Article

Political education, violence, resistance: the formation of conscience and the fight against authoritarianism and aggressiveness

Educação política, violência, resistência: a formação da consciência e o enfrentamento ao autoritarismo e à agressividade

Educación política, violencia, resistencia: la formación de la conciencia y el enfrentamiento al autoritarismo y la agresividad

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ABSTRACT

Essay with reflections on social violence and its manifestations at school. It is a relationship that can never be neglected, because education also contains the social tendencies that reproduce violence, aggressiveness, and barbarism. Based on texts by authors from the Frankfurt School, the theme of violence is discussed, highlighting its links with the social and economic system, which is reproduced exactly by promoting the destruction of people, cultures, and environment. Next, considerations are presented that show that such destructiveness affects the formation of subjectivities and the willingness of individuals to conform or resist this tendency. Finally, it discusses the historical possibility of concretizing the political dimension of education as a way of opposing and confronting the aggressiveness and violence inherent to advanced capitalist societies.

Keywords: Critical theory of society. Social violence. Education and resistance. Political education.

RESUMO

Ensaio no qual se apresenta reflexões sobre violência social e suas manifestações na escola. Trata-se de relação que jamais pode ser negligenciada, pois a educação também contém as tendências sociais que reproduzem a violência, a agressividade e a barbárie. Com base em autores da Escola de Frankfurt, discorre-se sobre o tema da violência, destacando seus nexos com o sistema social e econômico, que se reproduz exatamente promovendo a destruição de pessoas, culturas e o meio ambiente. Seguem considerações que evidenciam que tal destrutividade repercute na formação das subjetividades e das disposições de os indivíduos se conformarem ou resistirem a essa tendência. Por fim, aventa-se a possibilidade histórica de concretização da dimensão política da educação como forma de contraposição e enfrentamento da agressividade e violência inerentes às sociedades do capitalismo avançado.

Palavras-chave: Teoria crítica da sociedade. Violência social. Educação e resistência. Educação política.

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RESUMEN

Ensayo con reflexiones sobre la violencia social y sus manifestaciones en la escuela. Es una relación que no se puede descuidar nunca, pues la educación también contiene tendencias sociales que reproducen la violencia, la agresión y la barbarie. Con textos de autores de la Escuela de Frankfurt, se discute la violencia, destacando sus vínculos con el sistema social y económico, que reproduce a sí mismo exactamente promoviendo la destrucción de las personas, las culturas y el medio ambiente. Las siguientes son consideraciones que muestran que tal destructividad afecta la formación de subjetividades y la disposición de los individuos a conformarse o resistir. Finalmente, se plantea la posibilidad histórica de concretar la dimensión política de la educación como forma de oponer y confrontar la agresividad y violencia inherentes a las sociedades capitalistas avanzadas.

Palabras clave: Teoría crítica de la sociedad. Violencia social. Educación y resistencia. Educación política.

This essay presents reflections on social violence and its manifestations at school. This is a relationship that can never be neglected, as education also contains the social trends that replicate violence, aggressiveness, and barbarism.

There is no doubt that education is a powerful instrument for confronting and counteracting the institutionalized violence pervasive in various spheres of society. Whether in everyday domestic life, professional environments, public spaces, or within the digital realm — particularly on social networks where individuals and organizations apparently share values but also harbor potential hostility toward certain individuals or groups —, the presence of socialized violence and the ensuing tensions are easily noticeable in such spaces.

Given the extent of the phenomenon, which has an unlimited potential for destroying lives and bonds that make social life dynamic, education becomes even more relevant, as it carries the hope that it will be possible, through education, to reverse this overwhelming trend. On the other hand, it is in fact also widely known that educational institutions, including and notably the school, serves as arena for violent practices especially against people who do not conform to conventional norms due to their characteristics, or for being fragile, vulnerable and/or the ones who deviate from the standards considered acceptable (gays, lesbians, transsexuals, fat, blacks, women, people with disabilities, children, among others). This also includes the spreading of aggressiveness while coping with conflicts and problems of all sorts among managers, teachers, students, and their families — in relation to each other and among themselves.

Therefore, there is a relation between social violence and school violence that can never be neglected. In essence, the latter is an expression and a type of manifestation of the former. Thus, although education can be geared towards confronting violence, aggressiveness and barbarism in all its forms, an argument to be discussed later, precisely because of the existing links between school and society, and in order not to incur in a naive stance, it is essential to keep in mind Adorno's (1995) warning: if, on the one hand, it is necessary to oppose barbarism, especially in school, through the awareness that its organization and functioning can lead both teachers and students to be violent, which makes it "[...] possible for some undertaking through education and enlightenment." (Adorno, 1995, p. 138, our translation), on the other hand, it must be acknowledged that this institution has minimal possibilities of achieving this:

> [...] one shouldn't forget that the key for a decisive transformation lies with society and its relationship with the school. However, in this context, the school is not a

mere object. My generation experienced the regression of humanity to barbarism, in its literal, unspeakable and true sense. This is a situation that unveils the failure of all those configurations for which school is worthwhile. As long as society generates barbarism from itself, the school is only minimally able to resist it. (Adorno, 1995, p. 116, our translation)

Considering exactly how powerless individuals are in the face of the objective reality shaped by economic power and by social groups benefiting from it, the author argues that those interested and militant in the fight against violence and oppression "[...] direct all their energy so that education will be an education for contradiction and resistance" (Adorno, 1995, p. 183, our translation). Along with this understanding, it seems fundamental to make considerations about some social trends that constitute the stimuli to the violent behaviors and actions of individuals within and outside the school.

Before that, just a clarification on the relation between means and ends regarding violence. On more than one occasion, the authors of the first generation of critical theory, who serve as reference for the reflections elaborated in this paper, established a crucial distinction among the different motivations for violence. In general, we could assert that the purposes of violence are fundamentally power and domination, essentially aligning with acts of oppression. But there is a form of violence, which is exactly a reaction against these established structures that aims at the resistance and emancipation of those who perform the first type of violence. From correspondence exchanged in 1969, Marcuse (1999a, p. 100, our translation) emphasizes this point to Adorno: there is the "violence of liberation" that cannot be interpreted in the same way as "violence of oppression" . From his end, Adorno agrees with his pen partner. In the conversation with Hellmut Becker in 1968, which originated the article "A educação contra a barbárie" [Education against barbarism], the author asserts:

I suspect that barbarism exists wherever there is a regression to primitive physical violence, devoid a clear alignment with rational goals in a society where there is, therefore, an identification with the eruption of physical violence. On the other hand, in instances where violence leads to very embarrassing situations within clear contexts for the generation of more dignified human conditions, violence cannot be condemned as barbarism. (Adorno, 1995, p. 159, our translation)

Another author who proposes the same distinction is Walter Benjamin (2013). In an article discussing law and violence, the author indicates his agreement with the assertion that there are moments when the use of violence is legitimate, precisely because it embodies a tool or tactic for those fighting against oppression and the tendency within modern (bourgeois) society to establish a monopoly on the right to use violence, even if that means perpetuating injustice. The examples mentioned are the proletarian strike and revolutionary violence, which aim to achieve a fair, good, and dignified life.

It is acknowledged that the discussion on the relationship between means and ends of violence requires deeper exploration, something that goes beyond the scope of this work, hence it is essential to address the question of who should decide on "[...] the legitimacy of means and the righteousness of the ends [...]" (Benjamin, 2013, p. 146, our translation). Indeed, it is a historical task: to merge universal principles, forged over time through historical and political processes by various peoples and subjected to rational scrutiny, by experience, inclinations, interests and necessities of societies, groups, and citizens, all living in interaction with one another. In any case, we consider the discussion, herein brought forward, fundamental since on many occasions social movements

that act against forms of oppression and violence are severely repressed and criminalized, precisely because their actions are framed in some form of violence (against State power, private property, public order etc.).

The choice for critical theory is driven by the timeliness of the analysis made by the authors of late capitalism. The themes investigated by these scholars, among others, are diverse, showcasing the breadth of this thinking perspective. One can mention the concern around the media, the cultural industry, and the processes of subjectivation (Antunes and Maia, 2018; Zuin and Gomes, 2019), the violence and prejudice in education (Crochick, 2016), the interrelationships between culture, art, and aesthetics (Duarte, 2007). It is noteworthy the publication of various dossiers scrutinizing the critical theory and addressing the challenges of the 21st century. As it is the case of *Theodor W. Adorno: a atualidade da crítica*, which gathers international congress papers (Souza *et al.*, 2017). Other collections are: *Dissonância. Dossiê Herbert Marcuse* (Dissonância, 2018); *Dissonância. Dossiê Theodor W. Adorno* (Dissonância, 2019); and *Revista Dialectus. Dossiê Herbert Marcuse* (Revista Dialectus, 2019).

This work reinforces that critical theory is a powerful tool for analyzing current issues (the power of the mass media, the resurgence of fascism and authoritarianism, the influence of technology on subjectivation, etc.). On the other hand, some scholars who duel with other strong critical perspectives, as in the publication *Dissonância. Dossiê teoria decolonial e teoria crítica* (Dissonância, 2020). These bring the critical theory key concepts closer not only the theme of decoloniality, but also racism and feminism.

VIOLENCE AND ITS NEXUS WITH THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Violence is inherent to capitalism, but there is the unique Brazilian aspect of it. It is arguable that violence has also shaped the sociability in the country. In this paper, showing how this phenomenon has been configured since colonial times isn't feasible; it only highlights that authoritarianism in Brazil is one of the elements that support structural and institutionalized violence. To verify this claim, one simply needs to mention that during the process of redemocratization (1980s–1990s), human rights violations perpetrated by the military were overlooked (Nascimento, 2022), a trend that is becoming increasingly normalized. Another factor, associated with the previous one, is the fear of violence, exploited by the extreme right wing (Lima *et al.* 2020), which catalyzes authoritarian trends.

Schwarcz's (2019) book serves as a valuable resource to understand the correlations between violence and authoritarianism in Brazil. According to the author, slavery, racism, patrimonialism, corruption, social inequality, sexism, and intolerance are intertwined elements that significantly define Brazil in the 21st century, since all of them are problems and situations still unresolved. Hence the difficulty of democracy actually being established, and violence combated.

To reflect upon the social trends that constitute the stimuli for violence, we turn to certain formulations by Herbert Marcuse that aid in understanding how the capitalism's objectivity in its current stage, especially the intense concentration of means of production within powerful business and economic conglomerates, the extreme disparity between economically developed and undeveloped countries, which impacts directly on the inequality between social classes and between different social segments (men and women, whites and blacks, national and immigrants, executives and salaried workers operating in precarious conditions etc.). Additionally, it addresses the substantial population lacking access to fundamental life necessities like food, healthcare, education, housing, and leisure in numerous nations.

These are concepts elaborated by the author with the objective of analyzing the consequences of the development of the capitalist economy throughout the 20th century, considering the two

great wars (1914–1918 and 1939–1945) as an intrinsic phenomenon to this process, and pointing out the elements that constitute the ideology of the industrial society. For Marcuse (1969), the capitalism during the second half of the 20th century, that is, the economic system developed and fueled by scientific and technological advancements that extended itself to the scope of culture, turning its cultural goods in commodities and an extremely profitable business, tends to produce the unidimensional and totalitarian society. Unidimensional because alternatives to the established order are prevented from developing, even those originated within the same order,[1] which leads to the imposition and obligation of compliant acceptance of the course of material progress advocated on the basis of private interests imposed by ideology and violence; totalitarian because it imposes conformist integration, even in so-called democratic societies, to dominant social trends; opposition, organized or not, conscious or not, to the way and lifestyle in accordance with such interests is also violently repressed, either by the police forces, the judicial system, or the existence of certain social practices, including at school, which exclude from political debate and social life those who exactly represent the alternatives to consecrated standards. Examples to illustrate this situation are unnecessary; it suffices to highlight the violence and repression faced by social movements and certain groups of people, who, merely due to their existence, embody alternatives that must be stifled.[2]

Following these broader considerations, a notable concept derived from Herbert Marcuse's (1999a) way of thinking emerges: aggressiveness and destructiveness as inseparable companions of advanced capitalism. In countries where this economic system has thrived, a convergence of trends is noticeable — a blend of abundant production and improvement of the population's average standard of living, even if this has not changed the situation of social inequality in countries like Brazil. On the other hand, there is also an increase in individuals engaged in unproductive occupations, the orchestrated obsolescence of goods and services, the concentration of political and economic power, the high degree of social control and the manipulation of the citizens' behavior. This entire situation, despite yielding material advantages, resulted in what Marcuse (1969) calls the closure of the political universe and rhetoric.

We witness the confinement and suppression of political forces, which significantly impacts the psychological and instinctual life: individuals experience a growing sense of confinement within a lifestyle they feel unable to escape, running the risk of being unable to enjoy the achievements of civilization. If the masses find themselves in emotional distress, experiencing the anguish realization of limited options and fearing that any deviation from the "normal" functioning of society could prove fatal; and if economic development, guided by capital, hinges solely on the binomial progress and destruction — asserting dominance over nature, individuals, and entire societies through aggressiveness and violence —, then a striking observation arises. Alongside the tendency towards widespread destructiveness (inherent in capitalism), there emerges a parallel tendency that feeds and is fed by the previous one: psychological destructiveness.

> [...] our current society is distinguished by a prevailing destructive character structure within its individual members. But how can we discuss such a phenomenon? How can we identify the destructive character structure in our current society? I would like to suggest that certain symbolic events, symbolic issues, symbolic actions, illustrate and illuminate the profound dimension of society. This is the dimension

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1   As an example of the exploration of other forms of urban mobility, in addition to the automobile as a means of individual transportation.

2   In many of these cases, violence and repression can lead to the death of those who defy the norms, a stark reality readily evident with a quick glance at the daily news reports.

in which society replicates itself in the consciousness of individuals and likewise in their unconsciousness. This profound dimension is one of the foundations for upholding the existing political and economic order of society. [...] the prevalent destructive character structure in our society should be comprehended within the context of institutionalized destructibility, evident in both foreign and internal affairs [in countries]. The notoriety of institutionalized destructibility is evident, and examples of this are easily provided. It includes the constant increase in the military budget at the expense of social welfare, the proliferation of nuclear facilities, the general poisoning and pollution of the environment, the blatant subordination of human rights to the demands of the global strategy, and the threat of war in the event of challenging this strategy. This institutionalized destruction is both open and legitimate. It provides the context in which the individual replication of destructibility occurs. (Marcuse, 1999a, p. 144-145, our translation)

The provided excerpt sufficiently illustrates the inherent nexus between objectivity and subjectivity in the construction of social reality. Attention is drawn to the fact that the general context of destructiveness, of which Marcuse (1999a) mentions, also seems to be the result of how individuals deal with the constant repression to which they are subjected, fearing the imminent destruction, objectively real in a world permeated by wars and environmental threats, and with the psychic energy spent on self-preservation; the illusory sense of security and stability, offered by economic development, material progress, technological and scientific advancement, cannot resolve the factors that produce such destructiveness.

Besides the threats to life's sustenance and systematic repression, there is also the unequal and unbalanced distribution of social wealth and opportunities to access the material and cultural output generated by civilization. Hence, the self-centered pursuit of immediate self-preservation intertwines with the prevailing trend of the economic model in force, namely: aggression and violence wielded by isolated individuals and powerful groups, seeking to satisfy petty and personal interests, are aligned with the predatory, expansionist and imperialist nature of the capitalist exploitation of both natural and human resources; such individuals and groups seamlessly assimilate and enhance their prospects within social, political and productive devices, to the detriment of those who, in class-based societies, integration and adaptation are often systematically hindered a considerable portion, if not the majority, of the populations of societies where violence is one of its constituent elements are prevented and access to the minimum conditions of insertion in the economic order and social life is prohibited. As for advanced capitalism, to continue its development, needs to be nourished by this aggressive and violent social behavior, because it is precisely by this means that expansion occurs. Through the increasing exploitation of human (alienated) labor and nature, the continuous accumulation and replication of capital (increasingly concentrated within a handful of corporations, groups, and people) are guaranteed.

Among other aspects, this configuration, briefly described, explains the existence of attitudinal tendencies and behaviors that can be referred to as selfish individualism, coldness and indifference towards the others and the diversity, as well as conformist cynicism, which assumes the impossibility of changing the order of things. For those troubled by bad conscience, there is still a feeling of superiority towards the unfortunate, which can be alleviated by pious and charitable actions, and yet these actions do not change the situation analyzed here; the exact opposite occurs: the forms of religious or civic charity reinforce and justify the social hierarchy resulting from the extreme and brutal economic inequality between classes and between strata of the population.

Given the aforementioned conditions, it is possible to affirm that the "social cohesion" emerged from these conditions, where violence is encouraged and rewarded, is permeated by tensions and

conflicts that tend to culminate in irrational outbursts of aggressiveness of all against all. On the one hand, there are very effective forms of control and repression, through the enforcement of obedience to social norms, enforcement of terrible sanctions and penalties for the one who defies any norms; on the other hand, there is the criminal license in relation to irrational behaviors, such as acts of violence against specific individuals committed by people gathered in groups or protected by the anonymity and virtuality of digital social networks operating on the web.

There is no doubt that this whole complex set of factors produces the psychological deformation of individuals, making sense to resort to the not at all sympathetic and obvious jargon that in violent societies we have violent individuals. Marcuse (2018, p. 25-26, our translation), in an essay published in 1967, points out the implications of this process in which the individual and society tend to remain in symbiosis:

> As for the systematic manipulation and control of the psyche in advanced industrial society: manipulation and control for what and by whom? Beyond all personal manipulation in the interest of certain businesses, policies, and lobbies — the general objective purpose is to reconcile the individual with the mode of existence that their society imposes on them. [...] social needs must become individual needs, instinctive needs. And to the extent that the productivity of their society requires mass production and mass consumption, these needs must be standardized, coordinated, and generalized. [...] These brief observations suggest the depth of society's entry into the psyche, insofar as mental well-being, normality, is not that of the individual, but of one's society. Such harmony between the individual and society would be highly desirable if society offered the individual the conditions for their development as a human being according to the available possibilities of freedom, peace, and happiness (that is, according to the possible liberation of his life instincts), but it is highly destructive to the individual if these conditions do not prevail.

Therefore, the political, social, and economic apparatus, as it employs repressive and violent control over the private and instinctual lives of individuals, prompts more violence, which reinforces the logic that fuels capitalism: the irrational exploitation of resources for the selfish guarantee of economic success. One might notice "[...] the marks of a mutilated human being who collaborates with their own repression, hindering the potential for both individual and social freedom, by allowing aggression expansion" (Marcuse, 2018, p. 26, our translation). These are the terms which lay the foundations for defining the near-fatal contradiction of advanced capitalist societies: they are extremely rational, as they produce and mobilize the highest material resources (scientific, technical, and technological), with the potential to be used for the benefit of people and humanity, but, at the same time, they are irrational, since economic planning and calculation are not done according to human needs and society in general and because they are not under the control of individuals and the community, but of powerful economic groups and authoritarian governments. The consequences are stark: widespread violence and aggressiveness, income concentration, orchestrated waste and obsolescence, natural resource depletion, social inequality and extreme poverty alongside admirable wealth, deliberate and "rational" planning of exclusion, marginalization and extermination of people and human groups (especially those who pose barriers to the unimpeded reproduction of the social order, and those whose existence and resistance highlight the limits and illusion of capitalist material progress, with regard to the promotion of social justice, equality, and freedom).

This whole situation seems to be a result of the way economic rationality and social domination converged. If the survival imperative and self-preservation imposes conformist integration to societal

standards (work, values, behavior etc.), as means to achieve semblance of security and stability; and if such integration proves unattainable for large population contingents, due to direct correlation between the surge in social wealth and its private concentration, preserving of the *status quo* requires measures that enhance control over the masses. Although it is possible to identify fundamental forms of resistance to this overwhelming onslaught of capital and social segments that traditionally maintain privileged positions of power — such as anti-racist, anti-capital, feminist struggles (against machismo and patriarchy), for human and social rights, environment protection, in favor of tribals, indigenous nations, among others —, a rationality of domination that brings together the use of technology and terror is underway.

As for the first, a consolidated trend that enforces the adherence, by the people, to efficient performances at work. To some extent, this indicates that individualization has been reduced to the ability to adapt to the evolving technological apparatus. Thus, "[…] individual distinctions of aptitude, perception and knowledge are transformed into different degrees of expertise and training, to be coordinated at any time within the common framework of standardized performances" (Marcuse, 1999b, p. 78, our translation). Hence rationality emerges as technology — defined as the deliberate, systematic application of scientific knowledge to material production (Marx, 1985) — drives towards enhanced productivity and capitalist accumulation. This rationality pervades and molds work dynamics, social interactions, and even individuality, reshaping it into a state less inclined towards freedom and autonomy but rather yearning for "standardized efficiency", and by the ability to select "[…] the most efficient means to achieve goals they (the individual) often didn't define themselves" (Marcuse, 1999b, p. 78, our translation).

As for terror and the permanent threat, which become an empirical experience with the repression exercised by the holders of political and economic power and with the self-restraint, by individuals, of certain propensities, attitudes and behaviors that pose as risks for the one choosing for free expression, the production of fear is observed. Which means more than a feeling or sensation, since it involves the ways of behaving, facing, and acting in the face of the unknown and the non-identical. This is another evidence of the irrationality of advanced industrial societies, unfolding in the psychological regression of the masses, and the "rational" character of their irrationality, because it is extremely efficient and effective for the purpose of domination. In this regard, Marcuse (1969, p. 14, our translation) serves once again as reference:

> […] this society is irrational as a whole. Its productivity destroys the free development of human needs and faculties; its peace maintained by the constant threat of war; its growth dependent on the repression of the real possibilities of mitigating the struggle for existence. This repression […] does not operate nowadays from a position of natural and technical immaturity, but from strength. The (intellectual and material) aptitudes of contemporary society are immeasurably greater than ever before — which means that the scope of society's domination over the individual is immeasurably greater than ever before.

In addition to the extreme power over the individual, the fact that this society is characterized as class-based: prevailing antagonisms and contradictions that cannot be overcome internally or based on the logic of domination; inequalities are intrinsic to the social division of labor and its corollary, that is, access to material and cultural goods is systematically denied to social segments as a whole; finally, class-based society, in the current stage of advanced capitalism, seems only to produce based on conflicts, on the aggressiveness of those seeking a place in the sun and socialized violence. These are the elements that allow us to state that, even in among formal democracies, capitalist economic development has produced and replicated tendencies that can be referred to

totalitarianism, especially regarding forms of control and repression over individuals (organized in political groups and associations or not).

From all the aforementioned, it is also essential to weave a final reflection on the rationality of domination that operates by combining repression, manipulation, and violence, considering what was highlighted in the previous paragraphs: the articulation of technological rationality with terror. Again, we turn to the formulations of Herbert Marcuse. In his works *Eros e civilização* [*Eros and civilization*] (Marcuse, 1972, originally published in 1955) and *Ideologia da sociedade industrial* [*Ideology of industrial society*] (originally published in 1955), the author emphasizes, predominantly, the power of the productive, institutional and cultural apparatuses to promote conformism and the willingness of individuals themselves to actively integrate into the social and economic order — the fact presented is the ability of capitalism to incorporate and neutralize opposition, especially the labor movement, which relinquished its revolutionary essence, something that occurred throughout the 20th century. This is an analysis that has as reference the expansion of access to goods and services to most of the population in affluent societies or with high economic development under capitalism, which can be observed in the following excerpt:

> The productive apparatus and the goods and services it produces "sell" or impose the social system as a whole. [...] Products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness that is immune to their falsehood. Once these beneficial products reach a wider array of individuals and social classes, the inherent indoctrination they carry transcends mere advertising; it becomes a lifestyle. It is a good lifestyle — much better than before — and, as a good lifestyle, it acts against qualitative transformation. (Marcuse, 1969, p. 32, our translation)

The author emphasizes that, even with the maintenance of the class structure and the material distance between them, the different and antagonistic social groups tend to approach each other in terms of psychological dispositions. Marcuse also highlights that such a configuration is made feasible not only by technological rationality and its ideology of integration, but also through the exertion of control over the populations of peripheral and impoverished nations, which, at that time, were fighting for their emancipation, particularly in Africa and Asia.

DESTRUCTIVENESS AND SHAPING OF THE INDIVIDUAL

In writings from the late 1960s onwards — especially the essays "Agressividade em sociedades industriais avançadas" [Aggressiveness in advanced industrial societies] (originally published in 1967) and "Ecologia e crítica da sociedade moderna" [Ecology and criticism of modern society] (originally published in 1977) —, that same author seems to notice an important change, that is, Marcuse exposes a difference in the way he observes the prospects for integration between the so-called democratic societies in the Western world and in the peripheral regions within the capitalist framework. Additionally, he appears to identify signs of exhaustion of the economic model prevailing since the 1950s: for some, the included ones, benefiting from the welfare state and full employment, adaptation seems achievable by conforming to the system and showcasing efficient performance within its apparatus. For others, the excluded and marginalized ones, who don't reap the benefits of civilizing achievements, as well as populations of impoverished nations, escaping this very same submission and integration isn't an option. This adaptation proves both unattainable and undesirable, given that the concentration of income and limited circulation of wealth persist as glaring features of economic development. In essence, the resort to violence and aggressiveness, whether organized or not, to safeguard private interests, escalates due to the scarcity or absence of opportunities for

integration into an increasingly repressive social structure. This system offers fewer rewards for the sacrifices and concessions that every civilized individual must endure. The author further notes that, in addition to traditional forms of aggression, there exist other methods leveraging the available technical and technological resources, such as automobiles and missiles etc. The author thus refers to this process as such:

> The machine: the word suggests that an apparatus consisting of human beings can be replaced by the mechanical apparatus: the bureaucracy, the administration, the party or organization is the responsible agent: I, the individual, have only been instrumentalized. And as an instrument it cannot, in any moral sense, bear responsibility or be accountable for guilt. Thus, another barrier against the aggression, previously erected by civilization through a lengthy and violent process, is dismantled. And the expansion of advanced capitalism becomes entangled in a fatal psychic dialectic that contributes to and propels its economic and political dynamics: the more powerful and "technological" aggression becomes, the less it appears to satisfy and calm primary instincts. Instead, it tends to perpetuate and escalate. (Marcuse, 2018, p. 36-37, our translation)

The general purpose of the one-dimensional, totalitarian society managed in the favor of monopolistic capital and the concentration of political and economic power is evident, in which the rationality of domination predominates: to integrate individuals and subject them to an imposed mode of existence, especially by compelling them internalize specific (rather than universal) social needs as individual impulses.[3] This manufactured coincidence between the objectivity of capitalist aggression and the weakened subjectivity of the powerless individual doesn't occur without psychological upheavals conflicts. To shed light on this, we turn to Adorno's (1994) insights regarding the manipulation and deception cultivated within the cultural industry. The author posits an encouragement and exploitation of the vulnerabilities within the Self, aiming to "[...] turning an adult into an 11-year-old child" (Adorno, 1994, p. 98, our translation). Despite any success in such an undertaking, there lingers a certain unconscious suspicion that something doesn't align with what could and should actually be, with genuine potentialities failing to emerge amid a life marked by sacrifice and repression. In essence, "[...] the masses have long ceased to perceive and accept the world as it is crafted for them by the cultural industry" (*ibidem*, p. 98, our translation). Such a scenario can generate transgression and resistance, fostering social transformation. However, it also serves as a source of psychic suffering, imprinting, in both conscious and unconscious realms, a sense of impotence against the overwhelming force of objective reality. In fact, this is how ideology imposes itself, ratifying the existing social established order, perceived, with a high degree of accuracy, as practically eternal, immutable, and almighty. "Ideology is no longer a wrapping, but the threatening image of the world itself. Not only due to its interconnections with propaganda, but also because of its inherent configuration, it becomes terror" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1973, p. 203, our translation).

The cited authors in this last excerpt emphasize that individuals who have adapted and conformed, benefiting even minimally from social wealth and goods facilitated by civilizational advancement, recognize a state of generalized restlessness within themselves, an outcome of a social order that relies solely on stringent control to sustain its reproduction. If this can be applied to this group of "benefited" people, what about the countless women and men who aren't as "fortunate" and lack even the fundamental necessities of life (security, housing, healthcare, food,

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3   To illustrate this, we turn to the phenomenon of many people's compulsion for technological products that embody the idea of innovation and the permanent need for material progress, converted into "indisputable" values of modern societies.

education); this group grows continuously, propelled by the global, increasingly accentuated trend of concentrating socially generated wealth. In addition to psychological dissatisfaction, we live in a permanent state of struggle for survival.

In any case, there appears to be a prevailing situation where individuals, deformed and distorted within their psyche, grapple with a sense of discontent without a clear resolution. This occurs because the minimum distinction between inner and outer realms fades under the pressures of adaptation and the pursuit of efficient performance, often deviating from personal aspirations. Along this erasure comes the dissolution or alleviation of the inherent tension experienced by those struggling to keep some semblance of relative autonomy from objective reality. This inherent tension within individuals, coupled with the organized political action of groups and social classes, constitutes two of the essential elements that have historically driven social transformations. However, in the one-dimensional society of advanced capitalism, opposition stemming from nonconformist inclinations tends to be stifled and nonconformists tend to be either assimilated or eradicated. Thus, a feeling of revolt remains.

Thus, we witness the convergence of the capitalism's inherent violence with the escalating surge of aggression, enhanced by technical, technological, and scientific advancement — there are many instruments, progressively developed, used to perpetrate both (social violence and individual aggression). According to Marcuse (2018), the driving energy is redirected towards mechanical, electrical, electronic devices, among others, impacting the psyche, since aggression isn't solely reliant on the use of physical force and direct contact with the victim, but on utilization of intellect in finding the best and most efficient means to deploy violence without the aggressor getting his hands dirty. The author's hypothesis is that the driving satisfaction is thus reduced and finally interrupted. The replication and escalation of aggression stem from this ongoing quest for gratification that is never fulfilled. The persistent frustration continuous because the root cause of the problem — the repressive and castrating social order — is never addressed. Moreover, the feeling of guilt, which could inhibit violence, is weakened as aggression is mediated by the technological, political, and technological apparatuses. Therefore, besides failing to provide effective political action to curb immediate, direct, and routine aggression towards social interactions (such as domestic violence and against women, along with fatalities from traffic accidents), technological rationality converts aggression into rational and institutionalized action of the State and the bureaucratic and political apparatus.

> [...] the use of aggressive tools is as old as civilization itself, yet a crucial distinction exists between technological aggression and the most primitive forms. The latter not only differed quantitatively — being weaker — but it required a significantly greater degree bodily activation and engagement compared to the automatic or semi-automatic instruments of aggression. The knife, the "sledgehammer", and even the revolver are much more "intertwined" with the individual using them, fostering a closer connection to their intended target. [...] In contrast, technological aggression is not a crime. The high-speed driver of an automobile or motorboat is not called a murderer even if he is so; and certainly missile-launch engineers are not. [...] The new modes of aggression destroy without aggressors getting their hands dirty, their body dirty, their mind incriminated. The killer remains clean, both physically and mentally. The purity of his mortal work gains additional sanction if it is directed against the national enemy in the national interest. (Marcuse, 2018, p. 38, our translation)

Through repetition *ad nauseam* of aggression, individuals attempt, without achieving, to alleviate their pains and sufferings. And it is precisely this that sustains the established society, which

in turn promises but fails to fulfill freedom, autonomy, justice, happiness, and the satisfaction of individual needs. The way in which efforts aim at reducing social tensions (through the creation of fragile and false consensuses) alongside the handling of conflicts through repression, punishment and coercion, breed dissatisfaction. This also fosters an annoying feeling that very little can be accomplished to change society, precisely because the imposition of submission of the Self renders the individual feeling powerless. But that is not all: the individual, reliant and submissive to the technological and political apparatus, is compelled to annihilate the other (metaphorically and literally); therefore, nearly insurmountable obstacles arise to free and spontaneous experience with the non-identical, which would be of great value for the development and strengthening of the mature Self. Instead, integration, adaptation, obedience, and subjection are enforced, which leads to inertia, not because of harmony with the whole, but stemming from the decline of human faculties and consciousness regarding one's impotence in the face of the natural and social world. The imperative "let me protect myself, there is nothing I can do" seems to prevail. Often, protection and aggression are reduced to one another.

POLITICAL EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE

Following on and recalling what was just announced at the beginning of this essay — even with all the limitations and obstacles that surround the educational action of schools, it is possible to accomplish something, to oppose and face violence through education, as long as it assumes a political connotation or, in Adorno's (1995, p. 137, our translation) words, "[…] the center of all political education should be the prevention of another Auschwitz. This will only be possible to the extent that it tackles the most important issues without fear of contradicting any powers." —, insights into the relationship between violence and education are presented through the lens of some formulations by the authors of the critical theory (Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse). Rather than the following set constituting a pedagogical theory to guide teaching practice, the purpose is to produce a reflection that enables envisioning ways to strengthen one of the historical objectives of school education,[4] namely: political education aimed at fostering social consciousness entwined with self-awareness, intellectual growth, and personality development in opposition to the ideology of the school, which stipulates two extreme positions regarding the relationship between school and the social world (Adorno, 1995).

The first stance deals with the need for educational establishments to be unrestrictedly open to the outside world, and therefore, consistently seeking to adapt to the demands from society, invariably from the economic and technological scope, which manifests itself in the incessant search, carried out by educators and specialists, to reduce the supposed education lag concerning the advancement of the productive forces and labor development. That, according to Adorno (1995), forces education to renounce aspects of training and assistance crucial to students, once the exposure to corporate obligations is direct and without mediation, consequently conditioning educational action to external sources and without considering the real needs of students and teachers, as well as the potential for cultural renewal present in school spaces. The second stance, on the other hand, establishes that the school's seclusion from social life is a virtue. It suggests that the institution's duty is to shield children and young individuals from certain influences, supposedly,

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4   Historically, the school institution has been acknowledged as the primary locus of education in modern society, which encompasses cultural training, the assimilation of humanistic, technical, and scientific contents and certain political values, such as freedom and democracy. It is also recognized that the very same institution does not always carry out these purposes, quite the contrary, because not only does social violence manifest itself at school, but also its internal dynamics replicates forms of aggressiveness directed at certain groups of people. Even so, its potential to counter barbarism and socialized violence remains alive and could be developed if political education were taken seriously.

ensuring they remain safeguarded from detrimental external forces. Both stances constitute the ideology of the school, whose main characteristic is the concealment of its contradictions, precisely because they do not take education, nowadays, as a form of mediation and a social practice that maintains a relationship with society, and simultaneously keep its own specificity and rationality. It is based on these warnings that the terms in which political education could develop are defined:

> [...] the only effective realization of emancipation is that those few people interested in this direction channel all their energy so that education is an education for contradiction and resistance. [...] Thus, one simply tries to begin by awakening the consciousness that men are permanently deceived, because nowadays the mechanism of the absence of emancipation is the *mundus vult decipi* at planet level, that the world wants to be deceived. Everyone's awareness of these issues could result from the terms of an immanent criticism [...]. (Adorno, 1995, p. 183, our translation)

The author draws attention to two problems to be faced within the education field: the manipulation to which everyone is subjected in the cultural industry, politics, at work, and the persistence of conditions that continuously generate barbarism within civilization, and irrationality within rational actions, especially at the economic level (devastation of natural resources and predatory exploitation of people and natural resources).

The preceding considerations seem sufficient for an understanding of what political education is, as assumed here, and its potential to tackle both social and school violence and aggressiveness. Subsequently, this essay delves into four works of authors who serve as reference to the reflections for its elaboration, namely: insights on educational dictatorship by Marcuse (1964/1969), outlined in the work *One-dimensional man*; Ideias sobre educação política [Ideas on political education] (Horkheimer, 1963/1972); three conferences on education that took place in 1968, 1975 and 1976 (Marcuse, 2020); and *A reforma escolar: um movimento cultural* [*School reform: a cultural movement*] (Benjamin, 1912/1993).[5]

We consider essential for the reflection on the implications of political education in addressing violence, both in school and in other spaces where there is social interaction and deliberate action aimed at shaping the consciousness of individuals, resorting to Herbert Marcuse's (1969) critique of authoritarianism. For him, it is essential to continue questioning "who educates educators?" And precisely because it opposes the tendency inherent in bourgeois culture and education, which has served as an excuse for the domination of the working class and the peoples subjected to European and American imperialism. Since, supposedly, the others (all those who are not subject to dominant social standards and capitalist rationality) are uncivilized, ignorant, savage, etc., it would be legitimate, from this perspective, to force them to convert to the ideals of the Enlightenment. Marcuse's (1969) questioning highlights two aspects:

1. who can assure that the "cults" possess the truth when they are the very entities enforcing and benefiting from domination? And
2. freedom can only be the product and work of those who seek liberation.

These considerations lead to more questions than answers. If emancipation — and the education that facilitates it — isn't orchestrated by a select enlightened few, how is it possible to envision an educational approach that promotes the circumstances for liberation and autonomy

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5 The first date in parentheses refers to the year the paper was written and/or published. The second refers to the year of publication of the consulted works.

among those who have systematically and effectively been and are the object of domination and oppression, since individuals are not free to create the conditions of freedom? Therein lies the core of all political education. Marcuse (1969) also insists that the answer can only be formulated by the individuals themselves, even though they have few tools at their disposal. In a way, education aimed at freedom is already political in itself. In Marcuse's (1969, p. 207, our translation) words about resistance to the irrationality of the system (which we can be extend to education):

> [...] dialectical processes involve consciousness: recognition and seizing of liberating potentialities. Thus, it involves freedom. Consciousness is termed "unfree" when it is molded by the demands and interests of the established society; insofar as the established society is irrational, consciousness becomes free for the highest historical rationality only through the struggle against the established society. Truth and freedom from negative thinking stem from this ongoing struggle.

It is worth drawing attention to the author's criticism the author of what he calls "educational dictatorship": the imposition of values arbitrarily and abstractly defined by those wielding political and economic power. In this sense, education worthy of its name is one that acknowledges and clarifies power relations and structural determinations, while concurrently serving as resistance against forms of oppression and violence.

In line with the concept of political education opposing authoritarianism, Horkheimer (1972) postulates that it doesn't merely prompt students to adhere to specific democratic principles and values, as they often are perceived as hollow, illusory, and even fake, given the tangible reality within and outside the school constantly reveals the fragility and impossibility of actualizing democratic ideals. In this sense, teaching about solidarity, for example, can have the opposite effect in an environment that operates on the basis of competitiveness. Instead of mere rhetoric, in general, resembling moral education, it would be of great value to face education as a social process of fostering conditions and situations contrary to the trends that prevent the achievement of educational purposes, providing the full amplitude of experiencing culture, which is not limited to the content established in the curriculum and school subjects (Horkheimer, 1972).

This should stand as a paramount concern for educators. According to the author, one of the crucial problems is exactly the deficiency in the breadth of experience provided by mass culture and the media. Individuals, including adults, face numerous obstacles that often hinder their capacity to carry out experiments. Such an endeavors requires willingness to do so and on some degree of possible spontaneity, qualities often constrained by impositions that force everyone to perform efficiently. To illustrate the restricted range of experiences provided within school and limited choices imposed on the students, we only must mention two prevalent situations in high school. The first situation concerns the latest curricular reform of this phase of basic education, initiated by the Medida Provisória (Executive Order) (MP 746/2016 — Brasil, 2016a) and ratified by the National Congress — conversion of the MP into a Bill (PVL 34/2016 — Brasil, 2016b). As a result, we have the so-called New High School, which stipulates to students the choice and definition of different training itineraries. Attention is drawn to the fact that young people aged 14 or 15 are "choosing" a certain path at the expense of others, indicating a clear limitation of their experiences at school.

The second situation refers to a Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, a Ciência e a Cultura (UNESCO) recommendation, expressed in the document released more than a decade ago, *Educação Artística e Cultural nas Escolas da Europa* [*Road Map for Arts Education*] (Eurycide; EACEA, 2010). The text explicitly suggests that art education and exposure to diverse cultural expressions should align with the concern of preparing young people for the supposed complexity of the employment world. This view is observed from the restructuring of the capitalist

mode of production and manufacturing processes in the last decades of the twentieth century, which imposed the development of skills, abilities, and knowledge in tune with this "new" reality. This restructuring increasingly demanded inventive and creative workers, characteristics that could be promoted in contact with such content. Here as well, there is a restriction in experiences due to the instrumentalization of artistic and cultural education in school, which must always follow a predetermined direction beforehand.

The breadth of experience, to which Horkheimer (1972) refers, depends on a political education that transcends mere appropriation of certain formal contents and adjustment to the social order, unlike the conventional formula "education for citizenship". If all this is crucial for life in society, it is equally essential to provide the necessary deepening of the technical domain, the ability to deal with the social and natural world and foster intellectual and personality development. And this is achievable not by prematurely forcing students to choose predefined the path, but by expanding and enriching their relationships with the other and the non-identical, in essence, with all the diversity that characterizes the human experience.

On the other hand, political education is responsible for unveiling all forms of domination, oppression, and violence; that is if it takes seriously the objective of creating the conditions for fighting racism, prejudice of all kinds, fascism, misogyny, LGBTIphobia, machismo, etc., as well as revealing how people are and can be manipulated, even when democracy seems to work. Likewise, it is essential to highlight the psychological aspects prompting individuals to advocate interests that are contrary and alien to their own, especially when they are subjected to persuasive and convincing strategies exploiting their weaknesses. Finally, what Horkheimer (1972) emphasizes is the need to show the students that many individual reactions are projections aimed at hiding our limitations, imputing to others what is negative in us. The problem is that in doing so, the individual is adhering to interests that are not their own, since they have been systematically manipulated and deceived to block the possibility of uncovering the real reasons for their difficulties.

From another perspective, although with many points in common with Horkheimer, Marcuse (2020) also emphasizes that one of the ways to reverse the prevailing trend in society (and in school) is to facilitate political education, that is, an education not aligned with the destructive trends inherent in capitalist economic model. Firstly, it would be necessary to reorient teacher training, so that teachers become individuals incapable of tolerating violence and aware of its objective causes, by being educated and self-educating themselves to resist and fight for a pacified form of existence.

For the author, education is contradictory, as it contends with two opposing forces: one that supports and another that opposes the established order. The risk lies in education entirely falling under the control of aggressive and regressive tendencies, a scenario evident in the relentless attempts of ultraconservative and reactionary sectors to have total control over the teachers' work. They justify this control by accusing them to allegedly engage in indoctrination related to sexuality, political orientation, and religion. It is therefore necessary to mobilize forces against these tendencies, resisting and unveiling the facades of neutrality, objectivity, intellectual freedom, and tolerance present in educational institutions. In other words, it is not possible for educators to align themselves ethically other than in favor of Eros (life) versus Thanatos (death) (Marcuse, 2020).

Marcuse's reference is the university, and he advocates for an education that is politically oriented and resistant to the irrationality of the economic system. Thus, research that reinforces the model of aggressiveness against nature, other peoples, and social groups other than the hegemonic ones, as well as research that serves only to increase the profits and productivity of industry, without any consideration for other factors, such as the extinction of inequality, should not be allowed. It is also necessary to prevent the spread of racist, sexist, imperialist educational actions, programs, and policies that reinforce economic exploitation and social domination. In this regard, it is essential

to teach and research on social movements and initiatives to challenge the established order, in addition to "[...] critical and radical theories in history, literature and philosophy, including heresies and other persecuted movements [...]" (*ibidem*, p. 40, free translation from Spanish), as well as the critical analysis of fascism and imperialism. For the author, political education is that which highlights the intolerance of aggressive and destructive movements (*ibidem*).

Furthermore, university reform should introduce a new concept of learning and teaching, as well as an existential commitment to human emancipation and the fight against everything that contributes to the perpetuation of destruction, violence, oppression, and inequality:

> We insist on the objectivity of this purpose. The common interest of all people, not just the proletariat! [...] We want to learn the facts and how to interpret them, but we want to learn all the facts, especially those that are usually suppressed or hidden. In short, we want to learn more, not less. We don't want to destroy established educational institutions, but to rebuild them. Not de-schooling society, but re-schooling it. (*ibidem*, p. 49, free translation from Spanish)

Marcuse (2020) outlines the framework for university reform to take place, acknowledging the growing demand for educated individuals possessing some technical, technological and/or scientific qualification, imposed by the advance of the productive forces, increasingly reliant on the efficient work performance. This push coincides with a substantial rise in both unemployed and underemployed mass, representing two facets of the same coin labeled as progress; the other coin presents the production of material wealth and destruction of natural resources. The implementation of the reform designed by the author stands as a way to resist not only economic trends but also the aggression and inherent violence perpetuated by these trends.

To conclude, just one more small note on the same topic, dear to another thinker in the Critical Theory, Walter Benjamin. In 1912, still in his youth, the author stated that school reform is also a cultural movement. For him, if the education that takes place in educational establishments, in mass society, is obviously aimed at the new generations, then it is precisely in the permanent tension between teachers and students that the true richness of the educational process lies. On the one hand, the school promotes education through the dissemination of culture and the promotion of knowledge, values and principles that increase and intensify the progressive development of humanity, thus sustaining culture itself; on the other hand, for such development to happen, there is a need for constant renewal – it is this process that would propel dynamism to school and to culture, that is, the tension between what is established and what is to come.

Now, it is the students who carry the essence of renewal into the school because, more than the teachers – who might shield themselves from the increasingly institutionalized nature of formal education – they are the custodians of evolving trends in culture and society. This doesn't mean that we should immediately turn innovation and renewal into positive values and desirable objectives. However, it does indicate that in education, conflicts should not be neutralized by strategies that, most of the time, instead of solving them, only obscure their visibility and/or establish false consensus. That's why we can't turn our back on social issues, especially considering their presence within schools, affecting both the teachers' work and students' socialization. This is the essence of school reform, understood as a cultural movement, advocated by Benjamin (1993, p. 51-52, free translation from Spanish):

> The closest link between culture and school reform lies with young people. The school is an institution charged with preserving for humanity the heritage it has produced and conquered, continuously offering it to the new generations. That's not all: the

> school stores the past, although it must look at what is current. But facing the future, it can only offer strict attention and deep respect for the new. Conversely, it's the youth, to whom the school dedicate is services, that presents the institution with the future. The new generations are influenced by the school; they are insecure about everything that is real and everything that concerns their consciousness. They are probably selfish and ignorant, spontaneous, and uneducated (which is why they must attend school). However, they find themselves immersed in the essence of what anticipates the future. And the culture of the future is the school's only goal, and for that reason, it must nurture the future inherent within the youth. It must even allow youth to be themselves: it must enable and boost freedom. For these reasons, the most urgent need of modern pedagogy is none other than the creation of an adequate space for culture to develop itself.

For the author, while the school can offer the past to new generations, the youth in turn offers the future to the school. This would be the motto of school and cultural reform and political education. Students as protagonists alongside educators, because only in this way they will enjoy the full spectrum of experience. If the future is the school's goal, then its educational and political action implies providing and boosting freedom of children, adolescents, and young people. This freedom emerges from engaging with culture, with diversity, with imagination, with spontaneity, with the non-identical, with the conflicts, tensions and crises generated within the school, which, in turn, is the result of the formation process lived to the full.

Finally, we cannot harbor the illusion that the implementation of political education, in terms and principles advocated here, will be enough to cease aggression from claiming millions of victims around the world. As elucidated here, the roots and motivations of social violence lie in objective reality and dominance of an economic model that continually imposes the struggle for survival and self-preservation. Therefore, echoing once again Adorno's (1995) words on the relationship between individual and society, between objective conditions and subjectivity, the key to transformation lies in both objectivity and the ability of individuals to invent something else from it; and education can only foster an environment conducive to the awareness that it is necessary to resist the overwhelming power of capital and it's allied social forces. This is no small task, and we mustn't overlook the consequences of educational actions that result in people unable to make use of "elbow strikes" (Adorno, 1995). The author emphasizes an urgent need: dismantling the foundation of competitiveness so characteristic in school relationships, a factor contributing to the widespread promotion of barbarism. In short, persistently exposing the motivations behind social violence and its manifestations in school seems inevitable and decisive. This is how political education is justified.

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