

The social construction of authorship of advertising films

A construção social da autoria de filmes publicitários

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Abstract: *This article examines authorship within the field of advertising film, considering the operating of institutions and professionals involved in the creation of these products: advertising agency, advertiser and production company. From a perspective based on the field theory (Bourdieu, 1996), and in dialogue with authors who discuss authorship in the field of cultural production, the work aims to establish theoretical and methodological premises to understand the positions of authorship in advertising films, and the benefits of incorporating this understanding into the analysis of this kind of audiovisual work.*

Keywords: *advertising film; advertising field; authorship.*

Resumo: *Este artigo examina como se constrói o lugar da autoria no interior do campo do filme publicitário, considerando a atuação de instituições e profissionais envolvidos na criação destes produtos: agência publicitária, empresa anunciante e produtora audiovisual. A partir de uma perspectiva que tem como base a teoria dos campos de Bourdieu (1996), e em diálogo com autores que discutem autoria no campo da produção cultural, o trabalho busca discutir os lugares de autoria de filmes publicitários, com ênfase na relação entre instâncias criativa e produtora, e as vantagens de incorporar esta compreensão à análise desta espécie de obra audiovisual.*

Palavras-chave: *filme publicitário; campo publicitário; autoria*

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Introduction

This article talks about the issue of authorship in advertisement pieces. Coming from reflections on how we build and reproduce a possible place of authors in the interior of the advertisement production and how to understand this authorship helps us examine these movies in their poetic and stylistic dimension, proposing a reflection despite this phenomenon, supported by Bourdieu (1996) and his studies on Flaubert and the French literary field. In dialog with researches that investigate authorship in fields other than cultural production, such as cinema (JOST, 2009; RAMOS, 2004), telenovela (SOUZA, 2004; SOUZA e WEBER, 2009), videoclip (BARRETO, 2009, 2014) and advertisement itself (HANSEN, 2013), we come from the hypothesis that an analysis of the authorial aspects of an advertisement film must build the history of this field, determining the position of the agency, of the advertiser and the producer responsible for the creation of films studied in the relation with their competition, as well as their positions and dispositions derived from the social trajectory of the professionals involved in its production. To understand advertisement films, the themes, genres, styles and authorial instances that characterize how the expression of a point of view, of a position of agencies, advertisers, producers and creators that act inside these companies generate, thus, the necessity of knowing positions of reference that would motivate the presentation of a certain stylistic constitution and not another.

Thus, we recognize the necessity of localizing both the agency as well as the advertiser and the producer in the interior of what we are calling field of advertisement film, because we suppose that, if it is possible to think in an authorial instance of the context of production of these films, their constitution crosses the relationship among these three institutions. Although the conception of an advertisement film, its idea, either of responsibility of professionals of advertisement creation, it is important to affirm that a significant part of the space of possibilities of creation of an agency, even these with high degree of autonomy and recognized authorial nuance, is determined by the advertiser – for

essentially pragmatic reasons, as the fact that the advertiser, client of the agency, the one who approves the idea, pays for the production and signs the movie, but also by the fact that this advertiser company occupies a position in its own original field, which, in turn, will determine what will be possible or not to adopt this as public discourse, through advertisement, as taking a stand.

Brands, in the contemporary context, have trajectory and personality, position themselves within a market in which advertisers compete for space in shape of economic (and also symbolic) capital. The position of the advertiser fills in this space, it is possible to imagine, is directly related to the way it is presented in their campaigns and advertisement pieces. In this study, however, the focus of analysis lies preferably on the instance of creation (advertisement agency) and their relationship with the advertiser (company) and the production (audiovisual producer). Which does not mean, however, a suggestion that the advertiser and producer instances are less important in the constitution of this place of authorship – even because, as we concluded, placing where the highest degree of autonomy within a collective creative process demands an analysis of the specific case.

Origins and extensions of the notion of authorship

Discussions on authorship are abundantly found in practically all of the spheres of artistic and cultural production nowadays. In literary study, where certainly this preoccupation has been vastly debated, the issue on who produces a text and which are the implications on its form and content crosses disciplinary fields in a way of motivating the elaboration of different conceptual models. The landmark for contemporary discussions is found in the field of Foucault's criticism and in Barthes' defense on the death of the author. Given the distance between theoretical affiliation of both authors, what seems to be similar in their writing is a certain unsettling feeling with the applanating and romantic vocation that the notion of author, commonly applied and practiced in literary

criticism, would have on texts. About that, Barthes' comment is clear when he affirms that:

Giving an author to a text is to impose a safety mechanism to this text, is to give it the ultimate meaning, is to wrap up the writing. This conception is perfectly convenient to the critic, that intends to attribute the important task of finding out the author (or its hypostasis: the society, the history, the psyche, the freedom) under the play: once found who the Author is, the text is "explained", the critic won [...] (BARTHES, 2004, p. 69).

It is equally possible to detect, in Foucault and his notion of function-author, a (methodologic) effort, of taming this historically constituted construct with an almost sacred statute that empties out texts of autonomy, that would be submitted to their author's intentions.

The name of the author is not located in the status of men, is not located in the fiction of the book, but in the rupture that establishes a certain set of discourses and its singular way of being. Consequently, we can say that in a civilization like ours, there is a certain amount of discourses that are provided with the "author" function, while others lack such function. A particular letter can have a signatory, but not an author; a contract can have a guarantor, but it does not have an author. An anonymous text read on the street in a wall will have an editor, but not an author. The author-function is, therefore, characteristic of the way of existing, circulating and functioning of certain discourses within a society (FOUCAULT, 2001, p. 34).

In critic and in academic research on cinema, the debate around the notion of author is maintained since the *politique des auteurs* and constitute a vast field of studies, with extensions that get to the field of television and spread through reflections on authorship in specific products such as telenovelas, documentaries and videoclips.² With approaches that go from textual analysis to culturalism, what arises in common in the set of studies on authorship in the audiovisual field seem to be the agreement that prior meanings on who the author a product of this kind would be collaborate in the understanding of a book and a

2 Among the many authors that study the issue of authorship in the audiovisual field, we can cite Bordwell (2003), Gerstner and Staiger (2003), Gunning (1991) and Jean-Claude Bernardet (1994).

creative process that is originated. For an analyst whose questions would be centered in the work in itself, as it was the case of great part of 60's semiology, it is perfectly possible to leave the author "at the door of his theoretical constructions" (JOST, 2009, p. 11). In this research, however, we are challenged to face que issue of authorship and ways how it can be transposed for the analysis of advertisement films.

In fact, what matters here, more than attributing an authorship of an advertisement film, sterile procedure in the point of view of analysis and with a hard operation, is to detect which positions, amongst the various agents engaged in the creative process, concentrate the necessary capitals to decide on the composition of the film and in which aspects (thematic, narrative, aesthetic, etc.). Following the path taken by Souza (2004), Souza and Weber (2009), Ramos (2004), Nogueira (2002) and Barreto (2009, 2014), we go back to the premises offered by the theory of fields to reflect on the place of the author, the social meaning of authorship and the possible reverberations of this phenomenon in the composition of advertisement films.

Thus, the real hierarchy of explaining factors impose the inversion of progression adopted ordinarily by analysts: it is important to ask not how a writer came to be who he is – with the risk of falling into the illusion of a reconstructed coherence – but how, given their social origin and socially constituted properties, he could fill, or in certain cases, produce the positions already made or to be done offered by a determined sate of the literary field (etc.) And give, therefore, a more or less complete and coherent expression of position that were inscribed in a potential state of these positions (for example, in the case of Flaubert, the inherent contradictions of art for art and, in a more general manner, the condition of artistry) BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 244).

In *Pascalian meditations*, we find similar indications:

However, how can we distinguish such reading of the projection of the wild founded in vague analogies, with which frequency the reader is delivered (overall when he intends to get the role of author, thinking and living his reading as a second "creation")? The effort to walk on the

author's shoes is only justified when there are means of building the place as such, i. e., a position, a point (beginning of a point of view), in a social space that is nothing but the literary field inside which this author is located (BOURDIEU, 2007, p. 106)

Here, we go back to the idea that the social status of the creators involved in the production of films within the field is defined through the capitals necessary to fill it (in species and volume) and tends to be a certain specific point of about what is this field. The individual or collective author, or, as we prefer, the authorial instance is, therefore, a point in this space: to rebuild it helps the analyst give meaning to their choices, present in films in form of compositional strategies, mechanisms of production of cognitive, aesthetic and affective effects (GOMES, 2004). About that, Souza and Weber (2009, p. 80), when dealing about the role of screenwriter as telenovela author, they say:

It is especially important to widen the knowledge on relationships among which the social and historical conditions enabled the acknowledgement of screenwriters as telenovela authors in Brazil and the degrees of decision-making they have in a collective system of audiovisual creation to pick and choose the strategies of composition of scheduling the foreseen effects in the stories they've created.

We reinforce that, in the list of researchers we previously quoted, we come from the premise that, even in the context of audiovisual production performed within big companies and with strong commercial character, the authorial condition does not necessarily derive from an absolute control over the work by their creators. Which does not impede, on the other hand, that the creators have quality as a criterion, seeking to adjust this disposition to the demands of the market - with bigger or smaller strength, according to their own habits, their interests and the position they fill in the field. In the case of the field of audiovisual production, whose material specificities demand a structure of equipment and a diversity of professionals for its performance, it makes even less sense to think of an experience of creation absolutely separated from

an industrial logic, or minimally, of labor division. About that argument, Souza (2004, p. 3) says:

What these reflections reaffirm is the pertinence of the focus of investigation on the relations between the work situations of performers and the process of an authorial creation, about the conditions of a work process that allows to perform choices associated to the expression of styles and the authorial recognition. Arguments that point for the necessity of widening the knowledge on the conditions of process of creating and recognizing authorship in TV drama. Knowledge that helps composing more precise categories of analysis to face the interpretative limits made by the studies in this field that insist on the antinomy innovation-repetition, disregarding the authorial experiences in the field of massive commercial production.

What Souza is telling us is the necessity of the analyst to know the field in which these authorial instances are inserted in, because only with that knowledge, that allows reaching the meaning of authorship in the studied field, the analyst has conditions of precisely localizing the “particular experiences of authorship” (SOUZA, 2004, p. 4). That because such experiences are specific to each field of production and depend, still, in the state of this field and the place in which the agent or group responsible for the work is located.

Authorial instances in the field of advertisement films

In the specific case in the field of advertisement audiovisual production, it is possible to outline different occurrences of authorial attribution. For the “wide audience”, or for a non-specialized audience for this type of product, in most cases, the authorial instance of an advertisement film is the advertiser. As Ramos says (2004, p. 100), “the advertisement is a kingdom of anonymity for the audience”. It is interesting to notice how the terms “commercial” or “advertisement piece” are more common in this field of reception, whereas the word “film”, that refers to a more “artistic” and valued field of cinema is predominant in the field of specialized reception, as it is the case in awards and critique. When dealing,

through discourse analysis, with tensions present in the authorship of advertisement ads, Hansen (2013) concludes that:

[...] the voice that is highlighted in the creative process of the advertisement discourse, i. e., the voice which has visibility in the ad is the voice of the advertiser that signs the advertisement piece. This appreciation comes from a fact previously analyzed by us: the erasure of distance between advertiser and target-audience, enabling the latter to have the illusion of accessing the advertiser directly, without the mediation of an advertisement agency and their professionals. We foresee that this voice is highlighted for the target audience (real reader), usually someone not specialized in the subject and a potential consumer of the advertisement, in the moment of contact with the final advertisement. Through this reader's eyes, the responsible for the ad is the advertiser, which deceptively appears as the author (HANSEN, 2013, p. 149).

As Hansen indicates, the advertiser is nothing more than a “deceptive author” because the professionals of the agency are responsible for the conception of advertisement pieces. In many cases, the performance of the professional that represents the advertiser happens much more in the sense of allowing ideas or not, as a type of gatekeeper. When the agency detains an important symbolic capital, however, and it is recognized in the field for their creative ability, there is a bigger probability that the advertiser gives in to their propositions, even if they present risks – situation under the condition of the position of the advertiser himself, that influences his tendency or not to the innovation and the associated risk. Barreto (2009) also tensions this question to talk about shared authorship between the performatic instance (singers and bands) and the directive instance (directors), typical of the videoclip production field, bringing up the idea that the autonomy to create is derived from the added symbolic capital, which could be useful to think authorship in the field of advertisement films:

The consecration of a performer give him more relevance in the defense of specificity and autonomy of the productive context in which he are inserted in, because it pervades him the power of a successful representative in the competition process of his own field, stimulating

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his purposes of controlling the artistic management of his work and reacting to pressures coming from external fields. In the field of videoclip, directors, singers and bands considered as authors can, for example, put themselves against the label's inclination for success formulas, generally linked to the crystallization of pre-conceived ideas on how a clip of a certain genre should be (BARRETO, 2014, p. 66).

In a similar way, the field of advertisement films has its canons and conventions. The films of retail are emblematic of positions in which creators have little autonomy to create innovation. These canons are organized by known discursive shapes, as it is the case of films based on the witness of celebrities or in the appeal of authority (VESTERGAARD and SCHRODER, 1996, p. 97). The consecration, the recognition and the added symbolic capital are, in general, the indicators that an agency or creative have power to ask and convince the advertiser to bet on new ideas and to take the risks involved with innovation.

What matters here is to call attention to another aspect of the relationship between agency and advertiser: if, for the general audience, agencies and creatives eventually give up claiming authorship of films, the same cannot be said about the specialized audience – i. e., professionals of advertisement audiovisual production themselves, journalists and specialized critics. For them, the authorship of an advertisement film tends to be of the creative instance, of the agency (in the institutional field) and of the professionals of its team (in the individual field). To verify this affirmation, you just need to consult news about advertisement films in the specialized media, that, invariably, position the agency in the condition of authorial institution, adopting discourses such as “AlmapBBDO signs Volkswagen's new film”.

Similarly, awards are, in general, directed towards agencies, and these institutions take the award and get the prize of the symbolic capital. Hansen (2013, p. 161) defends that, in the dimension of effective doing, “the authorship is shared among the professionals of the agency and the advertiser” and that “the creative process of the advertisement discourse is a collective manifestation by nature”. We do not disagree of such

sentence, but we add that, despite being a collective work, in the terms described by the author (and in which we must insert the producer, in the case of films) it is for the agency and its professionals, overall the creators, that this authorship, in general, have more value and importance in the point of view of recognition.³

It is about a notion of authorship not only underlying the practices of advertisement activity and presupposed by those who participate in this field but institutionalized in the form of laws and regulations. The text of the Decree 57.690, enforced in February 1st, 1966, that regulates the Law n. 4.680, enforced in June 18th, 1965, which talks about the profession of advertisement person, is clear in regard to who is the owner of ideas present in films and campaigns:

The idea used in the propaganda is, supposedly, the Agency's, and cannot be explored by others, without the reception of a fair wage, reinforcing the disposed in the art. 454, of the Consolidation of Labor Laws (BRASIL, 1966, art. 9th, VIII).

The standard for the advertisement activity, published by the Executive Council of Standard Norms (Cenp - Conselho Executivo de Normas-Padrão), also brings indications that the recognition of authorship in advertisement pieces must lie on the agency (and its professionals): "As stimulus and incentive to creativity, it is presumed that the advertisement ideas, pieces, plans and campaigns developed belong to the Agency which created it, observing the law on copyright" (CENP, 1998, p. 9).

Authorship as the result of disputes for symbolic capital

It is important to briefly talk about how power relations are established and the division of work within agencies in the process of creating a film. Even inside an agency, the recognition of authorship of a film is not

3 Even so that advertisement agencies pay for their enrollment in prizes. In 2014, AlmapBBDO invested approximately 120,000 euros in advertisement enrollment. Source: Reclame, August 12th, 2014.

necessarily a simple and pacific process. Film's datasheets seem to be an interesting indicator of this dispute and the dominant positions within an agency. In the credits, that circle through the specialized media, shared by the agencies themselves, the order of presentation of information says a lot about the importance attributed to professionals in the process of creating and producing a film. Usually, after the title of the movie, advertiser and product, the first position listed is the advertising manager, followed by the creatives (copywriter and art director), producer and scene director. The technical positions, usually professionals of the producer, come next. About the importance of datasheets as an instrument of recognition of individual authorship, the advertisement professional Marcello Serpa says: in an interview to the magazine *Meio & Mensagem*:

And, in the market of creation, it is essential that we have a profound respect about two things. The first is for the advertisement people, the creatives, that is the respect for the datasheet, that means respecting the authorship and never putting your name in front of someone else's work. A creative director who puts his name in each and every job that appears in the agency is crushing the talents that work alongside him. This is a common practice everywhere (SERPA RESPONDE, 2015).

For hierarchy purposes, the creative director is pointed, in datasheets, as the main responsible for the film - even though the idea is not usually his, but from the creators, which are below him. It is expected that this professional is capable of recognizing, in the propositions presented by the creative duo, that one that has potential to become a film that fills the needs of the advertiser and assure recognition for him, for his team and for the agency.

Possibly due to the importance of the script as a primary instrument of materialization of the idea of a film, some researchers attribute a supposed authorship to the script writer. Ramos (2004, p. 98) asks: "Who is the creator of the 30-second 'piece', the writer or the director?", transposing for advertisement a tension between screenwriter and director that is typical of the field of cinema. Baggio (2009, p. 154) follows the

same path when talking about the “death of the advertisement author/writer”. The process of conception of the idea of a film, however, in the current practices of agencies, is the creative duo’s responsibility, being indistinguishable the precise origin of the individual’s point of view, except in rare cases that are expressed. In one of the few script manuals for advertisement films available in Brazil, Barreto (2004) summarizes this process:

Currently in advertisement agencies, there is this idea that writing scripts is task for the writer. [...] Writing the script, however, it is only the last phase of its structure. It is the technical phase. There is something else that comes before the knowledge on how efficient dialogues are built and how scenes are separated. This “thing” is the script’s basic element, it is what depends the creation of its structure. The ‘thing’ is the idea. And with the idea, there is no argument: in a campaign, the idea is the copy-writer’s and the art director’s responsibility (BARRETO, 2004, p. 25).

Marcello Serpa, originally an art director, had authorship attributed to many films throughout his career, for instance. Some agencies adopt today a work scheme in which multidisciplinary teams are dedicated to one or some clients, making this presupposed authorship to the writer to fail. In the point of view of social recognition, the authorship of an advertisement film, within the agency, is attributed to the duo that signs the creation and their director or hierarchical superior. From the point of view of analytical premises, this finding leads us to the analysis of the trajectory of these agents, and, overall, the position they fill in the moment of emergency of a studied film.

Agency and producer: between conflict and partnership

Finally, it is necessary to detain ourselves in the relationships established between agency and audiovisual producer. This relationship, very well described by Ramos (2004), tend to sway between partnership and conflict. This is due to the fact that the agents of the audiovisual field (mostly the director) have slightly more accentuated artistic aspirations than the

creatives of agencies. Generally, because they circulate in neighboring fields, such as cinema, in which the director's authorship is supposed, these professionals, in order to work with the advertisement field, have to be willing to, at least, share this place.

On the other hand, the field of advertisement films is the place where audiovisual professionals can find resources often scarce on other spaces - in comparison with the possibilities of acting in the Brazilian cinema, especially until the 90's, this difference is even more relevant. Ramos counterposes these two scenarios that are put for the audiovisual professionals in Brazil: on one hand, a more autonomous cinematographic work in terms of conception, but limited due to difficulties acquiring technical resources and low economic return; from the other, the subordination inherent to the task of filming the idea of others, but with the possibility of having access of a superior production structure in a field that values the aesthetic of their work. "However, despite the negative side, the activity has attractive attributes: the search for dominance in the cinematographic work, the technical appreciation, these are positive features regarding advertising to maintain a constant audiovisual update" (RAMOS, 2004, p. 94).

Frequently, the area of advertisement films is described as a space for learning and renewal on the behalf of professionals in the field. A director can have in this space a place of aesthetic experimentation that the cinema or TV less frequently enable. Ridley Scott, important movie director, started out in advertising, and still today, maintains a significant amount of production in this field, along with working in cinema.

I loved doing commercials. I loved turning footage, and loved the fact that commercials were on film. I loved how they were all visual. To me, advertising films were little capsules of perfection. You also got an opportunity to craft a 30-second commercial much more often than you did a 60-minute television film. (SAMMON, 1999, p. 29)

Although there is, in fact, a dispute for the control over the result of the work, overall between creatives and directors, it is equally true that some aspects of the way the productive process of advertisement movies

were built in Brazil end up favoring the performing instance in terms of relative freedom and autonomy. In the North American and English markets, the competition and level of specialization end up ranking directors per segment, limiting their action (BERTOMEU, 2011, p. 127). In addition, in these countries, it is much more common the follow-up of the creative team on set, which, in Brazil, rarely occurs, even due to the amount of work that, often, impedes creatives from leaving the agency.

In the interpretation of script for the construction of the audiovisual of the play, there is few clarity in the commands and decisions. The dominion of technique allows the directors to make consistent contributions and decide on many aspects that an advertisement professional does not know (BERTOMEU, 2011, p. 138).

That is because, even though animatics and/or storyboards generally foresee scenes and sequences of the film, they are less specific in terms of color, texture and lighting, camera movement, edition rhythm. Even plastic parameters, such as shot scale and framing, theoretically foreseen in the documents supplied by agencies, are possible to change. What Washington Olivetto says reinforces that idea:

Since the beginning of my life in advertising, I put all my trust at the professionals I choose to work with me and give all freedom to them, a fact that may explain the majority of my successes. In the case of commercial production, I say to the director what I want in the movie, but I let him hire the cast and crew, the lighting, the sets, the scenarios, the angle, the criteria of editing, the soundtrack, the sound effects, everything (OLIVETTO, 2008, p. 45).

In fact, this is the expected contribution of a director of advertising films: once captured the general idea of creation, he controls and take decisions related to the aesthetic dimension of the film. It is in this dimension, therefore, that the analyst who examines a movie can, generally, check the presence of a performing instance, in the shape of choices that are translated into strategies of mainly aesthetic effects. It

is evident that this reflection does not apply to all cases, but it points to a tendency of functioning of relationships between agency, advertiser and producer. That is because it is also true that, in order to work with certain performers, eventually the agency and the creatives have to give up their own autonomy and delegate the step of conception also to the producing instance. Among others, it is possible to think about the series of short films *The Hire* (Fallow/BMW/BMW Films, Anonymous Content, Zeta RSA Films. USA, 2001), in which the episodes (separated into two seasons) were written and directed by known filmmakers and in whose production, by the directors' appeal, the agency's interference was minimal.

Conclusions

This article discussed the place of the instances involved in the process of creation, approval and production of advertisement films, betting that this knowledge would help widen the range of possibilities of analysts to locate poetic, narrative and thematic choices within this films, that may be related to positions in these institutions and professionals in the field of production of advertisement films.

When dealing with a private film, the understanding of the place of the advertiser in their field enriches the analysis not only in the sense of understanding how this emergency was possible, but also regarding the forms how the discourse about the brand is inserted in this narrative. The creative instance, in turn, tend to be the place of thematic and narrative choices of the film, once it is up to the advertisement agency and the creative team the conception of the work, its general idea, its script and its primary indications of visual style. Finally, the reflection on authorship in an advertisement film cannot come before the understanding of what is the place of the audiovisual producer. Although it is an instance that supposedly would have less creative autonomy, once their function would be executing the idea created by others, the analysis of position and trajectory of the professionals linked to the producer

seems to be an essential procedure to understand many aspects of style, especially aesthetic style, of these films.

In short, we defend here an analytical posture that comprise textual and contextual aspects of advertisement films as a strategy to better understand how the creative choices of concrete agents reflects in the composition of these materials. And that, the advertiser, the creator and the producer have equal parts in this process, the authorship of an advertisement film being a social construction derived from power relationships between these institutions and agents that act on them. Finally, we reinforce that this reflection proposes general tendencies and premises for an analysis of this nature, that must be done in the empirical analysis of particular cases of concrete audiovisual productions.

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Date of submission: 15/01/2017

Date of acceptance: 02/02/2018