

**AINDA A SEMIFORMAÇÃO: CONTRIBUIÇÕES DE ADORNO E HORKHEIMER
EM TEMPOS DE CIBERCULTURA**

**AUN LA SEMI-FORMACIÓN: CONTRIBUCIONES DE ADORNO Y HORKHEIMER
EN TIEMPOS DE CIBERCULTURA**

**STILL ABOUT SEMI-FORMATION: CONTRIBUTIONS OF ADORNO AND
HORKHEIMER IN TIMES OF CYBERCULTURE**

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RESUMO: O presente trabalho tem como objetivo norteador desenvolver um estudo crítico e reflexivo acerca da semiformação em tempos de cibercultura. O estudo está amparado na teoria crítica, a partir de uma abordagem teórico-metodológica pautada principalmente nos estudos de Theodor Adorno e Horkheimer, que discute o processo de semiformação na sociedade contemporânea. Compreende-se a educação de maneira ampla, como um espaço tempo necessário para reflexão e tomada de consciência para formar as gerações sobre “ser e estar” no mundo na sociedade da cibercultura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Semiformação. Teoria Crítica. Cibercultura.

RESUMEN: El trabajo tiene por objetivo orientador desarrollar un estudio crítico y reflexivo sobre la semi-formación en tiempos de cibercultura. El estudio está anclado en la teoría crítica, a partir de un abordaje teórico-metodológico pautado principalmente en los estudios de Theodor Adorno y Horkheimer, que discute el proceso de semi-formación en la sociedad contemporánea. Se comprende la educación de modo amplio, como un espacio-tiempo necesario para reflexión y toma de consciencia para formar las generaciones sobre “ser y estar” en el mundo en la sociedad de la cibercultura.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación. Semi-formación. Teoría Crítica. Cibercultura.

ABSTRACT: The present work has as guiding objective to develop a critical and reflexive study about semi-formation in cyberculture times. The study is based on critical theory, from a theoretical-methodological approach based mainly on the studies by Adorno and Horkheimer,

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which discusses the process of semi-formation in contemporary society. Education is broadly understood as a necessary time for reflection and awareness to educate generations about “how to be” in the world in cyberculture society.

KEYWORDS: *Education. Semi-formation. Critical Theory. Cyberculture.*

Introduction

Society is mediated by communication and information technologies, and for some authors it is called the knowledge society, information society or cyberculture. Although these terms are used to characterize a way of life in which digital technologies are present in almost 100% of the activities developed by man, they use different theoretical contributions that we will not go into in depth in this text. Castels (2005, p. 17), disagrees with the terminology “information or knowledge society”, not because, for the author, knowledge and information are not central to our society. But because they have always been, in all historically known societies.

Thus, we will use the concept of cyberculture by Pierre Lévy (1999) to describe a new form of communication generated by the interconnection of computers around the world, in addition to the material infrastructure, which houses the human beings who maintain and use it.

Thus, the present essay is primarily concerned with the being of the subject in cyberculture from the assumptions of Adorno and Horkheimer. It is important to emphasize that such theories, despite having been produced in a different historical, political and social context, from the one which we are dealing with, present themselves as essential for the analysis of the current context.

This is not a denunciation of this historical time in a pessimistic way, but a reflection on the need to think about the subjects in the search for paths to emancipation, because the information network in which we are enmeshed is, mainly, ambivalent, because at the same time that it gives us freedom and democratizes information, it is also capable of generating ways of knowing reality in ways that are sometimes wrong.

Taking the words of Lévy (1999) here, the fact that cinema and music are products of the cultural industry does not prevent us from enjoying them, nor from talking about them from a historical and cultural perspective. Neither salvation nor doom lies in technique. Always ambivalent, techniques project our emotions, intentions and projects into the material world.

The instruments we build give us powers, but we are collectively responsible, the choice is in our hands (LÉVY, 1999, p. 16-17).

Thus, it is only possible to make technical objects, creations and cultural production, a path, a choice, if we have a clear understanding of their complexity. Such an understanding is essential here for a possible awareness and emancipation.

Thus, in the light of critical theory, with Adorno and Horkheimer as the main authors, we will seek in this theoretical essay to bring elements for reflections about this historical time, with emphasis on cyberculture. The methodology used consists of a bibliographic study in the light of the foundations of Critical Theory, and secondary readings that will elucidate some concepts, such as: Semi-formation, Cultural Industry, Cyberculture and Education.

The present study is justified as we are not just consumers of technical products in a headless manner, but men and women who live in a certain culture and we need to reflect on who we are, especially in the educational field, in order to try to raise awareness about these semi-formative obstacles.

Still semi-formation

When we deal with Semi-formation, we turn to Adorno, as a focus on his work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1985), in which are his first references to semi-formation, or “semi-culture” in its formative sense. The author refers to semi-formation as a social form imposed by a certain mode of production that impacts all instances and plans of life.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) criticize the semi-formed man, who in the author's words is converted to a “hallucinatory” system, in an attempt to become better, in an attempt to give meaning to the world. The authors point out that despite all the rationalization, we remain irrational, and mechanisms generated by the cultural industry modify us, transforming us by the agencies of capitalism, in a subtle way, which makes it seem the wisest thing to do. Like this:

For the consumer there is nothing more to classify that has not been anticipated in the schematism of production. [...] all the details, clichés ready to be used arbitrarily here and there and completely defined by their purpose in the scheme. Confirming it, composing it, that is its reason for being. The whole world is forced through the filter of the cultural industry. The greater the perfection with which his techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today to obtain the illusion that the outside world is the unbroken

extension of the world discovered in the film. (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 1985, p. 117-118)²

In this way, the world, which remains irrational, would be reconstructed in a planned mold that replaces what would be the consumer experience, anticipating the impacts of capitalism, resulting in the illusion that the world would be the extension of production in terms of the cultural industry.

In this bias, Adorno, in his studies, leaves us with the understanding that all individuals who are inserted in a capitalist society are necessarily victims of a false democratization of culture, in which they try to improve the existing conditions, which countless times it is under the aegis of the logic of consumption and the cultural industry.

On this subject, Freitag (1988) adds that the main features of the cultural industry are related to the artistic and cultural production of individuals, always organized in a capitalist manner, with the aim of introducing them to the market, due to their propagation and consumption. In this way, if this society is marked by capitalist consumption and production, certainly its ideas and works on works of art, culture, ideas, values, also become commodities.

It should be noted that the cultural industry consists of the reproduction of art, culture and knowledge in a format of standardization, uniformization and social adaptation. In this context, cultural goods come into existence as a result of people appropriating them only as a form of leisure, pleasure and spectacle, aiming only at the profit of capital, making them become dependent on their logic, distancing themselves of what should ultimately be the process of knowledge, development and human formation.

In other words, the reproduction process is the guiding axis, since the cultural industry is considered voluntary integration, from the top, of its consumers, and a factor that “doubles what exists in men’s consciousness”, forming the conscience when confirming the world in established order (ADORNO, HORKHEIMER, 1985, p. 175).

The media in general constitutes a privileged context to apprehend this semi-formative scheme. Be it in a direct way, as in the film, in which a “coincidence” reveals the logo, either by the subtle expression of a character; in this scheme, one realizes how much the media tries at all times to semi-form individuals.

² Para o consumidor não há nada mais a classificar que não tenha sido antecipado no esquematismo da produção. [...] todos os detalhes, clichês prontos para serem empregados arbitrariamente aqui e ali e completamente definidos pela finalidade que lhes cabe no esquema. Confirmá-lo, compondo-o, eis aí sua razão de ser. O mundo inteiro é forçado a passar pelo filtro da indústria cultural. Quanto maior a perfeição com que suas técnicas duplicam os objetos empíricos, mais fácil se torna hoje obter a ilusão de que o mundo exterior é o prolongamento sem ruptura do mundo que se descobre no filme. (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 1985, p. 117-118)

Thus, we can mention how much the media use different mechanisms to transform works of thought into entertainment.

Since the destruction of facts, events and works follows the logic of consumption, futility, trivialization and simulation, it is not surprising that everything is reduced, after all, to a personal question of preference, taste, predilection, aversion, feelings. This is the cultural market (CHAUÍ, 2006, p. 22).³

This is the consequence of the dominating logic about simulacra and the taste that amazes, but it also attracts all individuals of multiple ages, from different social classes, with a certain sickening alienation with their gadgets immersed in a varied range of social networks, that makes us consumers and dominated by the “sea of information”. Thus, the interference of the cultural industry, likewise submits us to the freedom and activity of the thinking subject, modifying his capacity to perceive and feel, generating in him the conformism, the adaptation, the regression of his senses.

Almost naively, we consume products as a form of leisure that take over our world, our time, our relationships and our lives. The dialogue, personally established, has been replaced by communication made through screens of multiple artifacts that surround us and are part of our daily lives. Throughout the day, we switched screens, from TV to Smartphones, to work computers. The ease of accessing information and communicating with a large group of people in real time brings a sense of freedom and a certain enchantment when selecting the content we want to read, view, access and retransmit.

The feeling of freedom is false, since the information offered to us through the multiple channels has already been previously selected by systems and algorithms. In other words, as we consume certain information, we leave traces on the network that are used by large financial conglomerates for commercial or political purposes. More and more information, with the same bias or ideological character, is offered to us, that is, the simple act of surfing the internet, reading the information on social networks unpretentiously, or buying any product, generates a series of data.

Colbo (2019) states that it is necessary to understand that the various forms of manipulation and power are apparently invisible in digital spaces. The Internet is a data factory and we act as indoctrinated consumers without adhering to the rules of constitution of the network, we also act as influential digital intermediaries.

³ Visto que a destruição dos fatos, acontecimento e obras segue a lógica do consumo, da futilidade, da banalização e do simulacro, não espanta que tudo se reduza, ao fim e ao cabo, a uma questão pessoal de preferência, gosto, predileção, aversão, sentimentos. É isto o mercado cultural (CHAUÍ, 2006, p. 22).

In view of this, the concept of semi-formation is present when standardizing information, in some cases, filled with Fake News, giving the impression that each individual is now a thinking and conscious subject because he has a varied range of information that can be replicated, transformed and discussed by other individuals.

Thus, the semi-formed subject takes himself as the subject of the world that merely reproduces. “For him, construction seems “natural”, the consequent domination of nature imposes itself in an increasingly determined way and starts to integrate all human interiority” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 1985, p. 208).

In this same perspective, Adorno, in *Cultural Criticism and Society* (1949), makes notes about ideology, which in his opinion would be society itself. Similarly, men remain subject to a reproduction of life.

That semi-formation, despite the clarification of illustration and the dissemination of information and even through it, has become the dominant form of contemporary consciousness - this is precisely what requires a broader theory. The idea of culture should not be sacrosanct to her, as is the habit of the semi-formation itself (ADORNO, 1979, p. 94).⁴

Semi-formation is “the spirit taken by the fetishistic character of the commodity” (ADORNO, 1979, p. 108). Iop (2009) defines the formation of the individual through the industrialization of culture, in which products lose their cultural essence, as they are transformed by the industrial process into semi-culture, thus, their products will serve as a formative content for society; since it is in various instances representative of social life and, even, in spaces and contexts of individuals who consider themselves “emancipated and critical” simply because they have access to information. In times of cyberculture, the manipulated information can generate catastrophic effects on the subjects' way of thinking.

The amount of information manipulated in different formats that we receive or access daily as a fast food of thought, offers little space for analysis and criticism. The way they are produced, with images, sounds, memes, clipping and DIY with videos as something ready, ends up passing on an idea of absolute truth. For Adorno, it is not enough to examine semi-formation without reference to the context of society's production, as a social formation self-generated by men and learned in its historical dialectic. In this sense, it is essential to understand the way information is produced and its ideological character.

⁴ Que a semiformação, apesar do esclarecimento da ilustração e da difusão de informações e mesmo por seu intermédio se tornou a forma dominante da consciência contemporânea – é justamente isto que exige uma teoria mais ampla. A ideia de cultura não deve ser sacrossanta para ela, conforme é hábito da própria semiformação (ADORNO, 1979, p. 94).

Resistance through knowledge consists of thinking about the role of education in favor of developing the experience of critical and emancipated thinking of the subjects.

Education as a form of resistance: a possible way out

From the problem announced above, we understand that it is possible and necessary formative and emancipatory spaces/times. Education is undoubtedly a form of resistance for the subjects to think and act.

In this bias, education to be effective, it is necessary to reflect on the criticism of semi-formation, and understand its process, then, to think about a possible emancipation, which for Adorno would be the central element of education. “The normative orientation of education is not imposed from the outside, but must jump from its historical configuration which, due to its contradictions, objectively requires its transformation from itself” (ADORNO, 1999, p. 183).

Thus, it is necessary to create forms of organization in educational institutions that can contribute so that the individual can develop cognitive strategies capable of understanding and analyzing the context of society for contradiction and resistance, in order to demystify the idea of information consumption and ideas that need further reflection and analysis. It is, therefore, inseparable that one of the main tasks of the school is to develop in students the capacity for critical reflection and decision-making, and also to go beyond the forms of reproduction and alienation of the pre-established knowledge of the semi-formation.

It is noteworthy that Adorno, even though he is not an education theorist, supports us with his substantial framework of analysis to think broadly about educational processes, with a view to resisting what is set by social and economic patterns. In the concrete history of the subjects, more than ever it is up to the school to unveil and programmatically disseminate the resistances expressed in different ways, which at the moment offer alternatives to the establishment resulting from the cultural industry.

However, teachers must be able to make use of the cultural industry's own resources to enable new generations to recreate relations with the cyberculture scene.

The cultural industry is part of a complex apparatus that involves the reality of the student, and as such represents the challenges for the transformation of the human being. It is essential, therefore, that the educational process bear in mind the formation of teachers' conscience, strengthening the values of ethics and human dignity.

However, talking about critical awareness has become commonplace in several studies in the most varied areas, but the process that involves critical reflection is much more complex and needs rigor, involvement, and, under no circumstances, should be seen as a path without ends and objectives, since:

[...] Critical reflection cannot be conceived as a thought process without guidance. On the contrary, it has a very clear purpose, by defining itself in the face of problems and acting accordingly, considering them as situations that are beyond our own personal intentions and actions, to include their analysis as problems that have their social and historical origin (CONTRERAS, 2002, p. 163).⁵

As stated by the author, critical reflection is a process of making the teacher aware, which is beyond his intentions, because the criticality that permeates this reflection allows him to question the social structure that ends up involving his work, enabling him a critical and conscious notion of the practice he developed and the consequences of this social practice in his teaching activity.

We also believe that the critical theory can be one of the ways for the development of consciousness in the educational process, playing a fundamental role for it to develop in a better way.

In this case, it is possible to combat false awareness as something of the very poison imposed on our daily lives. As author Adorno (1995) affirms, it is through education that we can find the possibility of resistance to avoid falling into semi-formation, it is through awareness and self-reflection that the individual can go beyond this logic.

Therefore, networks, in the computerized society, are not in themselves the problem, but the way we appropriate them. Here we take the words of Castels (2005, p. 19):

Thus, the question is not how to reach the network society, a self-proclaimed higher stage of human development. The question is to recognize the contours of our new historical terrain, that is, the world in which we live. Only then will it be possible to identify the means by which specific societies in specific contexts can achieve their goals and realize their values, making use of the new opportunities generated by humanity's most extraordinary technological revolution, which is capable of transforming our capabilities of communication, which allows us to change our codes of life, which provides us with the tools to really control our own conditions, with all their destructive potential and all the implications of their creative ability.⁶

⁵ [...] A reflexão crítica não se pode ser concebida como um processo de pensamento sem orientação. Pelo contrário, ela tem um propósito muito claro, ao definir-se diante dos problemas e atuar conseqüentemente, considerando-os como situações que estão além de nossas próprias intenções e atuações pessoais, para incluir sua análise como problemas que têm sua origem social e histórica (CONTRERAS, 2002, p. 163).

⁶ Assim, a questão não é como chegar à sociedade em rede, um autoproclamado estádio superior do desenvolvimento humano. A questão é reconhecer os contornos do nosso novo terreno histórico, ou seja, o mundo

Therefore, it is through reflections and appropriations of critical theory that we can offer possibilities to think along the path of self-criticism, the possibility of education, develop the exercise of an intellectual activity, which will offer a formation based on the emancipation and criticality of being human.

Final considerations

The objective of this text was to develop a critical and reflective study about semi-formation in times of cyberculture, taking education as a possible way to emancipate individuals to be and be in society in a way in which they have autonomy.

It is noteworthy that we do not have technophobic visions about the society in which we live, but to realize that the society mediated by technologies, here called cyberculture, is in itself ambivalent, since networks bring with them a series of possibilities and flows that are essential to think about the democratization of information. However, they also bring traces of a semi-formation in providing individuals with the false idea of freedom.

In this way, we understand that it is the role of education to discuss and promote formation that is capable of providing individuals with tools for the understanding and analysis, such as cultural, social and technological artifacts, and these need to be understood as a mediation language in the process of teaching and learning, focusing on the subject as a being of intentionalities that builds and reconstructs the society in which he is inserted, thus overcoming the perspective that the human being is hostage to such artifacts.

Therefore, we understand that education through critical theory may point out paths, although not very simplistic, such as presenting that there is a free and critical conscience that can be directed towards a possible transformation, where it may break with the semi-forming in times cyberculture.

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em que vivemos. Só então será possível identificar os meios através dos quais, sociedades específicas em contextos específicos, podem atingir os seus objetivos e realizar os seus valores, fazendo uso das novas oportunidades geradas pela mais extraordinária revolução tecnológica da humanidade, que é capaz de transformar as nossas capacidades de comunicação, que permite a alteração dos nossos códigos de vida, que nos fornece as ferramentas para realmente controlarmos as nossas próprias condições, com todo o seu potencial destrutivo e todas as implicações da sua capacidade criativa.

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