

Affects mobilizations in finance: humor, failure and neoliberal discourse in Faria Lima Elevator and Investidor da Depressão

A mobilização de afetos nas finanças: humor, fracasso e discurso neoliberal nas páginas Faria Lima Elevator e Investidor da Depressão

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ABSTRACT

Since financialization imperatives demand that individuals affectively engage with financial products, this study aims to analyze media calls for consumption operated by finance Instagram profiles that appeal to humor. As our analysis method, we use French Discourse Analysis to study intersections between discourses in these media calls. Although its contents seem to mock commonplaces in the financial self-help literature, they mobilize a discursive apparatus that legitimizes the norm by contradicting it. These humor-based productions validate certain types of behavior toward finance and build, by discourse, a specific consumer type by naturalizing practices and legitimizing behaviors linked to the financialization of economic relations based on communication.

Keywords: Communication, consumption, humor, financialization, discourse

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RESUMO

Posto que os imperativos da financeirização demandam engajamento afetivo dos indivíduos aos produtos, o objetivo deste artigo é analisar as convocações midiáticas ao consumo operacionalizadas por perfis de Instagram de finanças que apelam ao humor. Recorremos ao método da Análise de Discurso de linha francesa para estudar alguns cruzamentos entre discursos nessas convocações midiáticas. Embora seus conteúdos pareçam caçoar de alguns lugares comuns da literatura de autoajuda financeira, há um aparato discursivo que legitima a norma ao contradizê-la. Trata-se de produções que, a partir do humor, validam certos tipos de comportamento em relação às finanças e constroem, através do discurso, um tipo de consumidor específico, ao naturalizar práticas e legitimar comportamentos vinculados à financeirização das relações econômicas a partir da comunicação.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação, consumo, humor, financeirização, discurso

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THE CURRENT STAGE of capitalism, for Maman and Rosenhek (2022), requires individuals to increasingly engage with financial products – in discourses that correlate them with guarantees of security and well-being. The emergence of a series of communicational products of financial education that mobilize affects warped into discourses about what it means to be a self-responsible autonomous subject appears as a symptom. Such communicational actions thus value individuals who adopt certain practices to manage their personal finances (and their relationship with money and financial products) and appeal to a range of emotional engagement content. Affects mobilization thus works not only as a communicational strategy, but rather, a work with culture to legitimize certain types of consumption and produce consumer models. The authors state that “This emotional dimension represents a significant component in the cultural political economy of the constitution of financial subjectivities and the culture of financialization, that naturalizes the behavioral and dispositional requirements and demands that everyday finance poses to the general public” (Maman; Rosenhek, 2022, s.p.).

Among the various social network profiles dedicated to financial education, a specific niche appeals to humor as its main communication strategy to raise affective calls to the (symbolic) consumption of financial products. The aim of this article is to analyze the discourses mediated by Instagram profiles linked to financial education that appeal to humor as a form of affective engagement to financial products, especially considering the discursive strategies of calls to consumption triggered by these profiles.

The profiles *Faria Lima Elevator*¹ (as of June 2022, it has around 485 thousand followers) and *Investidor da Depressão*² (as of June 2022, it has 531 thousand followers) were chosen as the research *corpus*. These profiles were chosen because they use humor as a strategy to address financial content and due to the large number of followers. The posts made by these profiles during May 2022 were analyzed.

French Discourse Analysis was chosen to analyze the media calls for consumption, with emphasis on the intertextuality process that structures such productions and discursively legitimizes certain types of consumption. Maingueneau (2005) argues that intertextuality precedes discursivity, which means that the enunciating subjects never have full control over their discourse because it is generated and acquires specificity from its relationship with other discourses within a discursive field. From the understanding that discourses

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/farialima.elevator/?hl=pt-br>.

² Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/investidordadepressao/>.

do not exist in advance, but rather are placed in relation (of alliance or antagonism) to other discourses. Every discourse is thus crossed by other discourses, since the primacy of interdiscursivity constructs “a system in which the definition of the semantic network that circumscribes the specificity of a discourse coincides with the definition of the relations of this discourse with its Other” (Maingueneau, 2005, p. 35). From this perspective, we will map some of the intersections between discourses in media calls that use humor as the main strategy to call for the consumption of financial products.

THE DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF A CONSUMER FOR FINANCIAL PRODUCTS

A study conducted by Brazilian Association of Financial and Capital Market Institutions (Anbima) estimated that there were approximately 255 relevant digital influencers on financial education in the country in the second half of 2022, collectively having around 37.4 million followers³. Therefore, it represents a significant and current cultural phenomenon. The pages selected for this study do not exactly fit into the genre of classical financial education - since their contents are not geared towards clarifying how financial products work or how to manage wealth. Nevertheless, we can affirm that they act as educators of finance, since they are important players in the propagation and naturalization of financial products in everyday life, acting on the symbolic aspects that concern the acceptability of these assets in a cultural instance. There is an important aspect of affective engagement triggered by these humor profiles that, in their discursive interpellations, even if it is from a humorous bias, mediate imaginaries about how a successful life is engendered to a successful management of financial assets.

Faria Lima Elevator describes himself, in its Instagram profile, as “Root Financial Market”. He was inspired by *Goldman Elevator*, a famous *Wall Street* site, by a Brazilian context. In an interview for *Valor Investe* newspaper, the author of the page, who remains anonymous, states that “much of what is said here is not new to those who are already in the market. But giving publicity to this world helps to publicize what life is like in the ‘county’ (Faria Lima)”⁴. The profile is full of humorous content about the life of Faria Lima’s frequenters, market movements, and financial assets.

³Retrieved from https://www.anbima.com.br/pt_br/especial/influenciadores-de-investimentos-3.htm. Accessed on 12/16/2022.

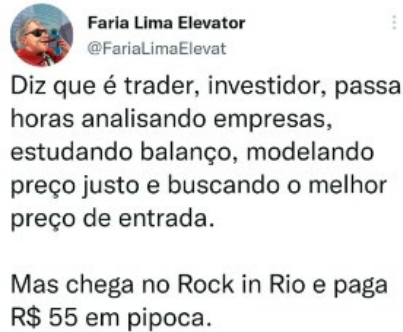
⁴Retrieved from <https://valorinveste.globo.com/objetivo/de-olho-no-mercado/noticia/2019/10/28/executivo-do-mercado-faz-barulho-com-touro-de-ouro-e-chega-na-pessoa-fisica.ghtml>. Accessed on 06/01/2022.

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Figure 1

Examples of posts by Faria Lima Elevator



Source: Instagram

Investidor da Depressão, on the other hand, has the following phrases in its profile description: “Investment Memes” and “Learn how to lose money before you win.” The page is run by Rodrigo Castro and employs a humorous strategy that involves inverting some common places in the financial market - such as, for example, the project “From a Million to a Thousand” (referencing Thiago Nigro’s best seller *Do Mil ao Milhão* - From a Thousand to a Million) - and the stories of failure in finances due to poor choice of financial assets.

Figure 2

Examples of posts by Investidor da Depressão



Source: Instagram

Thus, these profiles are not focused on providing technical financial education, as they do not teach how CDBs, LCIs, LCAs, and other financial products work. They also do not fall into the popular genre of financial self-help, which refers to publications that offer individualized solutions or procedures for achieving personal transformation in financial matters (Haro, 2013, p. 118). Additionally, they do not sell courses or financial products. However, these profiles share some common discursive assumptions with these other forms of communication, specifically related to the discourse surrounding the legitimacy of certain consumption practices.

According to Britto et al (2014, p. 181), “consumer capitalism has the characteristic of producing consumers and the consumption of products, even before the products have established their needs or utilities.” This implies that the demand for products, services, and goods cannot be solely understood from a utilitarian perspective (consumption because I need it), but rather from needs that are culturally constructed beforehand, based on shared values and norms that rank certain goods as more socially legitimate than others.

We start from a theoretical standpoint that asserts the construction of capitalist subjectivity as prior to and necessary for the functioning of capitalism. It argues that capitalism is not merely a mode of production but also a way of life that depends on the internalization of pre-existing moral values that make economic action rational in relation to its ends. This perspective aligns with various theoretical frameworks, such as the spirit of capitalism strand in Weber, and authors like Dardot and Laval (2016).

From the perspective that the production of the consumer precedes the production of goods and services (Santos, 2001), as the needs for them are mediated by culture as a way of life, *Investidor da Depressão* and *Faria Lima Elevator*, through the use of humor, serve as catalysts for the symbolic consumption of financial products, even if their viewers may not actually invest. Symbolic consumption refers to the idea that consuming a particular good serves not only a practical aspect in everyday life but also addresses broader symbolic and cultural issues. The concept of symbolic consumption encompasses the study of mechanisms through which meanings are attributed to things, as well as the transmission, communication, and hierarchization of sociocultural values materialized in goods and services.

From such theoretical assumptions, it can be argued that the examined profiles play a role in the discursive formation of individual-consumers of these financial products. Furthermore, they share several discursive imperatives with financial self-help, albeit presented in a cynical manner. We will now explore this further.

The pages studied, in a first aspect, are situated within the broader context of financialization, which refers to – which designates “the constant and continued increase of financial markets, players, institutions, and motives as protagonists of the world economy” (Haro, 2013, p. 111) – and its related legitimizing discourses. Financialized capitalism not only refers to a mode of action of the economic field, but rather, it demands the production of a specific type of subject, which “requires and nurtures a way of seeing and acting, a way of perceiving and interpreting the world, and a form of individual self-perception,” as well as “a specific type of behavioral and emotional management, which simultaneously produces and is produced by financial capitalism itself” (Haro, 2013, p. 112). Financial space, in this way, “is dependent on ‘metapolitical’ cultural disputes that shape the space of problem discussions and solutions” (Grün, 2013, p. 179) and aims to create a social and cultural environment that fosters the acceptance of financial products aligned with specific social sensibilities.

If, culturally, the savings account was considered as an effective and secure means of wealth management in Brazil, more recent demands of financialization require the legitimacy of another type of consumer of financial products – more willing to take risks and deal with volatility and possible losses from the promise of greater gains. It is in this environment, supported by discourses of “investment for all”, that a series of media actors gain relevance, with the power to moralize the decisions of individuals. Financial media celebrities invite their interlocutors to think about the legitimacy of their investment choices and propose a new model of emotional relationship with financial products.

The contents of *Faria Lima Elevator* and *Investidor da Depressão* has an intertextuality dialogue with the broader context of financialization and cultural validation of financial products as legitimate consumption practices. While these pages do not directly engage in the sale of assets, they contribute to the affective engagement with financial products and the production of symbolic consumption. In summary, at the discursive level, they are woven in the processes “of legitimizing financial education that, despite the discourse, fundamentally aims to promote the formation of individuals as consumers of financial products” (Britto *et al*, 2014, p. 177).

This way, the consumption of financial education products is not solely driven by utilitarian aspects, which involve the consumption of techniques and products to improve investment practices. It is also closely linked to symbolic aspects, encompassing the cultural and evaluative elements that, in public deliberations, define what constitutes a good investment.

This is why “knowing and using the consumption codes of my culture, I reproduce and demonstrate my participation in a certain social order” (Baccega, 2010, p. 59). In the context of consuming financial education products, the same mechanism applies as individuals’ affective engagement with these products correlates with the collective meanings attributed to them, signaling participation in a specific economic arrangement.

Therefore, if financial education becomes a necessity in today’s world, its symbolic consumption through communication products can be viewed as a process in which individuals participate. Through this process, they seek to establish their sense of identity, which is continuously under construction (Baccega, 2010, p. 59). In light of the financialization of the world, these media platforms produce a specific type of consumer by appealing to their emotions and encouraging them (symbolically) towards consumption (Maman; Rosenhek, 2022).

In *Faria Lima Elevator* and *Investidor da Depressão*, we can observe that this affective call to consumption is conveyed through humor. By discursive mechanisms of media call to consumption, we understand, like Prado (2013) the strategies used by media vehicles to provide viewers, packages of modal discourse related to the good living. The media calls involve how media outlets employ discursive strategies aimed at capturing the viewer’s attention and soliciting an active response by presenting consumption values that promise knowledge on how to navigate the daily world more effectively and thus achieve greater personal success. The call to consumption, therefore, encompasses communication strategies that contribute to the production of a specific type of consumer through media platforms, achieved by mobilizing legitimizing discourses that define what it means to “live well” and how this can manifest in the objects and services available for consumption, grounded in moral values associated with these goods.

Building on the assumption that affections ensure compliance with norms (Safatle, 2016) – including those related to socially validated consumption – the use of humor becomes a powerful discursive tool for fostering symbolic consumption of financial goods and services within the context of financialization and its cultural acceptability.

Media calls are performative. This is because within the call, there is always a slogan “that aims to create the illusion of a communication resembling a contract, but in reality, it is merely a simulacrum” (Prado, 2013, p. 58). It is precisely this aspect of the call that, for Prado (2013), explains how the media act from the language performative force. From this comes the fact that the need that emerges in the call is only manifested at the moment of its enunciation.

“Fantasy brings an object that is lost and must be recovered, but the paradox is that the object emerges at the exact moment of its loss” (Prado, 2013, p. 62). The *media*, therefore, acts from a pedagogy of desire. The consumer, who is produced and shaped by the discourse through this mechanism, is constituted by questioning the media’s discourse..

Investidor da Depressão and *Faria Lima Elevator* engage with and embody discourses associated with financialization. And “the mark that the questioning impresses is not descriptive, but inaugural” (Butler, 2021, p. 20), since the questioning is an act of speech whose “purpose is to designate and establish a subject in the subjection” of a discourse that precedes it – producing its social environment, so that “its reiterative operation has the effect of sedimenting its ‘positioning’ over time” (Butler, 2021, p. 20). *Investidor da Depressão* and *Faria Lima Elevator* appeal to discourses related to financialization and, in doing so, they question a type of subject and build a type of consumer *in* and *by* discourse.

In addition to the discourses associated with the financialization of society, these pages also share certain discursive elements with self-help literature and financial education. In the following sections, we will examine the specific discourses that are interrelated within this media landscape.

AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT BY HUMOR AND CYNICISM

In relation to discursive processes correlated with the production of positive affections for financial products (and the consequent production of a specific type of consumer), Leite (2017, p. 114) shows how some economic practices condemned at certain times were resignified and gained social legitimacy in others. One example is the figure of the “greedy investor” who, in more recent communication practices is transformed into the image of the “rational investor” – a character “who proclaims the benefits of the finance world and strengthens the programs and projects of financial education”. Thus, “elements of the imaginary about the financial market” such as the stock exchange, with its specific characters and actions, “are social constructions that were prepared at different times and that are related to divergent events in the history of capitalism, presenting them now as important protagonists, now as villains and causes of scandals and major economic crises” (Leite, 2017, p. 115).

In the case of media productions aimed at education or financial self-help, saving and investing wisely operate as slogan, so that “the traditional image of ‘crazed’ operators are slowly losing their ability to attract attention and

produce emotions” (Leite, 2017, p. 121). In turn, “it has been replaced by representations that highlight ‘rationality’ in capital markets, anchored in scientific studies, methods and software that give felling of security and legitimize investment practices, thus corroborating cognitive changes in society” (Leite, 2017, p. 121). The ideas of security and control gain primacy in speech, supported by methods that promise to control and predict the chaos of the market. *Investidor da Depressão* and *Faria Lima Elevator* in a humor way appropriate these discourses and transform the greedy and/or inexperienced investor in their investments into a central figure of the posts and memes made.

We found a number of examples in the analyzed period. In *Investidor da Depressão*, memes are often posted that mock financial education courses, especially those that promise quick and easy gains, very commonly marketed on *Instagram*. On 05/19/2022, for example, the page posted an interview of singer Gustavo Lima with the caption “The sincere course seller” saying: “90% of the things I tell is invented, see guys, and 10% is a lie.” On 05/04/2022, the meme said “Launching my new course ‘Savings Trader’ strategies with a return of 1% per month guaranteed”, with a news report announcing the rise in interest rates by Copom. On 05/17/2022, a comic strip of *Hägar the Horrible* edited as follows:

Course Seller: — This magic sword brings wealth
 Sucker: — I’ll give you a bag of gold for it
 Course Seller: — When will the sword bring me wealth?
 Sucker: — When you sell it!

In *Faria Lima Elevator* it is possible to find similar content that mocks this type of course. On 05/18/2022, for example, the enunciator of the page posted that “Technology is the new daytrader, a lot of people selling course promising to work from the beach in Europe earning dollar”. In addition, the approach that satirizes the dream of hyperbolized financial gains also materializes in content that mocks certain investment decisions: “The Brazilian does not look at the interest rate of the financing, but rather, if the installment fits on the budget” (06/30/2022); “And outside of social networks, do you beat the Ibovespa?” (05/27/2022); “The pinnacle of Brazil: declare IT the day before, fight for the land in the inheritance, (...) buy capitalization bond to get 100% of your money back” (05/26/2022); and “I want to see you explaining to your client that you invest in an inflation fund and that you are losing money in a year that inflation only rises” (05/05/2022).

Thus, in *Faria Lima Elevator* and *Investidor da Depressão* the “crazed operator” and the “bad investor” are highlighted as central characters of humorous narratives. They reinforce, in this way, discourses present in the contents of the books of financial self-help, since they curse the promises of quick gains proclaimed by many popular courses and snipe the crazed investor who makes bad investment decisions (such as not saving and making a large number of installments in purchases, investing in the Ibovespa down in the hope of high gains or buying capitalization bond that usually yield very little for lack of market knowledge).

Humor, in these productions, has as sense effect the indirect reprimand, attenuated, and points the finger at the behaviors and characters that, in the representation of the financial market made by the discourse, should be the object of mockery and contempt. In the process that transforms the crazed and/or unskilled investor into a character about which we should laugh, there is a discursive subtlety that marks a sharing between validated practices for financial success and those that are not, in a type of call for symbolic-affective consumption of financial assets that reinforces the argument that those who actually know what they are doing can achieve good results.

In this respect, we recall that, in the process of making humoristic discourse, it is necessary for it to trigger widely identifiable cultural codes (from a dominant ideological position) while operating a distortion of that same code (Berger, 2012). *Investidor da Depressão* and *Faria Lima Elevator* invite the public to laugh at bad investment choices, which is nothing other than a way to present a critique of a malicious character and ridicule bad investors. Bad investment practices, under this logic, are put under public scrutiny from a rhetoric of bad example. This expedient, however, reinforces the validity of the rules themselves that apparently make fun, from the twisting of their normal codes, since the contents of these profiles do not question the importance of being part of the investment market. Instead of betting on success stories, profiles appeal to failure to create the humorous effect and point out what should not be done.

Leite (2017, p. 121) draws attention to the fact that in the literature of financial self-help “those who are not seen as conscious planners are considered mere selfish speculators, attached to material wealth and money.” And thus, “this field generates normative categories that characterize impulsive speculators as figures that should be excluded from market circuits.” The pages studied start from the same principle by making fun of market agents who supposedly behave irresponsibly.

In addition to offering a vitrine of bad examples, the use of humor still reinforces another discursive field common to financial self-help. In genre,

there is often a discourse that seeks to consolidate the idea “of “rich man” in a simply intelligent man, who knows how to put money at his own service, thus not becoming his slave” (Leite, 2021, p. 332). Thus, “the mantra referred to is legitimized, strengthening a social logic that implies the incorporation of techniques capable of allowing individuals to transform themselves to achieve financial freedom” (Leite, 2021, p. 332).

This reveals a form of subtle sense of humorous discourse mediated by *Investidor da Depressão* and *Faria Lima Elevator*. There is a kind of pact established in the joke: if the reader is smart enough to understand the joke present in the posts and share the censorship made to bad investors, the discourse builds the triangulation that this same reader is smart enough to invest wisely, in a reaffirmation of the discourse of rationality in the financial market. The vitrine of bad examples, therefore, is accompanied by a veiled compliment to the reader who, put in place to laugh at the other, can affirm their own intelligence.

Related to the discourses that highlight negative examples in the relationship with financial products, another common discursive resource employed in financial self-help, as pointed out by Leite (2017), is the appeal to the notion that security and control can be achieved through techniques that predict market movements. The concept of the future is thus consistently invoked as a tool that evokes both negative emotions, such as the fear of losing assets, and positive emotions associated with risk mitigation techniques.

It is not by chance, therefore, that the discourse of financial self-help resorts, commonly, to social players that Casaqui (2020, p. 6) calls “futurists”: media personalities who produce inspirational narratives aimed on the future, “that mix with positive psychology, with the genre of self-help, with the activity of the personal coach, with the ‘coaches of the soul’ who preach the ideal of effective management of life”.

As highlighted by Casaqui (2020), futurism is constructed within media practices as an inspirational discourse. Although it may appear as the production of narratives grounded in expert systems, it often presents partial views of reality that are closely aligned with economic logics. Behind the interpretation of future scenarios, there exists a culture of consumption that emphasizes neoliberal logics, such as the dismantling of labor laws, social policies, and the idea of a minimal state (Casaqui, 2020, p. 17). This culture also praises individuals portrayed as “the man of the future,” such as high-performance entrepreneurs who are resilient, flexible, and perceive no limits to their activities (Casaqui, 2020, p. 17).

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There is a striking affective engagement in these narratives of the future. Feelings of uncertainty, confusion, insecurity and fear are mobilized, for the author, as ways to trigger his reverse:

in a society in which one of the founding links is fear, there is an important role reserved for narratives that mobilize ‘positive’ affections, which return to the subject the belief of a desirable future, planned and conceived from his desires. (Casaqui, 2020, p. 8).

In the analyzed profiles, the future is also repeatedly placed as the object of discourse – from a cynical perspective or from a nihilistic humor. There is a twist in traditional discourses of financial education and self-help that it is possible to predict the future to make rational and assertive investment decisions.

In *Faria Lima Elevator*, we found the following posts with this bias, in the period analyzed: “Just thinking of the elections dreads me” (05/23/2022); “If you had bought the XYZ asset 8 years ago, you would have earned XXXXX% today”. I wouldn’t have. “You would have sold *well* before that” (05/15/2022); “Never bet against IPCA” (05/11/2022); “60 to 100 years: my retirement is on land and real estate.” 40 to 60: all my retirement is in savings. 25 to 40: all my retirement is in Treasury Direct and Stocks. 15 to 25: all my retirement is in Crypto Coins and NFTs” (05/07/2022); and “Market does not discuss politics, discusses risk. It can even be policy.” (05/03/2022).

In *Investidor da Depressão*, the possibilities of predicting the future are also satirized. On 05/20/2022, the profile posted a video of a cut of the The Simpsons cartoon with the caption “The Future of those who do not invest” that had the following dialogue:

- We won’t need social security; we’re going to be rich!
- Yeah, we never going to need government aid
- [scene cutting for the future]
- Help me government!
- We need the retirement payment!
- Release our peanuts every month!

Also, on the page, you can find content such as: “Jesus showing that with the wallet I have there is no way to perform a miracle” (05/30/2022); and “I sell my friend buying trader robot: “I don’t know what is this urge you have to do shit” (05/19/2022).

These contents, which make fun of the idea that it is possible to predict the future, reestablish the pact of humor that we diagnosed earlier: it laughs at the

innocence of those who believe in this possibility (in another type of window construction of bad examples) while praising the reader for understanding the joke. In doing so, it reaffirms the validity of the assumptions of discourses linked to the financialization of society and weaves a morality to the consumption practices of products of the financial market.

In addition to this aspect, we can highlight other discursive lines that intersect. Weaved to financialization, it is quite common, in financial communicators, to a reference to neoliberal discourses, from which the statement “circulates the easy enrichment of the self-centered individual, presenting that it is composed of dialogical relations with discourses produced by capitalism, with emphasis on individualism” (Stafuzza; Pereira, 2021, p. 1685). For Leite (2021), one of the characteristics of the genre is to harmonize, in the discourse, a series of inconsistencies, since it preaches the effectiveness of its products at the same time that, however, suggests (based on principles such as freedom, autonomy and abundance proposed by this sector) that success is tied not only to the intelligence of playing the rule of the game, but rather, to adapt it to real-life contexts. “The production of the ‘neoliberal I’ evokes the importance of financial education, that is, an instrumental education that must stimulate financial skills related to the real world” (Leite, 2021, p. 333). Success or failure, in this logic, is always a responsibility of the individual.

This aspect is often satirized in the profiles analyzed. Faith in individual action is not as blind in humorous profiles as in self-help literature, which superficially may suggest a re-engendering of neoliberal discourse in these profiles. Personal effort and hard work are often satirized in this discourse as a way to create humorous effects.

Investidor da Depressão mocks this stance in memes such as “Twice a week I shoots up 5 times at the back of the house, to keep the rents cheap here in the neighborhood” (05/16/2022); “In real life you may be poor, but on Instagram the choice is yours!” (05/15/2022); and, in a meme with the caption “The secret is to stand out” the figure showed an email with the words “Hi, Douglas, good afternoon! How are you? You submitted a bank slip instead of your curriculum. Sincerely” (05/02/2022).

If irony gives a tone of humorous criticism to neoliberal discourses in *Invertidor da Depressão* and *Faria Lima Elevator* there are frequent pinpricks to postures considered lazy or little engaged, in a more explicit adherence to neoliberal discourse, even if under a satire bias. There you can find posts like: “Having a bad boss / leader can be a matter of bad luck. Continuing with a bad boss / leader is a matter of choice” (05/24/2022); “If Warren Buffett were Brazilian he would be a fixed income investor and a public employee” (05/12/2022);

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“Man is born good, the variable remuneration that corrupts him” (05/11/2022); and “You don’t have ADHD, you’re just really disorganized” (05/18/2022).

The pact established by jokes is maintained in these re-presentations of neoliberal discourse. As stated by Gobbi (1999, p. 127), humor mobilizes all instances participating in the communicative process: “the enunciator, who intentionally marks his speech as ironic; the receiver, who must necessarily decode that speech as ironic.” The humorous pact, in this way, will be based on a discursive practice from which the reader is placed in a position to transcend the literal message to glimpse the other meanings of the discourse.

But in addition to positioning the reader in a place of intelligence in the discourse – after all, he is treated as someone capable of understanding the joke – what other senses are these? Or, in other words, how does humor mobilize discourses about calling to the symbolic consumption of financial products?

Safatle (2008a) helps us to delimit these meanings from the perspective that if, for a long time, the discourses that legitimized economic practices demanded an ethics of commitment, today, in a historical moment in which the superego is founded on the imperative of enjoyment, we are incited to a flexibility of the regimes of indexation to the norms. The discursive calling, in these terms, is articulated around a “not taking yourself so seriously”, so that “capitalism would no longer require any kind of blind belief in the normative contents that it itself enunciates” (Safatle, 2008b, p. 1), in a discourse of power that laughs at itself. “This apparent absence of legitimacy,” however, would be the true core of his strength. This is to the point of saying that its legitimacy crisis would be its driving core” (Safatle, 2008b, p. 2), since it reinforces its own adherence to the rules from a cynical enunciation. “In other words, it is enough for them to be followed ‘cynically’ by making them justify the opposite of what they seemed to index.” Thus, the “socio-symbolic law is always complemented by a kind of double, a second superegoic law that can only be enunciated cynically” (Safatle, 2008a, p. 24).

In the ethics of cynicism, the concealment of the fetishistic character of the commodity is given from discourses that are capable of “reveal the secret of its functioning and continue to function as such” (Safatle, 2008b, p. 1). Parodic discourses are manifestations of these mechanisms, from which “we could take all distance from the normative contents of the capitalist ideological universe because the discourse itself of power already laughs at itself” (Safatle, 2008b, p. 2). It is, therefore, a triumphant capitalism that mock at itself and no longer fears critical discourse. Rather than meaning a crisis of legitimacy, such a mechanism is actually its reinforcement, articulated from a discourse that manages to cynically carry out criticism.

This cynical posture of humor, as opposed to meaning the unmasking of abuses of power-perpetuates the normativities while proclaiming the weaknesses of these normativities. Individuals, in this context, are called to sustain ironic identifications, in which “subjects affirm their distance from what they are representing or, even, from their own actions” (Safatle, 2008b, p. 9).

Unlike an ethics of commitment (which would be typical of the genre of financial self-help), humorous profiles call discursively from an ironic ethics – which already creates in it, for Safatle (2008A), a kind of identification by the negative. “This self-sarcasm is a cunning way of perpetuating narrative structures and frames of socialization, even while recognizing that they are completely ruined” (Safatle, 2008b, p. 12). For the author, it is precisely the cynical satirization of these ways of life that allows the content to continue circulating.

Investidor da Depressão and *Faria Lima Elevator* cynically appropriate the discourses of quick win, the possibilities of predicting the future and the neoliberal discourses of individual action. When doing it, in an apparent breach of expectations and satirization of the discursive models present in financial self-help, they end up reinforcing the same types of discourse. If, in appearance, they seem to criticize these discourses from humor, cynicism creates, as an effect of meaning, a distancing that recognizes the validity of these same norms, corroborating them. At no time, these discourses propose to criticize neoliberalism and investment discourses, but rather, they propose, from a cynical framework, to better affectively prepare investors for the symbolic consumption of the financial market (its values, norms and assumptions, even if many viewers of these pages may not even invest effectively).

Correlated to this, there is also another effect of noteworthy meaning in the discursive-affective calls to consumption in these pages, which refers to the reiteration of stories of failures and bad financial choices. In addition to acting on the reinforcement of the aforementioned discourses (although from an ironic perspective), another effect of meaning of this iterability is related to the naturalization of the perspective of loss. Failure, thus, is portrayed not only cynically, but also as part of the game.

FAILURE AS A NATURALIZED PRACTICE

Chua (2021, n.p.) draws attention to the fact that “In our era of late capitalism, we can bear witness to the ongoing creative fashioning of successful failure into a commodity which has grown in value”. This is linked to a series of manifestations, in culture, that preach the need to learn from failure and act accordingly, articulated to discourses that this is how entrepreneurial economics works.

Thus, “the marketisation of triumphalist narratives of failure is symptomatic of the rise of a new ‘ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism’, calling for ‘workforce participation’ in a new way” (Chua, 2021, s.p.). Certain types of successful failures are packaged to make an impact and turn into commodified narratives of failure.

Failure, in the literature of financial self-help, is often naturalized and justified from a discourse that preaches that the individual must overcome their fears to take economic risks. Thus, “factors such as uncertainty and risks begin to be read as positive assets in contrast to the ideas of stability and predictability that figured as characteristics of the capitalist model of the industrial period” (Leite, 2021, p. 333).

As we have previously stated, the profiles analyzed are filled with stories of failure. In *Faria Lima Elevator*, one reads joke like: “I’m not cold because I’m covered in losses at the broker” (06/25/2022); “Warren’s Berkshire could plummet 99% and still beat the S&P from the start. That’s the tweet” (05/14/2022);

“Remember: the important thing is not to try to make money, it is to lose less than your friend” (05/10/2022); “We are already in May and all that the Brazilian market has managed to do is lose 5 months” (05/09/2022); “Happy ‘you are not everyone’ Day. Remember, despite being a daytrader, your mother loves you’ (05/08/2022); “Some weeks you simply thank the existence of the weekend for the fact that the market closes” (05/06/2022); and “Income Tax Return: the retrospective prepared by the government to remind you of your terrible financial performance of the previous year” (05/04/2022).

In *Investidor da Depressão*, likewise, we find posts like: “Federal revenue plans loss tax after a large number of investors declare losses in 2022” (05/31/2022); “studies show that couples who trade together double the chances of losing money” (05/13/2022); “Going to work thinking about the losses I’m taking” (05/12/2022); “Asking your wife to open an OnlyFans because you lost your house” (05/11/2022); and, in a meme showing Titanic’s violinist: “Phew, the week is over! Gentlemen, it was an honor to lose money with you guys” (05/06/2022).

Along with the discursive mechanisms previously analyzed, another aspect of the pages studied concerns discourses that take failure as a naturalized practice, as part of the game. Walking alongside cynicism, failure is represented as something ordinary and often observed. There is, here, a kind of discourse that values the failure as a teacher and as part of the way to success. Losing a little to learn to gain a lot later is part of the discourse of financial self-help and is reiterated in these humorous profiles, in a perspective of naturalization that invites the viewer to take more risks and not suffer for it (not even in the face of eventual losses).

The valuation of the failure suggests that “tensions in the financial market continue to exist. Thus, satires have not disappeared, and the figure of the greedy, manipulative investor still feeds moments of crisis and composes fictions” (Leite, 2017, p. 121). Nevertheless, in these productions, the negative images of investments have as counterpoint the use of humor and a cynical rationality that, from an apparent denial, rectifies the assumptions of a discourse that calls for an affective relationship with financial products, even if it is from humor.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the use of humor and cynicism as communication strategies, *Faria Lima Elevator* and *Investidor da Depressão* are part of a movement from which “finances are often presented according to a logic of show and entertainment” (Haro, 2013, p. 114) and culturally integrated into everyday practices.

The analysis of the discursive of call strategies to consumption of these media productions reveals that financialization functions as a legitimizing discursive scene and, from this, these productions share a series of discourses with the genres of self - help and financial education - although under a humor bias. Among these discourses, stands out the censure of some types of investor such as the greedy, the unskilled or the ignorant - making them objects of mockery. By showing a vitrine of bad examples, the discourse also reveals its opposite, the appreciation of the rational and well-studied choice of investments, which mediates ordinary neoliberal discourses on meritocracy and the appreciation of individual action.

Although often the contents of these pages seem to mock commonplaces of financial self-help literature – such as the idea that it is possible to predict the future to make good investments and the idea that success depends on great personal commitment and effort – cynical rationality mobilizes a discursive apparatus that legitimizes the norm by seeming to contradict it. This, on the one hand, because the humorous pact positions the viewer, *in* and *through* the discourse, as an intelligent spectator – since it is assumed that he is able to understand the joke and therefore intelligent enough to stay out of the vitrine of bad examples. In a second aspect, because the denial of the norm recognizes the validity of the norm itself. For Safatle (2008B, P.7), “everything happens as if contemporary capitalism and its larger forms work from a certain logic of ‘carnivalization’”, from the assumption that the apparent suspension of the law, typical of Carnival social processes, are nothing more than a form of reinforcement of this law itself.

At times when cynical identification falters, it is possible to count on yet another effect of meaning engendered by discourse from which a successful failure can be valued as a good teacher and as part of the game. These are productions that, based on humor, create an affective discourse in relation to financial products, validate certain types of behavior in relation to finance and build, through discourse, a specific type of consumer, culturally prepared to act in the financial market, by naturalizing practices and legitimizing behaviors linked to the financialization of economic relations from communication. ■

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