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Literary reading, experience and education: reflections from Adorno's critique

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to discuss the relationship between reading literary books and education [*Bildung*] inspired by Theodor Adorno's critical contributions. This discussion is guided by the following questions: How does reading books contribute to a cultural education (or pseudoculture)? What is the role of the aesthetic experience in the analysis of a literary work? How might a frame of pseudoculture jeopardize this experience? To guide this examination, I have called upon some of the concepts and aesthetic categories used by Adorno, such as experience, schema, and immanent analysis, as well as his sociological investigations that may contribute to understanding the reading experience. From this perspective, I present some comments on the problems involving reading books and the education of the individual in the current context.

Keywords: reading, experience, education, literature, Theodor Adorno.

Reading books has played a significant role in our cultural history. By providing access to knowledge that is alien to the reader's immediate circle of relationships and helping to consolidate more individualized modes of reading and reflection, books have contributed significantly to the constitution of a modern subjectivity. Integrating themselves intimately with education and culture, books have been associated with the ideals of Enlightenment themselves, becoming a symbol of the bourgeois project of educating the individual: objects capable of nurturing the self-determination of the subject and promoting autonomy.

The changes in reading and in the form of the books that appeared in the midst of the digitization of culture over the last decades have made it pertinent to return to the question regarding the critical and/or ideological character present in reading books, as well as on the place of literary reading in a critical project of cultural education.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss, based on the critical contributions of Theodor Adorno, the relationships between the reading of literature books and the cultural education of the individual [*Bildung*]. This reflection is guided by the following questions: How does reading books participate in the education of the individual (or the half-education)? What is the role of aesthetic experience for the analysis of the literary work? How can a half-educational picture compromise this experience?

In order to conduct this reflection, I will recover some aesthetic concepts and categories present in Adornian thought, such as those of experience, schema and immanent analysis, as well as sociological research from Adorno that is capable of contributing to a characterization of the reading experience. From this perspective, I propose a reflection on the problems that involve the reading of books and the cultural education of the individual in the current context.

Contingencies of education: schematism and experience

In "Theory of pseudo-culture", Adorno (2010) makes a strong criticism of cultural education, both as a category defined *a priori* and in its present realization. Analyzing the way in which bourgeois society establishes, contradictorily, at the expense of self-determination of consciousness that was once its nourishing project, it finds that reification came to command the achievements of subjectivity and spirit to which cultural education was articulated. This made the conditions for the education of the individual to be overturned, in a perverse way, already in its inception: instead of undertaking a critique of the mechanisms and circumstances that impede the education, it began to offer a "half-education" [*Halbbildung*]. Taken as a whole, half-education engenders a false consciousness, at the same time the agent and product of a pseudo-culture. In this essay, Adorno explores the conditions under which such a process takes place.

Adorno maintains that the education of the individual and experience are related in the opposite sense, that is, the decline of experience is intrinsically articulated to the problem of half-education. Since experience was losing space in the process of education, by revealing the contradiction between education and society, the individual was expropriated of its place in the production of culture:

Pseudo-culture is an impediment to time, to memory, through which alone the synthesis of experiences which once signified culture entered consciousness. . . . whoever is deprived of the continuity of judgment and experience with schemata for coping with reality. (Adorno, 2010, pp. 33-34, my translation)

When the capacity to have experiences cools, along with their unfoldings in time and works of memory, are the

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typical schemes in a half-education frame that become the mediators of consciousness. The very *a priori* definition of education as an ideal and invariant category is then included as a scheme, contradicting its meaning and becoming entangled in the social contingencies of the education crisis, to the conversion of culture into value.

Referring to an important moment in the education process, the concept of schema does not come here with a sense of simplification or synthesis, but refers to the concepts of scheme and the schematism described in *The critique of pure reason* (Kant, 2010) – or rather the reading of Adorno of the Kantian philosophy –, with the intention of emphasizing the deleterious effects of reification and the appropriation of the schemes by cultural industry.

Kant (2010) gives the name of schema to the “formal and pure condition of the sensibility, to which using the concept of understanding is restricted to the schema of this concept of understanding.” (p. 183, emphasis added). The constitution process of the forms of understanding nourishes both the sensible intuition and the concept; the concept can be pure (like that of the circle) or empirical (like that of the plate). The point that follows is that:

Since there is no possibility of a direct relationship between the material that is empirically received by the sensibility and the organizing capacity, through concepts, of the understanding, there remains the use of a kind of mediation which, for Kant, coincides with the very procedure of schematism. (Duarte, 2003, p. 448)

According to Adorno (2010), Kant solves the discrepancy between the category that describes the object and the object itself arguing in favor of the existence of an “intermediate stage between intuition and concept, a kind of model or image” (p. 131, my translation). It is the use of these models that makes it possible to recognize what we perceive, besides giving an image to the concept, which acts as a representative link to the imagination. Exemplifying such a process, Kant states that the concept of number (say, five) could be described by the image of a sequence of points; but the number will only be properly sketched when a method is available to represent that number, with the use of the figure in this case. Quantity, causality and substance, among other *a priori* determinations of time and space, are also used by the philosopher as examples of schemes. Thus, for Kant (2010), “In fact it is not images of objects but schemata that ground our pure sensible concepts” (p. 183, my translation): “Without schemata, therefore, the categories are only functions of the understanding for concepts, but they do not represent any object” (p. 187, my translation).

Starting from this understanding, one problem, already denounced in *Dialectic of enlightenment* (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1985), touches on the fact that the cultural industry, by “selling” ready schematics, spares the subject from the need to deal with the sensitive multiplicity that

sensitive concepts seek to homogenize. Since the data of experience were previously grouped by the cultural industry, no further effort of classification is required from the subject – which entails a set of psychologically relevant implications.

The appropriation of schemas by the cultural industry simultaneously traverses the process of constructing the concept (leading to generalizations that no longer bear resemblance to their objects) and the perception of objects, which are sometimes distorted and compromised by false projections. For Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), if “mimesis makes itself resemble its surroundings, a false projection makes its surroundings resemble itself” (p. 174, my translation). The “recognition in the concept”, in turn, plays a relevant role in the passage from reflective mimesis to controlled reflection, operating as a substitute for the physical assimilation of nature by reducing diversity to an identical denominator. Insofar as the perception of the object is finalized by elements internal to the subject and external to the object, space is opened for the intervention of the repressed suffering – which acts on the psychological basis of prejudice. The kinship between mimesis and aesthetic experience in Adorno somehow makes an inversion in the sense of pathological apperception, which is founded on a false projection.

One of the issues that Adorno addresses to Kantian idealism is its ideological character, since the object appears to the senses as part of a human world, known to a subject as potentially free or only captive of itself, when, in fact, we are captives of a world previously established by relationships of exchange, commodity and the reification of human relations. A world in which subjectivity is not effectively free to dispose of its imagination to produce new schemes.

In the excerpt from the essay on half-education cited above, Adorno contrasts the “schemas” – used “to subjugate reality” in the administered society – to the “synthesis of experience,” emphasizing that when the subject is provided with ready schemes, the particular experience of the subject ceases to participate in the education process. This is partly why the decline of experience contributes to the corrosion of education and the diffusion of an alienated spirit: self-determination of consciousness is replaced by cultural elements approved in advance, while at the other end, the conscience split and distant from praxis manifests itself in the form of a simulacrum of experience, through which the semi-experienced strengthens its own reification – producing a false consciousness.

The pseudo-cultured person is excluded from culture, but also subjected to it, then takes advantage of a *sui generis* culture, which, far from presenting itself to a half-step of education, takes its place, “prepared by culture industry – the world of books is not put in the bookcase but actually read, even though they appear to be as lacking in history and as insensitive to historical catastrophes as the unconscious itself” (Adorno, 2010, p. 37). The half-education undermines the constitution of subjectivity, once

nourished by experience and concept. Both end up entangled in a perverse circle of extemporaneous determinations.

Notes on the Adornian concept of experience

In the essay on half-education, Adorno resists giving a precise definition of the concept of experience, avoiding the proclamation of an ideal, redeeming experience, while at the same time, in a dialogue with Kant and Benjamin, but also with Hegel, Husserl and Lukacs, extends and stresses the limits of its significance, opening itself to the discussion of its different aspects – including its metaphysical character and the social contingencies of its crisis.

In spite of his uncertainties¹, the concept of experience is a key point of Adornian philosophy (Negt, 2005): it is he who allows himself to defend the necessity and the actuality of philosophical thought, by means of what opposes the exercise of thought, in his attempts to construct identity – that is, of the non-identical that crosses the relationship between the subject, concepts and empirically perceived objects.

Far from constituting itself as a philosophical metaphor, the *non-identical* designates “the other of thought, that which resists it and which is still not only given but mediated by living labor and by the concept” (Negt, 2005, p. 87) – an idea that lies at the basis of Adorno's negative dialectic. If every legitimate thought comes from the demands and contradictions of the material, then the facts are also driven by thought. Hence the importance of experience in leading philosophy to the investigation of the problems that surround the relationship between subject and object in our society, without disregarding the suffering that the subject's irreconcilable state entails. This is why “the objectivity of dialectical cognition needs more subject, not less” (Adorno, 2010, p. 33). It is this experience that makes thought possible.

In the essay on half-education, the loss of communal authority, the fall of metaphysics, and the damage to spiritual experience are associated with the loss of the “continuity of consciousness” that characterizes experience that is bound to tradition and projected beyond present time (Adorno, 2010, p. 33). In spite of the evident proximity of this formulation to the concept of experience consecrated by Benjamin, at other moments, the ideas of both on the subject still have deep differences. This is the case for Adorno's preemptory departure from Jewish messianism and the attempt to reconcile experience and absolute – a purpose which, according to Jay (2004), would underlie Benjamin's idea of an original experience².

According to Negt (2005), instead of original religious experiences, the Adornian metaphysical experience would designate “the sudden moments of happiness, together with the precarious relationship of proximity and distance that accompanies this experience of happiness” (p. 87). Using Proust's literary work, Adorno (2009) shows how it is exactly the impossibility of finding happiness in the midst of original experiences that would make the recollection of specific places of the past replace its promise: the proximity of the images evoked by memory would make these images recede, as in our vision of the rainbow (even though the images of childhood are closer to the real landscapes). By leading a precept advocated by Benjamin himself to the limit, Adorno shows how proximity is contradictory to experience.

This position in relation to the role of the images on the experience, also leads Adorno to reject the Surrealist aesthetic defended by Benjamin³. While Benjamin sought to find mutual echoes of literature in philosophy and science, with evidence of interweaving between reflection and art, Adorno sought to deepen the unfolding of the dialect between subject and object, working to instruct a critical epistemology that he understood was possible only to the extent of distinguishing between the two poles, with all its contradictions, and establishing the primacy of the object – thus casting off false subjectivists (Adorno, 1995).

In spite of Kant's criticism, the focus is not on the arbitrariness of the separation between subject and object, as in true in Benjamin's case⁴, but rather in the circumstances surrounding this separation and its consequences. Here, one of the reasons for this warning, alongside Horkheimer, is that the yoke of myth by Western thought would have become a mythologization of reason (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1985) – an idea reaffirmed in Adorno's mature work (2009) in defense of the inevitability of metaphysics: “Metaphysics deals with something objective, without however being permitted to dispense with subjective reflection. The subjects run into themselves, into their “constitution”: it is up to metaphysics to reflect on how far they are nevertheless capable of seeing beyond themselves” (p. 311) The *metaphysical experience* is defended as an integral part of life.

Not only the subject cannot disconsider the metaphysics experience, but this is like a condition for the moment of truth to result from experience. Hence, metaphysics would be experienced as something of the very subject, specific such as his personal memories, regarding, precisely because of this, the possibility of a universe that is established through its particularities. Far from being

1 According to Jay (2004), Adorno's work does not entirely resolve the “confusion of denotations and connotations clinging to the word ‘experience,’” oscillating between the lament for lost experience and the irony over the romanticizing of a supposed “Pre-fall state” (p. 144).

2 The differences between them would extend to the reading of the Hegelian concept of experience, described by Benjamin as reductive and violent, but praised by Adorno (2013) as the antithesis of an “original phenomenological experience” (p. 133) or something ontological (as

intended by Heidegger), but a particular moment of the contradiction that would dialectically move the search of the true object for consciousness, implied by the mediation of knowledge.

3 In Adorno's words (2003), “The dialectical images of surrealism are those of a dialectic of subjective freedom in a state of objective unfreedom” (p.138). Therefore, it is not a question of the images “of an interiority, but fetishes – fetishes of the commodity – in which one has once fixed something subjective: the libido” (p. 139).

4 On the critique of Benjamin to Kant and Hegel, see Caygill (1998).

denied, metaphysics points to, according to Adorno, as a denial and a question concerning what is constituted for itself and for the objects, about life style, escape from suffering and happiness demand. An objective condition of the relationship established between subject and object within the empirical world, the metaphysics experience becomes part also of the speculative activity.

The “good” reification and the immanent critique of the literary work

Adorno’s intense dialogue with Benjamin on experience does not exclude the materialistic character of the concept. Adorno, convinced of the centrality of Marxism to the critique of philosophy and history, incisively questions the formulation that the concept would have assumed in the essay on some themes in Baudelaire. In correspondence addressed to his friend, Adorno accuses Benjaminian’s articulations between experience, memory and unconscious of not being dialectical enough. The core of this critique was the concept of reification (which, not by chance, Adorno recovers in his essay on half-education), which would demand a “dialectic theory of forgetting” as the necessary dialectical link between experience [*Erlebnis*] and experience [*Erfahrung*] (Adorno, 2012, p. 450).

According to Jay (2005), the criticism of György Lukács’s Marxist hegelianism would have been responsible for leading Adorno to produce a proper theory of reification, according to which one could distinguish a “good” from a “bad” reification (p. 340). Following this line, what Adorno is proposing in the letter addressed to Benjamin points, on the one hand, to a reading of Benjamin’s concept of aura as a good reification. On the other hand, it suggests that the forgetting implied in the reification would be an obstacle for the experience [*Erfahrung*] to take place: “Would the aura not always be the vestige of a human trace forgotten in the thing and would it not be trapped, precisely by the kind of forgetfulness, in what you call experience?” Asks Adorno (Adorno & Benjamin, 2012, p. 450).

The different perspectives on the idea of experience result in differences that are also in the aesthetic critique proposed by both (and for literary criticism, specifically) described by Hansen (2012) in the following terms:

Benjamin offered a theory of aesthetics known as *aisthesis*, which more comprehensively encompassed the works formal and stylistic features that are linked to his inquiry into the transformation of sensory perception and experience in modernity. Adorno’s microanalyses of literary and musical works demonstrated a dialectical mode of reading that took these works’ claims to aesthetic autonomy seriously, while tracing socioeconomic dependency in their very negation of the empirical world. (p. xvi)

Adorno does not deny Benjamin’s contributions to the experience of understanding the dialectic of medium,

author, receiver, and artistic form – without which the immanent analysis of the work of art would fall into mere formalism – but it problematizes the *locus* of possible resistance that Benjamin believed (especially in the cinema) and in the artistic frontiers opened by them – a possibility that Adorno denies vehemently (Hansen, 1987). Adorno seeks to show how the massive reproduction of art affects not only experience, but also the work of art itself in a structural way.

If experience, with all its contradictions, is presented as a corollary of a certain social, cultural and subjective configuration, then criticism is what the subject has in order for experience to surpass itself, reversing into the nefarious circuit of half-education. The focus of Adorno’s aesthetic criticism then gradually turns to the conditions that enable the immanent analysis of the autonomous work of art. The approximation between art and philosophy is understood as necessary for the experience of the work to be expressed as critical.

Adorno’s movement towards an immanent analysis of the work is possible because, for him, the play of tensions involved in the process of creation makes the experience, intrinsic to the social whole, materialize in the work itself. According to Adorno, this is not direct, but it follows on from the fact that the artistic form contains a negation of the material world in its presentation – which makes the art not coincide with reality, nor appear as a mere reproduction of the existing⁵. As a result of this process of negative construction, the aesthetic form is presented as a *sedimented social content* in the following moment (Adorno, 2006). This is because, although the work of art itself is the fruit of social work (also empirical, therefore), it is in the denying of the social whole that art begins to mirror reality, nourishing itself with its critical potential:

The basic levels of experience that motivate art are related to those of the objective world from which they recoil. The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artwork as immanent problems of form. This, not the insertion of objective elements, defines the relationship of art to society. (Adorno, 2006, p. 16)

Works of art are mediated by social totality, or rather by the dominant social structure in that historical moment. If the immanent analysis cannot do without the context in which the work is inserted, even in far back times, as in Ancient Greece, in the context of the cultural industry, this demand becomes even more significant (Adorno & Eisler, 2010). “Esthetic and sociological questions about music are interwoven indissolubly and constitutively” (Adorno, 2001, p. 366). This means that, in capitalist society, reification is intrinsic to art, making it

5 This assertion contrasts with the realism of the mature Lukács, whom Adorno accuses of remaining indifferent to the philosophical problem generated by the identity between “objective reality” and concrete work, of which it would become mere reflection, an expression of a “materialism Vulgar” (Adorno, 2007, p. 153).

even essential for the autonomization of the work (Adorno, 2006, p. 118) – which is true even if art is not reduced to its character of commodity (since neither the work nor the artist is enclosed in its external destiny, and the experience expressed by the work surpasses that of the artist⁶). In the midst of this circuit of negations, in expressing the law of its reification, the work of art becomes an antithesis of the inessential, in the same step in which the autonomization of the work offers occasion for its immanent critique.

Instead of a transcendent analysis, magnetized by external elements, or even prior to the work of art, the autonomous work now not only allows but *requires* an immanent analysis [*werkimmanente Betrachtung*] – the only one that would allow a dialectical critique of culture. Born within ideology itself, immanent analysis thus opposes the deception of a fictitious rupture which the transcendent analysis – devoid of the experience that would provide it with a ballast – would promote (Adorno, 1998, p. 22).

The principles of an immanent analysis of the literary work were described by Adorno at a conference on Sociology of Literature in the French city of Royaumont during a tribute to Lucien Goldmann. At many points, inspired by Benjamin's critique of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Adorno explicitly refers to the idea that the content of truth [*Wahrheitsgehalt*] (or "truth content" in a better translation of the word "Gehalt") of the work of art constitutes the main criterion for the evaluation of the literary work, which is distinct from its factual content [*Sachgehalt*]. The factual content of the work would be that which could be explored through the commentary, in contrast to the criticism in its full meaning.

Responding to the insufficiency of a philological analysis focused on the genesis of works, Adorno explains the way in which it becomes possible to reach both the factual content and the content of truth, integrated into the unity of the text. Literary criticism intertwines with the description of the set of elements that compose the work. Due to the impossibility of effecting a neutral description of the object, Adorno maintains that description does not dispense with comprehension, which are both inseparable steps in this process: "It is not only impossible to describe without understanding, but contrary to the prevailing general opinion, it is not possible to understand without the moment of criticism" (Adorno, 1975, p. 34).

Adorno systematizes this exercise by proposing a division between levels of analysis, which together would be able to offer an articulated vision of his moments. The first of these levels would be understanding. Taking the example of Ibsen's play, *The Wild Duck*, this level turns to the elements of action, such as the character's motivation expressed through behavior – everything that could possibly be situated on a factual level, but is not made evident in the text, requiring a deductive activity of the reader.

The second level would be the significance, which in this case would reach the author's intention to lend certain speeches and characteristics to the characters: the flawed act of the character Hjalmar Ekdal, when forgetting to bring the menu for the supper he had promised his daughter, thereby expressing Mr. Ekdal's autistic character and inability to love.

The third level of understanding is that of the idea, present in varied moments of the work. In *The Wild Duck*, it is concretely developed in the concept of the "lie" [*Lebenslüge*], that which makes it possible for man to exist. This idea would express the dialectics involved in the impossibility of individually eliminating the lie, basing life on truth and the awareness of reality, an initiative that makes the character a source of great misfortunes and a victim himself.

Criticizing the provisory nature of traditional literary criticism, which is regarded as tautological and reified (restricted to deciphering hidden messages in the text or listing motives that will appear in the literature manuals), Adorno introduces that which he highlights as the decisive level of criticism: the content of truth. It is here, according to Adorno, that a decision can be made on the aesthetic quality of a work, affirmed based on the existence or not of a content of truth. The real content of Ibsen's play could be the representation of the bourgeois world as a mythical world, by virtue of the knot of guilt that constitutes relations in bourgeois society – as if a blind fate reigned over a primitive, ephemeral and uncertain world in which the figure of the son (in a mythological sense) becomes a victim of this knot. Hence the emergence of the philosophical concepts of destiny, myth, guilt, and reconciliation, which are not, as he emphasizes, abstractly expressed, but rather assume a given configuration depending on the elements that this particular piece seeks to articulate. Literature communicates with Philosophy not through abstractions that go beyond the work, but through the concrete configurations of its pragmatic moments.

Finally, Adorno introduces the concept of explanation, identified with the exact moment of criticism. Assuming the form of commentary, the explanation becomes the moment that can bring together all the elements of analysis compared with the arbitrarily distinct.

Adorno discusses the contradictions embedded in the fact of mobilizing assumptions and knowledge that transcend the text during the immanent analysis. Showing the uselessness of "playing the fool" when faced with the work, Adorno emphasizes that transcendent knowledge should not be forgotten in the process of analysis, but mobilized and submitted to the experience of the work, before which they vanish. The aesthetic experience is raised to the fore. In this way, the transgressive character of the immanent analysis is revealed: the limits of the critic itself must be continually surpassed for its accomplishment (Adorno, 1975, p. 37).

With the principles of the immanent analysis exposed, there remains the question regarding the given conditions so that reading experience can take this analysis to term.

⁶ It does not mean that art cannot be dominated by the commercial ratio, but that, by hijacking artistic forms, it impinges on them the irrationality that characterizes the products of the cultural industry (Adorno, 2002).

Types of listeners... types of readers?

In spite of the importance of Adorno's literary criticism, the main focus of his aesthetics, as we know, was not literature, but music. Adorno's first ideas about a typology of musical listening were developed in 1939, along with the *Princeton Radio Research Project*⁷. About twenty years later, some of these ideas would be part of a series of lectures transmitted by radio (Adorno, 2011), among which were those about "types of musical behavior" of particular interest: being imminently sociological the nucleus of its reflections, presenting a detailed view of the criteria that compose the aesthetic experience in the case of musical listening – but which were not equally referred to in the literature by Adorno.

To compose a typology of listeners, Adorno initially establishes a qualitative differentiation of the musical experience. This was possible because the work was conceived of "as objectively structured and meaningful in themselves, things that invite analysis and can be perceived and *experienced with different degrees of accuracy*." (Adorno, 2011, p. 59, my italics). Making it clear that he does not want to fix a "completeness" of experience, Adorno delimits what he understands as "listening adequacy," equated with a "structural listening" – proper to the *experts* at the top of the list of types: one in which the listener not only shows but is aware of the formal qualities and subjective complexities of what he/she hears, but is also able to relate his musical experience.

While the group of experts would correspond to a limited number of music professionals, in the other strata there would be both the socially displaced types – and the good listeners, formerly belonging to the aristocratic circles (capable of spontaneous and grounded enjoyment but not associated with Technical criteria or idioms) – as well as those whose reception is internally mediated by the fetish of music – such as the cultural consumer, the emotional listener, the resentful or the jazz fan. For Adorno (2011), such a description of the types of listeners can be carried out in a coherent way to an immanent criticism, without the use of elements external to the object because "the interpretation of musical content is decided by the inner composition of the works" (p. 60).

But what is the relevance of a similar sociological approach in the case of the literary reading experience? Is the situation of literary reading equivalent to that of listening to music, to the point of justifying a classification of this experience, or a typology of readers? What is the pertinence of establishing more or less accurate degrees of reading, based on the principles of an immanent analysis of the literary work?

Literary reading as experience: possibilities

When Habermas (2010) made his critique of the concept of cultural industry, using literature, he argued

that "market laws" provide access to literary production, but it does not have the power to compromise literature through its facilitation (By means of a pricing policy). If the text were not submitted to a psychological facilitation, presenting itself in a simplified way, the fetishism of the merchandise, in itself, would not compromise literary production.

Although a work has not been subjected to any obvious psychological facilitation, Habermas disregards the fact that the experience of the reading public becomes a producing context of pseudo-culture. However, if we do not generalize the qualities of the object, but rather this experience, then we would incur a positivism that is not faithful to Adornian theory. What, then, specifically distinguishes the aesthetic experience offered by listening to music and the experience of reading? What brings them together?

If we think that experience corresponds not only to the momentary activity that surrounds the object, but to the possibilities (or limits) for the subject to relate to the material, it would not be absurd to propose a typology of readers similar to that which Adorno pleaded for the listeners. After all, the contingencies surrounding the crisis of experience are the same, shaped both by the social place of the individual, in relation to culture, and by the affective patterns that the objective condition of the subject provides. It is precisely the crystallization of the vicissitudes of the aesthetic experience that Adorno denounces at different moments of his work, showing how they reduce the critical power of art. There are, however, substantial differences between musical listening and literary reading, which make the two experiences qualitatively different.

The first of these differences refers to language. As a prerequisite for reading, the literary work calls for a linguistic proficiency that is more accessible to the educated citizen. The basic knowledge of music – notation, rhythm, harmony, etc. – are diffused much more narrowly. In a sense, the contradictions placed on literary experience are more closely intertwined with the idiosyncrasies of national educational systems, in their various facets. While literature has a historically privileged place within schools, musical training, stratified and fed back by the cultural industry, becomes more dependent on specific socio-cultural environments and the individual efforts of the listener to learn.

This situation approximates literature as the art of the average individual, while the characteristics of the book promote a more autonomous activity of the reader. Unlike radio, the book authorizes the reader to use as much time as is necessary for reading, to repeat it, or to move freely through the text without prejudicing, *a priori*, a structural apprehension of the unity of the text. This is not the case with the music listener. Even though recordings allow the listener to repeat portions of the song as often as they like, since rhythm, for example, is an inherent part of the song, segmentation compromises structural listening, which will be directly affected by radio reproducibility.

⁷ See Carone (2011).

In addition, the listener's difficulties in perceiving the structure of a piece of music is independent of the quality of the music, while the reading activity becomes more dependent on the complexity of the material. A classification of readers of literature would thus be subject to greater transience between supposedly different types of reader, generating an imprecise classification. This is because the quality of reading is associated with a wide variety of factors, promoting less uniform and / or discrepant experiences. In a way, it can be said that the book holds the key to its own experience, making the reader more capable of nurturing its formation.

The immanent characteristics of the book contributed to the fact that literature reached such a significant place in the bourgeois project of cultural education. This does not mean, however, that the aesthetic-literary experience is not affected by half-education, nor that literature is spared from the prejudices imposed upon it by cultural industry, as was intended by Habermas. It only means that the crisis of reading presents itself under peculiar historical-cultural conditions, and emerges in a moment of its own – conditions that differ from the development of other artistic modalities, and produce distinct effects (or damage) for the experience of the recipient with the work.

The reading in the current half-educational circuit

When Adorno sustains an immanent analysis of literary work based on truth content, he expresses a literature view consistent with the idea that art is not defined by its purpose, either as *art pour l'art* or as a source of "aesthetic pleasure," but, constituted as a fetish, it is able to reveal the contradictions that cross both its forms and the affirmation of its artistic character, as well as the conditions (objective and subjective) that participate in the conformation of experience in that context. From the reader's point of view, this means that the aesthetic experience advocated by Adorno is not centered on fruition, but on the possibility of exercising criticism.

Criticism, on the other hand, is not the result of a merely speculative activity, but is born of a reception of the woven work amid the perception of the aesthetic forms nourished by the experience of the reader. Content-based evaluations do not contribute to the experience of the work as a structural unit, but only as theoretical-philosophical generalizations that are not enough to compose criticism, since they fail to reach the work in its concreteness. Philosophical speculation, in turn, is essential insofar as the concept and schemas take part in the apperception of the work, and that immanent criticism is not completed without reaching the level of explanation.

Having opened up the critical potentialities inaugurated by the literature and stipulating the criteria for its immanent analysis, the question that arises at this point in the Adornian spectrum is how to find, in a generalized half-education framework, conditions

for the aesthetic-literary experience to take place. Especially considering the harmful effects of reification, the preponderance of the schemes produced by the cultural industry and their participation in the fusion of the experience.

In the case of literature, the reification of the aesthetic experience is expressed mainly in two ways, interspersed between the problems of cultural education: 1) in school, associated with the impasses of teaching literature in schools; 2) in the enlarged cultural scene, as far as the literary criticism and circumstances of its crisis are concerned.

The doctrinal mission of schools stimulates the offer of a teaching of moralizing literature as a tendency, affecting both the indication of titles and the induction of certain modes of reading. In addition to discouraging reading itself, the need to evaluate and quantify the results produced by the student contributes to the substitution of an immanent analysis for the factual description of the work, which is more easily stipulated as a correct answer. This phenomenon does not separate itself from the problems related to literary criticism, in a broader context, since "authorized intellectuals" end up carrying out the function of informing schools at lower levels regarding their teaching on parameters in vogue for analysis, especially those that are considered canonical. The reproduction of formulas inaugurated by specialists, replacing the reader's particular experience, tends to transform the activity of reading at the moment of introjection to pre-established schemes, thereby promoting a stereotyped reading. Thus, literary criticism itself, which emerged with the aim of broadening the possibilities open to the understanding of the text, becomes part of the vicious circle that competes for half-education – a phenomenon that foreshadows the decline of criticism itself and the loss of autonomy of school institutions towards the cultural industry.

Without experience, there is no criticism. But experience is not possible without risk⁸. In this case, the risk that their perceptual schemes will prove inadequate for the formulation of an individual judgment about the work, demanding the construction of new schemes. If the reading of good literary works favors a reconstruction of these schemes based on experience, then the criticism of the reigning semiformalization, in turn, will be all the more arduous the more imprisoned the subject is in previous and alien schemes to him – a condition that affects the individual, but cannot be completely solved in the solitude of reading.

Although Adorno agrees with Habermas's criticism that the facilitation of economic access to certain works

⁸ It is important to emphasize that risk is not welcome in a context in which education is conceived as investment, it is designed to integrate the individual into a managed society. Within such an educational project, the learner is expected to be able to produce results, not trials or doubts.

does not compromise its structure⁹, the “pocket edition” of a complex literary work becomes a decoy when it deceives the reader about the apparent simplicity of its Content. The traditional book, ambivalent as a commodity, is sold as an occasion for a reading experience that, despite the appearance of its envelope, will not be able to offer so many readers entangled in the vicissitudes of half-education. The work does not lose its aura, nor does it approach the reader. That is, the low price of a paperback edition does not make Machiavelli’s *The Prince* necessarily more accessible to an average Brazilian reader, because they will lack this time and educational preparation so that the text becomes actually comprehensible (Dadico, 2012). The mediating object participates in the experience that it propitiates, even when it carries an alographic art-like literature.

Although the book constitutes a medium par excellence of the cultural industry – such as radio, cinema or television – neither the reader’s experience, as we have seen, nor the quality of the literary work, nor the medium itself are isolated from its context. In fact, one of the tendencies that was most acutely noticed by Adorno in his research refers to the propensity to the “amalgamation” between the diverse forms of cultural production in function of its consumption (Adorno & Eisler, 2010), which led to a gradual loss of the autonomy of art. Faced with this loss, it becomes progressively more difficult to understand the literary work as a single object, or its reception as an experience apart from other means of reproduction. The digitization of the culture¹⁰ that is now expanding, while encompassing the different spheres of artistic production, seems to be the cornerstone of this prognosis. This phenomenon suggests that the reading experience is eventually moving, as well as the experience once mediated by mass media, towards the establishment of undesirable stereotypes.

The reader who uses a traditional book has a relatively large autonomy in relation to the environment, and can plan his/her reading in many ways: regulating the time and rhythm employed in the activity, choosing the desired environment and degree of concentration, opting or not for the feature of external elements to reading etc.

(Dadico, 2012). These conditions have been changing rapidly. Not only are works and reading transformed into the new cycle of the cultural industry, but the book itself, as a privileged mediator of a certain aesthetic experience, is radically adapting to be largely extrinsic according to the demands of literary work and reading activity. Reading a literary work on the screen of a cell phone, for example, promotes better access and portability of the book, but this does not mean that the reader will be able to read more or better for being able to access text that is ubiquitously available, networked, through a smartphone.

The conditions that the traditional book offered for the modality of reading, which the bourgeois project of individual education, seem to be less and less present in the digital book – an object that becomes a representative and agent of the set of transformations of reading in the context of new media. The time and loneliness that a certain type of reading requires is modified when the mediating object no longer promises the reader a departure from the surrounding world – as happened with the book on paper – but rather an immersion in the chain of connections that the digital devices now offer. At the same time, the wide range of services available via the Internet on websites, blogs, social networks and others makes school institutions no longer the only or main sources of reference for the reader to be introduced in the world of books and reading.

An effective deepening of this discussion leads to the realization of empirical research aimed specifically at critiquing of the new objects of mediation of literary work, and of literary works themselves, as they are perceived by the readers – an objective that unfortunately surpasses the possibilities and the measure of this test. I hope, however, that the reflections raised here help to better identify the problems that the digitization of literature may entail for the reading experience. I hope, moreover, that I have succeeded in highlighting the importance of better understanding the set of transformations in progress in order to assess if and how such changes will give rise to new reading experiences – which in turn can both contribute and offer resistance to the consolidation of a new half-educational cycle.

Leitura literária, experiência e formação do indivíduo: reflexões a partir da crítica de Adorno

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é discutir as relações entre a leitura de livros de literatura e a formação cultural do indivíduo [*Bildung*], partindo das contribuições críticas de Theodor Adorno. Esta discussão é norteada pelas seguintes perguntas: Como a leitura de livros participa da formação do indivíduo (ou da semiformação)? Qual o papel da experiência estética para a análise da obra literária? Como a semiformação pode comprometer esta experiência? Para conduzir essa reflexão, recupero alguns conceitos e categorias estéticas utilizados por Adorno, como aqueles de experiência, esquema e análise imanente, bem como pesquisas sociológicas do autor capazes de contribuir para uma caracterização da experiência de leitura. Sob essa perspectiva, proponho uma reflexão acerca dos problemas que envolvem a leitura de livros e a formação cultural do indivíduo no contexto atual.

Palavras-chave: leitura, experiência, formação do indivíduo, literatura, Theodor Adorno.

9 For Adorno (2010), “one cannot oppose the publication in paperback of important philosophical texts of the past with the argument that their content will suffer by this form and function of presentation without making oneself look like the ridiculous spokesperson for an historically condemned idea of culture” (p. 28, our translation).

10 For clarification on the concept, check Digitalization and Digitation (2014, September 08).

Lecture littéraire, expérience et formation de l'individu: réflexions à partir de la critique de Adorno

Résumé: Le but de cet article est de discuter de la relation entre la lecture de livres littéraires et la formation culturelle de l'individu [*Bildung*], sur la base des contributions critiques de Theodor Adorno. Cette discussion est guidée par les questions suivantes : Comment la lecture des livres contribue à la formation de l'individu (ou de la semi-formation) ? Quel est le rôle de l'expérience esthétique pour l'analyse de l'œuvre littéraire ? Comment la semi-formation, à son tour, peut affecter cette expérience ? Pour mener à bien cette réflexion, je récupère certains concepts et catégories esthétiques utilisés par Adorno, comme ceux d'expérience, schéma et analyse immanente, aussi bien des recherches sociologiques de l'auteur en mesure de contribuer à une caractérisation de l'expérience de lecture. Dans cette perspective, je propose une réflexion sur les problèmes concernant la lecture de livres et la formation culturelle de l'individu dans le contexte actuel.

Mots-clés: lecture, expérience, formation de l'individu, littérature, Theodor Adorno.

Lectura literaria, experiencia y formación del individuo: reflexiones a partir de la crítica de Adorno

Resumen: El propósito de este artículo es discutir sobre la relación entre la lectura de libros de literatura y la formación cultural del individuo [*Bildung*], basándose en las contribuciones críticas de Theodor Adorno. Esta discusión se guía por las siguientes preguntas: ¿De qué manera el hecho de leer libros contribuye a la formación del individuo (o de la pseudocultura)? ¿Cuál es el papel de la experiencia estética para el análisis de la obra literaria? ¿Cómo la pseudocultura, a su vez, puede afectar esta experiencia? Para llevar a cabo esta reflexión, recupero algunos conceptos y categorías estéticas utilizados por Adorno, como los de experiencia, esquema y análisis immanente, así como la investigación sociológica que puede contribuir a una caracterización de la experiencia de lectura. Desde esta perspectiva, propongo una reflexión sobre los problemas que afectan a la lectura de libros y la formación cultural del individuo en el contexto actual.

Palabras clave: lectura, experiencia, formación del individuo, literatura, Theodor Adorno.

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