

**The absence of anthropological discussion in the Neoliberal context:  
Reflections on education in the face of the latency of barbarism<sup>1</sup>**

*A ausência da discussão antropológica no contexto Neoliberal:  
reflexões acerca da educação frente a latência da barbárie*

*La ausencia de discusión antropológica en el contexto neoliberal:  
reflexiones sobre la educación frente a la latencia de la barbarie*

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**Abstract:** In contemporary times, major anthropological discussions about man have been renounced. It is understood that the silence produced around these debates produces a state of anthropological drift, in which the concepts underlying neoliberal rationality are uncritically assumed. However, when analyzing the neo-subject necessary and produced by this reason-world, it is identified that it is predisposed to a state of barbarism, since the competitive logic and the atomization of the individual tend to produce resentment and psychological suffering. In order to restore homeostasis, contemporary individuals may join gregarious hordes libidinally united to a leader. Given this, this essay discusses the functions of education in a contemporary context in which, due to a lack of anthropological discussion, there is flirtation with the latency of barbarism.

**Key words:** Neoliberalism. Barbarism. Education.

**Resumo:** Na contemporaneidade, renunciou-se às grandes discussões antropológicas acerca do homem. Entende-se que o silêncio produzido em torno destes debates produz um estado de deriva antropológica, no qual assume-se acriticamente as concepções subjacentes à racionalidade neoliberal. Contudo, ao analisar o neosujeito necessário e produzido por essa razão-mundo, identifica-se que ele é predisposto a um estado de barbárie, uma vez que a lógica concorrencial e a atomização do indivíduo tendem a produzir ressentimento e o sofrimento psíquico. A fim de restaurar a homeostasia, os indivíduos contemporâneos podem juntar-se a hordas gregárias unidas libidinalmente a um líder. Diante disso, neste ensaio discorre-se acerca das funções da educação em um contexto contemporâneo no qual, em decorrência de uma ausência de discussão antropológica, flerta-se com a latência da barbárie.

**Palavras-chave:** Neoliberalismo; Barbárie; Educação.

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**Resumen:** En la contemporaneidad, se ha renunciado a las grandes discusiones antropológicas sobre el ser humano. Se entiende que el silencio que rodea estos debates conduce a un estado de deriva antropológica, en el que se aceptan acríticamente las concepciones subyacentes a la racionalidad neoliberal. Sin embargo, al analizar el neo-sujeto requerido y producido por esta lógica-mundo, es evidente que está predispuesto a un estado de barbarie, ya que la lógica competitiva y la atomización del individuo tienden a generar resentimiento y sufrimiento psíquico. Para restaurar la homeostasis, los individuos contemporáneos pueden unirse a hordas gregarias unidas libidinalmente a un líder. En este ensayo, discutimos las funciones de la educación en un contexto contemporáneo en el que, debido a la ausencia de discusión antropológica, coqueteamos con la latencia de la barbarie.

**Palabras clave:** Neoliberalismo; Educación; Barbarie.

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## Introduction

This article discusses the role of education in a contemporary context, in which we flirt with the latency of barbarism as a result of anthropological drift. Anthropological drift is understood as the lack of an explicit debate about the concept of man in a neoliberal society. It is assumed that such absence means the return to a metaphysical conception of man, insofar as it is uncritically assumed that the essence of the individual is his propensity to engage in a competitive logic with his peers, which, ultimately, in this instance, leads to its atomization and the fracturing of bonds of solidarity and fraternity. Thus, neoliberalism, as a world-reason, hides, beneath the alleged total freedom of the individual, the demand for self-referentiality.

Based on Freud's perspective (2011, 2022), it is understood that the atomized individual, in order to guarantee the continuity of the self and seeking to eliminate unpleasant drives, tends to unite libidinally around the figure of a sovereign self, constituting an amorphous mass, in which the prohibitions and reactive psychological forces and drives are placed in suspension. It is inferred that at this juncture, violence and aggressiveness become privileged mechanisms for restoring homeostasis. Thus, in accordance with Adorno (2015), barbarism does not represent a discontinuity in civilization, but rather, an inherent part of the development of society that tends to manifest itself in certain historical, economic and political contingencies.

It is assumed that in neoliberal societies the possibilities of the occurrence of barbarism cases are increased to the extent that the atomized individual is not just the result of historically and socially established mechanisms. Atomization, in the contemporary context, is the result of an intentional project of subjectivation and introjection of neoliberal normativity, in order to sustain the desired configuration for society (Alemán, 2016).

This process reverberates in the educational field, as there is a discursive enterprise condemning pedagogies that operated from the desire-norm dialectic (Charlot, 2020). For Charlot (2020), the inability of these pedagogies to sustain themselves in a neoliberal context is due to the intention of establishing a norm of desire, which is inconsistent with the dominant rationality and its demand for the release of the individual's drives, in order to insert them into a desire-consumption circuit (Dufour, 2008). Charlot (2020) identifies that criticisms of traditional and new pedagogy are not accompanied by a debate or an educational proposition based on pedagogical assumptions. There is, on the other hand, the emergence of discourses about education that are exempt from anthropological concerns, among which the author highlights quality, cyberculture, neuropsychology and transhumanism.

It is understood that the absence of an anthropological reflection on the formation of the subject leads to the adoption of discourses and conceptions surrounding the dominant rationality. With this, educational institutions begin to organize the educational task in order to introduce into individuals the norms resulting from neoliberal rationality. The absence of an anthropological foundation that characterizes contemporary education can, in this way, encourage the atomization of the individual, the impoverishment of language, the desymbolization of the imaginary, inserting it, prematurely, into a competitive logic. Education would not prevent barbarism, but would rather be encouraging it. Taking Adorno's (2022, p. 129) statement that "the demand that Auschwitz not be repeated is the first of all for education", this study aims to outline some possibilities for a pedagogy that favors the maintenance of social cohesion and democracy.

The essay is organized into four sections. Initially, in "The concept of man in neoliberal rationality", we seek to identify the anthropological conception underlying neoliberalism. It is argued that this world-reason represents a return to a metaphysical conception of man, as it reduces him to a competitive logic. To substantiate this hypothesis, we seek to analyze the subjectivation mechanisms used by dominant rationality, highlighting its intentionality in forming an individual suitable for the maintenance and consolidation of a neoliberal society. It is also noteworthy that the

atomization of the subject and the absence of bonds of solidarity and fraternity are not sterile processes, as they cause psychological suffering, resentment and require a self-referentiality for which the individual is not prepared.

The neoliberal individual immersed in a competitive logic, atomized and, constantly, feeling threatened by the loss of symbolic markers, seeks to find mechanisms to eliminate the drives that cause displeasure (Birman, 2022). It is recognized that, among these, there are depressive possibilities (Dunker, 2023), the use of psychoactive substances, among others. However, the second section of the essay discusses the constitution of the masses and the libidinal union around a supposed sovereign as one of the mechanisms for seeking security and stability of the self. Based on Freud's perspective (2011, 2022), it is argued that the masses run the risk of becoming gregarious and hostile at times, as they suspend the prohibitions that prevent the manifestation of violence. From the moment an enemy is defined towards whom these feelings are directed, there is a risk of flirting with barbarism, that is, returning to the primitive stages of existence in which there is an impulse for destruction (Adorno, 2022).

The intention of the third section is to discuss the functions or possibilities of education in the face of the latency of barbarism. The hypothesis is presented that education finds itself in a moment of anthropological drift, in which the question of the subject is not raised, resulting in the uncritical adoption of the neoliberal metaphysical conception (Charlot, 2020). It is assumed that the expectations placed on education are paradoxical, in that one cannot adopt a naive position that it would be capable of curbing the dominance of neoliberal rationality transversal to different social spheres and phenomena. However, according to Savater (2012), it is necessary to be nourished with an optimism in recognizing, at the same time that education has obvious limits, it consists of the “most human and humanizing” of all human endeavors (Savater, 2012, p. 15 ). Thus, this section highlights the need for education that, if it cannot prevent barbarism, postpones it or creates spaces for the construction of counter-hegemonic rationalities or resistance movements. The study ends by making some considerations about the possibilities of an educational enterprise that maintains social cohesion and prepares individuals to live in a democratic society.

### **The concept of man in Neoliberal rationality**

In this section of the essay, we discuss the concept of the subject underlying neoliberal rationality. It is assumed that changes in the commercial economy unequivocally promote changes in the anthropological and ontological order. Dufour (2008), when discussing the intersections

between large economies - symbolic, mercantile, political, semiological and psychic, uses the concept of transduction, using it to designate the articulation between different economic dimensions and the capacity for reconfigurations events that occurred in one of them reverberate, reinforce themselves and spread to the others. From this perspective, there would be no lasting political and economic changes if they were not accompanied by anthropological reconfigurations. However, it is assumed that this process of constituting a subject necessary for the establishment and maintenance of rationality is not cause-effect, nor completely programmed and sterile, as it can result in the production of adverse effects on the individual's psychic scope.

In view of this, it is argued that the contemporary context is marked, in the economic sphere, by the prevalence of neoliberalism, characterized by the hegemony of competitive logic, the deregulation of markets and the weakening of the role of the state as an inducer of social policies and economic development (Harvey, 2014; Dardot, Laval, 2016). Such characteristics reverberate anthropologically and ontologically in individuals, to the extent that the business managerialism of life itself becomes a necessary condition for social survival and the maintenance of a mode of existence in accordance with the current standard. However, it is understood that the introjection of neoliberal normativity, in addition to leading to an atomization of the individual and the suppression of their bonds of loyalty, generates psychological suffering and resentment. Thus, the promise of total individual freedom assumed by neoliberalism ambiguously entails a need to sustain oneself in the void or absence of transcendent values (Lebrun, 2008). Based on Freud (2011, 2022), Adorno (2015, 2019, 2020, 2022) and Casara (2019), it is inferred that this context could be seminal for the constitution of gregarious hordes and the advent of post-democratic movements that flirt with barbarism.

It is recognized that, historically, there was an intersection between the economic system and the subject necessary to maintain such order. However, according to Alemán (2016), neoliberalism is innovative in that it assumes the intention of subjectifying the individual not only through the historical-social situation, but through a deliberate action of desymbolization and impoverishment of language that would facilitate the introjection of “[...] a business, competitive and managerial paradigm of existence itself” (Alemán, 2016, p. 15). It is reiterated that such a process is not aseptic, resulting, in addition to the promise of a full aspiration for freedom and unlimited enjoyment, in an exponential growth of psychic discomfort (Dunker, 2015, 2023; Han, 2017; Kehl, 2020; Carrenho *et al*, 2021; Alves, Sanches, Luccia, 2021).

Bearing in mind the paradoxicality between the assumption of freedom and the excessive psychological suffering resulting from neoliberal rationality, it can be inferred that the process of subjectivation of the individual and the constitution of the neo-subject are not

optional processes, but rather the result of cohesion. When it became a state policy, neoliberalism resulted in the deregulation of labor relations and the destruction of a state of rights, generating an increase in the number of unemployed or underemployed people, impoverishing the population and leading to an increase in the number of unassisted people, and excluded from government policies (Harvey, 2014; Saad Filho, Morais, 2018). Faced with this context, a pedagogy of unemployment emerges (Dowbor, 2013, 2020), in which high unemployment rates transmit a symbolic message to individuals about the need to maintain high productivity. This process results in the growth of emotional exhaustion (Han, 2017) and the generalization of competitive logic, as other individuals virtually represent a threat to the loss of social status and economic stability.

If once, in a classical liberal society, as analyzed by Marx (1998), the individual's labor power was traded as a commodity, in the contemporary neoliberal context, the individual perceives himself as profitable capital, investing in the development of psychological skills, social and work skills, in order to increase financial return (Cenci, 2020). Franco *et al.* (2023, p. 48) state that the theory of human capital represents the maximum hypertrophy of the individual, as it implies

[...] a relationship to oneself marked by the demand for constant self-valuation, mediated by the logic of the commodity. In a framework of extreme heteronomy, individuals are elevated to autonomous agents, capable of acting freely to satisfy their interests. Since each one is converted into capital, the subjects begin to understand themselves as companies subject to the insecurity typical of market dynamics. In a competitive society, individuals constantly compare and rank things and people, being themselves subject to (de)classification at all times.

In the formation of an individual entrepreneur of himself, other strategies for governing the population and introjecting neoliberal normativity are mobilized, of which the financialization of life, meritocratic discourses and the desymbolization and impoverishment of language can be highlighted. Neoliberalism ushered in an era of unproductive capital, in which the income of financial institutions and certain social segments does not come from investment in productive capital, but, in line with Dowbor (2017), from financial speculation and the appropriation of income through usury in credit offered to the working classes or in the form of continuous collection of public debt securities. Alemán (2016) corroborates this perspective by identifying that the population's indebtedness, concomitantly with potential unemployment, causes individuals to accept conditions of self-exploitation, understanding excess work or the renunciation of rights as something necessary and beneficial, in order to maintain their economic conditions.



Added to the naturalization of competitive logic and the financialization of everyday life is the legitimization of a meritocratic discourse and the “liberation of drives” (Dufour, 2008, p. 262). Neoliberalism is based on a promise of limitlessness, in which cheap credit, together with periods of economic stability, promote the illusion of democratization of consumption. Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco (2018, p. 54) add that these cycles of development, in which optimism and collapse are interspersed, “affect not only the material conditions of existence, but also the individual self, the ability to aspire to forms of do politics and understand the world”. In moments of economic growth, there is the diffusion and naturalization of a promise of stability and promotion of better material conditions on a permanent basis, which, due to the very configuration of neoliberal rationality, is not fulfilled.

Thus, it can be stated that neoliberalism is based on a false “symbolic assumption of equality” (Kehl, 2020, p. 14), through which the understanding is spread that everything is within everyone’s reach, if the individual dedicates himself with commitment, effort, merit and performance. However, such discourse is quickly deconstructed, as it comes up against the finiteness of resources, in addition to the recognition that obtaining economic achievements is beyond the individual's control. The paradox constantly hovers over the individual between a supposed right and promise to freedom and social ascension and, on the other hand, the risk of being constantly descending from the social class or being potentially unemployed. Success (or failure) is attributed to a strictly individual dimension, worshiping individuals who achieve it and blaming and holding accountable those who fail.

To the extent that an individual strives to obtain a certain achievement, but does not achieve it as a result of the fallacy of meritocratic discourse, it is assumed that he can adopt a position of resentment, in which “[...] he stops to identify himself as defeated and begins to identify himself as a victim, especially the innocent victim of a winner who, in these terms, begins to occupy the place of guilt” (Kehl, 2020, p. 15). It is pertinent to observe, in accordance with Weib (2020), that individuals who feel threatened or defeated tend to blame for their state, “not the apparatus that causes it, but those who critically opposed the system in the which they once had status” (Weib, 2020, p. 93).

This inability to criticize the apparatus that generates suffering is due, above all, to the fact that in neoliberal societies there is a deliberate effort to manipulate and impoverish language, as well as desymbolize the imaginary (Alemán, 2016; Casara, 2019, 2021 ). This action within the imaginary tends to make individuals assume the simplistic analysis carried out of the social environment as true, becoming incapable of criticizing the values constituted from the dominant world-reason. Thus, for example, the democratization of access to symbolic

markers of status can trigger, in those who feel threatened by the loss of exclusivity of possession or a supposed right, a feeling of hatred and resentment towards individuals on social mobility or those who criticized or intended changes in the hitherto dominant system.

In light of the above, it can be said that, anthropologically, neoliberalism represents the return to a metaphysical ideal of man, manifested by the supposed universality and essentiality of competitive logic. In summary, the neo-subject necessary to maintain the predominant rationality is desymbolized (Alemán, 2016), atomized (Franco *et al.*, 2023), potentially resentful (Kehl, 2020) and, consequently, incapable of maintaining bonds of fraternity and solidarity (Lebrun, 2008). Concomitantly with this, there is an interest of neoliberal rationality in freeing this individual from any prohibition or norm (Dufour, 2008).

Thus, the psychological suffering resulting from changes in the economic and social situation, with the advent of neoliberalism, as a world-reason and the hypertrophy of the individual, the loss of the legitimacy of authority and a crusade against norms and prohibitions. of pleasure, necessary to sustain cycles of consumption. The contemporary individual begins to demand the ability to sustain themselves in a void, becoming self-referential (Ghiraldelli Jr., 2023). For Lebrun (2008), the absence of the father, that is, of a subject capable of withstanding the violence necessary for the child's growth and establishing otherness, means that society becomes made up of individuals who were not forced to leave their home infancy. A paradoxical state is inaugurated in which, on the one hand, there is an excess of singularity and individuality and, on the other hand, an absence of a training project capable of preparing the individual for a stage of legitimacy crisis or the absence of an Other (Lebrun, 2008). This finding reverberates in the ways of organizing society, making the emergence of post-democracy and the inability to renounce oneself and assume socially shared positions imminent (Casara, 2019, 2021).

Thus, the individual who does not obtain the success promised by neoliberalism, by placing themselves as a victim, does not feel coerced or assume that they are above the law when it comes to holding others responsible and blaming them for their state. Contemporary social phenomena, such as the exponential growth of racism, xenophobia, homophobia and aporophobia, could be understood as arising from the presupposed threat that these groups represent for the loss of symbolic markers of social differentiation, that is, of “a fear of the consequences of general developments of society” (Adorno, 2020, p. 48). There is an intersection between the production of the neoliberal subject and the possibility of barbarism, insofar as this anthropological change and the constitution of the neo-subject can only occur in “[...] a climate of terror, of general precariousness, so that everyone joins the program”



(Alemán, 2016, p. 130). It is this way of managing and subjectifying individuals, characterized by fear and the constant threat of loss of status or monetary power that produces a psychic residue capable of initially triggering individual discourse against certain social groups (Adorno, 2015). Following the essay, we discuss the ways in which the atomized individual constitutes a mass prone to barbarism.

### **The latency of barbarism in a Neoliberal context**

In the previous section it was argued that neoliberalism, by spreading an idea of limitlessness and the possibility of social and economic advancement based on individual merit and commitment, generates psychological suffering in individuals. Added to this is the undertaking to remove prohibitions and norms, which makes the individual place themselves above the law, not feeling coerced to speak out even when their positions go against ethical perspectives or aspects necessary to maintain social cohesion. In view of the above, this section of the essay discusses the processes of constitution of the masses that lead to the imminence of barbarism. To this end, the works of Adorno (2015, 2019, 2020, 2022), Arendt (1999, 2012) and Freud (2011, 2020, 2022) are used as basic references.

In line with Lebrun (2008), Kehl (2020) and Adorno (2022), the hypothesis is defended that the atomized individual produced in the contemporary context is not prepared to deal with the state of self-determination and self-referentiality in which he finds himself. Left to himself, frustrated and devoid of bonds of fraternity and solidarity, it is assumed that he will tend to seek an imaginary sovereign or father with whom he will establish a “[...] relationship of infantile dependence with another [...] who should protect it, reward its efforts, recognize its value” (Kehl, 2020, p. 12). Arendt (2012) agrees with this perspective by identifying that the constitution of the masses necessary for totalitarian regimes is preceded by an “egocentric bitterness [which brings] with it a clear weakening of the instinct for self-preservation” (p. 444-445). The author continues by highlighting that in this social phenomenon, the “awareness of unimportance and expendability ceased to be an expression of individual frustration and became a mass phenomenon” (Arendt, 2012, p. 445).

Recognizing that the mass individual is not characterized by a predisposition to violence or rudeness, but rather by the absence of social relationships (Arendt, 2012), it becomes necessary to identify the elements that allow him to identify with a leader. Goldenberg (2022), when approaching this issue from a psychoanalytic perspective, identifies that there is no mechanism for convincing the masses, but rather the active production of a supposed sovereign. For the author,

“the common good of the masses is the desire to obey a leader. It is, therefore, not the will of the tyrant that subjugates the crowd, but rather the crowd that gives itself a dictator with an iron will [...] the group manufactures for itself the leader it needs” (Goldenberg, 2022, p. 50). Thus, the leaders capable of libidinally uniting the masses do not come from them, but are the productions of an amorphous crowd that requests them.

Such an understanding implies recognizing that the production of gregarious hordes does not require convincing strategies or that there is an overvaluation of the potential for forms of communication to form authoritarian personalities. In totalitarian movements, Arendt (2012) states, for example, that propaganda is always aimed at an external audience. In turn, Adorno (2015) comes close to this perspective in that he states that communication produces, above all, engagement. Thus, media action would only act on those individuals who already have a susceptibility to the fascist personality, producing in them a state of cognitive dissociation, a distorted view of reality itself and/or a greater attachment and union around authoritarian leadership.

In view of the above, it is clear that the creation of barbaric hordes is not the result of a discursive appeal, as “the masses would hardly be captivated by false, crude and specious propaganda, if they themselves did not have something that corresponded to the messages of sacrifice and life dangerous” (Adorno, 2015, p. 71). There would be a seminal aspect of fascism in each individual, to the extent that Adorno (2022) states that the authoritarian potential is still underlying in individuals, always having the “possibility that it will be repeated depending on the state of consciousness and unconsciousness of people” (Adorno, 2022, p. 129). Thus, the inhibition of hateful attitudes and aggressiveness is due, above all, to historical, economic and social circumstances and contingencies.

To the extent that, as explained in the previous section, the dominant rationality produces psychic discomfort and continuous resentment, there is a risk of fostering the development of this personality with authoritarian tendencies (Adorno, 2019). When feeling helpless and without prospects, individuals start to dream of “[...] the oceanic feeling being integrated into something outsized, which will redeem them from their smallness and everyday miseries” (Costa, 2022, p. 19). This causes him to become part of the mass, not through external coercion, but through identification and self-preservation, “instinctively subordinating himself to anyone who names his master” (Freud, 2022, p. 55).

Bearing in mind that identification with the leader does not require convincing or coercion, but rather identification, it is necessary to understand this process. The identification between subordinate and leader occurs, above all, because the sovereign feels uninhibited and

authorized to affirm or represent what future members of the mass would not say in a normal situation. It is this lack of inhibition or the risk of acting like a fool that causes atomized individuals to begin to gather libidinally around leadership (Adorno, 2015, 2020).

The risk and flirtation with barbarity that the masses behave in is due, above all, to the changes promoted in the individual in relation to morality. Freud (2022, p. 44) states that

[...] in the mass the individual is placed under conditions that allow him to free himself from the repressions of his unconscious impulse movements. The apparently new qualities that he then shows are precisely the manifestations of this unconscious, which, after all, contains everything that is evil in the human soul; the disappearance of moral conscience or the feeling of responsibility in these circumstances does not pose any difficulty to our understanding (Freud, 2022, p. 44).

Mass participation causes the interdicts and civilizing brakes necessary for social cohesion to be suspended to the extent that social fear, fundamental for the constitution of the sense of morality, ceases to act on the individual (Freud, 2011, 2022). Freud (2022, p. 64) continues discussing the suspension of morality, as he states that “in obedience to the new authority, the person is authorized to disable their previous moral conscience and at the same time give in to the temptation of gaining pleasure which he will certainly obtain by lifting his inhibitions.” Thus, the individual affected by previously repressed disturbances that cause displeasure begins to manifest them in order to restore homeostasis. With a lack of a sense of morality, there is a growing manifestation of violent activity, whereby “[...] the affirmation of the power of being would manifest itself in the face of the other person taken as an object” (Birman, 2022, p. 132 ).

Given the perception that the individual member of the masses is characterized by the suspension of prohibitions and the absence of social fear, it can be inferred that crowds always carry a risk of triggering violent actions, as “the tendency towards aggression is a disposition of the original instinct and autonomous from the human being” (Freud, 2011, p. 67). Thus, in a psychoanalytic approach, it is understood that aggressive tendencies are primary constituents of the human being, but that, as a result of civilizing processes, they are inhibited by reactive psychic forces (Freud, 2011). The constitution of civilization requires the renunciation of primitive instincts, sources of pleasure and happiness, in the name of a promise of security. The movement of the masses would represent a return to this primitive stage, insofar as the reactive forces that suspend the tendency towards aggressiveness are absent. A similar position is also adopted by Adorno (2022, p. 174), for whom “barbarism exists

everywhere there is a regression to primitive physical violence, without there being a transparent link with rational objectives of society”.

The perspective assumed so far shows that the barbaric episodes in the history of humanity, especially those that occurred within Western civilization, such as the Holocaust, cannot be understood as illogical or “pagan irruption” (Calligaris, 2022, p. 83), but rather processes arising from the historical, social and economic situation. Until now, it has been argued that the atomization of the individual by generating psychological suffering and demanding self-referentiality can make him seek submission to a leader to whom he is united in a libidinal way. Among the masses, prohibitions and social fear are lifted, causing members to express, often in the form of violence, their drives.

It is assumed that in the contemporary context, in which instrumental logic predominates and intersubjective relationships are established through a calculating process (Bauman, 2021), an obstacle or rational and utilitarian psychological defense is created that makes the return to morality difficult. The reification of human relationships and the absence of recognition of the other (Lukács, 2018; Honneth, 2018), as well as the predominance of a calculating subjectivity characteristic of rational thought (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1985; Horkheimer, 2015) could serve as a justification to eliminate or desensitize yourself to the pain of others, leading to everyday violence (Bauman, Donskis, 2019, 2021). Thus, the damage caused or the gradual elimination of others no longer become parameters capable of raising awareness or representing a return to morality, given that the top of an axiological hierarchy of values is occupied by efficiency, performance and financial return.

It is understood that violent acts or evil would not be the result of motivation or fanaticism (Calligaris, 2022), but something everyday and necessary for the execution and optimization of a task. In this vein, Arendt (1999) speaks of the banality of evil, that is, a constant action and understood as an object of work, not associated with enjoyment. For the philosopher, in Adolf Eichmann's stance, there would be an absence of awareness about the consequences of his actions - what would be expected from a war criminal - and of thinking from the perspective of others. The judge would have “[...] ignorance of everything that was not directly, technically and bureaucratically linked to his work” (Arendt, 1999, p. 67). In another work, the author further states that “[...] the murderers themselves, simply following orders and taking pride in their dispassionate efficiency, sinisterly resembled the innocent instruments of an inhuman and impersonal cycle and events” (Arendt, 2012, p. 33). Thus, the absence of scruples is normalized and justified by the need to carry out the task efficiently.

Given the risk of the masses trivializing evil, it becomes necessary, finally, to identify who the violent acts are aimed at. Freud (2011) already announced that the constitution and maintenance of large social groups would not be maintained only by the existence of common objectives, but, above all, by the existence of an enemy towards whom hatred should be directed. In major episodes of barbarism, especially those involving anti-Semitic stances, Arendt (2012) identifies a gradual construction of the enemy, in which hatred of Jews, initially, resulted almost exclusively from the conflict between a certain social class and the state, that is, there was a dimension of resentment towards a group that was identified as privileged or representing the state.

The fate of the violence of those who are resentful and insecure in relation to maintaining their social status and the exclusive domain of symbolic markers of differentiation, according to Kehl (2020), will always be that of members of another group hitherto understood as marginal, but which “they seek to achieve some social advancement” (Kehl, 2020, p. 174). Thus, mass violence will hardly be aimed at exotic cultures or at those who are “powerless and are content to occupy the lower ranks of society, posing no threat of rivalry” (Kehl, 2020, p. 174). These people are left with a feeling of insensitivity or irrelevance, but they seek, even in a pauperized way, to maintain their existence, to serve as identifiers of difference or supposed exclusivity.

In this section of the essay, we sought to discuss the process that leads the atomized individual and in constant psychological suffering of neoliberalism to integrate into a libidinal union around an authority. We also sought to highlight the relationship between the constitution of the masses and acts of violence, insofar as submission to authority allows the suspension of prohibitions and a return to a primitive stage of externalization of drives that generate displeasure. It is reiterated that barbarism is not an intentional part of a neoliberal program, but appears to be, above all, a functional dimension resulting from the inability to create mechanisms that absorb frustration and social resentment (Calligaris, 2022).

### **Education as a guarantee against barbarism**

In the previous sections, the latency of barbarism was discussed in a context transversalized by a rationality that promotes, through atomization and resentment, great psychological suffering. The implications of social, cultural and economic reconfigurations for the emergence of syndromes associated with barbaric personality and which have the potential to lead individuals to join gregarious hordes were also discussed. In view of the above, this

section discusses the possibilities of education being conceived as an enterprise of resistance to barbarism and an instrument of social cohesion and propagation of democratic values.

Initially, it is worth highlighting that Adorno (2015) already listed the fundamental requirement for education as preventing barbarism from recurring. The author, as previously stated, understood the return to a primitive stage of violence as a risk inherent to the civilizing process itself, opposing precisely those who understood state-sponsored demonstrations and hatred as illogical and irrational moments. With this, it is identified that the organization of violent hordes does not occur only as an unfolding of changes in the political, economic and social order, as it needs to find support in individual psychic mechanisms. This perspective allows us to take a positive stance in relation to education, in that it is expected, firstly, to act on the constitution of the individual and not, immediately, to transform social and economic macrostructures.

Given the above, below we seek to outline some considerations about how education can contribute to the process of debarbarization or temporarily distance us from the risks of social disintegration. In the seminal work for this study, Charlot (2020) identifies that an initial challenge for an education that opposes barbarism is the construction of a pedagogical discourse solidly based on an anthropological discourse. For the author, the great pedagogical discourses, whether originating from traditional pedagogies or new education, contemplate a dialectical relationship between desire and norm that was the foundation of the entire pedagogical process. However, Charlot (2020) identifies that in the last decade of the 20th century, educational discourses were appropriated by cynical realism and gradually abandoned the anthropological reference. The emerging and substitutive pedagogical discourses of pedagogical discussions are based on an anthropological silence, emphasizing not the subject that is intended to be trained, but rather the search for performance and optimization of learning (Charlot, 2020).

It can be inferred, still in line with Charlot (2020), that the discourses about education and the absence of an anthropological concern are not contingent or emerging from chance, but are the result of a certain social and economic configuration. With this, it is understood that the discourses about education, even assuming the absence of an anthropology, are uncritically assuming the conceptions of man and aiming for the formation of a subject consistent with the dominant rationality. Thus, especially, the discourses about neurodevelopment, the measurement of learning, total quality, the crusade in the name of protagonism and entrepreneurship, take-away pedagogies, flexible curricula and other propositions that obtain rapid discursive success and social acceptance, are due, above all, to their consonance in the production of a neo-subject. Like this



The new school and educational model that tends to be imposed is based, firstly, on a more direct subjection of the school to economic reason. It is linked to an apparently simplistic economism, whose main axiom is that the institution in general and the school in particular only make sense based on the service they must provide to companies and the economy. The flexible man and the autonomous worker are the references of the new pedagogical ideal (Laval, 2019, p. 29).

In this way, it is understood that the anthropological silence existing in hegemonic discourses about education ends up introjecting within the educational institution a project for the formation of a subject consistent with neoliberal rationality. The school renounces its public dimension, focusing on the training of a profitable man. As previously discussed, it is this man suited to dominant rationality, self-referential, self-entrepreneur and confident in meritocratic discourses who, when frustrated or resentful, becomes a member of the gregarious masses. Thus, by depriving education of its anthropological foundations there is a risk of fostering and producing a man who, depending on the economic and political situation, is predisposed to adopt an authoritarian personality.

Therefore, the first challenge consists of reestablishing the anthropological bases of education, bringing questions about the human condition and the intent of the educational task to the agenda. Breaking the silence about the anthropology that supports education needs to be accompanied by a careful analysis of the set of practices developed within institutions, in order to restore the dialectical balance between competition-solidarity/desire-norm (Charlot, 2020). Competitive logic, as it begins to not only mediate intersubjective relationships, but also the individual with himself, tends to produce a severe subject willing to self-exploit. Consequently, relationships with others tend to be organized according to the same logic, because, according to Adorno (2022, p. 139) “whoever is severe with himself acquires the right to also be severe with others, taking revenge for the pain whose manifestations had to hide or repress.”

Added to the effort to restore the balance between competition and solidarity is the need to discuss pedagogies that are based on the neoliberal norm that “decisions must be made based on the criterion of exclusive personal satisfaction” (Casara, 2021, p. 205). Such confrontation must be done to the extent that the hedonistic desire for personal satisfaction tends, according to Casara (2018, 2021), to reduce the public dimension, to encourage the emergence of anti-politics and a post-democratic state. This presupposition cannot be taken as synonymous with the return to an educational model based on an external norm, but rather a democratic model, in which self-referentiality gives way to a set of socially and collectively constructed values.

It is also believed that Nussbaum's thinking (2014, 2015) also offers support that allows us to think about an education capable of de-embarking the world. In this essay, we focus on two aspects of the aforementioned author that make reference to the need to develop critical sense/argumentative capacity and the role of the arts and humanity for democracy. In relation to criticality, Nussbaum (2014, p. 77) relies on the Socratic concept of examined life to defend the need to:

[...] a life that does not accept the authority of any belief just because that belief has been inherited through tradition or because, by force of habit, it has become a banal thing; a life that questions any and all beliefs, statements or reasons presented and only accepts those that have the capacity to resist the demands of consistency and foundation that reason imposes.

The examined life differs from a dogmatic acceptance of tradition in the same way that it implies a departure from a skeptical perspective. It is noted that such capacity cannot be an object of teaching, but rather a daily exercise and unequivocally related to democratic citizenship. The exercise of examining would also imply, according to the author, “examining yourself and being able to analyze the reasons that lead you to support one thing over another” (Nussbaum, 2014, p.78). The process of building a reflective referentiality would trigger, according to the philosopher, a change in the stance of those with whom the individual differs in relation to their points of view. This point is important, as it would allow the development of the moral knowledge necessary for citizenship (Nussbaum, 2015).

The discomfort resulting from the civilizational process, according to Freud (2011), will always require palliative elements that allow, temporarily, to restore the organism's homeostasis. It was argued, throughout the text, that the libidinal union around an authoritarian leader and the organization of the masses can perform this palliative function for the resentful individual, in the same way that others can make use of other resources. From the Freudian perspective, art and literature could offer “[...] illusions in the face of reality [...] thanks to the role that fantasy plays in mental life” (Freud, 2011, p. 19). To the extent that negative value is attributed and school curricula emphasize a pragmatic aspect and profitable knowledge, it is assumed that individuals are deprived of the formation of an important resource for psychological balance. This encourages them to seek other strategies, including the formation of gregarious hordes.

In view of this, it is essential to rethink the role played by humanities and art in the school curriculum, because, even if they do not meet the principle of profitability, they play an indispensable role in the formation of a critical and imaginative citizen. In this vein, Nussbaum (2014, p. 81) argues that “imagination allows us to have a deep perception of the other person's

experience that, otherwise, is very difficult to achieve in everyday life”. Thus, through the arts and humanity, it was possible to develop those capabilities that seemed to be absent in the perpetrators of barbarism (Arendt, 1999).

## Conclusions

The objective of this essay was to discuss the role of education in a contemporary context, in which, due to anthropological drift, there is a flirtation with barbarism. During the study, it was argued that neoliberal rationality is based on a metaphysical conception of man, reducing him to a competitive logic. The atomization of the individual and self-referentiality, instead of resulting in a stage of complete freedom, can generate psychological suffering and resentment. It was assumed that such a situation could trigger a libidinal search for union around a leader, triggering the construction of gregarious hordes, in which violence is highlighted as a possibility due to the suspension of social fear. Thus, the supposed absence or anthropological drift can result in a flirtation with barbarism.

In view of the above, it is recognized that the risk of barbarism does not arise only from macrostructural conditions, such as economic, political or social crises. Barbarian events always reveal an individual psychological dimension of those involved. Based on this inference, it was argued about the possibility of educational institutions adopting a pedagogy whose primary objective is to avoid the repetition of barbaric events.

To this end, the need to restore the anthropological foundation of education was initially defended, so as not to adopt an uncritical conception of man. Based on the criticism made of the neo-subject and its potential to become part of a barbaric enterprise, the need to critically analyze the practices developed within educational institutions was defended, in order to restore balance in the dialectical relationship between desire-norm /competition-solidarity. Such a procedure would require avoiding teaching that focuses solely on optimizing learning or reproducing competitive logic and encouraging the introjection of neoliberal normativity. Likewise, we understand the need for humanities and arts subjects to be considered central in the school curriculum, as it is through them that the skills and critical spirit necessary to sustain democracy and social cohesion are developed.

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