

Article



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GAROTO BOMBRIL AND HAMLET: teaching advertising through literary fiction

*Garoto Bombril e Hamlet: o ensino da publicidade pela ficção literária**Garoto Bombril y Hamlet: enseñar publicidad a través de la ficción literária*

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ABSTRACT:

Advertising, one of the first and most relevant consumer rhetorics, has been undergoing visceral transformations in its *modus operandi*, due, among other factors, to the use of algorithms and generative artificial intelligence. The same occurs in terms of its communicational frameworks, responding to social pressure with the inclusion of agendas and representations that were previously silenced. Given this context, how to teach advertising creation? This article reports a methodological experience applied in the classroom in advertising courses and demonstrates that investment in literature not only generates a more attractive form of teaching but also deepens the human dimension in students.

Keywords: teaching, advertising, literature, retextualization, methodology

RESUMO

A publicidade, uma das primeiras e das mais relevantes retóricas do consumo, vem passando por transformações viscerais em seu *modus operandi*, em função, entre outros fatores, da utilização de algoritmos e da inteligência artificial generativa. O mesmo ocorre no plano de seus enquadramentos comunicacionais, atendendo a pressão social com a inclusão de pautas e representações antes silenciadas. Face a esse contexto, como ensinar especialmente criação publicitária? O presente artigo relata uma experiência metodológica aplicada em sala de aula em cursos de publicidade e propaganda e demonstra que o investimento na literatura gera não só uma forma de ensino mais atraente como aprofunda a dimensão humana nos estudantes.

Palavras-chave: ensino, publicidade, literatura, retextualização, metodologia

RESUMEN

La publicidad, una de las primeras y más relevantes retóricas del consumo, ha ido sufriendo transformaciones viscerales en su *modus operandi*, debido, entre otros factores, al uso de algoritmos y de inteligencia artificial generativa. Lo mismo ocurre en cuanto a sus marcos comunicacionales, respondiendo a la presión social con la inclusión de agendas y representaciones que antes eran silenciadas. Ante este contexto, ¿cómo podemos enseñar especialmente la creación publicitaria? Este artículo relata una experiencia metodológica aplicada en el aula en cursos de publicidad y demuestra que la inversión en literatura no sólo genera una forma de enseñanza más atractiva sino que también profundiza en la dimensión humana de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: enseñanza, publicidad, literature, retextualización, metodología

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Advertising and literature: veiled voices, velvet-y voices

Today's current use of algorithms to understand consumer behavior and offer them new consumption possibilities is also bringing about changes in the training and actual work of advertising creative professionals. While it is necessary to equip them with the skills to act competently in a field that requires permanent knowledge of digital culture and the use of generative artificial intelligence, it is equally essential to make them aware of the unavoidable ethical dilemmas and the mandatory insertion of minority social representations in advertising materials, even if, although legitimate, they are strategically mobilized with the aim of being marketed as an alternative discourse.

In other words, on the one hand there is a need to teach "creatives" how to use technological resources to catalyze and make their work more effective, and on the other to keep their sensitivity activated in order to propose solutions that affect their target audience, no longer considered as a contingent of numbers, but as a group of similar beings whose condition, as human as their own, is fragile and ephemeral. The aim of this article is to present a methodology that we developed from research, with due contextualization and reflection below, carried out in the classroom with students from two traditional social communication courses (with a major in advertising), precisely in the subject of advertising writing, based not on technological training, but on the second line of force mentioned above - that of teaching with an emphasis on affections, then explored through literature in general, and specifically through literary fiction.

The verses of exemplary alliteration from the poem "*Violões que choram*", by Cruz e Souza (1995, p.50-3), "veiled voices, velvet-y voices", fit precisely, albeit in an inverted form, in the unfolding of the discursive choices and omissions of advertising in its history as a social text: since its beginnings, in its printed materialization (posters, leaflets, newspapers, magazines, etc.), advertising communication has operated almost entirely with the dominant voices, leaving the others silent, veiled; its voices, regardless of the products promoted, have always been the majority and veiled, since by framing only its positive attributes, with language elements capable of creating persuasive effects, advertising behaves like a smooth fabric, averse to friction. These elements are recognized as rhetorical and poetic procedures transposed from literature, in which it finds its source and its own *habitat*.

In this sense, a series of studies, research and books have demonstrated, more intensely in the last three decades, how the arts have been the matrices (and continue to be the sources) of advertising - literature provides linguistic resources for the advertising text; painting is the basis for the creation of the printed visual instance of advertisements; music is put at the service of goods, brands, social causes and electoral campaigns through jingles; feature films provide the narrative stratagems that substantiate the brevity of commercials etc. There is, therefore, already a solid bibliography in Brazil, albeit restricted, proving the mimetic operations, adaptations and adjustments that advertising language, in the constitution of its canon, produces and reproduces from the various arts.

In the broad field of teaching advertising creation, it is essential to mention that a variety of valuable works have emerged, such as *Publicidade: arte ou artifício* [Advertising: art or artifice] (Piratinunga, 1994), *Magia e capitalismo* [Magic and capitalism] (Rocha, 1995), *Por uma teoria da publicização* [For a theory of publicization] (Casaqui, 2011), *Criação publicitária* [Advertising creation] (Correa, 2014), *Hiperpublicidade* [Hyperpublicity] (Peres and Barbosa, 2007), as well as collections such as *Publicidade Imaginada* [Imagined advertising] (Casaqui et. al, 2011) and *Criação publicitária – desafios no ensino* [Advertising creation - challenges in teaching] (Hansen et.al, 2020), which examines in depth the structural and methodological conditions of teaching and learning in advertising. In the specific sphere that addresses the migration of literary resources to the advertising text, the works of Carrascoza (1999, 2003, 2004, 2008 and 2014), Citelli (2004), Covaleski (2010) and Hansen (2015), among others, stand out.

However, our experiment moved away from these general purposes and even from the possible interfaces between the topics of literary writing and those of the advertising text, as already mentioned, but which we will detail below.

The rhetoric of consumption as seen through literary production: the methodological basis

Discussing the production of advertising discourse (especially its poetics) and consumption (understood as a complex and comprehensive socio-cultural practice), based on literary narratives, was the general objective of our research "Consumption and the teaching of advertising through literary works", carried out within the scope of the PPGCOM in which we are integrated as a teacher and researcher, which lasted from 2018 to 2022.

As specific objectives, we sought to share and debate the conceptions of consumption (material and symbolic) found in the works of fiction we selected, as well as thematic elements that allowed us to deal with classic and/or emerging themes in the activity and teaching of advertising, particularly advertising creation (and writing).

To this end, in the research stage of the study (Bonin, 2006), we selected ten works of literature, both domestic and foreign, focusing on the genres of novels and short stories, capable of providing us with distinct, traditional and unprecedented angles of contemporary advertising discourse, namely: the novels *Vidas Secas*, by Graciliano Ramos (2001), *O rei do cheiro*, by João Silvério Trevisan (2009) and *Nada*, by Danish author Janne Teller (2013), the short stories *Teoria do Medalhão*, by Machado de Assis (1994), *Um e outro*, by Lima Barreto (2014), *O pôster*, by Luis Fernando Veríssimo (2013), *Natal na barca*, by Lygia Fagundes Telles (2018), *Escrito na testa*, by Italian Primo Levi (2005), *O enorme rádio*, by American John Cheever (2010) and *Um episódio distante*, by American Paul Bowles (2010).

In line with the stages we set for the project, we began the research by producing an article in which the novel *Vidas secas*, by Graciliano Ramos, provided us with a set of theoretical and analytical connections between consumption and citizenship. Starting from Calvino's (2001) perspective in *Por que ler os clássicos* [Why read the classics], we contextualized the work of the writer from Alagoas as a classic of Brazilian literature and discussed striking passages of the plot, which involved the inclusion or exclusion of the characters in social spaces according to their consumption practices, with the support of authors such as Canclini (1995). We expanded on the idea of Baccaga (2011), who pointed out a passage open to the discussion of the dream of consumption, to highlight in this story the desire of the character Sinhá Vitória to own a bed (better than her own) like that of Tomás da Bolandeira. We've shown that the dog Baleia dies dreaming that she's consuming prey animals, that Fabiano decides to take off his new shoes to go to the party in town because not only do they squeeze his feet, but they don't match his style, as well as other passages that corroborate literary language strategies that flow into advertising discourse.

Next, *Escrito na Testa*, by Primo Levi, was the starting point for us to write a text about the objectification of man, the advent of new media and the commodification of the body in consumer society, since the short story, as the title suggests, tells the story of a couple who submit to an advertising agency's proposal to display the name and logo of a product, a perfume, on their foreheads. In this way, the husband and wife act as portable media, similar, albeit grotesquely, to the first sandwich men (still a common way of advertising products in urban centers).

In the third article, we look at the short story *Um e outro*, by Lima Barreto, about the advertising of durable goods (specifically cars), consumption as a social identity and some of the suitorial resources often mobilized by advertising, using Bourdieu's (2007) concept of distinction. This is because the plot of the narrative centers on a woman who becomes interested in a man when she sees him driving a car (something rare in the early decades of the 20th century), begins a love affair with him and breaks off the relationship when she learns that the vehicle doesn't belong to him, the man was just a private driver - he had possession, but not ownership of the good.

Gretchen's Nap, a story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, allowed us to investigate improvisation in artistic (and advertising) creation, *ready-mades*, and the work routine in advertising agencies - in an advantageous way over the story initially chosen, *Teoria do Medalhão*, by Machado de Assis, which we abandoned. Fitzgerald's short story proved that creative professionals operate like musicians in a *jam session*.

With *The Poster*, by Luis Fernando Veríssimo, a poster that refers in its plot to the famous photo of Che Guevara, we discuss intertextuality in advertising creation, the unusual use of the commonplace in advertising, and the saturation of signs in the media.

The novel *Nada*, by Janne Teller, proved to be productive in dealing with contemporary existential emptiness, as well as the discursive strategies of advertising and the logic of media production. In this novel, young people use arguments (typical of advertising texts, such as appeal to authority, place of quality, place of quantity, comparison, etc.) to convince a friend to come down from the tree he climbed because he disbelieved in life and chose to do nothing, and this subject, among the branches, also mobilizes (the same and different) arguments to counter the reasons of his acquaintances, in a clash of ideological positions.

In John Cheever's short story *The Huge Radio*, a young couple consume music played on the radio every night and unexpectedly tune in to a strange station, on which there are prosaic but also dramatic conversations about sick people, abused children, etc., which in reality are conversations between the residents of their own condominium. The story proved to be rich for debating themes such as the spectacularization of everyday life, the omnipresence of the media, the invasion of privacy in the mass media, the symbolic consumption of values, images and ideologies massively produced by advertising campaigns.

The solar world of advertising, the mechanisms of persuasion and the "magic" of advertising discourse, according to studies by Rocha (1995) in *Magia e capitalismo- um estudo antropológico da publicidade*, we discussed in an article based on the retextualization of the short story *Natal na barca*, by Lygia Fagundes Telles - which, moreover, can also be explored from another theoretical angle, since Christmas is the most important date in the promotional calendar in countries with a strong Christian tradition like ours. Lygia's narrative was exemplary for

showing advertising's "way of seeing", the luminous discourse about products, focused on a surface lyric, with the emphasis on everyday situations and funny human types like Garoto Bombril, distancing itself from the lyric of shadows, shadows that, whether we like it or not, spread through our existence.

We replaced the previously selected short story *A distant episode*, by Paul Bowles, with the story *Semplica girl - The diaries*, by the American George Saunders, which proved to be more suitable for discussion and analysis in order to deal with the world of brands, the use of credit cards (as a facilitator of consumption) and the effects of technology on the media.

And finally, also outside of our initial list of selected works, in place of João Silvério Trevisan's novel *O Rei do Cheiro*, we worked with the short story *A Temporary Matter*, by British author Jhumpa Lahiri (2014), to present various theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of consumption, especially that of Douglas and Isherwood (2006), its links with advertising communication, discursive non-sayings and the implications of non-consumption.

In this dozen or so texts, we examined various pressing issues in advertising, the advertising creation process and its current teaching in Brazil, using the concept of retextualization, according to Bettetini (1996) - the appropriation of texts from one domain (in this case, the artistic, literary domain) to investigate and produce texts from another domain (the scientific domain - precisely here the study of consumption, advertising and its creative process). In the basic analytical structure of the articles, we used French Discourse Analysis (ADF) procedures, literary theory assumptions, elements of argumentative semantics, rhetorical resources and socio-cultural conceptions of consumption.

It should now be pointed out that each of the ten texts was designed to be used in one or two classes in the advertising and publicity course, in theoretical or practical subjects, adding up to enough content for 20 classes, an entire semester with a workload of between 20 and 40 hours. Accompanying each article, we created suggested activities and exercises for the students. Our proposed course of action would be as follows: a) in the first class, read the literary work in class, highlighting its production conditions and data about its author and b) in the subsequent class, present the article in which the work was retextualized to discuss (share and expand) topics in advertising teaching, then propose a practical interaction for the students to consolidate their learning.

The lesson of things: research in the classroom

In accordance with our objective, and with the aim of investigating the acceptance of the new working method, i.e. the use in the classroom of the articles we have produced, addressing aspects of the poetics of advertising and its interactions with consumption through literary texts, we carried out a survey with three samples - two made up of undergraduate advertising and publicity students and one made up of undergraduate advertising and publicity teachers and postgraduate students.

There were a total of 110 questionnaires, resulting in the following universe of interviewees:

- a) 25 students from the 6th semester of the Advertising course at the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo;
- b) 75 students from the 5th semester of the Advertising course at the Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing (São Paulo unit);
- c) 10 undergraduate professors from advertising and publicity courses (SENAC, FMU and ESPM), master's and doctoral students from PPGCOM-ESPM.

The students and teachers were given access to two articles in March 2022 with a deadline of one week to read them. The following week, they answered the short questionnaire that we structured with seven closed questions and one open question (so that they could express themselves freely) about the reading they had done.

Our aim was to measure the results of the reading activity of two (of the ten) retextualizations we developed, one at the beginning of the project (the short story *Escrito na testa*, by Primo Levi) and the other towards the end (the short story *Natal na barca*, by Lygia Fagundes Telles), both of which, like the others, were written as adjuncts to the content taught in the classroom about the advertising creative process, its discursive strategies and its symbolic consumption.

Initially tabulating the first sample, we noticed that the 25 interviewees at ECA-USP, i.e. 100%, readily said that the activity had aroused their interest. All of them also easily recognized content studied in their course subjects. Equally - and more importantly for us - 100% of these students said they had learned something about advertising and consumption through the article. Similarly, the 25 interviewees agreed that literary works are attractive for studying advertising and would like to read other texts on the subject based on literary texts. Asked if, after reading the text that discusses the logic of advertising through Primo Levi's short story *Escrito na testa*, they were motivated

to read other stories by this Italian writer, 22 students said yes (88%) and only 3 said no (12%). Along the same lines, 21 students said that they felt motivated to read the works on advertising and consumption mentioned in the article, resulting in an approval rating of 84%. In the last question on the form, we asked the students to freely write their opinion on the activity if they wished. Below are some of these spontaneous comments:

I found the way of approaching literary content and advertising interesting and innovative. This way of approaching the subject made it easier to read and caught my attention.

Very different from any other scientific article I've ever read. I found it very interesting.

It's a very interesting activity because it addresses strategies, tactics and even the general context of advertising in a more figurative, Dionysian way, making the topic more interesting.

I liked the approach of advertising linked to literary texts, as it is an original alternative to traditional case studies.

The second sample, made up of ESPM-SP students, reveals similar figures. Out of 75 interviewees, 73 said that the activity had aroused their interest, i.e. 97% of this group. Asked if they could easily recognize content from their course subjects in the article, 71 students (95% of the sample) said yes.

Almost in the same numerical dimension as the ECA-USP sample, 99% of ESPM-SP students said that they had learned something new about advertising and consumption after reading the article in which we dealt with aspects of advertising poetics based on the short story "*Natal na barca*", by Lygia Fagundes Telles. 72% of the students even said they were motivated, after the activity, to read the works on advertising and consumption mentioned in the article. And 66% were also motivated to read other stories by this Brazilian writer.

What's even more relevant for our research is that 68 out of 75 students interviewed, or 91%, believe that literary works are attractive for studying advertising and around the same percentage of them (88%) would like to read other articles on advertising based on literary works.

The comments left with the last question (the only open one) of the questionnaire by almost all of the ESPM-SP students are, in general, quite extensive - and follow the same positive tone as those interviewed at ECA-USP, as can be seen in the examples below:

I'd never read texts with such a clear point as this one. I loved the way the works were cited to exemplify the make-believe nature of advertising and its importance in the minds of consumers. I believe that storytelling is a fun way of assimilating something, especially when it's about a brand or the advertising itself. The activity was more relevant to me than expected, I confess that I was touched by the story of the teacher and her faith, I was interested in the text and it aroused my curiosity. There weren't any major discoveries made about advertising because of the text, but some points that I hadn't thought of before became clearer.

Reading the article reinforced some concepts that had already been conveyed to me, through disciplines related to the humanities (sociology, psychology and anthropology) and advertising creation, about advertising needing to have a "fantastical and magical" bias, since human beings need refuge from reality, feeding their imagination through stories, so that they can reason about the subjects that are conveyed to them, in order to understand different points of view. Just as we learn in courses involving the conceptualization of strategy, through examples of the strategies of Roman generals, among other participants in remote but real wars, the use of literary works to be used as advertising study material can be stimulating and serve as an example of how to entertain the interpreter of the message.

The article is very interesting and rich. I had never seen advertising through the eyes of a literary text. And I realized that the content I had in college, especially the Semiotics class, helped me a lot to understand this parallel. The arguments used to explain and establish this link between literary theory and advertising language are very well explained and written and make perfect sense, making it easier to understand this relationship. In addition, the article has helped me learn that advertising can be seen in many ways and from many points of view. It is possible to look at advertising in a way that is outside the "ordinary", the natural, different from the way we are always used to looking at it

I found the article very interesting. The text covered content from various subjects I've learned, from the first semester to the present day. I even remembered some things I'd forgotten, such as some logic content. It is interdisciplinary without losing the connection, in an objective and clear way the article is enjoyable and quick to read.

The third sample, made up of 10 interviewees, including professors from various higher education institutions, engaged in advertising and publicity courses (SENAC, FMU and ESPM), as well as master's and doctoral students from PPGCOM-ESPM (members of the CNPQ Communication, Consumption and Art Research Group), ratifies, together with educators and researchers in the field, the advantage of retextualizations as a method of teaching and discussing advertising and consumer poetics. 100% of the interviewees in this group said that the activity had aroused their interest. And the same 100% recognized content in the article that they usually work on in the subjects they teach in advertising and publicity courses, or that relate to consumption as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon.

Likewise, the 10 interviewees (100%) said they had learned new links between advertising and consumption through the article and felt motivated to read other stories by Primo Levi, since they had read the corresponding article, the same one requested of the ECA-USP students. 80% of those interviewed felt motivated to read the bibliography cited in the article; 100% believe that literary works are attractive for the study of advertising; and 90% were keen to read other articles on advertising and consumption based on literary texts. Below are some comments on the activity and the methodology proposed:

An excellent alternative for approaching consumer studies, which should not, as is often the case, be studied as phenomena dissociated from other cultural practices.

Advertising courses need new approaches. Analyzing advertising pieces ends up being a process of navel-gazing. We need to realize that "there" is advertising in other discourses and this one shows that.

I think bringing articles like this to class encourages students to become more observant and to see communication and consumption in other works.

In view of the results obtained with three different samples, we believe it is feasible to apply the proposed methodology as a complement to the regular content of courses that deal with the evolutionary aspects of advertising techniques, their history and their links with consumer studies. And we feel the need to investigate with other classes the experience of reading the other eight texts we prepared for this purpose, thus verifying whether they were equally fruitful approaches and further ratifying the method.

Two in one: advertising taught and literature promoted

The reconfigurations of advertising activity and the consequent training, in today's advertising courses, of professionals capable not only of working with an eye on algorithmic metrics and sometimes using generative artificial intelligence, also require that new advertisers gain artistic knowledge and values that enhance their immersion in the world of the sensitive, in which understanding and respect for the human condition expands.

We have proven that teaching advertising, with an emphasis on aspects of the creative process (but not only) using works of literary fiction, is productive in this context. The potential of the method we have presented is huge, since we can choose for future studies both classic works, from any country and historical time, and those that have just come out of the printers.

In the first case, let's remember the classic anthropological experiment by Laura Bohannan (1968), who introduced the story of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the indigenous Tivs of Nigeria, and how immense the possibilities are for finding angles in Shakespeare's plays for teaching interpersonal and social communication through advertising. In the second, three narrative books published at the end of 2023 and the beginning of this year (2024) are fully relevant for retextualization aimed at teaching advertising: *Liberation Day*, by George Saunders (2023), veteran American fiction writer, winner of the Man Booker Prize for his novel *Lincoln in Limbo*; *Friday Black*, the debut of New York writer Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah (2023) and *Cursed Rabbit* by young South Korean Bora Chung (2024). In the short story of the same name, "Liberation Day", Saunders recounts the daily life of a company of lobotomized workers, whose memory is erased in order to satisfy the public at an amusement park - a situation that makes us think of the ubiquitous work of advertising creative professionals. In Adjei-Brenyah's work, several violent and grotesque stories thematize the terror of capitalism and its labor relations, such as "Friday black" (which refers to the unscrupulous struggle of consumers to secure goods at the lowest price on Black Friday), or "How to sell a jacket, according to the Ice King" and "In retail", in which the techniques of persuasion operated by advertising abound. The narratives "The Head", which updates Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray* (and its cult of beauty) (2012), "Goodbye, My Love", in which androids become artificial romantic pairs - an unprecedented sample of the liquidity

of love relationships advocated by Bauman (2004) -, among others in the collection by Bora Chung, a finalist for the International Booker Prize, are equally appropriate for discussing controversial issues in contemporary media representations.

In short, the classic rhetorical and marketing formulation "buy one, get two" appears, from the report of our research results here, to also be applicable to the use of literature, which is not restricted to the root function of providing expressive inputs for advertising, but is extended to promote the dissemination of reading and the expansion of the repertoire of university students.

Thus, by providing theorizing through articles that teach the stages of the creative process, techniques for creating advertising pieces by associating ideas, linguistic resources and other sources that catalyze and amplify creative solutions, the student, future professional, or already working in the field, gains double knowledge: that of their own activity, advertising communication, and that of literary art, the root and branch for the impulse - and leap - of their creativity.

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