BORDERLINE GRAPHICS: AN ANALYSIS OF CINEMA MARGINAL POSTERS

REGINA C. WILKE
SENAC-SP / BRAZIL
REGINA.CWILKE@SP.SENAC.BR

PRISCILA L. FARIAS
USP & SENAC-SP / BRAZIL
PRISCILA.FARIAS@PQ.CNPQ.BR

ABSTRACT
This paper presents a study on Brazilian Cinema Marginal film posters. It identifies the political and cultural context of the posters production, and considers their graphic, communicative and meaningful aspects.

In 1968, the Institutional Act #5 (AI-5) comes into force in Brazil, and, for the next ten years, the country is haunted by the most violent period of military dictatorship. Cinema Marginal has its heyday between 1968 and 1973, a period marked by the military regime (1964-1985). Such films portray the spirit of that era in dissimilar ways that alternate between romanticism, horror, romance and suspense, often with political messages in subtext. Its main shared characteristics are the subversion of cinematic language and experimental attitude. Such films interact with avant-garde theatre, visual arts and Brazilian popular music, especially with the Tropicalia movement, setting up a privileged moment of creation, despite the sombre political framework.

INTRODUCTION
The study of Cinema Marginal posters aims to gathering information for a better understanding of Brazilian design history. The posters selected for this study are those designed for the films listed by Puppo (2008), in his catalogue for an exhibition of Cinema Marginal movies.

Initially, we describe the political and cultural context influencing Cinema Marginal, and summarize the concepts that determine its language. We then introduce the Brazilian graphic arts environment of the era, and present the identified authors of the posters. Finally, based on an organization of the posters by affinity groups, we discuss the posters’ relation to the audiovisual language of the films, proposing a reflection on the visual, communicative and meaningful aspects of these graphic artefacts.

CINEMA MARGINAL
Cinema Marginal, also called underground or alternative experimental cinema (‘udigrudi’ cinema, according to cinema novo emblematic
filmmaker Glauber Rocha) is characterized by its experimental language and idiosyncratic techniques.

*Cinema Marginal* production era was marked by Brazilian military regime (1964-1985), when society came under the control of the armed forces, who imposed a policy of repression that curtailed most basic rights and liberties of the citizens. In 1968, the Institutional Act #5 (AI-5) came into force, and the subsequent ten years were marked by the most violent events of that period. In this social-political context, the censor would persecute Brazilian politically active artists.

In the 1960’s, innovative cultural movements emerged, like *Cinema Novo* (new cinema), characterized by movies that focused on Brazilian reality and lower production costs; and *Tropicalia*, a musical and cultural movement that articulated hedonism and opposition to military dictatorship. In the end of the 1960’s, there was also the emergence of countercultural and hippie movements. The ascend of ‘marginal’ culture in Brazilian intellectual debate was underlined in visual artist Helio Oiticica’s motto ‘Seja marginal, seja heroi’ (‘Be a marginal, be a hero’), that alluded to bandit Cara de Cavalo (horse face), a myth built by the press.

At this point, *Cinema Marginal*, a very heterogeneous set of films, produced approximately between 1968 and 1973, stands out, in dialogue with *tropicalism*, with mass culture and its icons, with the culture of comics, suburban theatre-circus, *chanchada* (Brazilian trashy comedies) and traditional Hollywood genres.

The young ‘marginal’ filmmakers broke away from one of the tenets of *Cinema Novo*, that of dramatically portraying Brazilian reality. In their quest to respond to the historical moment, they made room for aesthetic experimentations that would take place, according to Ramos (1987: 31) in ‘a fictional world that alternates between enjoyment and horror, always having as a reference the middle class itself, the producers of the films themselves, their fears, their angst and their pleasures.’

**PRODUCTION CONTEXT**

In the 1960’s, technical schools still dominated the teaching of graphic arts in Brazil. On the other hand, graphic design was in the verge of being institutionalized in the country, with a discourse based on the precepts of functionalism, influenced by European schools, especially Bauhaus and Ulm. This institutionalization was guided by a technical, rational vision, more than artistic or simply commercial motivations. Within this framework, the Industrial Design courses at the School of Industrial Design – ESDI, in Rio de Janeiro, and within the Architecture and Urbanism undergraduate program offered by the University of São Paulo School of Architecture and Urbanism, were established.

The conception of movie posters, in its turn, was, mostly, in the hands of draftsmen or illustrators, or of visual artists, who produced the image, and of lettering artists who were responsible for
rendering texts. The process also involved technicians specialized in photolithography.

The designers of Cinema Marginal posters fit these different profiles. Tebaldo Simionato was a painter and a commercial artist. Ferdy Carneiro graduated from Rio de Janeiro School of Industrial Design, and, other then working as a graphic designer, was also a journalist and an art director for advertising agencies. Fernando Pimenta, who attended the National School of Fine Arts and the Institute of Graphic Design, was an illustrator and a graphic designer who produced not only posters, but also newspaper ads for the films. Rogério Duarte, a designer and one of the founders of Tropicalism, articulated constructivist principles with elements of Brazilian popular culture. Oscar Ramos, highly respected in Brazilian visual arts scene, would also act as an art director and film set designer. Theresa Simões was a recognized visual artist as well. Miécio Caffé, who was an illustrator, painted panels for the façades of almost all movie theatres in São Paulo the 1960’s and 1970’s. Benicio, a self-taught artist, produced illustrations for magazines and movie posters, being responsible for around 50% of the pornochanchada (a mix of pornography and comedy genres) posters, and for at least 300 movie posters overall. Eduardo Catinari, also a self-taught artist, worked with artistic painting and graphic arts. Mixel Gantus was an illustrator and a set designer. Hamilton and Môca were illustrators. Other poster designers were part of the staff involved in the film production: Guara (Guaracy) Rodrigues was an actor, an assistant director, and an editor for the movie for which he designed the poster; Tonacci and Geraldo Veloso are filmmakers who designed their own film posters.

This diverse profile of training and professional practice resulted in an eclectic set of posters. While one line of work followed the precepts of ‘good form’, another endorsed the individual language of the visual artists or illustrators, and yet another would ensue the layout-men style of visual communication born in advertising agencies (Cardoso 2005). The design of movie posters, at a given moment, is put in the hands of advertising agencies, which directly sign the pieces, and soon begin to provide specialists, like Benício, Gilberto Marchi and Fernando Pimenta (Ramos & Miranda 1997: 96).

CINEMA MARGINAL POSTERS

Of the 61 films considered for this analysis, 43 are feature films, five are medium-length films and 14 are short movies. It was possible to locate only 37 posters, all made for feature films. Other movies of this category were never released commercially, or it was not possible to locate their posters in the public archives visited.

For the purpose of description and analysis, by observing affinities in the use of image and text, the posters were organized in the following groups:

- Lettering integrated with illustration
- Text superimposed to illustration
LETTERING INTEGRATED WITH ILLUSTRATION

In seven of the 37 posters analysed lettering is integrated to illustration. Handmade illustration and the use of perspective are expressive resources found in three posters of this group. The strength of this technique in the construction of meaning can be verified in the posters for À Meia Noite Levarei Sua Alma (‘At Midnight I’ll Take Your Soul’, 1964), author unknown (fig. 1); O Bandido da Luz Vermelha (‘The Red Light Bandit’, 1968), designed by Miécio Caffé (fig. 2); and Nenê Bandalho (‘Despicable Baby’, 1970), by Hamilton (fig. 3). Other posters with lettering embedded in the image were also recorded: O Pornógrafo (‘The Pornographer’, 1970), designed by Mixel Gantus (fig. 4); Meteorango Kid, um Herói Intergalático (‘Meterorango Kid, an Intergalactic Hero’, 1969), by Rogério Duarte (fig. 5); and Ritual dos Sádicos (‘Sadistic’ Ritual’, 1969); by unknown designer. This last film was banned by the military government censorship, and later launched as O Despertar da Besta (‘The Awakening of the Beast’).

À Meia Noite Levarei Sua Alma is the first horror movie made in Brazil; its narrative is violently anti-catholic and influenced by comic books (Puppi 2004). The poster’s perspective structure, drawing style and prevailing dark tone (fig. 1) are reminiscent of a horror setting, supported by other elements: the undertaker Zé do Caixão (‘Coffin Joe’, José Mojica Marins’s alter-ego), the coffin, the clock marking midnight, the cross, the cemetery, the skull, blood, all symbols of religion present in popular imagination and treated in tone of blasphemy in the film and in the poster. The letters in red are part of the design, reinforcing the sense of depth and match the blood that flows from the top of the poster.

Figure 1. Poster for À Meia Noite Levarei Sua Alma (1964), directed by José Mojica Marins, designer unknown.

O Bandido da Luz Vermelha, the film that made of Roger Sganzerla a famous director, takes up tropicalist spirit and bad taste aesthetics. It
features an anti-hero, a misfit character, identified in the bandit’s aphorism: ‘When we are not able to do anything, we screw up. We screw up and get screwed up’. The poster illustration, by Miécio Caffé (fig. 2), in perspective, emphasizes the figure of the bandit, and his dubious taste shirt, eyes facing the reader, weapon directed to a rape scene. The light beam serves as a basis for the film title, with hand-drawn uppercase letters simulating volume. In the background we see the action spot, the city of São Paulo. As for colour, red and yellow predominate, the red light of the lantern becoming yellow by poetic licence, while red, used in the title, reinforces its content by redundancy. This perspective representation, interrupted in the foreground by the rape scene, is directly related to the plot and to the film editing language.

Figure 2. Poster for O Bandido da Luz Vermelha (1968), directed by Roger Sganzerla, designed by Miécio Caffé.
The film *Nenê Bandalho* presents the drama of a bandit around the urban space, seen from bird’s eye view, trying to escape from police by walking on roofs, driven by a western track, in homage to American cinema western and crime genres. In the poster (fig. 3), the perspective organizes the titles, which simulates buildings, and introduce the character in action. Colour plays a key role in connecting the significant elements of the image. Other information, reversed white or red from a solid black area, is set in neo-grotesque sans serif, upper and lowercase, aligned left, creating hierarchies by the use of different body sizes.

In the movie poster for *O Pornógrafo* (fig. 4), lettering is integrated to the illustration by displaying text inside comic strip balloons. The graphic language of the poster makes reference to the movie plot, where a bored journalist becomes the author of successful pornographic comic books.

In the poster for *Meteorango Kid* (fig. 5), we find a psychedelic aesthetics, related to the consumption of hallucinogenic drugs and alterations of perception, which are part of the universe of the main character, who constantly seeks to escape reality through fantasy and libertarian delusions. The use of ambiguous lettering, where text may be read as image, the choice of complementary colours, the feminine figure representing woman’s sexual freedom, the geodesic form as an allegory for intergalactic, all those elements portray the spirit of the film. The poster also exemplifies the language of a graphic artist tuned with the visual trends of his time.
TEXT SUPERIMPOSED TO ILLUSTRATION

In eight posters text is superimposed to illustration: those for *O Profeta da Fome* (‘The Prophet of Hunger’, 1970), directed by Benicio (fig. 6); *O Segredo da Múmia* (‘The Secret of the Mummy’, 1977/81), by Oscar Ramos; *Lilian M* (1974/75), by Gilberto Marchi (fig. 7); the two posters for *As Libertinas* (‘The Libertines’, 1968 and 1969), by designers unknown; *Cristais de Sangue* (‘Blood Crystals’, 1974/75), by Móca; *A Margem* (‘The Edge’, 1967), designed by Tebaldo Simionato (fig. 8); and *A Herança* (‘The Inheritance’, 1971), poster signed by advertising agency Blane Arte e Comunicação.
The colourful poster for *Lilian M* (fig. 7) was designed for a black and white film. It has a strong advertising appeal, set by the illustration, colour and letterforms. The text is fragmented, allowing for different readings. Words overlap the image, the subtitle in foreground, like a stamp, cutting the poster diagonally, marking the confidential nature of the narrative. The title shows hand drawn letters, integrated to the illustration. The expression *confissões amorosas* (‘love confessions’) positioned at the extreme bottom of the poster, highlights the journey experienced by the marginal character. The drawn image portrays the main character surrounded by elements of torture, like power switch and wires, against a peeling wall. The dichotomy experienced by the character is represented by the colour of her hair, of half warm and half cool colour.

In the poster for *A Margem* (fig. 8), it is possible to observe the influence of European modernist design style in the choice and setting of lowercase sans serif type.

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**Figure 7.** Poster for *Lilian M: Confissões Amorosas (Relatório Confidencial)* (1975), directed by Carlos Reichenbach, designed by Gilberto Marchi.

**Figure 8.** Poster for *A Margem* (1967), directed by Ozualdo R. Candeias, poster designed by Tebaldo Simionato.

### PHOTOGRAPHY ASSOCIATED WITH GRAPHIC RESOURCES

In most of the posters analysed (11, to be exact), photography is used in combination with type or hand lettering. Often, the photographic image is in black and white, as in *O Anjo Nasceu* (‘The Angel is Born’, 1969), designed by Thereza Simões (fig. 9); *Sem Essa, Araña* (‘Come on, Spider’, 1970, fig.
caveira, my friend (1970); and 25 (1975), all three by unknown designers. In other posters, photography is combined with other resources including colour, like in o jardim de guerra (‘the war garden’, 1968), designed by guará rodrigues (fig. 11), a mulher de todos (‘a women for all’, 1969, fig. 12), bandalheira infernal (‘hell of a mess’, 1975), o homem de corpo fechado (‘the sheltered man’, 1971) and a sagrada família (‘the holy family’, 1970), the latter four by unknown designers. Only two posters in the set analysed, copacabana, mon amour (1970) and o estranho mundo do zé do caixão (‘the strange world of coffin joe,’ 1968) both by unknown designers, rely on the use of colour photographs.

in the poster for o anjo nasceu (fig. 9), a naked boy with angel wings attached to his body incorporates the idea of birth and the symbol of innocence, of naiveté, establishing a poetic correspondence between image and movie title. Two other elements, the shadow and the gun, complete the picture, and change the original meaning, highlighting the ambiguity of this image and of the film title. In the handwritten text that runs parallel to the boy’s body, the title is distinguished by being underlined. The director’s name and film year are positioned at the end of the diagonal created by the arm and the gun. The poster shows graphic refinement in the construction of the image by controlling the spatial and visual directions generated by the composition.

the poster for sem essa, aranha (fig. 10), shows a staged photo of character zé bonitinho (‘cute joe’), a cheesy dandy who always succeeds, and a stripper, having as a backdrop the canvas of a suburban circus. this synthetic image of the film alludes to the rescue of chanchada (brazilian trashy comedies) promoted by cinema marginal. the poster takes distance from the film due to the absence of colour. The calligraphic typeface used in the producer’s caption (‘a belair apresenta’) contrasts with the grotesque sans serif type chosen for the film title and other information, centred in the foreground, which complements the balanced composition of the image.

figure 9. poster for o anjo nasceu (1969), directed by júlio bressane, designed by theresa simões.
In the poster for the film *Jardim da Guerra* (fig. 11), which was heavily censored, the composition of the photograph highlights the female body, a kind of solution that belongs to the repertoire of mass culture. This is combined with a red text box that covers part of the scene, and that, combined with the text content (‘a love film’) makes reference to censorship, a constant threat in this historic moment. Type, always in upper case, varies in style depending on the kind of information. Colour plays an important graphic and semantic role by approaching the film title to the text box in the foreground.

*Figure 10. Poster for *Sem Essa, Aranha* (1970) directed by Roger Sganzerla, designer unknown.*

Nymphomaniac *Angela Carne e Osso* (Flesh and Bone Angela), played by actress Helena Ignez, is the central character of *A Mulher de Todos* (fig. 12). The silhouetted photo on orange background shows the character with a cigar in her mouth, jeans button open, barefoot and defiant. The film title cuts the poster in the character’s belly height, and the word ‘de’, in smaller body size, reveals and accentuates details of the woman’s provocative attitude. The slab serif type disrespects rules of spacing between words. The poster as a whole speaks to the spirit of contempt for the prevailing values of society.

*Figure 11. Poster for *Jardim da Guerra* (1968), directed by Neville d’Almeida, designed by Guará Rodrigues.*
Figure 12. Poster for *A Mulher de Todos* (1969), directed by Rogério Sganzerla, designer unknown.

**PHOTOMONTAGE**

Five of the posters analysed, designed for the films *Câncer* (1968/72), by Fernando Pimenta (fig. 13); *Bang Bang* (1971), by Andrea Tonacci (fig. 14); *Gamal, o Delírio do Sexo* (*Gamal, the Delirium of Sex*, 1969, fig. 15), by unknown designer; *Viagem ao Fim do Mundo* (*Journey to the End of the World*, 1968), by Ferdy Carneiro (fig. 16); and *Lerfa Mú!: Decifra-me ou te Devoro* (*Lerfa Mú!: Decipher Me or I’ll Devour You*, 1979), by Lygia Ferreira de Carvalho (fig. 17), use photomontage.

The feature film *Câncer* never entered the commercial circuit, and the poster on figure 13 was created for a special exhibition. It shows a picture of director Glauber Rocha, who participates in the film narrative, sometimes intervening, sometimes shouting. The image, according to Pimenta (2009), is the result of photographic mergers ‘the splash is a merger of several nanking splashes, done over various separated sheets of paper, then selected, cut, assembled, photographed and retouched to exhaustion’, resulting in an expressive synthesis of the violent universe of the movie. The picture emerges from the white background, and both, figure and background, build information. The film title and the name of the director portrayed are set centralized in grotesque uppercase type, with differences in size and weight marking hierarchy—a very static composition that creates a counterpoint to the active image.
Figure 14. Poster for Bang Bang (1971), directed by Andrea Tonacci, designed by Andrea Tonacci.

Bang Bang is a thriller in a tone of satire, with reference to comic books and burlesque movies, and with emphasis on the visual construction of the characters, treating the scenes as pure cinematic events (Leite Neto 2004). The poster (fig. 14), designed by the film director, features a photomontage and, according to Barro (2008) embodies the movie. In the montage we see the main characters; the convertible car, repeated in three different angles creating a sense of motion reminiscent of American action films; and a movie camera, that suggests the metalinguistic character of the piece. The predominance of black and white areas alternate in the composition, highlighting fragments and adding rhythm to the piece. The word ‘Bang’ is repeated three times in the geometric centre of the poster, suggesting a specialized sound sequence. The vertical red stripe on the left displays again the name of the new film, set with the same serif typeface, contrasting with the sans serif used for other information, in a rich graphic composition that includes reversals in reading direction.

Figure 15. Poster for Gamal: o Delírio do Sexo (1969), directed by João Batista de Andrade, designer unknown.

The poster for Gamal, o Delírio do Sexo (fig. 15), shows a photomontage composed of movie scenes. It refers to the plot of the movie, where, after a disagreement with his nymphomaniac wife, a man wanders the city, gathering misfortune companions that, in the end, will also fall in his wife’s arms. The title is hand-drawn and combined with type setting that simulates an out-
of-control collage, with a mix of different styles, alignments and body sizes, in a dreamlike atmosphere (Silva 2008), a typographic metaphor of delirium.

The poster for the movie Viagem ao Fim do Mundo (fig. 16) shows solutions taken from the repertoire of modern graphic design, in what refers to image-making techniques, type choice and alignment. It displays a collage of newspaper fragments and pictures, outlining different plans to form a high contrast image homogenized by use of colour. The image of a woman dominates the space, supported by the diagonal axis. In the title, different font styles, weight, body size and case are used. The graphic language of the poster speaks to the structure of the film, composed of many overlapping levels of enunciation and of various forms of language, incorporating issues such as fascism, consumption, mysticism, poverty, and, in a pioneering and iconic way, tropicalism (Heffner 2004: 39).

The poster for Lerfa Mú!: Decifra-me ou te Devoro (fig. 17) consists of a mix of drawing and photomontage. The resulting image causes impact by the use of a big area in red, and by the rhythm in the photomontage, combined with the text alignment used for the credits and the uppercase and tilted lettering used for the title.

Figure 16. Poster for Viagem ao Fim do Mundo (1968), directed by Fernando Cony, designed by Ferdy Carneiro.

Figure 17. Poster for Lerfa Mú!: Decifra-me ou te Devoro (1979), directed by Carlos Frederico, designed by Paulo Carvalho and Lygia Ferreira de Carvalho.
FILM FRAME MOSAIC

Four movie posters make use of film frame mosaic compositions: *Prata Palomares* (1971) designed by Catinari (fig. 18); *Os Monstros de Babaloo* (*Babaloo’s Monsters*, 1970, fig. 19); *Dezesperato* (1968); and *Ovelha Negra, uma Despedida de Solteiro* (*Black Sheep, a Bachelor Party*, 1975), the later three by unknown designers.

The poster for the movie *Prata Palomares* (fig. 18) shows the main character as a veiled woman holding a baby, like a Madonna, in the foreground. The calligraphic title is displayed on the top of the poster, in white and blue, reinforcing the ethereal aspect of the image. Just below, a wall with defenders introduces the mosaic, composed of film fragments in red and black duotone framed by a colourful geometric structure that contains the production credits. The use of red highlights blood scenes, revealing aspects of the plot. Some photos fuse with the predominantly blue background, altering the perception of space and time between successive images.

The movie poster for *Os Monstros de Babaloo* (fig. 19) also features a composition made from film frames in duotone, organized by a geometric structure. However, while the poster for *Prata Palomares* makes reference to church stained glass, this one is reminiscent of De Stijl compositions. Most of the photos highlight the grotesque universe of the movie, associated with
the aesthetics of the ugly and the extravagant. The text in sans serif type, set in upper and lowercase, occupies areas marked by colour. The alignment of the title reinforces the centreline of the poster and introduces a sense of rhythm that bounces in the different sizes of the spaces where the images are inserted.

**DOCUMENT SIMULATION**

The film posters designed for *Matou a Família e foi ao Cinema* (‘Killed his Family and Went to the Movies’, 1969), by Thereza Simões (fig. 20); *Crônica de um Industrial* (‘An Industrialist Chronicle’, 1976), by DPP-Embrasil (fig. 21); and *Perdidos e Malditos* (‘Lost and Damned,’ 1970), by Geraldo Veloso (fig. 22); all simulate the looks of official documents or legal evidence.

![Figure 20. Poster for Matou a Família e foi ao Cinema (1969), directed by Julio Bressane, designed by Theresa Simões.](image20)

The movie poster for *Matou a Família e foi ao Cinema* simulates a plea of guilty produced in case of *flagrante delicto*. The title of the film simulates a stamp and production credits are set next to the picture of the defendant. The poster thus makes direct reference to the film title.

![Figure 21. Poster for Crônica de um Industrial (1976), directed by Luiz Rosenberg Filho, designed by Fernando Pimenta.](image21)

The movie poster for *Crônica de um Industrial* (fig. 21) simulates a document file, evidence records held within a binder or a notebook. The handmade letters reinforce the unique, individual character of the notes. The pictures focus the love life of a married businessman, seeking to compensate his existential void with sex. According to the designer, the composition was done, ‘with what was available at the moment, that is, haste and lack of money’ (Pimenta 2011).
The poster for Perdidos e Malditos (fig. 22), commented by Silva (2008) is distinguished from others, as it consists of a statement written by the author of the film and poster. Printed in blue, it is titled with the director’s name, Geraldo Veloso, set in uppercase with classic serif type, aligned by the centreline of the page. The remaining text is handwritten, and the content directly addresses the public, like a very informal, personal note, directly from the author. ‘If you don’t understand the movie’, says the note, ‘that’s your problem’.

Figure 22. Poster for Perdidos e Malditos (1970), directed by Geraldo Veloso, designed by Geraldo Veloso.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the movie posters for Cinema Marginal films analyzed, the techniques employed for image production and type setting reflect the state of graphic design practice in the period, but also show peculiarities of a cultural universe where filmmakers, actors, artists, illustrators and advertising agencies layout men all contribute to their design. Because they belong to a context in which artistic and expressive production was highly valued, and commercial issues were not always taken into account, very often the resources available were scarce, leading to a significant number of posters printed in one or two colours.

Among the most recurrent graphic elements found in the posters are images of naked or barely dressed women, often in defiant poses (figs. 7, 10, 11, 12, 15, 19, 21), and men holding guns, frequently showing aggressive disposition (figs. 3, 6, 9, 14, 18). Those strong figures are evocative of the rebellious attitude of the filmmakers against the military regime.

In what regards typefaces, grotesque sans serif prevails, quite frequently set asymmetrically, according to modern typography taste, as would be expected in an era when professional design training was being established in Brazil. There are, however, a significant number of posters that use calligraphy or handmade lettering, usually to convey a sense of intimacy, urgency or humour (figs. 4, 9, 21, 22). There are also a few pieces were different type styles, sizes and weights are juxtaposed, suggesting an atmosphere of hallucination, extravagance or frenzy (figs. 5, 15, 16).

By their choice and articulation of graphic elements, the posters analyzed convey the
peculiar, diverse, and often-controversial concepts exposed in the films, making explicit Cinema Marginal characteristics.

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