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The construction of a modern ethos in Rio de Janeiro: illustrated magazines and published objects

A construção de um ethos moderno no Rio de Janeiro: revistas ilustradas e objetos publicizados

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ABSTRACT

Through the analysis of objects and technological devices published in advertisements in *Kósmos*, an illustrated magazine and important documentary support from the first years of the 20th century, this article sought to understand how Rio society assimilated the modernization of the Federal Capital, what effects it produced interaction with cars, electric trams, heavy machines, and other modernisms that went beyond those of an urban order, represented in the press of the time. For the study, all editions of the six years of the magazine *Kósmos* were analyzed, sometimes making use of intertextual comparisons with the narrative of other publications, such as *Revista da Semana*. As demonstrated in the study, the hypothesis is that, as "windows" for the understanding of modern culture, the technological devices and other objects published on the pages of the press brought more than revelations of how the reconfiguration of public space took place, of new ways of seeing and being in relation to modernity. With their own symbols, they helped in the aspiration and construction of a new moral value, character and a new lifestyle for the people of Rio.

Keywords: Illustrated magazines. Modernity. Rio de Janeiro. Advertising. Objects.

RESUMO

Por meio da análise de objetos e aparatos tecnológicos publicizados em propagandas da Kósmos, revista ilustrada e importante suporte documental dos primeiros anos do século XX, este artigo buscou alcançar entendimento sobre como a sociedade carioca assimilou a modernização da Capital Federal, que efeitos produziu a interação com carros, com bondes elétricos, máquinas pesadas e outros modernismos que iam além das de ordem urbana, representados na imprensa da época. Para o estudo, foram analisadas todas as edições dos seis anos de publicação do impresso periódico. Como demonstrado no estudo, a hipótese é que, como "janelas" para o entendimento da cultura moderna, os aparatos tecnológicos e outros objetos publicizados nas páginas da imprensa trouxeram mais que revelações de como se deu a reconfiguração do espaço público, das novas formas de ver e ser na relação com a modernidade. Com simbologias próprias, auxiliaram na aspiração e na construção de um novo valor moral, seu caráter e um novo estilo de vida para os cariocas.

Palavras-chave: *Revistas ilustradas. Modernidade. Rio de Janeiro. Publicidade. Objetos.*

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ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINES AND THE IMAGINARY OF THE EUPHORIC TIMES OF RIO DE JANEIRO

At the beginning of the 20th century, illustrated magazines showcased modernity by presenting an "aesthetics of spectacle" (Martins, 2008) through photographs, advertisements, cartoons, and articles by chroniclers who supported urban transformations and mentalities. This required educating sensibilities to shape a *Homo urbanus*, adapted to metropolitan life. Large cities — as Georg Simmel (2005) explained — influenced their inhabitants' mental organization due to the accelerated pace of interactions, impersonal relationships mediated by monetary predictability, and the dominance of rational calculation. However, urban life also gave rise to a culture of spectacles and visual culture, including illustrated magazines, which sharpened the senses and helped audiences, spectators, and readers construct their cognitive frameworks about the urban experience.

This new gaze, according to Jonathan Crary (2012), is the product of a historical construction that became radical at the beginning of the 19th century, when optical devices, scientific knowledge, and institutions were amalgamated and reorganized, breaking the Renaissance visual paradigm. This provided the emergence of a new type of observer in the West at the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century, a "subjective observer" totally different from those of previous centuries. The reorganization of this observing subject's gaze occurred before the emergence of photography and cinematography, as it was related to a new ordering of knowledge, discourse, and social practices that would come to shape the forms of the visual entertainment and spectacle industry in the 20th century.

The importance of the illustrated magazine in disseminating consumer practices during this phase of industrial capitalism is also highlighted. The new needed to be announced and consumed, quickly becoming obsolete, which provided new themes for the pages of illustrated periodicals. Such publications served as a primer on what it meant to be modern and how to adapt to the radiating poles of "civilization," such as Paris and London. This was particularly relevant for the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro, the Federal Capital of Brazil, recently remodeled under the administration of Rodrigues Alves (1902-1906) by Mayor Pereira Passos. It is worth noting that, during the First Republic, the city served as a showcase of progress (Neves, 1991), at least as an aspirational idea of progress. Through a visual and fragmented aesthetic similar to a panel, illustrations, cartoons, snapshots, chronicles, poems, and advertisements emerged, juxtaposed on its pages. All of this was associated with a more sophisticated graphic treatment and better paper and printing quality than newspapers. Visuality allowed heterogeneous readers, not always highly literate, to "read" and browse the news, providing a spatial and temporal map for the residents of Rio de Janeiro.

Thus, the pages of illustrated magazines symbolically provided materiality to the dream of the Brazilian elite, from its Capital, of being able to compare itself to civilized countries. "Rio Civiliza-se:" this was the catchphrase that impelled public figures, the elite, and opinion makers, writers, and chroniclers of the time to criticize

old habits and defend physical and moral reforms (Siciliano, 2014). In the city, the visuality of new times was shaped by the tricks of urban reforms, and the construction of taste as a practice of distinction between its inhabitants (Bourdieu, 2007) was configured by the printed media, especially illustrated magazines, through clothing and objects. These objects expanded their utility to become "objects of desire" (Forty, 2013).

To understand how illustrated magazines contributed to the development of modern lifestyle sensibilities, part of this research is presented in this article. We chose to use the textual and visual material present in the advertisements of *Kósmos* magazine. And why *Kósmos*? *Kósmos* was published from January 1904 to April 1909, covering much of the historical period of the federal capital's modernization process. With editorial direction by Mário Behring and later by Jorge Schmidt, it represented the vision of the bourgeois elite of the time. By incorporating technological innovations on its pages, many inspired by foreign publications — *Kósmos* called itself a magazine modeled after European and North American publications in its opening editorial — becoming a symbol of the modern press. Its issues, available in the digital collection of the National Library, mentioned the administrative policies of the period while narrating the ways of being, seeing, and behaving in Rio de Janeiro. Above all, *Kósmos* embodied the visual and material culture of a modernizing project for Brazil, which presented itself as two distinct countries: one in the interior, marked by *coronelismo*, uninterested in including the nation among the world's greats and where political support actually came from, and the federal capital, a space of discontinuity, often used as a metaphor for the country, although far from it. Both were registered within the same Republic circle.

Just like *Revista da Semana*, *Fon Fon*, *O Malho*, and other publications from the early 20th century, *Kósmos* helped build the imagination of the "euphoric times" of the Federal Capital and transform the Avenue, materialized by the recently opened Rio Branco, into a place to see and be seen. In four and a half years, *Kósmos* became the main spokesperson for this imaginary of progress, consolidating a "new urban mythology" (Dimas, 1983).

With elaborate language, averaging 50 pages per edition and larger in size than other magazines (32 cm × 26 cm), *Kósmos* was printed monthly, with copies sold for two thousand *réis* (Brazilian currency at the time). Additionally, it had an extensive list of collaborators, including Afonso Arinos, Alberto de Oliveira, Artur Azevedo, Capistrano de Abreu, Coelho Neto, Euclides da Cunha, Felix Pacheco, Francisco Braga, Gonzaga Duque, João Ribeiro, João do Rio, José Veríssimo, Lauro Muller, Lima Campos, Manuel Bonfim, Medeiros and Albuquerque, Olavo Bilac, Oliveira Lima, Raul Pederneiras, and Vieira Fazenda.

This work uses advertisements from *Kósmos* magazine as a significant documentary source from the early 20th century. Through these traces, it reflects on how a new ethos and worldview were constructed in the then Federal Capital of Brazil. The concepts of ethos and worldview are understood here from Geertz (1989,

p. 143-144), with ethos being the moral and aesthetic style of a group or society, and worldview as "the framework that elaborates things as they are," "containing the most comprehensive ideas about order."

Initially, advertisements from a series of 24 editions of the magazine were analyzed, published in 1904 and 1905, the first years of the magazine's publication and the years when modernization work in the federal capital was also underway. This first section aimed to develop the model for descriptive and interpretative analysis of evidence during the empirical observation phase. As an initial methodological criterion, advertisements referencing modernity in the text or image were selected to identify the terms and associations used. We sought advertisements that served as "windows" for understanding the modern ethos of the early 20th century, often associated with the materiality of scientific-technological achievements. Through this approach, we encountered many objects, their design, and all their symbolism of the Europeanized urban-modern experience.

Of the 29 highlighted advertisements, only three featured images of men, women, or children. In contrast, the majority showcased the opulent and complex machinery of the printing and photographic industries, such as boilers, gas stoves, lamps, and gramophones. These advertisements materialized the desired progress through the promoted technological devices. In Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, there was a need to aspire to and experience new moral values and lifestyles, embracing beauty and cleanliness.

Such technological devices not only reflected modernity but also facilitated the assimilation of an urban culture. According to Forty (2013), in his studies on the history of design, objects serve as vehicles of interaction and social exchange, and he describes how goods and their uses evolved as they began circulating globally. From a social perspective, Grant McCracken (2015) argues that objects are crucial for materializing cultural categories. He contends that objects provide a means to express, organize, and categorize an entire culture. Goods offer a tangible manifestation of culture, enabling individuals to visually discriminate and distinguish culturally specified categories. Ultimately, goods and their uses contribute to shaping and defining cultural order and spaces.

An analogy can be drawn between the concepts of American anthropologist Grant McCracken (2003; 2015) and his British colleague David Miller (2013) regarding the power of objects, which are not merely accessories but crucial in defining the individual. As Miller (2013, p. 140-141) observes, "We think that [...] we are free agents who can do this or that with the material culture we possess. But we cannot."

Building on the ideas of Grant McCracken (2003; 2015), Adrian Forty (2013), and David Miller (2013), the analysis of advertisements from the modernization period of the federal capital aimed primarily to identify which objects were featured. The selected advertisements not only showcase these objects but also reflect the transformations and emerging lifestyles of the era. Thus, secondary questions were formulated to guide the research: What objects were deemed modern by Rio de Janeiro society at the dawn of the 20th century?

KÓSMOS ADVERTISEMENTS AND THE MATERIALIZATION OF MODERNITY IN RIO DE JANEIRO

But what Rio de Janeiro was this that the illustrated magazine *Kósmos* depicted as the stage for an ongoing civilizing process? In the then federal capital, numerous changes were unfolding, influenced by the European model of transforming other capitals, such as Paris and London, into suitable environments for what Walter Benjamin (2009, p. 43) referred to as the "phantasmagoria of capitalist culture." During this period, historiography notes a time of relative political peace and economic growth in Europe and the United States — thanks to the balance between expansion and consumption, a result of urban, industrial, and technological development. This era is often referred to as the "*Belle Époque*," [1] a term associated with a time when countries like Brazil also enjoyed political and economic stability, enabling them to align with the modern European imagination. This was the moment to materialize the plans and ideas of engineers and sanitary reformers who, since the Second Brazilian Reign, had aimed to bring the lights of progress to the "capital of the Empire" and dispel the aura of backwardness surrounding the "capital city." "It was time for the ugly caterpillar city to metamorphose into a pleasant butterfly city and become a metonym for Modern Brazil" (Siciliano, 2011, p. 11).

Urban reforms alone would not be sufficient to eliminate all associations with the colonial, backward, ugly, and dirty past. Mobility and order were considered essential for advancing commercial activity, growth, and progress. It was necessary to redefine the city not only in terms of its physical layout but also in terms of behaviors and lifestyles, influenced by the concept of *habitu*[2] as described by Bourdieu (2007). According to Bourdieu, it is not merely economic conditions but also tastes, preferences, and lifestyles that position individuals within the social space. As Tatiana Siciliano (2011) explains, to align with the European model, more formal mechanisms for transforming customs were required to suppress those perceived as influenced by a Portuguese-African spirit and replace them with "civilized" habits.

Pereira Passos played a crucial role as an "agent of progress," imposing urban order through disciplinary control and the introduction of new codes of civility. This occurred despite vigorous public debates from groups that opposed the juggernaut of civilization. Through decrees and bans on street vendors, as well as the repression of practices such as begging, spitting, and urinating in the streets, the goal was to educate the population. The aim was to adapt the inhabitants of the

1 The *Belle Époque* refers to the historical period, particularly in the Western world, spanning from 1871, when the Franco-Prussian War ended, to June 1914, when World War I began. This era was characterized by the euphoria brought about by the technological and scientific progress of the second half of the 19th century.

2 The concept, as conceived by Pierre Bourdieu (1983), refers to a system of individual schemes, socially constituted by structured (in the social) and structuring (in the mind) dispositions. This concept is acquired through and by practical experiences (under specific social conditions of existence) and is constantly oriented toward the functions and actions of everyday behavior.

federal capital to a new lifestyle, primarily characterized by the refined manners of elegant European society.

These were new values confronting the contradiction between the ancient and the modern, embracing new attitudes while maintaining continuity with traditions. The key was to "appear modern." Achieving this required deciphering the signs and codes of habits and objects deemed modern and adopting them. Merchandise and any demonstration of adherence to modern norms became symbols of social distinction. Those wishing to join a particular elite circle needed to embrace a specific way of life and a universe of symbolic differentiation. Understanding and incorporating the etiquette of the new era were also essential.

This was the movement of elite families (or those who aspired to such status). In this way, they asserted their superiority over other social classes, legitimizing their claims not so much through material or economic capital, but primarily through their way of thinking, ideals, lifestyle, and cultural and social "capital." Magazines and newspapers played a pedagogical role in disseminating new ideas and social codes that contributed to shaping the "soul pattern of *Homo Urbanus*" (Siciliano, 2016, p. 10).

The objects showcased to the public in the printed pages of illustrated magazines also played a significant pedagogical role. Objects and their designs are imbued with meanings. Although succinctly defining objects is challenging, it is important to interact with and view them as material entities rather than mere representations. Objects can include items, articles, merchandise, landscapes, or urban works. Objects exist long before language, but perceiving them without their layer of meaning is a significant challenge and a reflection of what is understood as culture. In the realm of culture, nothing is devoid of significance; every cultural expression is already imbued with meaning.

Kósmos aimed to both construct and represent the mindset of the elite within the civilized world. Consequently, its advertisements featured objects that promoted hygiene and elegance. The magazine advertised water filtration systems, such as *Mallié* filters (Figure 1), dental services, perfumes, syrups, elixirs, drugstores, purgatives, and mouthwashes. Although this was a period before advertising had become a professional field, the sensitivity applied in creating these advertisements was crucial, as the most subtle emotional appeals often unconsciously persuade consumers, masking the commercial intent. As Tatiana Siciliano (2016) notes, advertisements evoke functional equivalents of the "myth," turning projections or identifications into consumable goods.

Everardo Rocha (1995) emphasizes that advertising, as a system of ideas circulating within the social order, serves as a means of understanding, identification, and adaptation to behaviors, as well as a new ideological expression of society. It was essential to ensure that nothing would hinder Brazil's entry into the progress agenda.

The advertisement for *Mallié* water filters (Figure 1) appeared in the early editions of *Kósmos* (February 1904). The text highlights that the filter is of French

Source: Mallié Filters (1904, p. 52).
Figure 1. ¼-Page Advertisement for *Mallié* Filters.

origin and provides "absolute sterilization." Key features emphasized in the advertisement include the "ease of installation and cleaning," as well as the "simplicity and elegance" of the object, which confer the same distinction upon its owner. Everything from Europe, particularly France and England, was considered superior and a model to be emulated in Brazil. Adhering to the hygienist principles of the time, cleanliness was a central theme in homes, on the streets, and in the bodily *héxis* (Bourdieu, 1983)[3] of individuals aspiring to the modern urban *ethos.*

3 In the article *Gostos de classes e estilos de vida*, Pierre Bourdieu (1983, pp. 83-84) asserts that lifestyle is "a unified set of distinctive preferences that express, within the specific logic of each symbolic subspace, furnishings, clothing, language, or bodily *héxis,* the same expressive intention. This principle of stylistic unity is surrendered to intuition and is fragmented by analysis into separate universes."

Shoes were crucial in distinguishing the inhabitants of the Federal Capital. They signified social status and "morally" erased the stain of slavery. Brazil had abolished slavery less than two decades earlier, and one of the restrictions imposed on enslaved people was the prohibition of wearing shoes. By the early 20th century, the so-called freed people were no longer labeled as "slaves," but they had not yet been integrated into the world of free labor or supported by public policies. They often lived precariously, relying on underemployment and odd jobs, and walked the city streets without shoes, either out of habit or due to financial constraints. Consequently, shoes became a significant symbol for their wearer, representing inclusion in the civilized group and serving as a marker of distinction. Through consumption, individuals could select, classify, and give meaning to the relationships around them. A good pair of shoes indicated that a person was aligned with European standards. As Sevcenko (1998, p. 556) noted, "any man can wear a jacket and a tie, but it is in his walk that the past reveals itself." This makes the Condor shoes advertised in issue 24 of *Kósmos* (December 1905) particularly noteworthy (Figure 2). The advertisement highlighted that these shoes were made using the "most perfect North American system" and were described as "elegant, solid, durable, and waterproof."

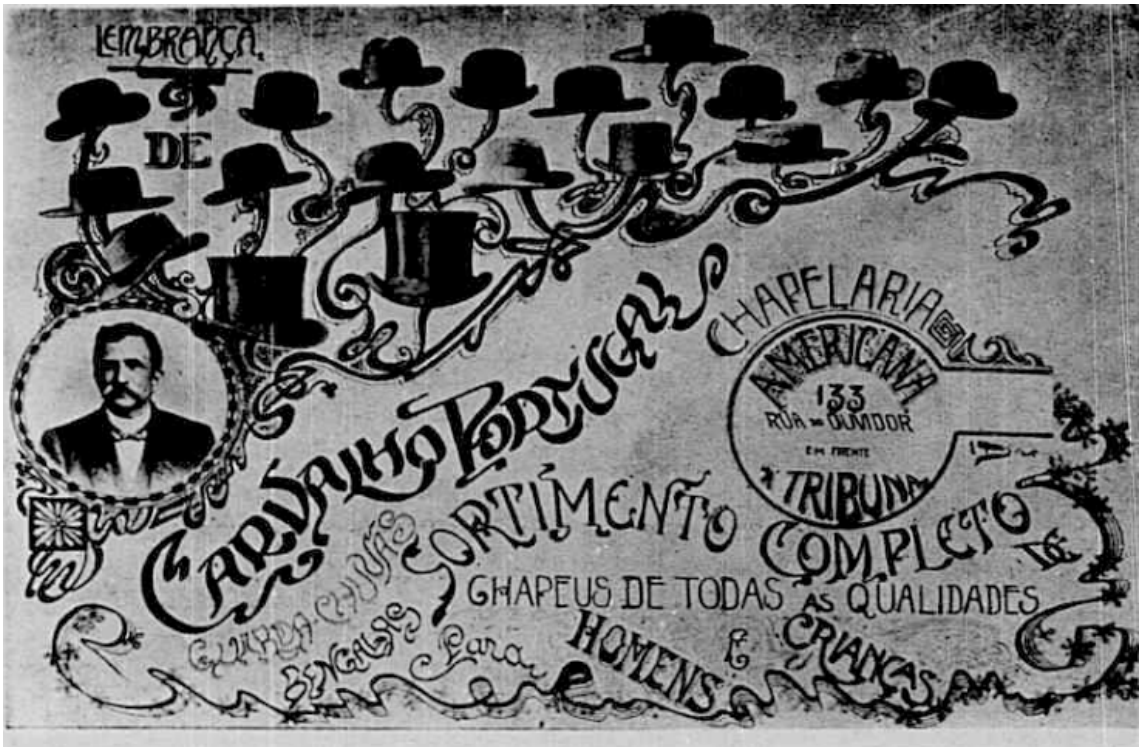
Source: Condor Footwear (1905, p. 88).
Figure 2. ½-Page Advertisement for Condor Footwear.

Another example of footwear advertising is the Clark shoe, featured in *Kósmos*, issue 21, September 1905. In the early years of the Republic of Brazil, modern men were expected to walk in the English style, mastering the "catwalk" technique, ideally with Clark shoes, described as "the only superior ones in Brazil," and noted for

being "waterproof, comfortable, elegant, and solid" (Figure 3). Men's fashion of the time was characterized by sobriety, typical of the businessman at the turn of the century, but it did not forgo luxury and refinement. Even in the frequent heat of the federal capital, it was common to wear shirts with collars and cuffs made of *tricoline* (a type of poplin fabric), wool, linen, or pure silk. Over these shirts, overcoats were worn and could be alternated with tailcoats or coats depending on the occasion, age, and, most importantly, social status. Pants were typically made from wool, linen, or *tricoline*. The outfit was completed with ties, socks usually made of Scottish thread, suspenders, hats (Figure 4), and walking sticks.

Source: Clark Footwear (1905, p. 3).
Figure 3. ¼-Page Advertisement for Clark Footwear.

In addition to dressing in a modern style and performing the "footing" walk on the Avenue, homes were expected to incorporate objects that reflected the new era. "From fundamental inventions to the most surprising, from large structures to small details, a cartography of novelties captivated the eyes of these men,



Source: Chapelaria Carvalho Portugal (1905, p. 51).
Figure 4. ½-Page Advertisement for *Chapelaria Carvalho Portugal*.

amazed by their marvelous machines," as Costa and Schwarcz (2000, p. 10) remind us. Advertisements for manufacturing facilities, foundry machines, and lamps showcased the materiality of progress. The sentiment was that Rio de Janeiro was aligned with developments occurring in other parts of the world, creating an atmosphere of harmony with global progress and civilization.

Heavy machinery, metal constructions, steel, and equipment featuring new technologies, such as electric lamps (Figures 5 and 6), embody and sustain this modernity. A particularly curious and symbolic example is the advertisement for *The Pyrilampo* (a beetle known for its ability to emit light due to the luminescent function of its organs). This ad includes images and a list of newly developed technologies for home illumination, emphasizing the name *Pyrilampo*, which evokes bucolic poetic imagery (forests, nighttime silence, and nature). This attempt seeks to make the consumption of lighting fixtures more relatable and familiar.

As seen in advertisements from that period, the emphasis is on images of machines, lamps, equipment, and materials. The accompanying texts do not directly appeal to consumption. Instead, advertisements commonly featured complimentary language and terms that conveyed the credibility of the objects' origins, such as "large factory" and "complete." Additionally, the texts highlight the variety of types, their functions and usefulness, and, importantly, the origin of their manufacturing.

In the advertisements for *Guinle & Co* (Figure 7), for instance, both text and image highlight the technological advancements of the time, including turbines,

Source: O Pyrilampo (1905b, p. 56).
Figure 5. Full-Page Advertisement for *O Pyrilampo*.

steam engines, pumps, compressed air tools, typewriters, and *Odeon* gramophones (Figure 8). The advertisements also feature equipment powered by electrical energy, such as chandeliers, pendants, table lamps, sconces, and lanterns. Electric energy revolutionized the city not only from an infrastructural perspective but also in terms of social customs. Nightlife, which was further encouraged

Source: O Pyrilampo (1905a, p. 49).
Figure 6. Full-Page Advertisement for *O Pyrilampo*.

by urban reforms, was extended thanks to energy, first gas and then electricity, allowing for more time spent on the streets. However, the same electric light that powered trams and dispelled darkness also evoked fear. These were the ambiguities of progress, perceived differently by those directly involved and those on the sidelines.

Souce: Guinle & Co. (1904, p. 51).
Figure 7. Full-Page Advertisement for *Guinle & Co.*

As the advertisement texts convey, "demanding," "knowing how to use," "having," and mastering social codes were not just mechanisms of differentiation, the foundation of social life, but also markers of experiencing modernity. Through these objects, individuals positioned themselves within a civilizing process that was not always easy to adapt to.

Source: Gramophone Odeon (1905, p. 91).
Figure 8. ½ -Page Advertisement for *Gramophone Odeon*.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The illustrated magazine *Kósmos*, through its chronicles, photographs, and advertisements, reinforced the pedagogy of civilizing morality. Advertisements were employed to prevent and control diseases, beautify and scent bodies, which needed to appear healthy to be considered healthy. Having sun-free skin and perfumed bodies symbolized a departure from the image of a slave-owning country. Thus, illustrated magazines offered guidance on how to dress and behave, provided a primer on new social codes, and encouraged the acquisition of objects that would embody these codes.

In this way, advertisements in illustrated magazines like *Kósmos* reveal how objects deemed "modern" helped construct a new worldview and *ethos*. Advertising, through "symbolic constructs," promotes desirable lifestyles and identities that the public is encouraged to identify with (Kellner, 2001). Studying these objects allows us to understand the transformation that occurred in various aspects of social life. As Grosz (2009) notes, we inevitably perceive the world in terms of objects. Objects serve as resources for acting, living, and leaving a mark on things. In the context of the early years of the Brazilian Republic, objects mediated the relationship between individuals and the "new world," helping them to understand, aspire to, and assimilate it.

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