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<sup>14</sup>According to Flor (2021), “lettering refers to a unique, personalised typographic expression designed for a specific application, combining shapes and graphic elements such as colour and texture to convey a set of attributes, a message, or an idea” (p. 12). It is characterised by letters that “are not part of fonts available for purchase and repeated use. Instead, they are created specifically for a particular situation and purpose. In this sense, it can be compared to illustration — an illustration made with letters” (p. 12).

layout is framed by the very medium, evoking the format and materiality of a newspaper — despite the magazine being bound. The typography draws the reader’s attention through overlapping elements and the grey tone created by a uniform typeface, consistently arranged in either one or three columns. Additionally, the text size enhances its visual impact, standing in parallel to the images.

In the November 2024 issue of the French magazine *Numéro*, the typefaces, though neo-grotesque and functional, stand out in the composition due to their scale, extending beyond the physical limits of the page and surrounding the text, thereby accentuating the chromatic contrast between figure and background. A three-column grid structures the text layout, yet the composition fluctuates. While weekly news magazines typically employ two-column formats, *Numéro* disrupts this convention by introducing variation, making the text appear to “float” within the rigid structure. In its fashion editorial, the magazine employs lettering reminiscent of light painting, a technique in which the movement of a light source is captured through long-exposure photography. The decorative quality of the foreground lettering contrasts with the photographic image in the background.

*Dazed & Confused*, in its extended edition (Autumn 2024; cover available at <https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/64524/1/ayra-starr-autumn-2024-issue-african-superstar>), also challenges typographic conventions of legibility and readability through its composition of characters on the pages: letterings, whose shape and materiality evoke textile weaves, replace the usual headlines on the cover; they also replace the highlights in the news articles and introduce the fashion editorials, creating a visual unity through their repeated use. Additionally, other typographic transgressions, by the standards of a typical magazine, can be identified, such as the text in columns where blocks are displaced and “float” within the typographic grid; the outline lettering on the mirrored pages that emphasises the theme running through the publication (“The Impossible”); as well as the use of red in the typographic accents, reinforcing its unique visual identity.

Regarding Brazilian publications, *Harper’s Bazaar Brasil* magazine (November 2024; cover available at <https://harpersbazaar.uol.com.br/estilo-de-vida/patricia-carta-fala-sobre-a-edicao-de-novembro-de-2024-da-harpers-bazaar/>) demonstrates the impact of typography through opposites and contrasts: the magazine’s double-page spreads exhibit a balance between the elements placed side by side, whether through their size, colour, or the visual strategies that guide the composition. At the same time, the typography stands out with the use of capital letters and/or custom initials, incorporating techniques such as photomontage and bricolage.

Typography, in its almost sculptural function, transcends the traditional role of conveying textual information, becoming a visual language that evokes emotions and translates themes and concepts. The use of highly stylised fonts, with deliberately distorted shapes, overlapping elements, or even deviations in letter

spacing — such as those in the pages of *Elle Brasil* (images available at [https://www.instagram.com/mar\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_vin/p/DDr7OvgxtIC/?img\\_index=3](https://www.instagram.com/mar_____vin/p/DDr7OvgxtIC/?img_index=3)) — is a purposeful choice that signals a shift from conventional typographic norms. This creates an intense dialogue between image and word, where the typographic design itself becomes an extension of fashion, reflecting the pursuit of originality and exclusivity characteristic of this industry. In this regard, typography evolves from a mere functional tool to a fundamental aesthetic component, shaping the publication's visual identity while reinforcing its editorial concept.

These examples highlight the significant role typography plays beyond merely visually representing the literal content of the text. It creates an atmosphere that complements, and often intensifies, the message being conveyed. In other words, the impact of typography is not only tied to the content it represents but also to the way that content is visually expressed, evoking emotions and cultural or aesthetic associations that enrich the reader's experience.

## Typography in Fashion Magazines: Final Reflections on the Tension Between Style and Clarity

The text explores how typographic expressions in fashion magazines, both diachronically and synchronically, often challenge the principles of legibility and readability, prioritising *form* over *function*. Aspects such as maximising legibility and clarity, the use of serif fonts for traditional text, and the concept of typography as an invisible element, as proposed by Beatrice Warde (2010), are often deprioritised or even challenged by publications — at least from a graphic-visual and editorial perspective.

In the context of fashion magazines, where visual appeal and aesthetics take precedence, typography becomes a realm for experimentation, with conventions of clarity and legibility often being subverted. Over time, typographic choices have evolved to prioritise aesthetic expression over functionality increasingly. For instance, typography during the *illustration era* of *Vogue America* (1909–1940) proved to be a dynamic and expressive element, seamlessly integrating into the magazine's visual identity in a fluid and innovative manner. The flexibility of the logo and typographic experimentation, often embodied in hand lettering created by illustrators, allowed the magazine to adapt to the various artistic trends of the time. This strategy gave *Vogue America*'s covers a constantly refreshed character, where image and text merged symbiotically, reinforcing the creativity and editorial (and visual) distinctiveness of the publication.

On the other hand, the contemporary magazines analysed employ typography in diverse ways to create visual impact and reinforce their editorial and visual identities. *Harper's Bazaar France* and *Harper's Bazaar Brasil* use modern serif fonts and wide spacing to emphasise titles, subtly contrasting text throughout, thereby highlighting the dominance of modern typography in the world of trends and fashion. *V Magazine*, in contrast, is distinguished by its dynamic

interplay between text and image, where content is laid out in harmony with the photographic project, particularly in journalistic articles and fashion editorials. *Interview*, on the other hand, adopts a more radical approach, featuring dense blocks of text that occupy nearly the entire page, creating a homogeneous typographic mass that emphasises the materiality of the medium, akin to the layout of a newspaper.

Consequently, other publications also challenge conventional standards. *Numéro* pushes the boundaries of neo-grotesque typefaces, expanding them beyond the physical limits of the page while also employing grids that make the text “float” within a rigid structure. *Dazed & Confused*, on the other hand, adopts a more experimental approach, using lettering reminiscent of textile weaves, exploring column displacements, and applying colours to the typeface to reinforce its visual identity. In this way, typography emerges not only as a functional element (for reading) but also as an expressive and structural tool in contemporary editorial design, contributing to the construction of each publication’s aesthetics and narrative.

The shift from traditional principles of legibility reflects these publications’ pursuit of innovation and originality in graphic design<sup>15</sup> — especially prominent in the fashion industry and, more specifically, in conceptual women’s fashion magazines (Calza, 2015) like *V Magazine*, *Dazed & Confused*, and *Interview*. By treating typography as an image rather than just a medium for text, the goal is to create a visual experience that is as impactful — if not more so — than the images themselves. However, this emphasis on form often compromises the readability and clarity of the message, requiring readers to exert extra effort to decipher the content. In many instances, the objective is less about conveying information efficiently and more about evoking a sensation or emotional response in the reader — a hallmark of fashion editorials, particularly in conceptual and luxury magazines<sup>16</sup>, where emotion and visual appeal often take precedence over functionality.

The tension between *form* and *functionality* is a central theme in contemporary typographic/editorial design and visual communication, particularly in the realm of fashion. This tension often reflects trends and editorial strategies that seek novelty. In many cases — especially in the magazines discussed throughout this text — the choice to prioritise visual expression over legibility and readability

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<sup>15</sup>As Leslie (2003/2003) suggests, magazines provide designers with the opportunity to innovate, update, and implement graphic changes due to their periodic nature. Described as “a continuous organic project” (Leslie, 2003/2003, p. 6), magazines are distinguished by their capacity to incorporate changes — more or less subtly — based on the interests of their editors. Moreover, magazines have the power to set graphic trends (Leslie, 2003/2003) and introduce stylistic innovations that often influence other forms of media and visual communication (Zappaterra, 2009).

<sup>16</sup>It should be emphasised that these strategies are not universally adopted across all women’s fashion magazines, as the segment encompasses publications with varying characteristics — ranging from those targeting professional fashion producers to those aimed at an audience interested in DIY fashion. In this context, the scope and approach to content can vary significantly from one magazine to another within the segment (Calza, 2015).

can shift typography away from its original function: facilitating easy reading and understanding of content. In the context of fashion, where the image is paramount, typography reclaims and modernises a historical role, balancing the need for aesthetic appeal with the challenge of conveying a visually captivating and emotionally resonant message through text.

Fashion magazines offer a significant opportunity for typographic experimentation and creativity, allowing them to uphold their visual identity and editorial vision. In this context, words often take on an iconographic value that can sometimes overshadow the text itself, prompting readers to balance textual comprehension with visual interpretation. While the modern serif style appears dominant and emblematic of the fashion industry, other typographic forms emerge, defying conventional standards of legibility and readability and questioning the interplay between text and image.

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