

Formation amid instrumentalization and criticism: critical theory conceptual elements to the educational field¹

*A formação entre instrumentalização e criticidade:
elementos conceituais da teoria crítica ao campo educacional*

*La formación entre instrumentalización y criticidad:
elementos conceptuales de la teoría crítica al campo educacional*

Viviane Prux Branco² 

Filipi Vieira Amorim³ 

Carmen Lúcia Fornari Diez⁴ 

Abstract: This paper discusses the attack on humanities based on philosophical aspects that encompass principals and fundamentals of Critical Theory, mainly supported by studies from Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973). A conceptual dialogue is presented, given the theoretical nature of the essay, to emphasize its significance to present-day. The purpose is to understand the meaning of Human Formation in the face of educational antinomies lined by constant attacks on humanities. The methodology is typified as a bibliographical analysis translated into studies and considerations on Critical Theory, with particular attention to the following theoretical-conceptual elements: Cultural Industry, Semi-Culture and Instrumental Reason. The essay presents partial conclusions, for despite denouncing an attack on humanities through the implementation of a national educational project of Semi-Formation, the study assumes the possibilities of new arguments that do not end with this research.

Keywords: Education. Critical theory. Cultural industry. Semi-culture. Instrumental reason.

Resumo: O artigo discute o ataque às humanidades a partir dos aspectos filosóficos que englobam os preceitos e fundamentos da Teoria Crítica, com base, principalmente, nos estudos de Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) e Max Horkheimer (1895-1973). Apresenta-se um diálogo conceitual, dada a natureza teórica do ensaio, e evidencia-se sua pertinência à atualidade. O objetivo do texto é compreender o sentido da Formação Humana frente às antinomias educacionais pautadas por constantes ataques às humanidades. A metodologia caracteriza-se pela análise bibliográfica, traduzida em estudos e reflexões sobre a Teoria Crítica, com atenção especial aos seguintes elementos teórico-conceituais: Indústria Cultural, Semicultura e Razão Instrumental. O ensaio apresenta conclusões parciais, pois apesar de denunciar um ataque às humanidades, através da efetivação de um projeto pedagógico nacional de Semiformação, o estudo pressupõe o surgimento de novas provocações que não se encerram nesta pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Teoria crítica. Indústria cultural. Semicultura. Razão instrumental.

Resumen: El artículo discute el ataque a las humanidades a partir de los aspectos filosóficos que engloban los preceptos y fundamentos de la Teoría Crítica, basándose sobretudo en los estudios de Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) y Max Horkheimer (1895-1973). Se presenta un diálogo conceptual, dada la naturaleza teórica del ensayo y se evidencia su adecuación a la actualidad. El objetivo del texto es comprender el sentido de la Formación Humana frente a las contradicciones educativas marcadas por constantes ataques a las humanidades. La metodología se caracteriza por el análisis bibliográfico, traducido en estudios y reflexiones sobre la Teoría Crítica, con especial atención a los siguientes elementos teórico-conceptuales: Industria Cultural, Semicultura y Razón Instrumental. El ensayo presenta conclusiones parciales porque, aunque denuncie un ataque a las humanidades, por medio de la efectividad de un proyecto pedagógico nacional de

¹ **Submitted:** 06 Apr. 2019 - **Accepted:** 03 Apr. 2020 - **Published:** 01 Nov. 2020

² Leonardo da Vinci University Center (UNIasselvi) – Email: vivipruxb@gmail.com

³ Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG) – Email: filipi_amorim@yahoo.com.br

⁴ Federal University of Paraná (UFPR) – Email: miuxe@hotmail.com

semiformación, el estudio presupone el surgimiento de nuevas provocaciones que no se encierran en esta investigación.

Palabras clave: *Educación. Teoría crítica. Industria cultural. Semicultura. Razón instrumental.*

Introduction

Critical Theory, as a theoretical field, allows us reflection and understanding on some issues related to Human Formation in general, specifically regarding Education, a composing element to Human Formation. Based on this argument, the article addresses three fundamental concepts described by Adorno and Horkheimer, great minds linked to Frankfurt School - the birthplace to Critical Theory. The goal is to identify possibilities for understanding the current historical moment facing some “pedagogical reforms”, mainly in Brazil. The concepts we shall discuss are: i) Cultural Industry; ii) Semi-Culture; and iii) Instrumental Rationality.

We will not take said “educational reforms” as objects of study in this essay, but we will refer to them due to their proximity to the instrumentalization of education subjects to the detriment of the development of their critical and emancipatory thinking. For that matter, we can name three ongoing reforms that converge to subjective rights devaluation: i) High School Reform; ii) Common National Curricular Base; and iii) School Without Party. The hypothesis that these proposals deny subjectivity, due to their common restriction to humanities, serves as justification for the conceptual debate we propose and, at the same time, as a claim to debate about consequences arising from what we shall name an “attack on humanities”.

It's important to highlight that the choice for the term “humanities” not only refers to Human Sciences as a great area, but it also broadens its understanding horizons. It means that we recognize what Japiassu (2012) names “The Human Sciences crisis” caused by Natural Science's strong influence. Therefore, the announce of the broadening of Human Sciences' understanding horizons means that there are epistemological, ethical, esthetical and political elements surpassing academic and technical-scientific formalities present in both the noun (science) and the preceding adjective (human), (i.e.), insufficient to what humanities represent in a broadened sense (WELSCH, 2007). Another fundamental aspect justifies the approach, in general, and the choice for the word “humanities”: the absence of public discussion, which was replaced by bureaucratic construction of said proposed reforms – High School Reform; Common National Curricular Base; School Without Party –, excluding both civil society (social movements, educators collectives, syndicates, associations) and researchers with extensive experience in the affected areas.

The scenario we face suggests the conversion, albeit subtle, of critical thinking – both academic and social – which becomes a kind of passive acceptance in the face of a projection that threatens a range of socially conquered and built rights, ensured throughout history, and that is now at risk of extinction. In the same way, we understand that these “reforms”, increasingly apolitical, carry the potential of totalitarian reason, disguised as a promise of a society free from “perverse ideologies”. Therefore, the motivation for us to seek

understanding of issues immanent to the reforms is close to the problem that involves a conception of subjected-subject, one who does not act or does not react in the face of antinomies exposed to his existential condition. At a time when we find ourselves in a world that is increasingly paradigmatic, capitalized, and, as usual, almost without relevant formative experiences, subjection becomes an effect – therefore, transformed into the engineering of cause and effect – of what Adorno calls semi-culture.

Reform as instrumentalization

The instrumentalization of the reality presented in this configuration of reforms and projects needs a critical way of thinking that is not at the mercy of thoughts conditioned in the immediate data. This reductionist elaboration opposes what Adorno defended and, at the same time, shows itself as an example of subordination to the neoliberal logic of the market. “This subordination, symbolic and reductionist, to the market logic can bring serious problems to the society, the affected would not only be the dominated ones, but it also leads to cultural semi-formation of those who represent the order of the dominants” (ZUIN; PUCCI; OLIVEIRA, 2000, p. 121). This capitalist logic of projections offered to human “needs” does not inspire an emancipated subject, disposed and interested in unveiling self-reflection, a just society, or even an authenticity of his experiences.

So, we need to pay attention to what the educational reforms are trying to bring: is it *Bildung* (formation) or *Halbbildung* (semi-formation)? To understand the contributions of Critical Theory, it is interesting to note that it makes us shift to understandings that affirm the subject's ability to judge, decide, be autonomous, independent, and understand that not all scientific progress means success, for dominating social aspects and nature means the domain of the subjects among themselves. Critical Theory's alert is, in this context, precisely for the domain of the subjects among themselves and of nature, because the forms of domination can lead us to barbarism.

Barbarism is understood as something very simple, that is, being in the civilization of the highest technological development, people find themselves held back in a peculiarly uneven way regarding their own civilization - and not just because they do not have, in their overwhelming majority, experienced formation under the terms corresponding to the concept of civilization, but also because they are seized by a primitive aggressiveness, a primitive hatred or, in cultured terminology, an impulse of destruction, which contributes to further increase the danger that this whole civilization comes to explode, a trend that imminently characterizes it. I consider it so urgent to prevent this that I would reorder all other educational objectives for this priority (ADORNO, 2000, p. 155, translation by the authors).

If we consider that the premise occupied with overcoming the self-destructive impulse represented by barbarism requires the reordering of educational objectives, what is at stake are not only educational reforms but antinomies of formation. It is for this reason that, among others, the conceptual foundations of Critical Theory have been chosen as the background for the arguments presented in this article, so that we can know and contrast the Cultural Industry as premises of a semi-culture (*Halbbildung*). The term Cultural Industry was first employed

in 1947 when Adorno and Horkheimer (2006) published the “Dialectic of Enlightenment”. This concept was supplied by “mass culture”, which, in interviews and radio conferences, was explained by Adorno (1999, p. 08, translation by the authors):

The term Cultural Industry is intended to replace ‘mass culture’, as it induces the bait that satisfies the interests of the holders of mass communication vehicles. The defenders of the expression ‘mass culture’ want to give the impression that it is something like a culture arising spontaneously from the masses themselves.

Adorno and Horkheimer claim that Cultural Industry is formed by media, which imposes its capitalist patterns to behaviors and values, as well as creates specific needs, turning everything into business. Adorno perceives this mechanism as fraudulent when it promises and does not deliver, (e.g.) in erotic scenes at the movies. The pure nothing or the impoverishment of subjectivity created by the Cultural Industry is called Instrumental Reason. This technical knowledge, specifically Technology, is at the service of the Enlightenment, and when we deal with the Age of Enlightenment, we are referring to the commitment that the subject made so that he could seek and build for himself a free condition, one of an emancipated subject, without fear of magic or of any situation that would link him to the myths impregnated with the medieval. Concerning the myth, Adorno (1999) points out that everything is directed to humanity and that humanity is capable of projecting the subjective over nature.

Myth becomes enlightenment, and nature becomes mere subjectivity. The price men pay for increased power is alienation from what they exercise power over. Enlightenment behaves with things as the dictator behaves with men. It knows them to the extent that it can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them. This is how in-itself turns to for-itself (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 21, translation by the authors).

This plot between power and alienation was also studied by Adorno and Horkheimer (2006) in the work “Dialectic of Enlightenment”, aimed at discovering why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, was sinking into a new kind of barbarity. This barbarity concerns the subject becoming the object of his own work, the technique serving him, but he does not know the order of this process, nor who dominates what. Here, the Enlightenment fruit is lost.

Coming to our present time, we feel that the reforms and the educational projects, made by minorities who are concerned with their own interests, carried without the recognition of the plurality immanent to school or even to society, allude to a twisted reminiscence of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment that once freed people from mythical questions and mysticism, unfolded the evolution of science and unveiled new knowledge, is now reversed, as if our understanding had reached its apex and we needed to return and see less again, converting ourselves to a new mythology.

In this way, the Cultural Industry strategically uses capitalism with the technical domination over the subject, the capital, the innocence. False clarity is just an expression of the myth, which aims at obscuring and illuminating, at the same time, to eliminate the search for concepts, and they, the concepts, appear briefly, barely clarifying us the necessary (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006). This situation falsifies human relations with nature, and

between humans – before we were dominators of technique, of science, now we are their victims, characterizing an anti-Enlightenment.

The art of subordination by way of ephemeral distraction is part of the entirety of the Cultural Industry, and enlightenment becomes a myth, once again, when, after dominating nature, it progresses technically; but as the development of the system has made it inhuman and without reason, charging it for the ends and not the means, it has bequeathed to reason be the servant of the ones who hold power. It is precisely in this sense that Adorno and Horkheimer (2006) claim rationality beyond the system and the acting power, for capitalism has deepened social inequalities and created detachment from the subject and his sense of being. The perishing of the emancipatory potential of rationality, due to its reduction to instrumental reason, is the cause of the crisis of reason. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer (2006, p. 25, translation by the authors), “knowledge is the radicalization of mythical anguish”.

As reason gets instrumentalized, truths are no longer universal, they are always in favor of a system, and the idea is to denounce what Cultural Industry calls reason. Adorno had the idea of unmasking the philosophical systems that try to eternalize themselves in instrumental reason. How, then, can we recover the basis of rationality? In this essay, we try to achieve that with the reinforcement of the philosophical activity, in the sense of getting detached from the mass of the Cultural Industry and its Instrumental Reason. Philosophy is the combination of a spirit of wakefulness with the idea of fighting in the ranks of a (un)enlightened society and contributing to a democratic society with emancipated subjects.

Evidently, Philosophy does not only play the role of protagonist and defender of a social and political model, but also provides access to careful and critical reflection on today's culture and society. This explains why thinking from a 'standing point of Philosophy' means asking first about the meaning of things – 'what', 'why' and 'for what'. To be a Philosophy teacher certainly means to be familiar with the instruments of mediation of knowledge, but it means, above all, to know Philosophy's *modus operandi*, the method by which one seeks to understand the phenomena and think about things. It means to resist the conditions of the monad and the objectified conscience, to resist to schematic thoughts – the model for positive science – seeking, on the other hand, to potentialize the philosophical method of understanding the world and, especially, life in society (JUNKES; HORN, 2015, p. 72, translation by the authors).

We believe that instrumental rationality is pushed by the Cultural Industry that emerges from capitalism and governs different fields, both administrative and educational. This model's analysis of rationality, presented in Adorno and Horkheimer's studies, suggests that reason has become instrumental and that it is the servant of those in power. With the union between Instrumental Reason and the power of capitalism, human beings began to crave dominance over nature without realizing that they were dominating themselves. Ultimately, the continuity of this process led us to the Cultural Industry, creating Semi-formation (*Halbbildung*), the antinomy of Formation (*Bildung*): “syndromes and structures of thought such as these are apolitical, but their survival has political implications” (ADORNO, 2000, p. 62, translation by the authors).

At this point, we stand between criticality and instrumentalization, for criticality

should offer humanity's emancipation from the powers of myth, but through this progressive domination of nature, it has engendered the return of the myth in forms of absolute social domination: from educational reforms to the standardization of freedom by media influence, by social standards, or even by the concomitance of both. Through the suggestions and results of educational reforms, there can be systematic domination of political, social, and economic relations to achieve semi-formation. Thus, we cannot consider semi-formation as an isolated act, since it has subordinations such as the instrumentalization of reason and reproduction with none kind of process evaluation. Adorno's (2005) perspective is that isolated pedagogical reforms do not bring substantial contributions and they can, furthermore, reinforce the state of crisis of Formation because they slow down the needs and demands to be made to those who must be educated. This reveals an innocent disregard facing the power that extra-pedagogical reality exerts over them and demonstrates the fragility and incipient reflections of relationships with society, interfering positively or negatively in it.

We have two identical dynamics: first, with the Common National Curricular Base, that underwent three reformulations at three different times, that is, three versions; second, with the proposal of the School Without Party project. These possibilities express our idea of capital, that it dictates rules even in education, a subtle and delimited movement that, among others, marks out the Cultural Industry attacks on humanities.

In the case of the draft bill no. 867/2015, which creates the School Without Party Program, with Miguel Nagib as its founder, people have been confused when asking themselves if the school must exist **with** or **without** a party. When we deal with parties, do we deal in the **political-party** sense or in a **public-political** position? Well, the latest news shows that this project's basic argument is to target teachers and schools, but in a contradictory way that preaches political neutrality, creating a false sense that, without the project's approval, national education will fall into disrespect for family values and subversion. In this sense and among other discussions, the groups that make up the hegemony that approves proposals and educational reforms refer to this erroneous and intellectually dishonest nomenclature when they talk about studies and researches developed in the field of gender and sexuality issues, converting them into an "empty discourse" which they name "gender ideology", with the purpose of frightening the conservative society.

In an article published in 2016, the board of the National Association for Research and Postgraduate Education - ANPED (2016, p. 61, translation by the authors) pondered that the School Without Party project puts a more just and equal society at risk:

The National Education Plan is at risk [...] with the announcement of a set of measures that attack free expression, dialogue, the collective construction of the pedagogical projects of schools; - The movements that fight against supposed 'gender ideology', such as 'school without a party' and other variations of gag laws, fundamentally hurt constitutional rights of free expression, freedom to teach and the possibility of building a quality public school. It is not possible to achieve quality where ignorance and intolerance reign; - The process of broadening access to higher education, which made it possible for new subjects to enter the Brazilian university, will stagnate.

As we have observed, the attack on the humanities is also an attack on society as a

whole. Gaudêncio Frigotto (2017, p. 19, translation by the authors) reflects on the form of organization of the public institution, today marked by acute destruction of rights and nature in favor of capital:

In order to maintain this increasingly irrational system, the political power of the national states has gradually been annulled, transferring the true government of the world to the large economic groups, hegemonized by financial capital, and to the international bodies that represent them, especially the World Trade Organization and the World Bank. A power without society is then structured, or, as analysts have characterized, a permanent state of exception. A state that within nations is commanded by central banks and economic ministries, which define the measures that guarantee a profit, especially for financial capital. A power that affirms itself on a cultural and legal level supported by the strength of an increasingly violent police state.

Thus, both the Common National Curriculum Basis and the School Without Party program, and others that represent attacks on the humanities, demonstrate that they are at the service of capital and, cunningly, intend to diminish emancipation and critical information: preserving humanity and the processes of humanization is not their focus. The reforms mentioned represent a danger, they bring with them automatic ideas that, the less we see, the less we will have thoughts and attitudes with meanings of our own. Instrumentalized ideas, instrumentalized language. Semi-culture goes through the reforms and educational projects, something similar to what Adorno and Horkheimer tell us – which once again highlights the topicality of their concepts – because this movement of reforms and projects is a decoy that, by calling itself “pedagogical reforms”, actually creates another mythification of the masses: an unqualified instance broadcasts what can be “sold” or what can be invited to access.

Instrumental rationality and semi-culture

The cohabitation of instrumental rationality over the totality of rationality articulates the return of the myth in the most absolute form of social domination. Instrumental Reason is at the disposal of the constructions and improvements of instruments at the service of the system. In its turn, the system tries to eternalize the current state of reality, thus preventing any movement towards a truly significant transformation, improving technical knowledge more than critical knowledge.

Horkheimer, as said by Reale and Antiseri (2006, p. 476), stresses that reason is now ancilla administrations (servant of the administration) and, “having renounced its autonomy, reason has become a tool”. Horkheimer (2015) in the book “Eclipse of reason: a critique of instrumental reason”, presents the concept of rationality which, according to his understanding, is at the basis of modern industrial culture. He reflects that we are finite beings, preaching a solidarity that derives from the fact that everyone suffers and dies, daring to propose a “theology of one conscience that the world is a phenomenon” (REALE; ANTISERI, 2006, p. 108, translation by the authors), that injustice must not be the last word and that the murderer must not triumph over the innocent victim.

Adorno and Horkheimer (2006, p. 71, translation by the authors) present us with the argument that enlightenment denounces human instrumentalization.

Thought, in the sense of enlightenment, is the production of a unitary scientific order and the derivation of factual knowledge from principles, no matter whether these are interpreted as arbitrarily chosen axioms, innate ideas, or supreme abstractions [...]. Every objective to which men refine themselves believing it is discernment of reason is, in the strict sense of enlightenment, nonsense, lies, 'rationalization', even if philosophers dedicate their best efforts to avoid this consequence and divert attention to philanthropic sentiment. Reason is 'a power to derive the particular from the universal'.

Well then, if we have enlightenment as a promise of a better and fairer society, where is its limit so that it does not become totalitarian or legitimize the current order? It is in this sense that we glimpse the destruction of enlightenment, given the advance of Instrumental Reason materialized by the antinomies in the very locus where it would be opposed: the school.

The falsehood of Clarification is not the application of logical-deductive reasoning, the necessity of the discipline, or even of methodological precision. Its falsehood is characterized by the pretension that the subject-object relationship is indefinite, capable of always being modified through the exercise of the will, despite social obstacles and conditioning. Now, even before the question is asked, we already know by anticipation how we should behave to be recognized as 'subjects' and not social pariahs. As in the myth, we are faced with a society in which its facts beg for the reproduction of the always identical. And the sameness goes hand in hand with conformism and resignation to horror. [...] are the present horrors the fruit of a reduction of mythical irrationalism? For Adorno, the answer would be no, because, in the text *Culture and Civilization*, he states that: 'the evil does not derive from the rationalization of our world, but from the irrationality with which this rationalization acts' (ZUIN; PUCCI; OLIVEIRA, 2000, p. 52-53, translation by the authors).

Therefore, the means are fine-tuned with the ends, the market ends in particular, which oppose reason. The contradictory movement of human reason threatens us and brings us ever closer to dehumanization. Therefore, even if we do not dissect the political-pedagogical reforms that are under the spotlight in Brazil today, they represent this ideal of dehumanization, something like a humanity without humanity, given the high value of instrumentalization to the detriment of criticism, of behavioral passivity in counterpoint to collective freedom. This realization legitimizes the impression of Instrumental Reason that exists in educational reforms or projects that go by without speculation in academic circles, all invisible, carrying a false clarity and a strong agency defending that **knowing how to make things is knowing to produce**. That is why, in other words, when we deal with Instrumental Reason, we are dealing with its technical and scientific aspects, with how it led the human being to an emancipatory condition, but this same reason led humans to full irrationalism, a process of semi-formation, in which the identity of the individual was removed. On this aspect, Petry (2011, p. 90, translation by the authors) states:

The subjective reason, in the absence of the determination of the ends that should guide its realization, becomes instrumental rationality and serves domination of nature in the capitalist society, structured in a logic of production. However, to the extent that society organizes itself based on this mechanism of goal-oriented means,

which are defined by the need to produce capital, and constitutes itself as a rationalized society, the individual is also forced to adapt, having to mold oneself according to demands external to him. Thus, the domination exercised by instrumental rationality does not concern only the external nature, but, above all, the individuals.

The damage that Instrumental Reason – produced by the Cultural Industry – causes to the individual is demonstrated by the very way to which its cultural contents are absorbed: they are objectified and treated coldly as mere merchandise, limited to a semi-formation, “a false experience restricted to the affirmative character, which results in the satisfaction provoked by the consumption of cultural goods” (ADORNO, 2000, p. 23, translation by the authors). Thus, the inability to understand the whole picture – and yet feel good about this Cultural Industry totalitarian process – is remembered by Adorno as a process similar to the objective condition of the antechamber of Auschwitz, the production line of death. It is, therefore, a way of thinking that the Cultural Industry can impose a stereotyped form through reforms, projects or attack on humanities, since “the more the machinery of thought subdues what exists, the more blindly it is settled with this reproduction” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 34, translation by the authors).

Now, let us think about the contemporary impacts of **semi-culture** or **semi-training** on society, which is materialized by the continuity of the Cultural Industry. This equivalence has been shown in pedagogical reforms and projects related to education in all areas of formal schooling. This logic, as a result of neoliberalism, is based on industrialized culture through educational suggestions that are exhausted in few references, creating a fetishization of criticism without any theoretical basis and actions expanded by “fake news”, for example. In general, we received a bombardment of information, of symbolic artifacts without any aesthetic quality, alerting to the problematic condition of the semi-training in which technology and enlightenment do not have a real objective of intellectual qualification in matters of material progress and human experience.

For him [the semiformal subject] all words become a hallucinatory system, in an attempt to take hold by the spirit of all the things his experience does not grasp, to arbitrarily give meaning to the world that makes man meaningless, but at the same time, they also become an attempt to defame the spirit and the experience from which he is excluded and to impute to them the guilt, which, is, in fact, society's guilt, that excludes him from the spirit and the experience. A semi-culture [or semi-formation] which, opposed to simple inculturation [or lack of formation] hypostatizes limited knowledge as truth, can no longer bear the rupture between the interior and the exterior, individual destiny and social law, manifestation, and essence. This pain contains, of course, an element of truth in comparison with the simple acceptance of the given reality. However, semi-culture, in its way, resorts stereotypically to the formula that suits it best in each case, either to justify misfortune or to prophesy catastrophe disguised at times as regeneration. [...] Culture has become a commodity in its entirety. Thought loses its space and is reduced to isolated knowledge of facts. [...] thought reduced to knowledge is neutralized and mobilized for simple qualification in specific labor markets and to increase people's market value. Thus, it sinks the self-reflection of the spirit that opposes paranoia. Finally, under the conditions of late capitalism, semi-culture has become the objective spirit (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 182-184, translation by the authors).

Semi-formation (*Halbbildung*) is in close relationship with Instrumental Reason and this is the basis for semi-formation: Cultural Industry is nourished by this new fact. In this context, the cultural production process unfolds into merchandise, deteriorating its sense of cultural identity and emancipation. Based on Adorno's thoughts, today, what manifests itself as semi-formation is not only in what pedagogy comprehends but also in sociology, where ready-to-go knowledge takes the place of training: “the masses are affirmatively semi-formed to confirm continued reproduction of the current as a copy by Cultural Industry” (MAAR, 2003, p. 461, translation by the authors).

When dealing with semi-formation, we refer the argument to questions of formation, not only in its educational conception but in the sense of meeting the fetishization of formation and culture. The emancipatory dimension of both is conditioned to new processes of understanding since the dubiousness of the subjected-subject can create fetishes to reification and to itself. Well, if cultural formation is now a semi-formation and society adheres to a semi-culture and both prevent an emancipated and (self)reflective consciousness, how could we have, in Critical Theory, a historical promise that could destroy such domination? How could society transform its consciousness into an autonomous consciousness where the mechanisms of barbarism are not fed? Adorno and Horkheimer (2006, p. 121-122, translation by the authors) assure the following:

The fewer promises Cultural Industry has to make, the less it can explain life as something endowed with meaning, emptier, it necessarily becomes the ideology it spreads. [...] ideology thus reduced to a vague and uncompromising discourse does not become more transparent or weaker. It is exactly its vagueness, the almost scientific aversion to fixate on anything that does not allow verification, that precisely functions as an instrument of domination.

Therefore, it is a question of denying the real as a movement to overcome what is already determined, but first of all, it is necessary to verify the social context of production of social formation. Semi-formation is more than a pedagogical movement or something inside a pedagogical sector since its permanence needs society to internalize it, it needs to seem natural. We must keep in mind that education aims to lead humanity to emancipation, to the emancipated consciousness that advances on the Instrumental Reason that goes beyond the limits of the individual and becomes politically concrete. Furthermore, it is essential to have in mind the recognition that neoliberalism may be using education, reforms, and projects without community elaboration and collaboration, to ensure semi-formation as a source of domination and oppression. For Adorno, formative education of informed consciousness by self-reflection would be the apex of society's hegemony so as not to suffocate in the restlessness that is being the object of oneself.

Concluding remarks

Through the effort made in this essay, mainly with the help of the authors here studied, we understand that Formation antinomies, suggested in the interpretation of Critical Theory, help us in the recognition of the educational and pedagogical identity that is

manifested, among others, in the educational reforms that attack the humanities. The current challenge to the theme of Formation is to proclaim the importance of self-reflection and critical thinking. Both should guide our actions. When we deal with critical thinking, we deal with self-judgment, intentional judgment; therefore, knowing oneself in order to be able to tend to others, since otherness concerns human daily life.

Critical thinking can sometimes mean and receive a negative connotation for common sense, that is, the harm and reproach about something, but the depth of this way of **being** and **thinking** is beyond the formal logical questions, which they consider to be authenticity only measurable through their experiences. In this sense, critical thinking presents itself as a possibility of overcoming the mythical simplism of the set of opinions and conceptions that, coming from experiences in a given social context –, because they are immutable – crystallize as natural and necessary truths, that is, those that do not evoke reflections or questions. At this point, Critical Theory helps us to fight against the crystallization of truths considered immutable by common sense, in order to interpret the existing discrepancies not only in educational reforms, but also in the very sense of Formation.

Therefore, in the light of what appeared to us and before the legacy of Critical Theory, represented here by the thought of Adorno and Horkheimer, the reforms and projects do not account for the whole, only by their *doxa* at the expense of the *logos*. Thus, they may even suggest a *logos*, but we fall back to semi-culture so present in the text. We see, thus, the attack on the humanities, which expresses, inspires, and objectifies our (dis)intellectuality. In this antinomic relationship between Formation, defended by the authors of the Critical Theory, and the actuality of the attack on the humanities, we have seen administrations defending formations and reforms that do not conform to laws and do not attend to the political senses in the name of the common good.

The period of lassitude is clear. Thus, it inspires us to seek in the humanities the strength to resume human formation in a dignified manner, without discrimination. To standardize is to passivize and the passive subject succumbs to any myth that tries to eternalize the present state out of fear and social insecurity. The capitalist agenda, which governs society, claims scarcity of resources but, encouraging futile pleasures and competitiveness, consecrates the human sacrifice aimed at serving capital. In this sense, education, with its reforms and projects, prioritizes training – in the very sense of giving determined form – obedient workers instead of questioning citizens. By (de)forming conformed workers, via an exclusively technical-instrumental perspective, it supplants the hopes of a future of human fulfillment at civilizing levels in which human exploitation cannot be sustained.

In conclusion, although we recognize the impossibility of closing the issue, we highlight once again the expression “Auschwitz antechamber”, employed by Adorno. It is not by chance that we have brought back these terms, which serve us so that we can follow a reflexive path about the present day. We can see that the attitudes of hatred that have been taking hold in our country have been worsening – manifestations such as those foreseen by the author, and others such as prejudice, conflicts, individuality and indifference, epistemological patrol and obscure vigilance, anti-intellectualism – therefore, we can

consider this historical moment we live in as barbaric times, because the media, with its “formative” character, continues to keep us close to these situations. The most shocking thing is not to familiarize oneself or to find it normal, but to be inert and (re)affirm and (re)produce the current order.

References

ADORNO, Theodor W.; HORKHEIMER, Max. **Dialética do Esclarecimento**. Tradução de Guido Antonio de Almeida. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2006.

ADORNO, Theodor W. **Educação e Emancipação**. Tradução de Wolfgang Leo Maar. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2000.

ADORNO, Theodor W. **Teoria da Semicultura**. Porto Velho: EDUFRO, 2005.

ADORNO, Theodor W. **Textos Escolhidos**. São Paulo: Editora Nova Cultural, 1999.

ANPED. **Manifesto ANPEd** – Quando a democracia corre risco o Direito à Educação também é atacado. Rio de Janeiro, 09 maio 2016. Disponível em: <https://anped.org.br/news/manifesto-anped-quando-democracia-corre-risco-o-direito-educacao-tambem-e-atacado>. Acesso em: 05 dez. 2018.

FRIGOTTO, Gaudêncio (org.). **Escola “Sem” Partido**: esfinge que ameaça a educação e a sociedade brasileira. Rio de Janeiro: UERJ, LPP-RJ, 2017.

HORKHEIMER, Max. **Eclipse da razão**. Tradução de Carlos Henrique Pissardo. São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2015.

JAPIASSU, Hilton. **A crise das ciências humanas**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2012.

JUNKES, Delcio; HORN, Geraldo Balduino. Autorreflexão e autonomia do pensar como pressupostos teóricos e metodológicos do Ensino de Filosofia: análise a partir da teoria crítica. **Educação**, Santa Maria, v. 40, n. 1, p. 63-74, jan./abr. 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5902/1984644415908>.

MAAR, Wolfgang Leo. Adorno, semiformação e educação. **Educação & Sociedade**, Campinas, v. 24, n. 83, p. 459-475, ago. 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-73302003000200008>.

PETRY, Franciele Bete. **Além de uma crítica à razão instrumental**. 2011. 252 f. Tese (Doutorado em Filosofia) - Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2011.

REALE, Giovanni; ANTISERI, Dario. **História da Filosofia**: de Nietzsche à Escola de Frankfurt. São Paulo: Ed. Paulus, 2006.

WELSCH, Wolfgang. Mudança estrutural nas ciências humanas: diagnóstico e sugestões. **Educação**, Porto Alegre, v. 30, n. 2, p. 237-258, maio/ago. 2007.

ZUIN, Antônio Alvaro Soares; PUCCI, Bruno; OLIVEIRA, Newton Ramos de. **Adorno: o poder educativo do pensamento crítico**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2000.

Notes

ⁱ Article translated by Brenda Bressan Thomé 

Anti-Plagiarism Check



Distributed under

