

A relação entre Indústria cultural e educação a partir de um *reality show*

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Resumo

O texto que ora se apresenta é resultado de um estudo de reflexão filosófica e que problematiza um tipo de programa televisivo na perspectiva de usos de técnica de instrumentalização da Indústria Cultural. As análises partem de estudos anteriores realizados a respeito de programas denominados de *reality shows*, tomando um deles como objeto de atenção, o Programa Big Brother Brasil. Os estudos originais são de caráter qualitativo, com dados coletados por meio de entrevistas a analisadas pela técnica de análise de conteúdo de Bardin, acrescidos com a reflexão filosófica mais recente das contribuições de Adorno e Horkheimer. A principal intenção é discutir a ideia de jogo existente no programa, e de como essa ideia é utilizada na perspectiva de Indústria cultural apresentada por Adorno e Horkheimer de acordo com interesses de quem a transmite. Problematisa-se que a escola é a agência que pode se contrapor à ideia disseminada pelo programa, uma vez que o jogo é conteúdo universal a ser aprendido e vivenciado em perspectiva educacional e, no caso de nossa discussão teórica, isso pode ser realizado na perspectiva de emancipação.

Palavras-chave: Indústria Cultural. Reality Show. Jogo. Educação. Emancipação.

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The relationship between cultural industry and education based on a reality show

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Abstract

This text is the result of a philosophical reflection that problematizes a type of television program in the perspective of the Cultural Industry usages of the instrumentalization technique. The analyzes are based on previous studies carried out on programs called reality shows, taking one of them as the object of attention, the Big Brother Brazil Program. The original studies are of a qualitative nature, with data collected through interviews and analyzed using Bardin's content analysis technique, added to the most recent philosophical reflection on the contributions of Adorno and Horkheimer. The main intention is to discuss the idea of game existing in the program, and how this idea is used in the perspective of Cultural Industry presented by Adorno and Horkheimer according to the interests of those who transmit it. It is problematized that the school is the agency that can oppose the idea disseminated by the program, since the game is a universal content to be learned and experienced in an educational perspective and, in the case of our theoretical discussion, this can be done in the perspective of emancipation.

Keywords: Cultural Industry. Reality Show. Game. Education. Emancipation.

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Resumen

El texto que ahora se presenta es el resultado de un estudio de reflexión filosófica y que problematiza un tipo de programa de televisión desde la perspectiva de los usos de la técnica de instrumentalización de la Industria Cultural. Los análisis se basan en estudios previos realizados en programas denominados reality shows, tomando como objeto de atención uno de ellos, el Programa Gran Hermano Brasil. Los estudios originales son de carácter cualitativo, con datos recogidos a través de entrevistas y analizados mediante la técnica de análisis de contenido de Bardin, sumado a la reflexión filosófica más reciente de las aportaciones de Adorno y Horkheimer. La intención principal es discutir la idea de juego existente en el programa, y cómo se utiliza esta idea en la perspectiva de Industria Cultural presentada por Adorno y Horkheimer según los intereses de quienes la transmiten. Se problematiza que la escuela es la agencia que puede oponerse a la idea difundida por el programa, ya que el juego es un contenido universal para ser aprendido y vivido en una perspectiva educativa y, en el caso de nuestra discusión teórica, esto se puede hacer en la perspectiva de la emancipación.

Palabras clave: Industria cultural. Reality show. Juego. Educación. Emancipación.

Introduction

At the beginning of the decade marked by the year 2000, Brazilian broadcast television (TV)³ witnessed the emergence of a new type of programming known as Reality Shows. These programs, which had already achieved significant success on international TV channels since the late 1990s, remain a hallmark of large production companies based in economically powerful countries. Among the most prominent in Brazil, and still airing after 22 seasons, is *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB)⁴. The rights to this show are owned by the Dutch company Endemol, which also operates in Brazil and grants brand usage rights to the Brazilian company Rede Globo de Televisão through commercial agreements.

In the early seasons of *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB), we reflected on the program's impact, relating it to education (BORGES, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2007). These reflections were generally based on problematizing a common aspect of reality shows, frequently highlighted in BBB, namely that it was a game. Thus, we began to discuss the possible subversion of the concept of a game as presented by the program, in which the idea of competition for the prize (initially R\$500,000, now R\$1,500,000 in its 22nd season), while governed by rules, would justify behaviors that might be morally questionable, even if not prohibited by the rules. In this context, participants' actions, though not contrary to the rules, would be judged by the public, who would promote or eliminate contestants through voting until only the final winner remained. As the years passed, the public's involvement and moral judgment expanded into social media, becoming a media phenomenon.

The initial study that inspired our reflections was qualitative in nature (RICHARDSON, 1999), for which, over the course of three years, we interviewed teachers and students from schools in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. The interview guide focused on the BBB program and the experiences with the game, both inside and outside school, and the responses were analyzed using Bardin's content analysis model (2016). The most recent addition to the analyses involves a philosophical reflection on our previous findings, illuminated by the contributions of Adorno and Horkheimer.

³ The program *No Limite* had a significant impact on Brazilian television in the year 2000, and although it did not last as long as other more contemporary Reality Shows, it had the effect of awakening the public's interest in this type of show. Perhaps its pioneering role in Brazil is the reason it was revived two decades later, once again becoming a point of interest for a major broadcasting network.

⁴ The first edition of *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB) took place in 2002. Its audience success was so immense that two editions were held in the same year. See <https://www.publico.pt/2002/01/30/jornal/big-brother-e-a-grande-aposta-da-rede-globo-166902>, accessed on January 5, 2021.

BORGES; FURTADO.

The development of our initial reflections focused on providing evidence to support our hypothesis of the subversion of the concept of a game and raising the question: if this were the case, which institution would have as much influence as television to propose a different idea about the game? Our answer was, and remains, the school. However, we had already identified the challenges that prevent the school from operating in this way, due to the difficulties in addressing the concept of a game within schools. In general, games are used more as a teaching methodology rather than being taught as content (FURTADO; BORGES, 2019).

Grounded in the ongoing debate surrounding issues related to Big Brother Brasil (BBB) and the media's influence on education, this text aims to extend our initial reflections by engaging in a dialogue with the writings of Adorno, as well as his collaborations with Horkheimer, both members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Our intention is to demonstrate that BBB is a concrete manifestation of the Culture Industry (CI) and, as we will argue, promotes a distorted notion of the game as a human practice, where the competitive nature, even when governed by rules, justifies individuals' actions especially when those actions are not bound by the rules.

One possible interpretation of what we assert above regarding the game in Big Brother Brasil (BBB) is that if something is not prohibited, it is permitted. The goal of the Culture Industry, as the German philosophers already pointed out, is domination, based on the atrophy of imagination and spontaneity (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 1985), which, in this case, keeps viewers under the control of the prevailing social system. With this premise, we will also argue that school education, by virtue of the school's social function, has the potential to offer an alternative conception of the game. If it acts accordingly, it fulfills the role of emancipatory education, capable of producing true consciousness, as envisioned by Adorno (2008; 2009).

To address this task, we will structure the text into two parts: in the first part, we will briefly present the Big Brother Brasil (BBB) program, emphasizing the game elements it portrays and its identification as a representation of the Culture Industry (CI); in the second part, we will engage in a dialogue with Adorno, also drawing on his work with Horkheimer, to argue that the way the program is presented fosters a conception of the game that runs counter to the interests of an emancipated society. This perspective can and should be deconstructed by schools, fulfilling their role in offering education for emancipation. Finally, we will provide specific considerations that articulate the relationship between education, the Culture Industry, and BBB.

Development: BBB, Game, and the Culture Industry

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The successive editions of Big Brother Brasil (BBB) do not undergo significant changes, with only a few novelties between seasons to capture the attention of the large audience. Most of the program's structure, as we will describe, has been examined in studies by Borges (2003; 2004; 2007); Minerbo (2007); Jablonski and Lazary (2007), among others. In general, BBB is a reality show that aims to broadcast to the general public the daily interactions of people living together as a social group inside a house. There is a set number of participants (in the 2022 edition, there were 22), who enter the house to remain for a certain number of weeks. The length of their stay depends on a system of rules that determines whether they continue or are eliminated from the "game" each week. The participants in the house are isolated from the outside world, with no access to news or communication. Throughout their time in the house, they are monitored 24 hours a day by a system of cameras and microphones. Thus, both intimate and group events are followed by the large audience, who can access the footage through a paid system called Pay per View, or watch daily highlights aired by the free-to-air television channel during a designated time slot in its programming schedule.

Among the various programs of this style, Big Brother Brasil (BBB) stood out by becoming a recipe for success in multiple countries, essentially forming an international network within this genre. As we have already mentioned, this reality show presents itself as a large-scale game, within which there are several other mini-games, often referred to as challenges, such as the Leader's Challenge, Angel's Challenge, Food Challenge, and Bate-Volta (which saves participants from elimination for the week), among others that will be discussed throughout the text. As a game, it is governed by rules, among which the weekly elimination of contestants is one of the most notable. This process continues until the final week, when, from a set number of finalists (the remaining contestants in the game)⁵ one is declared the winner by a "popular" vote, earning the cash prize.

Regarding the elimination rules, there are certain flexibilities that grant immunities, such as: the weekly leadership role (earned by winning specific challenges); the benefit granted by the *Angel* (also won through a type of challenge); or various other possibilities introduced in each edition of the program, such as the advantage given by the *Big Fone* (a phone in the house that receives calls altering the course of the game). The weekly elimination nomination typically places two or three participants up for public vote (from *BBB3* onward, this became known as the "paredão" or "showdown"). This nomination is usually determined by the week's leader, through a vote by the group of contestants, or by other strategies introduced in each edition, as previously mentioned. Once the "paredão" is

⁵ With few exceptions, the number of finalists has frequently been three contestants.

BORGES; FURTADO.

formed, it is up to the viewers to decide who gets eliminated, with votes cast via the internet or phone lines (in some editions).

Before delving into the association between the program and the Culture Industry (CI), a few comments are necessary based on the brief description provided, as well as revisiting arguments we have made in other works regarding the ethics that permeate Big Brother Brasil (BORGES, 2007). These earlier approaches, developed in the first decade of this century, resonate with more recent works such as those by Minerbo (2019) and Garibe (2021). From the outset, our position has been that the conception of the game propagated by the program is rooted in the neoliberal logic prevailing in the globalized world—namely, a view of the game as a human action, whether playful or not, that, when developed under rules, is oriented toward competition. The idea presented is that competition is a part of our daily lives, and only through competence and cunning can we navigate the challenges of the world. Thus, within the game, actions that are not prohibited by rules demonstrate competencies and merits. In the context of the program's game, this involves forming alliances with other contestants, creating groups, and devising empathy-driven strategies that appeal to the broader audience in order to secure favorable votes.

In our previous arguments, we highlighted that the strategies used to ensure survival in the game, which often involve manipulating fellow contestants, as well as those aimed at swaying the voting audience, frequently reveal a disconnect between the participant's behavior inside the house and their true self outside of it (something now closely monitored by social media and the broader media). These same strategies, however, evoke excitement in the audience, sometimes generating sympathy, at other times antipathy, sparking popular debates and judgments about what is right and wrong. It is understood that this is a moral debate, which intensifies emotions while simultaneously exposing the contradiction among those who supposedly vote for the participants, in a country with a Judeo-Christian tradition. This contradiction, in our view, lies between the discourse of what is morally acceptable and the notion that "if it's not written, it's allowed." In this case, a lingering sense of distrust may arise: does the audience really vote, after all?

The question raised in the previous paragraph remains unanswered to this day. The organizers claim there is an audit in place; however, the voting process, whether by phone or internet, is computerized and not subject to public control or access. The audience is only informed of the voting results each week. Without true transparency in the vote count, each result becomes an act of faith. Consequently, the network frequently faces criticism from competing broadcasters and on social media regarding the potential manipulation of the program's progression and outcome to align with

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economic or ideological interests.

Many times, the winners have been contested, precisely for the aforementioned reasons. After three editions, there was a growing appreciation for the "caipira" (rural) archetype of the Brazilian, based on the profiles of the first three winners,⁶ who were celebrated for their strategic merits despite their supposed cultural inferiority. In this case, it reveals the notion that success in the game does not depend on knowledge, education, or cultural accumulation, but rather on resources some of which may be morally questionable that lead to the final goal. This brings us back to the same questions: What kind of "player" is being portrayed? What kind of "cunning" is being propagated?

We will not dwell on the first questions, which were debated in previous works and for which we have new arguments to support the hypotheses we already formulated regarding the ethics of the program. Our focus here is on the third question, where we will present arguments about the reproduction of "art" in *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB) based on its identification with the artifices of the Culture Industry (CI). We believe it is useful to address the CI by already incorporating aspects of the program.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) argue that the CI functions as a mechanism of Enlightenment (positive science) for domination, and the way it achieves this is through the creation of mass culture. To fulfill its objectives, the CI employs various strategies, which we will attempt to summarize.

It is crucial to uncover the objectives of the Culture Industry (CI), and we can begin by discussing the invention of needs. People are led to believe, through a series of systematically designed and implemented procedures, that the "artistic" product offered meets the needs of the individuals it targets, as do all the consumable products associated with it. In this regard, the Frankfurt philosophers are precise in using the term CI, especially with the word "industry," which, in Marxist terms,⁷ refers to the place where commodities are produced products meant to satisfy human needs. Thus, the invention of needs is aimed at encouraging consumption, with a clear focus: workers and employees. The intention is to shape the passive consumer, dependent on these products, alienated from the modes of production. In this scenario, the CI never loosens its grip on the consumer, offering no room for resistance, no chance for emancipation. It keeps the individual in the condition of a replaceable entity a mere nothing, an object.

⁶ This refers to the contestants: Kleber (Bambam), from the countryside of São Paulo, winner of Big Brother Brasil I; Rodrigo (Cowboy), also from the countryside of São Paulo, winner of Big Brother Brasil II; and Dhomini, from the countryside of Goiás, winner of Big Brother Brasil III.

⁷ This refers to the work: Capital: Critique of Political Economy, Volume I: The Process of Production of Capital. See Marx (2013).

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The method the Culture Industry (CI) uses to keep the individual as a mere "nothing" is through distraction, the most diluted version of the word entertainment. Every product labeled as "art" is intended to foster a "bad conscience of serious art," while also keeping the individual within a dynamic of productivity. In this sense, entertainment becomes an extension of work under capitalism, functioning as a tool of domination. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, this form of entertainment offers no genuine escape or autonomy; instead, it serves to reinforce the conditions of subjugation by making leisure indistinguishable from labor. Fun, therefore, becomes a controlled mechanism to keep the individual passively aligned with the demands of the capitalist system (1985, p. 64),

The supposed content is nothing more than a faded façade; what remains imprinted is the automated sequence of standardized operations. The only way to escape the work process in the factory and office is by adapting to it during leisure time. This is the incurable disease of all entertainment.

The strategy of using entertainment is extended. Big Brother Brasil (BBB) as a whole, including its continuous presence on paid channels 24 hours a day, along with frequent flashes in the free-to-air programming to update viewers on what is happening in the house, and the inflating of the network's online platform, fuels the reproduction of news on social media and even on other TV channels.⁸ In times of expanding communication and entertainment channels via the web, Big Brother Brasil (BBB) spreads across multiple media platforms, including video-sharing sites like YouTube, where it stands out. This diversifies and increases the ways the program is consumed, making it difficult to measure piracy across sharing platforms. For the concept of the Culture Industry (CI), this is noteworthy and aligns with two principles outlined by Adorno and Horkheimer (1985): 1) The CI must diversify its products, even if they are essentially created through repetitive forms; and 2) The content must embed itself in the consciousness of consumers, increasing the ways it reaches people and engaging more of their senses. This mirrors a similar movement seen in the sports market—where it's no longer just the game as a spectacle but everything that can be consumed around it.⁹

⁸ Rede TV, for instance, airs a program called A Tarde é Sua on weekday afternoons, hosted by Sônia Abrão. For years, this show has dedicated much of its airtime to narrating and discussing events from the Big Brother Brasil house, even though BBB is aired by a rival network.

⁹ It is hard not to recall the concept of "sports chatter," which, according to Eco (1984, p. 224), "is the magnification of waste and thus the pinnacle of consumption. Through it and within it, the man of consumer civilization directly consumes himself." This refers to an extension of the sports product beyond the game itself. Perhaps we can think that Big Brother Brasil (BBB) is producing something similar, even though as a "game," it tends to be more temporally limited.

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In this way, the program amplifies the possibility for those interested to follow along, while also involving even those who are not, as the program's daily events reach people regardless of whether they seek it out. Thus, the show is offered for consumption alongside other products, as it is sustained by major sponsors whose brands are consistently featured during key moments of the program, such as challenges and parties. We cannot deny that BBB exemplifies the Culture Industry (CI) operating at a high level of functionality.

During moments of entertainment, it is crucial to examine the role attributed to laughter. Laughter serves to deceive happiness or, as Adorno and Horkheimer remind us when referring to Bergsonian studies, it simulates happiness by ridiculing others. For these reasons and more, the authors describe the Culture Industry (CI) as the "cathedral of entertainment," often drawing on the Aristotelian function of art—the cathartic function, which ensures some form of relief or suspension of suffering for individuals.

From the perspective of the CI, entertainment enables individuals to associate with and agree with what amuses them. For this to happen, the individual is, in some way, distanced from empathetic processes of sociability, isolating themselves in a world of perfection detached from the social whole. In terms of social reality, of which suffering is a part, the entertainment offered by the CI (once embodied by the Roman circus) gives the individual the illusion of exemption from suffering, a forgetting of something that seemingly does not belong to their life, perhaps due to the process of naturalization that has been imposed. Adorno and Horkheimer (1985, p. 68) argue that entertainment is "actually an escape, but not, as it claims, an escape from the harsh reality, but from the last vestige of resistance that reality still allows to exist. The freedom promised by entertainment is the freedom from thought as negation." In this light, what we see in *Big Brother Brasil* is a series of montages of the most humorous or curious events, often ridiculing the participants, effectively provoking pleasure, laughter, and cathartic entertainment.

The exemption from suffering, as referred to here, will be revisited later, because the CI does not only use humor to 'prepare' individuals to cope with suffering. It is also common to present the suffering of others to allow for continuous identification, so that individuals become accustomed to a naturalization of suffering.

Thus far, we have discussed observable intentions in the strategies used to frame key moments of the program; now, let us address the technological strategies. The CI thrives in times of technological development and capitalizes on this by glorifying technique. The product presented must stimulate consumption, so it is beneficial for the employed technique to construct performances

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and create a spectacle, utilizing the concept of totality (the whole and its parts). Through the exaltation of technique and various production resources, talents can be highlighted, enhanced, or subdued, their shortcomings mitigated in essence, keeping them under control, making them "docile." We can recall, for example, the previously mentioned "caipira" contestants, who gradually transformed into prominent characters through the application of technique and technological resources of the program, creating the stereotypes that the CI authors identify as fitting the industry's interests.

Adorno (2002) asserts that the Culture Industry (CI) targets the soul of individuals. We have seen that entertainment serves a cathartic function, but it also aims to reduce the individual to a passive state, alienating them from reality, freeing them from the need to think, and thus erasing their uniqueness as a person. In this process, the CI engages the individual in a reality that disguises their active role as passive, taking on the role of the welfare state by offering social assistance. This explains why the media often spearheads campaigns that not only drive the economy but also appear to take a leading role in resolving immediate crises. Big Brother Brasil (BBB) has fulfilled this role on several occasions, most notably in 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. During this time, the program played a significant part in raising awareness and appearing to address social concerns. However, the show also carries a pretense of discussing social issues through the voices of its participants, as if they were legitimate experts on these matters.¹⁰

Despite normative restrictions in various territories, which relate to censorship of what is disseminated as information and entertainment, the Culture Industry (CI) cleverly circumvents the limitations imposed upon it. Its typical approach is to present its "art," using its own language that follows what Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) called "avant-garde art," which is characterized by content that is usually prohibited. However, the authors distinguish CI products from the type of art it seeks to imitate, because the avant-garde is centered on asceticism and the absence of modesty, whereas the CI, on the other hand, is both pornographic and puritanical. This is so because it employs an eroticism whose intention is to offer something without fully doing so, as it deprives the subject of complete access.

The strategy of the Culture Industry (CI) mentioned above is what allows Adorno and

¹⁰ In the 2021 edition, participants discussed gender equality, racism, and other controversial topics, and the program seems to want to assign a relevant societal role to these discussions. One reflection we can make on this is an update to a critique of sophistry. Just like the philosophers, the sophists did not work, because in Greek culture, labor was a devalued activity. In this case, members of Greek society spent their time in contemplation. We know that philosophy developed from this contemplative use of time, but the sophists similarly used it to formulate supposedly true ideas. Our suspicion is that the BBB participants are being forged as the new sophists, in an environment where work is almost non-existent, and where participants enjoy the time to share their views about the world and its phenomena. See, for example, the article <https://www.uol.com.br/splash/colunas/mauricio-stycer/2021/02/05/leifert-muda-de-ideia-e-agora-elogia-o-bbb-por-debater-discriminacao-racial.htm>. Accessed on February 10, 2021.

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Horkheimer (1985) to assert that art becomes commodified and transformed into a consumer good. In other words, the useless is converted into something useful, and as a result, what has use value is transformed into exchange value. *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB), being broadcast on free-to-air television, employs a "permissible" form of erotism, with affectionate moments under the covers, intimate scenes in the pool and bathrooms, seductions at parties, among other aspects. Undoubtedly, the producers seem to aim at showcasing a type of "intelligent" art that awakens the aesthetics of erotism without overtly violating laws. Thus, being aware that it is a "game," the producers and the audience create a sort of pact where behavior that might be morally questionable outside the confinement is acceptable and even expected within, especially regarding the use of the body for seduction and persuasion.

In terms of its approach to what is presented as art in general, the CI adopts its own style, which intertwines the universal and the particular aspects of cultures, thereby creating romantic fantasies. This is the process of crafting an aesthetic style that seeks to evoke the real, precisely to awaken the aesthetic dimension of individuals their romantic sensibilities and this in itself is ideological. It is no coincidence that Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) call this *aesthetic barbarism*. This strategy is associated with the other mechanisms already mentioned, aimed at dominating individuals, particularly workers, through the use of culture(s). Regarding this, the authors note that

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Only the industrialized and consequent subsumption is entirely suited to this concept of culture. By subordinating all sectors of spiritual production to this singular aim—occupying people's senses from the moment they leave the factory in the evening until they clock in the next morning, marked by the task they are to perform during the day this subsumption ironically fulfills the concept of unitary culture, which the philosophers of individuality opposed to massification (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 1985, p. 62).

The Culture Industry's (CI) intention of domination through massification is evident in its association with liberalism. Alternatively, liberalism can be seen as having the CI as its goal, because in some way, the idea of competence is present within it. When the CI romanticizes real life and soothes suffering, it subtly implies that only the incompetent are unable to overcome it.¹¹ This is precisely why the rise and development of the CI occurred in countries with the most advanced industrialization. It is in these countries that the greatest expressions of the CI have flourished,

¹¹ Chaves (2014) faz uma reflexão a respeito das afirmações de Adorno quanto ao trato do sofrimento pela IC. Segundo o autor, a IC opera de modo a desenvolver a adaptação do sujeito ao sofrimento por meio de sua exposição a segundas experiências de sofrimentos a ele apresentadas.

including cinema, radio, jazz, and magazines.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), cinema, at the time they theorized about the Culture Industry (CI), played an important institutional role in refining morality sometimes by promoting control over barbaric instincts, and other times by pointing toward revolutionary instincts. What would they say about television or social media today? It is certain that in their time, radio, as a "democratic" vehicle of information since it reached consumers without them having to pay already valued the human voice. However, by assigning it an absolute status, it also imposed a false imperative.

Social media and television multiply the "art" of the CI compared to what the German philosophers discussed, and *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB) fully exploits everything these media offer. To do this, it creates a web of strategies, the most prominent of which are additional shows tied to the main programming, such as *Mesa BBB*, *Bate-papo BBB*, *BBB - A Eliminação*, along with extensions into the programming of other cable channels owned by the same Globo group.

A key factor in helping the CI achieve its goals is the role of advertising. Advertising must be the primary driver of consumption, and as such, the content is less important than the purpose. Advertising is the cornerstone of the CI's strategies, to the point where Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) referred to it as the lifeblood of the CI. Its importance is so great that it sometimes blurs with the CI itself, both from a technical and economic perspective. Both rely on similar resources, the main feature being the disguise of the same thing as something new. That is, while it appears new due to varying dynamics, the content remains the same.

Adorno (2002), referring to his time, stated that the potential uses of advertising greatly benefited from cinema and its technical elements, whose primary purpose was the manipulation of individuals under the imperative of efficiency. In the terms of the Culture Industry (CI), advertising is closely linked to mass production, amplified by the proliferation of technical means in the modern world. In the realm of art and culture, both strategies advertising and mass production need to operate on the idea of content novelty. However, for Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), they functioned based on the absolutization of imitation.

Language reenters the scene, now as a tool of advertising. According to Adorno and Horkheimer (1985, p. 77):

Through the language he speaks, the client himself contributes to the advertising character of culture. For the more completely language is absorbed into communication, the more words transform from substantial vehicles of meaning into signs devoid of quality, and the greater the purity and transparency with which they

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convey what is intended, the more impenetrable language becomes.

As we can see, language here no longer centers on words. These lose their power to signs, and this happens precisely because of the potential for using images. The Culture Industry (CI) is always reinventing itself, always constituting a kind of initiation ritual. The reduction of words and the rise of signs is a significant advancement in the CI's manipulation of individuals through the isolation of each being. More and more, people close themselves off in their world where contact is unnecessary. Perhaps this explains the great success of social media, where people meet without touching and call it "friendship." This is why Adorno (2002) says, "the culture industry can do whatever it wants with individuality only because, within it, and always, the intimate fracture of society is reproduced" (p. 34). *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB) has cameras all over the house where participants are confined, creating a true spectacle of images in the show's editions on open TV, so that, despite the participants engaging in many dialogues, there is an invitation for viewers to interpret the program through images, letting them speak for themselves

Education, Culture Industry, and the Case of the Game

In this section, we present a focused discussion on our conception of the role of education in combating the Culture Industry (CI), specifically as an alternative to the intentions of programs like *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB). We continue to adopt the critical perspective of Theodor Adorno, now also considering his contributions to the classic discussion on the relationship between education and emancipation. However, it is necessary once again to acknowledge the contribution of Max Horkheimer, as some foundational ideas are still drawn from his collaborative work with his colleague from the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research.

The fundamental Adornian proposition we bring forth is that the function of education is to prevent Auschwitz (ADORNO, 1995). What the Frankfurt philosopher means is that what he calls barbarism is emblematically represented by what occurred in that concentration camp, and, therefore, it is the role of education to prevent such barbarism. However, in a dialectical aspect, Adorno also says that Auschwitz happened, in part, because of education. Thus, in Adorno's thought, we find two approaches to education: one that leads to barbarism, referred to as semiformation, and another that

opposes barbarism, known as education for emancipation.

In Adorno (1995), there is an initial presentation of an educational perspective dominated by instrumental rationality,¹² which is extensively discussed elsewhere (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 1985), and whose purpose is domination. The authors argue that modernity fostered the idea of the necessity for demystification and the consequent disenchantment of nature, which implied its domination. The development of instrumental reason in the direction of dominating nature consequently led to the domination of humanity itself, as humans are an integral part of nature.

The greatest expression of the domination of humans by instrumental reason is the emptying of consciousness and the loss of experiences, as well as the ability to have meaningful experiences. The educational processes developed under this paradigm have, even in countries that produced geniuses, also produced criminals who threatened or destroyed many lives. Adorno (1995) states that these processes have generated barbarism. According to the philosopher, educational systems, dominated by the ideology of instrumental reason, prioritize technical training while neglecting the education necessary for humanization. This is why educational processes considered excellent by evaluative institutions often produce individuals with high competence for executing complex tasks, driven by technological knowledge, but do not necessarily form whole persons. It is this type of education that Adorno (1995) refers to as semiformation, because, according to him, individuals who follow such educational processes will never be fully formed.

According to the philosopher, semi-formative processes directed by instrumental reason have historically led to the creation of tools and procedures that, far from fulfilling science's promise to improve human life, have brought chaos and destruction, as exemplified by Auschwitz. This kind of thinking made Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) key figures in the debate regarding the theory that reason and intelligence differentiate us from animal species. After all, is self-destruction rational?

Adorno (1995) asserted that one of the functions of education is to transform the subject through consciousness. However, the philosopher was not referring to a mere self-awareness, focused on subjective moral improvement, which would sound like a critique of an entire generation of early Enlightenment philosophers. Instead, he referred to a consciousness that should provide individuals with a sense of their place in the world, encouraging their participation in society and involvement in

¹² The concept of instrumental reason and its implications for culture, art, politics, and science are present throughout the research agenda of the first generation of thinkers from the so-called Frankfurt School. In Adorno (2008, p. 194), it is evident that instrumental reason operates through the notion of division, as “through the motives there explained, the instruments or means of thought became autonomous in relation to their objectives and became reified.” Similarly, one can think of cultural production within the logic of the Culture Industry (CI). As a result, the formative ends of culture become detached and devalued in relation to its means of production, creating a cultural expression that is far more technical reason than genuine experience, and for this reason, it is semiculture.

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democratic processes. Unfortunately, what has been observed is the opposite. In modernity, education has been stripped of its consciousness-raising and, therefore, emancipatory functions, according to Adorno. What we see instead is that educational institutions have increasingly focused on instrumentalization, training individuals solely to perform tasks in an alienated manner, serving market interests (SILVA, 2001). According to this same author, instrumental reason has triggered a mindset focused solely on production, detached from the real need for knowledge to develop human life as a whole. In this context, the production-oriented mentality, with an emphasis on technique, becomes circular and aimless, seeking progress for its own sake, while forgetting that technique is merely an extension of human hands (ADORNO, 1995).

The contradictory role assigned to education, marked by a clear dichotomy between theory and practice, generates alienation and individuals who operate on "autopilot." As a result, it is lamentably asserted that the perspective of consciousness-raising education is largely absent in most educational institutions and systems, making the prospect of emancipation more distant. However, it is known that this situation, which keeps individuals instrumentalized, serves the interests of the dominant social system. It is no coincidence that there is significant interest from social elites in the privatization of both basic and higher education. In the case of higher education, instrumentalization aims to ensure a lack of resistance, or in other words, to nullify the emergence of critical thinking (SILVA, 2001). Meanwhile, in the case of basic education, the commodification of education is advancing rapidly,¹³ with the intent to train workers to serve capitalists, disguised as an education guided by a Common National Curricular Base that claims to educate for citizenship (LIMA, 2019), but which we know is directed toward favoring the market with immediate and future profits.

Based on this brief overview, an education that does not engage human potential, that undermines human and political formation in favor of an education that is predominantly technical, constitutes what Adorno (1985) describes as semi formation. From the perspective of individual development, this semi formation presents, according to the philosopher, irrational and conformist content that shapes authoritarian subjects, mirroring the system that forms them. We would go further and argue that it amounts to a lack of genuine formation, as education focused primarily on technical skills centers on interests external to the individual. Let us see what an important translator and

¹³ The basic education market has the highest profitability within the Brazilian market, which is already profitable as a whole. According to Lima (2019), the profit in basic education is 83% higher than in higher education, and the author also states that 26.5% of students enrolled in schools and daycare centers in Brazil are in private institutions. Additionally, the private sector generates 1.4 billion reais per year from the sale of educational materials, with the federal government being the main buyer. <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/opiniaio/a-ofensiva-do-capital-contra-o-ensino/>. Accessed on February 12, 2021).

interpreter of Adorno has to say about this:

Education is not for emancipation; it is a commitment to an ethically idealized end within the socio-cultural context. For education to be effective, it must critically address real semi formation, resisting the material limits imposed on life in the "plane" of its effective production. Emancipation is a central element of education, but to be real and effective, it must be thematized within the framework of heteronomy. The normative orientation of education is not imposed from the outside; rather, it should emerge from its historical configuration, which, due to its contradictions, "objectively demands its transformation from within" (Adorno, 1999, p. 183).

The objective real contradiction points inherently beyond itself, through the possibility of a determined not abstract negation of the prevailing order. "Consciousness" serves as the objectification of this contradiction, acting as an inverse force in the sense that it adapts (MAAR, 2003, p. 473).

Although the author mentions semi formation as an operational form of 'education,' we believe that the effectiveness of the education he advocates must arise from a critique of the reality that permeates individuals, which is not permitted by semiformative actions. The critical subject will emerge from the conscious subject, which is not possible in a society of unconscious individuals, composed of those who are semiformed, hence we refer to it as a lack of genuine formation. This is confirmed in the theoretical realm when we consider the issue of ideology, which, as Adorno (2009) pointed out, is no longer merely false consciousness but propaganda in favor of domination. If ideology cannot be conceived solely as false consciousness in our time, we can assert that it is primarily characterized as a semiformative principle and can thus be understood as something that operates directly in favor of oppression, and for this reason, as a lack of genuine formation.

Semi formation, or lack of genuine formation, has a direct relationship with what we discussed in the previous section; it is intertwined with capitalism and is maintained, if not fueled, by the Culture Industry (CI). In Maar's (1995) Adornian reading, *semiformative* actions that obscure individuals also convince them, just as the CI convincingly transforms culture into a commodity, since for Adorno, "semi formation is the spirit taken by the fetish character of the commodity" (ADORNO, 1996, p. 399). We already know that the CI can be strong enough to mold society to its interests and can influence the formation of consciousness, being one of the forces that Adorno (1996) claimed threaten subjectivity by shaping the understanding of reality as it is presented in its "arts," thus reinforcing the power of the dominant social system (MAAR, 2003) and the anonymous forces that threaten subjectivity, namely the "CI." Thus, the Frankfurt philosopher's idea is reinforced that the CI accomplishes *semi formation* because it provides "[...] a false experience limited to an affirmative character, stemming from the satisfaction provoked by the consumption of cultural goods" (MAAR,

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1995, p. 23). As we are arguing, in our view, this constitutes a lack of genuine formation, as it prevents individuals from accessing the consciousness that would emancipate them.

In resistance to lack of genuine formation, there exists the possibility of emancipatory education; we must indicate how it can emerge. According to Silva (2001), it is essential to consider that there are social and historical conditions that subject individuals to forced adaptations. Individuals can become so involved in the reality they are led to believe in that their belief shifts to viewing adaptation as the only alternative. The way to break this mechanism is through education that operates in the opposite direction, toward resistance, contestation, and contradiction. However, Silva (2001) states that it is a formation that goes beyond a self-contained opposition; it must be operated as :

[...] something that restores our consciousness to the movement that should be inherent to it, that of action grounded in history. For a historical being, the opening of possibilities is always historical. In this sense, the historical past, when appropriately elaborated, can support a critique of the present—not because such criticism confuses itself with nostalgia or a desire to return to the past, but because the possibilities of the past, both realized and unrealized, help us to expand and deepen our criteria for considering the present [...] (p. 32).

The author aligns with Maar (1995), and we also agree that it is necessary to learn to critique the present in order to assist in the process of understanding one's own experience within the reality in which the individual is situated. Thus, what is offered to the individual is the opportunity for reflection on their existence in the world and the reality they inhabit. If this can be achieved, emancipation will occur, establishing the contradiction pointed out by Maar, that "the very process that imposes barbarism on men simultaneously constitutes the basis for their survival" (1995, p. 11). This is because, according to the Adornian interpretation of the mentioned author, subversion is a characteristic tendency of critical education; however, it requires a break from education that focuses solely on technical reproduction, efficiency, and effectiveness; it must open to the historical process and engage with the diversity of people.

When it comes to how education can be critical through the handling of any type of knowledge in the school context, we are bringing the content of games into the discussion. In literature, the game is an element of culture theorized and problematized by various thinkers, among whom we must mention Caillois (1990), Huizinga (2012), Brougère (2003), among others. These thinkers have long been utilized by prominent Brazilian scholars, including Kishimoto (1994) and Freire (2005). Despite differences in epistemological approaches, what both the classics and Brazilian studies have in common is the connection of the game to culture; that is, playing and its most playful form play are

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inherent to human culture, or as one of the fathers of anthropology, Franz Boas, stated, to cultures. According to Furtado and Borges (2020), from a philosophical-sociological perspective, the game can be described as a subjective activity, given that the individual's dominance is predominant and, therefore, a human activity. As an element of culture, the game is part of the knowledge to be socialized between generations and, thus, a form of knowledge to be accessed by education in the broad sense and by formal education in the narrow sense, both as universal content and as local knowledge.

From the perspective of educational reality, Furtado and Borges (2019) stated that games in the school context have been experienced much more methodologically than taught. This means that games have been used more as a resource for something rather than socialized as necessary knowledge. The studies that gave rise to the present reflection and were mentioned at the beginning of this text also affirm that there is evidence showing that there are incipient formative processes regarding the conceptual approaches to games, leading to ideas being fixed around rules, competition, and fun, often causing games to be confused with play, which also lacks conceptual approaches (KISHIMOTO, 1994). According to the author, although in common sense and in some languages there is similarity between the two, games and play are distinguished by their structuring characteristics, such as seriousness, the degree of ludic nature, the number of rules, among others, which is corroborated by extensive literature (FURTADO; BORGES, 2019).

Given the points made in the preceding paragraphs, we can deduce that if schools do not develop sufficient formative processes regarding education through, for, and by games, individuals become dependent on other formative agencies, including the media, or as we are addressing in this text, exposed to the Culture Industry (CI). The situation may be even worse because the aforementioned studies by Borges (2007) indicate that schools may reproduce the games and their concepts from outside, particularly from the CI. The data from Borges's (2007) studies already showed the incidence of *Big Brother Brasil* games in schools, indicating a significant influence of the CI on educational processes concerning the formation of, for, and by games. Thus, the concept oriented simply by normatization and competition seems to overshadow what we advocate as the idea of games from an emancipatory educational perspective: games, as human, cultural, and subjective actions that, in a playful manner, allow humans to produce culture and socialize social legacies.

In two decades of exposure to Big Brother Brasil (BBB), there has been a significant acceleration of the influences of the Culture Industry (CI), not only through television but also due to the growing reach of social media. This leads us to consider the high risk of consolidating values and

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concepts about games propagated by the program. If we think along the lines of Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), we may be experiencing a continuum of at least two decades of semi formation which we prefer to call lack of genuine formation—stemming from the socialization of specific knowledge that is not necessarily discussed in terms of forming critical consciousness. Without the "filter" of the school, an educational agency sufficiently strong to engage with the media, individuals are not only left at the mercy of media influence, but the CI also enhances its capacity for action by utilizing the school itself.

Um processo de educação para emancipação requer da escola a condição de formadora. Isso implica formação dos formadores, projetos pedagógicos, investimentos financeiros, mas, sobretudo, processo de autoconsciência. Mediante esses pressupostos inferimos que seja necessário repensar saberes sobre o jogo, enquanto elemento da cultura, que permite a formação crítica com prazer e alegria (FREIRE, 2005) na perspectiva de educação emancipatória. Isso implica aprofundamento das abordagens conceituais de jogo e ludicidade e de como esses objetos são tratados na história da educação. Também é preciso considerar que a dimensão lúdica e o jogo não são categorias existentes apenas na objetividade, isto é, externas ao sujeito, mas se constituem como estados de consciência do sujeito (LUCKESI, 2002) e, portanto, como elementos da sua subjetividade. A IC certamente sabe disso, e não por menos opera com o jogo enquanto elemento de manipulação. Portanto, pelo conhecimento da ludicidade e do jogo, também se auxilia no processo de formação das consciências e, se o projeto pedagógico aponta para o fazer crítico, o jogo aprendido na escola também o será. Sabemos que tudo isso é algo complexo e com muitas demandas. Nossa reflexão aqui pretende ser tão somente uma ponta do fio de Ariadne.

In Conclusion: Articulating the Discussion

The reflection developed so far has not aimed to reach concrete conclusions regarding the issues raised. We have contemplated over the years the media influence on the idea of games, which is disseminated through various television programs and, more recently, also spread via the internet. One only needs to check the programming schedules of several open or closed channels, or browse the internet, to see numerous games being used as attractive strategies for consumers. In the case of reality shows, and more specifically Big Brother Brasil (BBB), we have argued about the excess of strategies that seem to propagate a perverse idea of the game that goes against the interests of humanization. Therefore, in this text that we are concluding, we have chosen to engage in the exercise

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of reflecting based on the work of theorists of the Culture Industry, in order to understand how the reality show operates and how one might resist it.

Based on the discussion, we can say that regarding the relationship between games and *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB) or rather, the assertion that BBB shapes a nearly non-conceptual understanding of the game, or its neoliberal form there exists an opposition between two conceptions: that of BBB, predominantly oriented by normalization and stimulated competition, and the emancipatory conception, which must regard the game as a cultural and subjective human action aimed at the socialization of culture and knowledge accumulated over time and across territories.

With this, we believe that this study contributes to the debate surrounding the object of the game, as well as to the discussion regarding the influences of the Culture Industry (CI) in various contexts. However, we also believe it is possible to consider another question for further exploration in our ongoing studies: if there truly exists a modification of the traditional structures of the game, it would be interesting to think about how and why BBB tends to reorient some of the fundamental characteristics of the game. It is almost a creation of a game in its own way, which fundamentally reflects the form of the CI.

At this point, many questions can be discussed, but let us focus on the rules within the time and space in which BBB takes place. Certainly, the idea of controlling the rules and the playful situation in time and space by the players is modified within the program; after all, they do not fully control the rules and forms of the game. There exists a two-way game based on the interaction between players and the audience, meaning between those who play and those who "judge" the game of others. This moral component is very strong, as we have indicated throughout the text.

Furthermore, in terms of reorienting characteristics, the idea of time and space also undergoes interesting modifications, as it seems that the space of the game is not merely the house the confinement since everything is not resolved solely there, but also by external factors. For this reason, participants often engage in performances and various strategies to reach the audience and project a positive image. Ultimately, they play not only against their housemates but always for the others, for the audience, and for society.

Another reflection pertains to the possibility of BBB manifesting as an advancement in the concept of the Culture Industry (CI). In this sense, as we have indicated throughout the text, it is no longer merely ideology meaning a certain distortion of reality that, while obscuring, still presents specific fragments of reality. Rather, it is the direct propaganda of elements of semi formation or lack of genuine formation. The educational implications of this are dangerous, as we have pointed out in

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the development of our argument.

We have seen that, according to the Frankfurt philosophers, the Culture Industry (CI) aims for domination through the massification of culture. We have also observed that when schools absorb what comes from the CI, they amplify the potential for lack of genuine formation. This has been characteristic of educational systems, as schooling has served to support the prevailing social system.

Regarding the treatment of games, they are typically used as a methodological resource and less taught as elements of culture. With this approach to games, students graduating from educational systems lack the opportunity to learn about games more than they would from other formative agencies, including the media, and in the case we analyzed, the *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB) program.

Based on the argument presented above, we observe that the power of capitalist domination is achieved even more effectively, as individuals are exposed to "learning" that serves their interests, provided through schooling, and they also enjoy the benefits derived from the strategies of the CI, which finds favorable conditions in the absence of resistance.

Therefore, it is urgent for schools to reclaim their Adornian role of preventing barbarism, adopting a critical stance and forming consciousness. This means not only discussing media programs themselves but also addressing the accumulated knowledge of humanity that can aid in emancipation, including, among other universally necessary contents, games.

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