





## THE TEXTBOOK IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: DIALOGUES WITH THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The purpose of this text is to promote reflections on the textbook from a historical perspective and its relationship with the culture industry. To support the study, we resorted to the works developed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), Benjamin (1989), Bittencourt (2001, 2020), among other authors who discuss the proposed theme. By understanding that textbooks are elements of school culture, and the educational environment is intertwined with a broader social context, therefore, we understand that textbooks also have a relationship with this structure. In this context, it is possible to emphasize that the textbook is a commodity of the cultural industry, which reproduces the dominant ideologies and generates profits for its producers. Therefore, a rigorous evaluation is necessary for the use of this material in the teaching and learning process, aiming at the critical and emancipatory formation of the subjects.

**Keywords:** Textbook; Cultural industry; Merchandise.

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## O LIVRO DIDÁTICO EM UMA PERSPECTIVA HISTÓRICA: DIÁLOGOS COM A INDÚSTRIA CULTURAL

**Resumo:** Este texto tem por finalidade promover reflexões acerca do livro didático em uma perspectiva histórica e sua relação com a indústria cultural. Para fundamentar o estudo, recorreremos aos trabalhos desenvolvidos por Adorno e Horkheimer (1985), Benjamin (1989), Bittencourt (2001, 2020), entre outros autores que discutem a temática proposta. Por entender que os livros didáticos são elementos da cultura escolar, e o meio educacional está entrelaçado a um contexto social mais amplo, logo, compreendemos que os livros didáticos possuem relação com tal estrutura. Nesse contexto, é possível enfatizar que o livro didático é uma mercadoria da indústria cultural, o qual reproduz as ideologias dominantes e gera lucros aos seus produtores. Assim sendo, é necessária uma avaliação rigorosa para a utilização deste material no processo de ensino e aprendizagem, tendo em vista a formação crítica e emancipatória dos sujeitos.

**Palavras-chave:** Livro didático; Indústria cultural; Mercadoria

## EL LIBRO DE TEXTO DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA HISTÓRICA: DIÁLOGOS CON LA INDUSTRIA CULTURAL

**Resumen:** El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo promover reflexiones sobre el libro de texto desde una perspectiva histórica y su relación con la industria cultural. Para apoyar el estudio, recurrimos a los trabajos desarrollados por Adorno y Horkheimer (1985), Benjamin (1989), Bittencourt (2001, 2020), y otros autores que tratan el tema propuesto. Por comprender que los libros de texto son elementos de la cultura escolar, y el ambiente educativo se entrelaza con un contexto social más amplio, por lo tanto, entendemos que los libros de texto también tienen relación con dicha estructura. En este contexto, es posible destacar que el libro de texto es una mercancía de la industria cultural, que reproduce las ideologías dominantes y genera beneficios para sus productores. Por lo tanto, es necesaria una evaluación rigurosa para el uso de este material en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje, visando la formación crítica y emancipadora de los sujetos.

**Palabras-clave:** Libro de texto; Industria cultural; Mercancía.

## Introduction

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This text aims to promote reflections on the textbook from a historical perspective and its relationship with the cultural industry. This material is one of the main tools used by teachers in the classroom and, over time, has undergone modifications in its form and content following political determinations, curricular changes, among other factors.

Thus, understanding that this material carries the ideology of the ruling classes and is a profitable commodity in the context of capitalist society, we have identified it as the central problem of this research. However, some questions arise: What is the importance of the textbook in the teaching and learning process? Does the textbook enable critical learning? What is the relationship between this material and the cultural industry?

To answer these questions, we conducted bibliographic and documentary research, which involved materials published in books, scientific articles, postgraduate works, and national legislation. We drew upon the works of Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), Benjamin (1989), Bittencourt (2001, 2020), among other authors who discuss the proposed topic and contributed to the development of this text.

Understanding that textbooks are elements of school culture and that the educational environment is interconnected with a broader social context, we recognize that these materials are influenced by this structure and, consequently, by political, economic, cultural, and social determinations.

Therefore, investigating the production of textbooks under the aegis of the cultural industry will contribute to understanding the factors that influence this process, as well as the ideologies embedded in these works. Thus, a rigorous evaluation is necessary for the use of this material in the teaching and learning process, considering the critical and emancipatory formation of individuals.

## The historical process of the textbook in Brazil

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The first textbooks were produced in Brazil during the early years of the imperial period and were used in the country's first public education institutions, “[...] at the secondary level in some provincial capitals of the Empire and in the small and scattered schools for reading, writing, and arithmetic” (Bittencourt, 2020, p. 5).

The aforementioned author clarifies that the first publishing house established in Brazil, after the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family in 1808, was the *Impressão Régia*, which translated some works for students attending the Military School in Rio de Janeiro.

With Brazil's independence in 1822 and the elimination of the *Impressão Régia*'s monopoly, other publishing houses began to emerge, most of them owned by Portuguese and French proprietors. According to Bittencourt (2020), textbooks followed adapted curricular programs and were under the control of provincial governments, as well as under the supervision of the Catholic Church.

With the establishment of Colégio Pedro II in 1838, in Rio de Janeiro, textbooks began to be used more systematically in the country. During this period, education was accessible only to a select few, mainly the children of the elite, and the European model—particularly French society—served as the cultural reference for this social class. This is easily identifiable, as the textbooks used in Brazil were frequently imported from France. Another contributing factor was that the Brazilian press lacked the proper conditions for producing and publishing such books (Silva, 2012).

The use of textbooks in secondary and primary schools was encouraged by curricular reforms that introduced new subjects into the curricula, requiring specific books. In this context, Brazilian intellectuals, driven by nationalist ideals, developed textbooks and reading materials for these levels of education during the Imperial Period and the early First Republic.

Regarding this issue, Zacheu and Castro (2015, p. 3) explain that:

The authors who contributed to the production of textbooks and reading books for Primary and Secondary Education during the imperial period and the beginning of the First Republic produced works aimed at the construction of national identity, driven by the interests of the State. In this way, as well as other elements present in the school culture, the textbooks also reinforced and contributed to the formation of the feeling of nationality, imbued from the initial moment with patriotic visions in the production of the history of Brazil.

In the last decades of the 19th century, the number of schools increased in various regions of the country, and this panorama led the Francisco Alves publishing house, located in Rio de Janeiro, to invest in the production of textbooks, considering the economic importance that these materials could offer.

Bittencourt (2020) points out that, thus, true school bestsellers were produced, such as the reading books by Felisberto de Carvalho and those by Olavo Bilac in partnership with Coelho Neto. In this regard, it is highlighted that reading books were widely disseminated in

the first half of the 20th century, whose themes were related to the dissemination of patriotism, contemplating topics about Brazil and stories about Brazilian folklore.

It should be noted that, at the beginning of the 20th century, the literacy primers used since the imperial period were still used in elementary schools. However, Zacheu and Castro (2015, p. 6) warn us that:

Despite the existence of primers, the Reading Book became the fundamental teaching material for elementary education, capable of shaping students' minds. To achieve this, these materials had to be designed to provide diverse knowledge and cultivate in students a love for reading, while also enabling moral development through their content. In this regard, translations of works on the lives of saints were initially used. With the advent of secular schools, fables gained prominence in didactic works, replacing moral and religious content with moral and civic themes.

Regarding secondary education, the authors report that textbooks should be carefully chosen by the teacher, and for their adoption, they should follow the regulations instituted by the states, so that the mandatory reading of classic works would remain.

With the establishment of school groups, a republican model of primary school, new content and teaching methods were incorporated into its organization, and these were contemplated, according to Bittencourt (2020), in some works of the time, among them, the issue of moral formation. Regarding school books, the author emphasizes that not only the contents were considered, but also new illustration techniques were perfected.

It is important to report that during the 1930s, the National Book Institute (INL) was created, which had the function of promoting the implementation of a system to support the production and distribution of didactic books in the country, however, it was in 1938, through Decree-Law No. 1.006 of 12/30/1938, that the first legislation was created that established the conditions for the production, import and use of didactic books. In its art. 3", it is evident that:

School groups comprised "[...] a type of didactic-pedagogical and administrative organization of a more complex, economical and rational school, suitable for the expansion of primary education in urban centers. It presupposed a building with several classrooms and several teachers, a more homogeneous classification of student groups by levels of advancement, the division of teaching work, assigning each teacher a class of students and adopting the correspondence between class, series and classroom" (Souza, 2008, p. 41).

From January 1, 1940, textbooks that have not been previously authorized, granted by the Ministry of Education, under the terms of this law, may not be

adopted in the teaching of pre-primary, primary, normal, professional and secondary schools throughout the Republic (Brazil, 1938, s.p.j).

According to Freitag, Motta and Costa (1989), this decree had a greater function of political-ideological control than properly a didactic function. In 1945, Decree-Law No. 8.460, of 12/26/1945, was instituted, which dealt with the conditions of production, import and use of the textbook, but determined that public authorities could not establish preference between books of authorized use, this choice being free to the teacher (Brazil, 1945).

In 1966, during the military government, an agreement was made between the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the North American Agency for International Development (USAID), which guaranteed investments in various sectors of education. After this agreement, the Commission for Technical Books and Didactic Books (COLTED) was created, with the objective of coordinating actions related to the production, editing and distribution of didactic books. The aforementioned agreement ensured sufficient resources for the free distribution of 51 million books in the period of three years (Pimentel, Vilela, 2011).

With the promulgation of Law No. 5.692 of 11/09/1971 (Brazil, 1971), the military government promoted a reform in education, instituting 1st and 2nd grade education. From then on, the National Foundation for School Materials (FENAME) was created, responsible for the execution of the textbook program, whose resources would come from the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE) and the minimum assertions established for the participation of the Units of the Federation. Regarding this, Bittencourt (2020) complements that several publishers benefited from government measures, one of them being the expansion of the purchase of books for distribution to students with low economic power. In relation to the production of books, the author emphasizes that the publishers perfected the elaboration of the same, where they developed a new aesthetic for school works through colored illustrations, addition of images and a diagramming similar to magazines of the time. In addition, the students carried out the exercises in the book itself, this being a disposable material. Given this context, she asserts that "[...] the images of the books had pedagogical functions, but these, many times, only served to improve sales and were not articulated to the learning processes [...]" (Bittencourt, 2020, p. 9).

In the 1980s, with the process of redemocratization of education and curricular reforms, the quality of textbook publishing became the focus of federal evaluations with the creation of the National Textbook Program (PNLD). Thus, the PNLD was instituted by Decree No. 91,542, of 08/19/1985 (Brazil, 1985), which configured a new restructuring of the program. According

to Pimentel and Vilela (2011, p. 11), the objectives involved the issue of "[...] waste of textbooks, abolishing the disposable book which implies demands for greater durability of this material and allowed the reuse of the book and the creation of textbook banks."

A new milestone for the textbook issue, in the 1990s, was the policy of purchasing and distributing books to students of public schools, this implementation influenced the configuration of didactic works. Due to problems regarding the quality of the textbook, conceptual errors, among other aspects, in the year 1996 "[...] was initiated the process of pedagogical evaluation of textbooks of the early years of elementary school, which culminated with the publication of a guide in 1997. This procedure was extended to other levels of education [...]" (Pimentel, Vilela, 2011, p. 9).

From that moment on, the production of textbooks should follow the norms and criteria established by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). On this issue, Bittencourt (2020) reports that school books should have a durability of three years, as they would be redistributed annually, and the aspects related to illustration, content and activities should follow the established standard, to achieve approval in the evaluation process.

It is necessary to report that the normative and evaluation procedures of this material remain present in the current educational context, as the textbook is considered an important support for the teaching and learning process, providing a structured basis for the dissemination of school knowledge. It is worth mentioning that the historical trajectory of the textbook was marked by changes in its form and content, resulting from changes in the educational area. Thus, it is possible to understand that the ideological precepts are embedded in this material, since its use met the needs of the context of each era, and in capitalist society it has become a product of the cultural industry, an issue that needs to be better explored.

### **Textbook: product of the cultural industry**

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At this moment, we will approach the concept of the Theory of the Cultural Industry, developed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, understood by the standardization of thoughts and behaviors through the manipulation of artistic and cultural production. The theorists seek to explain the impact that the cultural industry exerts on citizens in the sense of suppressing their critical thinking, as a means of contributing to the strengthening of the capitalist system.



Thus, we emphasize that among the cultural goods analyzed by Adorno and Horkheimer, we seek to reflect, in this text, on the textbook and its relationship with the Cultural Industry. The concept of Cultural Industry developed by these German philosophers and sociologists is related to a political and economic system that aims to produce cultural goods, such as cinema, radio, magazines, among others, conceiving them as commodities and employing strategies to maintain the progress of the capitalist system through the alienation of the masses. These ideas are systematized in the book "Dialectic of Enlightenment", produced in the 1940s.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) point out that the cultural industry is capable of promoting illusory needs and desires that can only be realized by the products of capitalism, threatening the artistic production of technical and intellectual basis, so that these become a commodity capable of alienating man. About this, Rezende (2020, p. 2-3) emphasizes that:

The cultural industry seeks to homogenize and standardize products so that they are consumed by the largest possible number of people, in this way, it tends to follow a pre-established model so that consumption is immediate. The individual becomes an object, unable to perceive that it is abstracted from reality. It is capable of determining consumption by acting on the state of consciousness and unconsciousness of people.

Regarding the standardization of technique by the cultural industry, Santos (2004, p. 40) reports:

This standardization of technique generates an ever-increasing centralization of power for the hegemonic classes because, as 'commodities are considered by all as a kind of 'primary necessity,' consciousnesses become uniform and, in this way, the forces of permanence perpetuate the status quo of industrial society.

In this way, man ceases to think about himself and becomes a simple cog that increasingly promotes the progress of this system. Thus, culture comes to be used as an instrument of domination, maintaining social inequalities. Given this scenario, it is understood that the mass media are used for the generation of profits, and not to develop the critical consciousness of the subject before consuming cultural and artistic products, a reality that compromises the quality of reflection and personal analysis in the face of media influences.

In this context, Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) weave harsh criticism of the cultural industry for commercializing culture and art and using the mass media to manipulate people and turn them into effective consumers of these goods. Moreover, they add that in the cultural



industry the subject's capacity for reflection is annulled, since pure and simple consumption is imposed sovereignly on him. In the face of this situation, consumption becomes alienated, and the individual loses his human dimension and is reduced to merchandise. In the words of Marx (2011), it is the reification of man as opposed to the fetishism of commodities. On this reality, Santos (2004, p. 42) presents that

The commodity acquires an almost miraculous, phantasmagoric power in advertisements broadcast by mass media. The images acquire an incredible plasticity, only existing in the ads themselves. It is interesting to note that the cultural industry works with the principle of non-satisfaction of human needs and desires. The principle of frustration or incomplete satisfaction is necessary so that the customer, dissatisfied or partially satisfied, returns to desire the miraculous effects of the commodity, since their needs have not yet been met. However, this dissatisfaction occurs in a very subliminal way. It is necessary that it is implicit that the product does not guarantee complete satisfaction, since the desiring subject needs something to fulfill (although this object of desire never, or almost never, fulfills) his need to be.

Given this, the only human dimension assumed by individuals, in a capitalist society, is that of a consumer, so that he does not use criticism or contestation before the products of the cultural industry (Marcuse, 1973). Regarding the formation of the consciousness of mass society, Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) reveal that it is formed by the reification and standardization of products by the rationalization of technique, which are propagated by the cultural industry. In addition, it highlights that the rationalization of culture, in industrialized society, is transformed into semi-culture, generating the so-called semi-formation. On semi-formation, Iop (2012, p. 21-22) clarifies:

Semi-formation would be the formation of the individual through the industrialization of culture, in which products lose their cultural essence, as they are transformed by the industrial process into semi-culture. Thus, the products of semi-culture will serve as formative content for mass society. This formative process is called semi-formation, as it is not carried out by cultural content, which is the content immanent to the true work of art, but with content from semi-culture, that is, industrialized culture understood (...) as a pseudo-culture. This points to the fact that the consciousness of the masses, formed by semi-culture, in a process understood as semi-formation, results in a non-emancipated consciousness.

Faced with this question, Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) emphasize that only education is the instrument capable of leading society to emancipation. Furthermore, Iop (2012)

complements that for the conquest of emancipated consciousness it is necessary the development of critical reflection of the subject, involving their social experiences and the objective experiences of humanity. However, the education provided to the population is tied to technical rationalization, which is strengthened as an ideological principle of capitalism.

Given this, it is necessary to emphasize that capitalist society fosters consumerism and the production of industrialized cultural products as a means of crystallizing its power. To overcome this situation, it is important to develop emancipated consciousness, which is only possible through cultural formation, which is the fundamental content of education, and not through the industrialization of culture, as this results in semi-formation, and, consequently, generates alienation.

### **The relationship between the textbook and the cultural industry**

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At this juncture, we shall address the textbook as one of the products of the cultural industry, which fulfills a salient function within capitalist society, extending beyond its utilization as material support for the teaching and learning process. To this end, we shall present, initially, some characteristics of the textbook as viewed by Bittencourt (2001).

The aforementioned author posits that the textbook is, primarily, a commodity, as it constitutes a product of the publishing realm that adheres to the dictates of manufacturing and commercialization techniques in accordance with market logic. In its production, diverse actors are involved, such as the editor, the author, programmers, and illustrators. It is emphasized that the textbook, as an object of the cultural industry, prescribes a mode of reading organized by professionals and not solely by the author.

Another characteristic reported is that the textbook serves as a repository of school content, constituting the fundamental support for the transposition of academic knowledge to the school context, in addition to encompassing the privileged content within a specific curricular proposal. Furthermore, it is conceived as a pedagogical instrument, as it presents not only the content of the disciplines, but also the manner in which these should be taught to students.

The final characteristic defines the textbook as a significant vehicle conveying a system of values, an ideology, and a culture. Thus, didactic works transmit stereotypes and values of the dominant classes, in consonance with the precepts of bourgeois society.

It is pertinent to emphasize that the historical trajectory of the textbook has been marked by modifications in its form and content through curricular programs, governmental measures, among other actions. Consequently, it is understood that this material is the bearer of the ideology of the dominant classes and a profitable commodity within the context of capitalist society.

Regarding this matter, Brisolla (2015, p. 90) reports that "in the cultural industry, cultural goods are bent to the logic of capitalism, transforming not only culture and art into commodities, but also education." In this respect, she adds that:

The textbook is a commodity like any other, since, as a product of human labor, it contains within itself objectified, materialized labor, converted into merchandise. As it aids in the dissemination of ideologies due to the legitimacy and fetishization attributed to it, the textbook is subordinated to the market and is managed according to these criteria (Brisolla, 2015, p. 87).

Given the above, it is fundamental to explicitly state that education, over the years, has been at the service of the hegemonic class, articulated to the patterns of social control and integrated into the process of market globalization. Regarding this, Bandeira and Oliveira (2012, p. 230) warn:

Education, [...] is already strongly integrated into this process of market globalization, as an extremely profitable product, which can be freely commercialized and which aims to consolidate a structure of domination, masking the differences under the guise of rationalization, productive modernization and market economy.

Thus, the textbook, as an educational instrument and a profitable product, had to adapt to the demands and requirements of the market, becoming a commodity of the cultural industry. In this sense, Bittencourt (2004, p. 311) asserts that the textbook is a commodity because it is "[...] a product of the publishing world that obeys the evolution of manufacturing and commercialization techniques belonging to the logic of the market".

Freitag, Motta and Costa (1993) follow this defense by reporting that the manufacturing of the textbook follows the dynamics of standardization and large-scale production, in addition to having a perishable, disposable character, since its use by students has a pre-determined

validity. Regarding this, Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) argue that the praise of technical progress is the main invitation to discard it like tin cans, after a brief period of use.

For Brisolla (2015, p. 109), such aspects "[...] express a political, economic and cultural reality associated with the forms of production, distribution and consumption of the textbook, as well as referring to the subjective universe that limits critical thinking".

In view of the presented assertions, we perceive that the cultural industry stimulates the large-scale production of products belonging to the educational market, such as the textbook, and, consequently, encourages consumption alienated by the social mass, thus perpetuating the "pseudo-formation".

In view of this, Munakata (2012) complements that the textbook, in addition to being an object of culture, is also a commodity that is intertwined with the State and with the publishing market, the latter directed by technical rationality.

In this sense, Brisolla (2015, p. 122) explains that:

In this way, the textbook is produced for pedagogical purposes with the aim of being consumed, evaluated, and corrected in accordance with the organizational rigidity and content policy that constitutes it. This organized and pedagogized structure of the content confers acceptance and status of truth, and is therefore not questioned by the political system, education, the school, parents, teachers, and children.

Therefore, it is understood that the textbook is an instrument possessing authority and absolute truths, little contested, and a material impregnated by the discourse of the development of skills and competences.

Another important item to be considered in the process of understanding the textbook as a commodity of the cultural industry refers to the image issue, which has undergone transformations over time, in addition to meeting pedagogical functions aimed to promote ideological precepts and the sale of didactic works.

Ferraro (2011, p. 180) comments that the use of images and illustrations in the textbook ceases to be "[...] a merely decorative element, transforming itself, above all, into a powerful communication resource, aiming at better commercialization of the product".

On this issue, Benjamin (1989) presents that the iconographic images have gained space in didactic publications, but the way they started to appear in books can be compared to the display of goods in a supermarket. Thus, both images and goods are placed on the same level.

The illustrations present in textbooks, in addition to constituting a pedagogical artifice, are related to marketing and technical aspects. The didactic work, as an industrial product, has numerous functions that are inserted in its construction and that will be reflected in its images. Thus, the observation of the engravings, the vignettes and explanatory captions of a book allows us to glimpse the limits eventually imposed on the author of the text (Bittencourt, 2001).

In this context, it is possible to understand that the images that make up the texts of textbooks represent a potential instrument to disseminate the ideological conceptions of capitalist society, influencing the perception and understanding of students about values, social hierarchies and economic relations, shaping their worldviews from an early age.

Regarding the power of images, Ferraro (2011, p. 98) emphasizes that:

The entire composition of the textbook carries within itself the potential for the transmission of ideologies. In this aspect, the images that serve as illustration are chosen with defined objectives to illustrate and reaffirm the written text, but also as carriers of values and conceptions, [...] that make up the ideology of the dominant class, which is at the top of the social pyramid, holder of wealth and, consequently, of social power.

Therefore, images cannot be considered as an attraction or mere illustration, whether on the cover or within the content textbooks, but they are an element that needs to be contextualized and interpreted critically. Finally, we emphasize that the textbook is one of the main pedagogical materials used by teachers in the classroom, and these should be a support tool for the teaching action and not just a manual to be followed to develop the curricular content, without space for dialogues and problematizations.

### Final thoughts

This study sought to present the concept of the cultural industry and the textbook as one of its products, which is linked to technical rationality and permeated by the ideology of the capitalist system. Thus, it is more focused on the standardization of thoughts and behaviors instead of promoting the teaching and learning process under a critical and emancipatory perspective.

In light of this, it is necessary to emphasize that, even though textbooks follow pre-determined rules and content, and are transformed into commodities by the Cultural Industry, it is of utmost importance that teachers use them critically, making use of their knowledge to

bring discussions and problematizations to students in order to develop critical awareness in them and promote an emancipatory formation.

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