

# The ontological-materialist perspective of subjectivity: contributions to educational research

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## Summary

The article analyzes the problem of subjectivity from an ontological-materialist perspective. We carried out a bibliographical review with a qualitative approach, using the Ontology of Social Being (Lukács, 2010 and 2013) as a reference for understanding the subjective dimension in the analysis of work and reproduction, in the development of the category of individuality. We also used articles by Brazilian theorists (Vaisman, 2009; Silveira, 2002; Lessa, 1997; Carli, 2013; Chagas, 2013; Tonet, 2012; Saviani, 2003; and Duarte, 2013) who promoted these reflections from the perspective of historical materialism, the theoretical perspective that guides our investigation and presentation. The results showed that there is an in-depth discussion of subjectivity in Lukács, deciphering the totality of complex that have implications for education. Thus, the text presents conceptual/categorical foundations that contribute to the investigations. It also makes it possible to decipher the emancipating potential of subjectivities in educational praxis, in the relationship between education and the ethical-transformative commitment aimed at developing individuality for itself.

Keywords: Subjectivity. Individuality. Ontology of social being. Education.

## A perspectiva ontológico-materialista da subjetividade: contribuições para as pesquisas em educação

## Resumo

O artigo analisa a problemática da subjetividade tendo por subsídio a perspectiva ontológico-materialista. Realizamos uma revisão bibliográfica,

com abordagem qualitativa, utilizando como referência a *Ontologia do Ser Social* (Lukács, 2010 e 2013) para a compreensão da dimensão subjetiva na análise do trabalho e da reprodução, no desenvolvimento da categoria *individualidade*. Também utilizamos artigos de teóricos brasileiros (Vaisman, 2009; Silveira, 2002; Lessa, 1997; Carli, 2013, Chagas, 2013; Tonet, 2012; Saviani, 2003; e Duarte, 2013) que promoveram essas reflexões sob o prisma do materialismo histórico, perspectiva teórica que orienta nossa investigação e exposição. Os resultados demonstraram que há uma discussão aprofundada sobre a subjetividade em Lukács, decifrando a totalidade de complexos que apresentam implicações para a educação. Assim, o texto apresenta fundamentos conceituais/categoriais que contribuem com as investigações. Também permite decifrar o potencial emancipador das subjetividades na práxis educativa, na relação entre a educação e o compromisso ético-transformador, voltando-se ao desenvolvimento da *individualidade para si*.  
Palavras-chaves: Subjetividade. Individualidade. Ontologia do ser social. Educação.

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## La perspectiva ontológico-materialista de la subjetividad: contribuciones a la investigación en educación

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### Resumen

El artículo analiza el problema de la subjetividad tomando como base la perspectiva ontológico-materialista. Realizamos una revisión bibliográfica, con enfoque cualitativo, utilizando como referencia la *Ontología del Ser Social* (Lukács, 2010 y 2013) para comprender la dimensión subjetiva en el análisis del trabajo y para la reproducción, en el desarrollo de la categoría de *individualidad*. También utilizamos artículos de teóricos brasileños (Vaisman, 2009; Silveira, 2002; Lessa, 1997; Carli, 2013, Chagas, 2013; Tonet, 2012; Saviani, 2003; y Duarte, 2013) que promovieron estas reflexiones desde la perspectiva de el materialismo histórico, perspectiva teórica que orienta nuestra investigación y presentación. Los resultados demostraron que hay una discusión profunda sobre la subjetividad en Lukács, descifrando la totalidad de complejos que tienen implicaciones para la educación. Así, el texto presenta

fundamentos conceptuales/ categoriales que contribuyen a las investigaciones. También permite descifrar el potencial emancipador de las subjetividades en la praxis educativa, en la relación entre educación y compromiso ético-transformador, dirigido al desarrollo de la *individualidad para uno mismo*.  
Palabras Clave: Subjetividad. Individualidad. Ontología del ser social. Educación.

## Introduction

The debate on subjectivity is nothing new in the field of the social sciences and humanities. However, it is still considered by many theorists to be a problematic and/or complex issue, especially in the context of Marxist thought.

For some currents, it is difficult to identify a "theory of subjectivity" in Marx, which would be an epistemological problem. For some in the Marxist tradition, this would be an underlying concept, given the primacy of a structural conception of society that tends to understand phenomena in an economic way. With this discussion in mind, how can subjectivity be analyzed from the perspective of historical-dialectical materialism?

We have observed that some elements contributed to fragmentation and reductionism in Marx's thinking, causing his analyses to suffer a different fate from other theorists. Among these, we can highlight: the historical context of the nineteenth century, marked by the boiling of social events and revolutions (especially that of 1848 that inaugurates the insertion and the protagonism of the working class in the international scene); the Marx's methodological to a revolutionary project, identifying itself ideologically and politically with the interests of workers; and its object of research, essentially, bourgeois society and the political-economic system that characterizes it.

In the midst of such an adverse historical context, many of the problematic issues surrounding the study of Marxian critical social theory are due, in particular, to the publishing trajectory of Marx's theoretical elaborations. This is because some texts written before the publication of *Capital*, his mature work, remained unknown for a long time.

It was only after the Second International (1889-1914) that the ideas of Marx and Engels began to effectively penetrate the workers' movement, albeit in a problematic way, with positivist influences that promoted vulgarization, reducing their thematic universe to make it accessible to workers and political activists (Paulo Netto, 2009). Thus, works such as *The German Ideology* and *The Grundrisse*, which were fundamental to understanding the intellectual journey of the authors and essential for thinking about the construction of the method, remained unknown until the 1930s.

The result of this process was the fragmentation of Marxian thought, which stripped Marx of much of his philosophical construction, implying an "economic determinism" that became part of the interpretations of Marxist scholars. In this context, the question of subjectivity came to be understood as an irrelevant component, a secondary phenomenon of production relations.

This concept took on a new meaning when the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács analyzed it in his work *Towards an Ontology of Social Being*, in which he dedicated himself to the philosophical reconstruction of Marx's thought. Written in the 1960s, but only published for the first time in 1984, Lukács's work aimed to lay the foundations for the construction of the ethics of historical materialism. However, the dense systematization consumed the last years of the author's life, as he sought to reveal and counter the degradation of Marxist thought resulting from the Stalinist period.

Its aim is to overcome two symmetrical deformations of Marx's thought [...]. Univocal determinism, which absolutizes the power of the economic factor, taking away the effectiveness of the other complexes of social life, [and] the teleological interpretation, which, in turn, fetishizes necessity by considering every social formation or every historical action as a step on the way to achieving an immanent or transcendent end (Tertulian, 1984, p. 60).

The Hungarian philosopher goes on to analyze the complexes of life in society, considering the formation of the *social being*, understanding *work* as the founding category and *praxis* as the mediating activity between "man and nature". He investigates in depth the relationship between *teleology* and *causality*, everyday life and important spheres such as reproduction and

*ideology* (such as economics, politics, law, religion, science, art, philosophy), estrangement and alienation.

Therefore, Lukács activates a set of fundamental components to interpret phenomena in their real movement in the multiple determinations - and not determinisms! - that characterize the totality, establishing a "unity in diversity" between objectivity and subjectivity present in the authentic materialist ontology undertaken by Marx. In his work, Lukács emphasizes the active role of consciousness and subjective mediations in the construction of the "world of men".

In view of the above, our aim in this paper is to address some aspects of the problem of subjectivity, using the Lukacsian ontological-materialist perspective as a subsidy, seeking to situate the contributions of this approach to educational research. To do this, we carried out a literature review, analyzing moments from the "little" and "big ontology" (Lukács 2010 and 2013, respectively) that allow us to understand the subjective dimension in the analysis of work, reproduction and the development of the category of individuality.

In order to discuss the subject, we have also taken as a reference some articles by Brazilian Marxist theorists who analyze the themes of subjectivity and individuality, demonstrating their centrality in dialectical historical materialism, namely: Vaisman (2009), Silveira (2002) Lessa (1997) Carli (2013) and Chagas (2013); as well as the works of Tonet (2012), Saviani (2003) and Duarte (2013), who promoted reflections, especially in the field of education, guided by the prism of Lukacsian ontology.

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## **The question of subjectivity/individuality in the ontological-materialistic perspective: some approximations**

We begin this discussion from the following premise: subjectivity is a central issue for historical-dialectical materialism (Saviani, 2003).

It is beyond our scope to analyze the whole of Marx's work<sup>1</sup>, so we would like to start by drawing attention to fragments found in two of Marx's texts. In *The German Ideology* (1845), the author points out that "consciousness can never be anything other than conscious being, and the being of

men is their real life process". He states that it is necessary to "[...] conceive of the sensible world as the totality of the living sensible activity of the individuals who constitute it" (Marx; Engels, 2009, p. 31 and 39), because life determines consciousness. In the preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), he reiterates: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being; on the contrary, it is their being that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 2008, p. 49). In light of the above, it is important to consider: What is the *being* to which Marx refers?

In order to understand the "sensible world as the totality of sensible activity", György Lukács (2010 and 2013) analyzes in depth the complex process of entification of social being, with work as the founding category, the phenomenon that originates social life. He identifies that *teleological poses* - instituted in the dialectical tension between teleological acts (pre-idealized by subjects, set by consciousness and therefore subjective) and causality - demarcated a quite distinct terrain of human life: the ontological leap that marks the constitution of a new type of being, the social being, whose mediation with nature is established through its praxis.

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Starting from the onto-historical analysis of work, the Hungarian philosopher realizes that in the original forms of organization of social being, his daily praxis makes him produce not only goods necessary for material/concrete production but also thoughts, ideas and representations, building a set of immaterial, cultural and symbolic products essential to its reproduction. As such, he identified that the ontological genesis of subjectivity lies in work, given that it is in the act of work that consciousness arises:

The simple fact that a teleological purpose is realized in work is an elementary experience of everyday life for all men, becoming an indispensable component of any thought, from everyday discourse to economics and philosophy (Lukács, 2013, p. 47).

<sup>2</sup>In order to scrutinize the complexes of humanization of social being, Lukács analyses the role of consciousness in Marxian thought, producing a "(Marxist) phenomenology of subjectivity". He understands that, over the course of the development of social being, human consciousness ceases to be just a biological epiphenomenon and acquires a new function *that carries*

*teleological poses of praxis*: a form of non-material objectivity that is constitutive of being in the process of producing its existence.

The multiplicity of teleological acts by individuals means that praxis has an effect on the worker/human being "[...] transforming his activity into another that is ever broader and at the same time more differentiated and conscious" (Lukács, 2010, p. 82). The results of socially produced work tend to be generalized, so social reproduction is also the expanded reproduction of subjectivity.

<sup>3</sup>In this way, Lukács (2010, p. 82) observes that increasingly complex forms of sociability have emerged, causing subjects to continue to develop "[...] in an increasingly varied multilaterality [...], culminating dialectically in the [...] objective embodiment of generity [...]", which also places different demands on the subject, causing the character of individuality to emerge.

This process, which takes place objectively and subjectively, in constant interaction between objectivity and subjectivity, gives rise to the ontological bases from which the singularity of the human being, still in many ways merely natural, can gradually acquire the character of individuality (social, possible only in sociability) (Lukács, 2010, p. 82).

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We can see that the philosopher identifies the emergence of human singularity in the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, which becomes established as *individuality*, as its own socially determined system that reacts to the alternatives present in *everyday life*, sharing common characteristics and universal objectifications of the human race.

As Vaisman (2009, p. 441-442) points out, the category of individuality for Lukács is not an original human fact, but is constituted on the basis of a "[...] reciprocal determination with generality". The author states that it is not a question of understanding the individual as simply determined by the "social environment", but of understanding the field of social interactivity, in which individuality is forged simultaneously with the production of the social world itself, in other words, in areas of human existence that mutually determine each other.

Acts of conscience build the world of values whose epiphenomena differ from natural causality, causing new and extremely diverse needs to

emerge in individuals. The totality of social processes appears as the "[...] result of the interaction between many causal chains set in motion by various social actors: the result therefore necessarily goes beyond individual intentions" (Tertulian, 1984, p. 65). Thus, reality is permeated by the category of causality, which is governed by laws that manifest themselves independently of consciousness, causing the individual to find their field of choice delimited by the objectively posed possibilities.

For praxis to be possible, the subject must have knowledge of the real/causal processes so that natural causalities can be transformed into posited causalities, at the service of a teleological purpose (Lukács, 2013). Social beings set in motion a chain of alternative decisions to respond to the problems raised by reality, looking for ways to solve them, meeting their objectives. In this way, the choice between alternatives is based on specific circumstances to satisfy a specific need.

Subjectivity is therefore an ontological sphere that influences the development of the social totality. In this sense, in addition to the teleological forces that ensure the organic exchange between society and nature, Lukács (2013) situates the secondary teleological forces, which have as their object the consciousness of other subjects. Secondary teleological forces are those which have the consciousness of other subjects as their object, that is, which try to influence and shape the behavior of individuals, expressing themselves in inter-subjective relations.

The course of every human being's life consists of a chain of decisions, which is not a simple sequence of different heterogeneous decisions, but refers continuously and spontaneously to the subject of the decision. The interrelationships between these components and the human being as a unit form what we rightly call, in everyday life, the character, the personality of the individual human being (Lukács, 2010, p. 95-96).

In this passage, the author draws attention to what characterizes the singularity of the social being, its *personality*, as the substance of individuality. As an essential component in the formation of human life, and a historical product of everyday praxis, subjectivity is socially produced, constituted in a specific cultural reality. Thus: "[...] the individuality of man and his personality



are constituted in the concreteness of social life, within a historical process that challenges and marks the subject" (Silveira, 2002, p. 105). Therefore, individuality is not something natural, given a priori, but a historical, mutable *embodiment*, situated in a specific time and space. Corroborating this perspective, Carli (2013, p. 22) states that "the individual man builds his personality through the answers given to the questions posed [...]", considering the diversity of demands and alternatives.

As Lukács (2013, p. 95) points out, "[...] regardless of the degree of consciousness, all men's ontological representations are largely influenced by society". In this way, representations of human life "[...] play a very influential role in the social praxis of men and are often condensed into social power" (Lukács, 2013, p. 95). The philosopher draws attention to the existence of superstructural spheres of society that form dimensions of social practice and condition the way in which subjects respond to chains of alternative decisions. Among these complexes is *ideology*, which is defined by the author as "[...] the form of ideal elaboration that serves to make human social praxis conscious and capable of action" (Lukács, 2013, p. 464), unlike the limiting conception of "ideology as false consciousness".

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The category of ideology is understood as a means of social struggle, an evaluative component of class struggles, since it plays a specific role in the development of sociability. They are ways of understanding the world, making people aware of conflicts and able to act objectively to resolve them. They can take on dimensions of reproducing the *status quo*, as well as emancipatory and revolutionary dimensions. <sup>4</sup>Lukács' analysis of the ideological superstructure - which is expressed in the creation of socially organized institutions, whose forms are legal, political, scientific, religious, artistic and/or philosophical - demonstrates that human consciousness, subjectivity, has its own forms of objectification and is not simply an epiphenomenon derived from the economic structure.

## The question of subjectivity at the current stage of development

As we have seen, Lukács's work recognizes the ontologically essential role of consciousness in the development of sociability. Lessa (1997, p. 111)

points out that Lukács recognizes the peculiar character of being of human subjectivity, which even though it is not "material" is "objective", exercising an ontological function in the categorical unfolding of the world of men.

Over the course of historical development, the constant improvement of the productive forces has transformed the objective and subjective conditions for the reproduction of social being. In these terms, Carli (2013 p. 20) emphasizes that "[...] active adaptation and the establishment of the process of retreat from natural barriers and the constitution of human individuality [...]" engenders a greater sovereignty of "man over nature". The greater the advancement of sociability, the greater the levels of humanization and individualization of the social being, since the development of forms of work and the dimensions of practice give rise to the creation of new complexes, which are established in everyday life and impose new mediations and responses to the alternatives posed, in a continuous and uninterrupted process.

In the current stage of development governed by capital, Silveira (2002, p. 104) draws attention to the need to understand subjective processes "[...] from the registers of interiority present in each subject, tensioned and interpellated through the concrete expressions of hegemonic sociability". It calls for an analysis of the mercantile logic, which determines the production of commodities and, consequently, the production of subjects, in a relationship that tends towards the reproduction of capital. This is based on the dimension of immediacy, subsuming human protagonism to an order considered to be "unalterable" and "eternalized" in the capitalist system. In this sense, given that modes of production cannot be maintained without a specific form of consciousness, the processes of alienation and estrangement mark the individualization of man and his personality in the concreteness of modern social life, stating that:

This is, therefore, a process that implies real subjection, dispossession of one's own condition as an individual in the face of a power that, as well as making the product of work strange, also makes work strange for the worker, internalizing this relationship. This power, which is instituted despotically, is evident not only objectively, but also in the symbolic field when it processes the development of the commodity form into a fetish (Silveira, 2002, p. 104).

The category of alienation appears as an obstacle to the development of humanization because, in the context of the socio-technical division of labour, the individual limits his creative capacity, becoming oblivious to his own activity, not recognizing himself in the end product, in other words, in his process of objectification. Thus, there is a fragmentary perception of the unity of the human race, as a social-historical category in constant movement in the institution of class society and the division of labor.

Lukács (2010) points out that the constitution of capitalism brings with it a universal estrangement of the human being. This manifests itself as the estrangement of being from itself, in other words, of individuals from their own generativity. Considering that work is the foundation of the subject's generic being, which becomes estranged in capitalist society, Chagas (2013) emphasizes some characteristics that synthesize this complex process:

Marx highlights four connections in which estranged labor presents itself: 1. that of the subject with his product, 2. that of the subject with his productive activity, 3. that of the subject with his generic life and, finally, 4. that of the subject with other subjects. Marx shows that, in bourgeois production, the product, the result of the objectification of labor, ceases to be, for the subject, his own objectified being, but only a foreign object that confronts and enslaves him. The object produced by the subject – its product – opposes it as a foreign being, turns against its producer and comes to dominate it. [...] This estranged objectification is matched by an estranged subjectification, because the loss of the object produced, of the production of the means necessary for its own life. In short, the loss of everything that means production through human labor is not only material, but also affects the inner world, human subjectivity. There is therefore an inversion of values: an impoverishment of subjectivity, a devaluation of the subject in the face of an valorization of the thing, an enrichment of the object, of the product of labor. To the extent that the product is alien to the subject, the productive activity itself becomes alien to him; the work itself becomes an external activity, which produces deformation and one-sidedness (Chagas, 2013, p. 76).

Given that work, as a free and conscious activity, gave the subject the domain of consciousness over the instinctive, purely biological element, its development "denies the human essence" in the current conditions,

dispossessing the subject of his generic being, of what gives him specificity as a social being, making him alien to himself. In this sense, there are times when the development of the productive forces is not accompanied by the development of individuality - it itself becomes a commodity, which is realized through the mediation of exchange, of money. It even ends up limiting subjectivity, generating strange processes, enhanced by the valorization of the commodity, the product, to the detriment of the subject who produced them.

In addition to the subject's estrangement from the product and activity of work, as well as from his generic life, there is also an important element to highlight, which is the subject's estrangement from other subjects. Chagas (2013) approaches this as *intersubjective*, constituted in the division of classes, resulting from the composition of the usufruct of labor, in which "[...] both capitalists and workers are strangers in the face of each other" (Chagas, 2013, p. 78).

The contradictions resulting from the unequal development of sociability mean that individuals carry subjective traits and implications - cultural, evaluative, ideological, ethical-moral, etc. - which express and condition the specific modes of existence and reproduction of each class. This complex process of class struggle does not develop in a rigid, mechanical and linear way, nor does it reveal itself immediately. In order to grasp the intersubjective phenomena of classes, it is necessary to consider:

[...] the full influence of effects, precisely in the most concrete dimension of the social being, on the most intimate, the most personal forms of thought, feeling, action and reaction of each human person. [...] It is just as false to think that there is a non-spatial and non-temporal substance to human individuality, which can be modified only superficially by the circumstances of life, as it is erroneous to conceive of the individual as a simple product of his environment (Lukács, 2013, p. 284).

In this fragment, Lukács draws attention to the mutability of phenomena and the dialectic that runs through the historicity of reality, in view of the dynamism of human activity, in which individual lives are constructed (their affections, worldviews, motivations, etc.). Modern subjectivity requires the individual to be able to respond to the issues with which they relate concretely,

which need to correspond to the prevailing expectations of hegemonic reproduction. As a result, individuals find their possibilities for action limited by the concrete circumstances of their daily lives, but on the other hand there is a field of choices for alternative decisions that can enable new objectifications and scenarios for change. Therefore, as the author points out, the subject is not a simple "product of his environment" and is always giving concrete answers to the dilemmas of action in life with which he is socially confronted.

Carli (2013 p. 24) points out that there is an innovative contribution by Lukács to the materialist ontology of social being in the discussion on the category of alienation: the identification of the category of *exteriorization*, which did not originally appear in Marx's philosophy. The exteriorization works as the opposite of alienation, understood as "[...] the positive feedback of objectivity on the creator man, that is, when there are no foreign obstacles between the man and the product of his praxis". This leads to the recognition of the subject in relation to their daily practice, implying the apprehension of various determinations of reality that drive mutual development, both in individuality and in generativity.

However, the intense social fragmentation, accompanied by the weakening of substantive values and collective references (Silveira, 2002, p. 106), marks the current subject. This context means that relationships are established "between things": aimed at satisfying immediate survival needs, based on the pillars of production, possession and consumption, giving rise to "individualism", given that the dominant neoliberal ideology emphasizes the polarity between personal and collective interests, with the former prevailing.

This rationality that presides over social relations, through the reification of the present, not only reinforces the prospect of maintaining the capitalist order, but also invests in the destruction of bonds that lead to the humanization of subjects. In doing so, it seeks to shape subjectivities from a perspective of immediacy, in which the ephemeral and fragmentary, short-term production and insensitivity towards others are key components. [...] We need to understand that the subject we are trying to shape is self-centered, disbelieving of collective spheres, competitive, efficient and will continually seek to absolve itself of social responsibilities, delegating them primarily to the state (Silveira, 2002, p. 109).

In modern subjectivity, then, there is an *ontological inconsistency* highlighted by Silveira (2002, p. 107), which produces fractures in the social space, to the extent that debates are tangentialized, for example, "by the perspectives of psychoanalysis, education and politics", without a mediating understanding between these complexes. Corroborating the author, we emphasize the need to construct new meanings for the set of practices experienced by the subjects, which can be established in an articulated way, affirming the centrality of subjectivity and personality and the need to develop a form of historical-critical awareness of reality.

## **The ontological-materialist approach and the debate on subjectivity in education**

From the point of view of Lukácsian ontology, as a secondary and complex *teleological* process that emerges in the social totality, education, in the broad sense, consists of training subjects to "[...] to react adequately to new and unpredictable events and situations that occur later in their lives" (Lukács, 2013, p. 176).

Thus, the nature and function that educational praxis plays in the development of sociability is centered on the acquisition of "[...] knowledge, skills, behaviors, values, etc. that enable the individual to become able to participate consciously (even if this awareness is limited) in social life" (Tonet, 2012, p. 140). The educational phenomenon therefore presupposes a fundamental mediation between consciousness and reality, acting directly in the formation of subjects, in the transmission of accumulated human experience.

In his analysis of work, Lukács identifies the process of *educating man towards individuality*, which, as we have seen, is seen as the overcoming of mere biological singularity and the product of social development. Vaisman (2009) discusses this assertion, emphasizing that:

[...] the individuality is not a mere passive reflection of so-called social conditionings, but something that is formed and in this continuous formation, the educational dimension is emphasized, which occurs, of course, within the complex experiences of "alternative decisions", ie in the choices that are made on various levels of

social existence, from everyday life to decisions of an ethical and political nature (Vaisman, 2009, p. 455).

Based on this fragment, we can see that the educational dimension is a key element in shaping the individuality and personality of the subjects, providing the knowledge that enables them to choose between alternatives. In this way, education refers to the problem on which it is founded: "[...] its essence consists in influencing men to react to new life alternatives in the *socially intended way*" (Lukács, 2013, p. 178).

The individual is a historical and social subject who incorporates forms of behavior and ideas that have been created by other individuals, passed on and assimilated in everyday social relations (Saviani, 2003). Thus, it is essential to understand the reproduction requirements of "socially intended action", which are placed in a fundamental sphere of the life of social being: *everyday life*: "[...] men's being is their real life process on the highest levels of ideas and experiences, as well as in the confusion, the confusion of everyday life" (Lukács, 2013, p. 560).

In his analysis of everyday life, Paulo Netto (2012, p. 68) emphasizes that: "[...] everyday life is the alpha and omega of the existence of each and every individual". The author states that no individual existence cancels out everyday life, which imposes a pattern of behavior on individuals, based on specific characteristics of thoughts and practices that crystallize a *way of being of the social being in everyday life*. This is not to say that everyday life is static, or that it is a mold into which subjectivities fit and personalities are built. This is not to say that everyday life is static, or a mold into which subjectivities fit and personalities are built, but that this space constitutes an automatization of singular life, in which individuals tend to reproduce socially instituted practices in a mechanical way, without triggering mechanisms of reflection, reproducing day-to-day experiences immediately.

If the socially determined function of educational praxis is centered on "producing, directly and intentionally, in each individual the humanity that is produced historically and collectively by all men" (Saviani, 2003, p. 93), education, both in its broadest sense and in its narrowest sense (as a space for institutional training), directly incorporates everyday elements that are heterogeneous and immediate. The relationship between education and daily life

at the current stage of development acquires, in these terms, a spontaneous materialism, which tends to condition the responses to the identified problems in a reproductive manner, without challenging their material objectivity, that is, without questioning the nature of representations, in a direct relationship between thought, the hegemonic knowledge produced, and action.

Paulo Netto (2012) points out that the character of utility is confused with that of truth in everyday life, because the determinations of everyday life mean that each and every individual only perceives themselves as a singular being, losing the generic dimension that appears subsumed. Thus, "[...] access to human-generic consciousness does not occur in this behavior: it only occurs when the individual can overcome singularity [when] he suspends the heterogeneity of everyday life" (Paulo Netto, 2012, p. 69).

Considering this basic character of everyday life in the formation of consciousness and the determinations involved in educational praxis, Saviani (2003) emphasizes the need for educators to understand the difference between the empirical student and the concrete student:

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In view of the characteristics of human subjectivity highlighted by the Marxian perspective, the educator and teacher are faced with a student, a concrete student and not simply an empirical student. This means that the student, that is, the individual he is responsible for educating, synthesizes in himself the social relations of the society in which he lives and in which the educational process in question takes place (Saviani, 2003, p. 93).

Education is a purely social process and establishes a reciprocal relationship with other areas of human activity: work, culture, economics, law, politics, science, philosophy, art, religion, etc. In this way, the "concrete student" is situated in this multilaterality of "complexes" that make up an articulated whole, synthesizing the social relations that must be taken as a reference: starting from empirical experiences, but going beyond them, surpassing them. Saviani therefore calls for reflection on the need for the educational process to go beyond the level of spontaneous everyday knowledge, that is, the empirical and fragmented view of reality. To this end, overcoming immediacy makes it possible to develop training processes that allow individuals to understand



the world in which they live in its multiple determinations, in the concrete totality that is the starting point for knowledge.

However, where there is a social division of labour and unequal ways of organizing society, based on exploitation and alienation "[...] an education aimed at the integral formation of the human being is impossible" (Tonet, 2012). In this way, the fragmentation of content with a view to training for the market and consumption results in implications, especially in the sphere of educational policies, which guide the development of educational practice, spreading into everyday school life. But it's worth pointing out that this "impossibility", imposed by the current ideological, political and economic structure, doesn't necessarily imply the absence of alternatives capable of mobilizing the formation of an "individuality for oneself".

The market logic that prevails in everyday relations poses a dialectical question for subjects: capitalist society contradictorily generates humanization and alienation (Duarte, 2013). In turn, the development of the productive forces reaches ever greater heights, promoting objectifications that are far more complex and indispensable for humanity and proportionally producing levels of contradictions that move history and the reproduction of human life, generating alienation. Socially produced wealth is privately appropriated and, as we have seen, the fruits of labor, the objectifications of subjects, do not rise to the level of the human-generic consciousness of individuals. In this sense:

We are all part of the processes that humanize and alienate. There are no spheres of human life or types of activity that, in this society, are exempt from the reproduction of alienation. There are no alienated individuals and non-alienated individuals. At most, we can talk about greater or lesser degrees of alienation. And yet we must recognize that these greater or lesser degrees of alienation can occur in a heterogeneous way in the life of an individual, in other words, perhaps it would be more cautious to say that the individual, in certain spheres of his activity, of his objectification, can show himself to be less alienated (Duarte, 2013, p. 68-69).

Considering the discussion presented by Duarte, we can understand that educational institutions, as well as the various spheres of contemporary society, are spaces of correlations of forces that humanize and alienate. As a privileged sector for the socialization of the most developed forms of

knowledge, education can both strengthen the prevailing material and spiritual reproduction and provide elements for criticism, prompting the production of new objectifications. This, then, is the emancipatory potential of education in the development of subjectivities: determining the socialization of the knowledge produced, which can contribute to critical awareness, going beyond the phenomenal dimension of reality, acting in the sense of overcoming the purely instrumental-reproductive rationality, which is triggered by neoliberal logic and which embodies educational systems.

Access to mechanisms for knowing what is real contributes to the formation of a broader conception of the world and, in this sense, can lead to an overcoming of *individuality in itself* to *individuality for itself*. According to Duarte (2013, p. 71), we begin our formation spontaneously, shaping the constitution of the being itself. In order to overcome it, the individual needs to achieve the condition of *being free, rational and universal*, taking: "[...] himself, his activity, his insertion in social relations, the society in which he lives, as an object of critical reflection, as an object of critical appropriation and transformation". To think of *individuality for itself*, as highlighted by Duarte, is to think of a process of *conscious, intentional and collective* transformation, whose potential for realization is primarily through education.

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## Final considerations

At the beginning of this article, we stated that the analysis of subjectivity is present in the theses of historical-dialectical materialism; however, its meaning has been the result of biases and simplifications, which have marked various debates in the Marxist field and have led to some misunderstandings in Marx's work: a fracture between the determinations of being (philosophical-ontological conception) and the methodological specification in relation to society. It is precisely in the philosophical analysis subtracted from Marx's thought by many theorists that György Lukács focuses on the construction of *the ontology of social being*, broadening this debate.

From this perspective, we have seen that individuality is an ontological sphere that influences the development of the social totality and is the historical product of everyday praxis. The socio-historical development of

generic individuality, which singularizes the social being, also shaped the development of the personality - made up of values, symbols, knowledge, affections, etc. - which particularize individuals. We understand that subjectivity is constituted in everyday social relations and that the greater the advance of sociability, the greater the levels of humanization and individuation of the social being.

We also reflect that the achievements that elevate the human being to ever greater levels of complexity in capitalist society, dialectically and contradictorily, also increase the processes of estrangement and alienation that act in the opposite direction to the development of individuality, blocking human-generic potential. This process means that the subject's existence only acquires meaning at the level of daily immediacy, of individualism and, as such, the individual loses his generic link, his collective dimension: The individual comes to understand himself as a singularity, based on the conceptions that legitimize his way of being in the world, guiding his personal interests, motivations and objectifications.

In this sense, what is the relationship between subjectivity and education? We can see that the complex of education is fundamental to the development of subjectivity, acting as a mediation between gender and the individual, whose function is to produce the humanization of subjects by transmitting culturally established experiences. As a result, education is influenced by hegemonic positions and is institutionally organized to meet, as a priority, the needs of the expanded reproduction of the socio-symbolic systems that characterize a given society and direct relations between classes. Thus, the ideological and cultural repertoire is presented to the subjects through educational praxis, making them appropriate the objectifications and assimilate the normative set through which socially desirable models of behavior are inculcated so that they become members of the community to which they belong.

The theorists analyzed reflect that, in addition to the utilitarian-reproductive aspect, educational praxis also dialectically enables access to objectifications that enhance mediations between the student and their real conditions of existence. As a privileged context for the dissemination and socialization of knowledge, education is the complex that introduces subjects to the cultural riches produced by humanity, such as art, philosophy (pure forms

of ideology for Lukács) and science. These are essential for overcoming reifying contexts, which can contribute to the development of *individuality for itself*, in other words, "the development of the personality through its elevation to generality" (Lukács, 2010).

The aim was to show that educational praxis is surrounded by a dialectical tension between reproduction and humanization, alienation and transformation. <sup>5</sup>From a transformative perspective, education can enable mechanisms for suspending everyday life, when directed towards: "[...] cultivating the human race, that is, the social being and, within it, man, aiming at his being-for-himself, that is, with a defetishizing intention, at least ideally dissolving estrangements" (Lukács 2013).

Given the elements presented so far, we can identify the contributions of the ontological-materialist perspective of subjectivity to education. Firstly, we believe we have demonstrated that there is an in-depth discussion of subjectivity in Lukács and that the philosopher confronted the complex and contradictory relationships between gender and the individual. Therefore, this work is an invitation to the ontology of social being. By overcoming the fragmentary conception of analyzes of the real, which fractional the object of knowledge, the onto-methodological perspective can be used as a reference for the understanding of subjectivity, deciphering the totality of complexes that result in implications for the educational sphere.

In short, the ontological-materialist approach makes important contributions to the analysis of the dimension of the subject, the central locus of investigation so dear to educational research. Through this conception, we can confront some of the gaps and discourses that point to the insufficiencies of historical materialism in satisfactorily answering questions about the dimension of subjectivity and everyday life.

More immediately, the text presents conceptual/categorical contributions to research. Lukács' (2010 and 2013) analyses of subjectivity are expressed especially in the chapters on work, ideology and reproduction and in the reflections on the categories of individuality, class struggle, estrangement, alienation and exteriorization, which are briefly presented throughout this research.

Given that this analytical perspective addresses the multiple determinants that characterize today's society, based on the capital vs. labour conflict - which continues to be the basis of this system and of the broadening of social issues that present themselves as demands in school contexts - it can contribute to investigations on a variety of topics, such as race, gender, social movements and social classes, among others.

More generally, this reflection makes it possible to analyze the relationship between education and the ethical-transformative commitment to the world, perceiving the emancipatory potential of subjectivities in educational praxis. Lukacsian ontological thought is part of the theoretical-analytical repertoire of critical historical pedagogy, with emphasis on the contributions of Demerval Saviani and Newton Duarte, and is also present in the philosophy of education in the analyses undertaken by philosophers such as Ivo Tonet, Ester Vaisman and Sérgio Lessa, who we take as reference in this article. These authors present a rich theorization on ontological foundations and their interface with education, which can serve as a subsidy for research and investigations in the educational field, qualifying the debates.

We know that some "pedagogies of capital in crisis" are launching discourses focused on individualism and entrepreneurship in contemporary times, permeated by interests aligned with the neoliberal ideology of providing the cultural formation necessary for the reproduction of the system, adapting social relations to the interests of the market. In times of immediate and segmented information, post-truth and neo-conservative advances, thinking of subjectivity/individuality as an element of emancipation and education as a mechanism for humanization. In times like these, thinking about subjectivity/individuality as an element of emancipation and education as a mechanism for humanization, aimed at broadening the consciousness of subjects in order to form an *individuality for themselves*, is essential in order to provide a *new meaning to the given conditions* that is more inclusive, plural, collective and welcoming.

Finally, we stress that this study is an effort to systematize the research problem. A general outline of an approach to a complex and relevant topic today. When researching the subject, we observed that there is still a small number of published works, especially in recent years, dedicated to

the analysis of subjectivity from the perspective of ontology-materialism. We therefore hope that this brief analysis can arouse interest and contribute to theoretical production, encouraging new studies and research to qualify and broaden this debate.

## Notes

1. *It should be remembered that Marx did not specifically elaborate a "theory of subjectivity", but the debate is present in his works: Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right; The Jewish Question; Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts; The German Ideology; Grundrisse; For the Critique of Political Economy; The 18th Brumaire and Capital.*
2. Term used by Tertulian (1984, p. 66) referring to Lukács' analyses of alienation and reification ("innocent" and strange) and the multiplication of qualities and their synthesis in the harmony of the moral personality between the human race in-itself and the human race para-itself.
3. As identified by Vaisman and Fortes (In: Lukács, 2010, p. 28), the category of generativity explained by Lukács refers to "[...] the overcoming of the natural mute genus and the advent of the properly human genus, precisely in praxis [...] from which the processual constitution of social being takes place, in a contradictory and unequal way".
4. For reasons of scope, we can't go into the Lukacsian analysis of the category of ideology, but we suggest reading the chapter The Ideal and Ideology in the book Towards an ontology of social being (v. II).
5. Suspending everyday life means provisionally overcoming immediate phenomenality, given that there is no way to break with everyday life, which is an insuppressible and ineliminable sphere of social existence.

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