



Liquid Education

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Walking through a museum's spaces is a delight, but a delight that comes with a responsibility: the responsibility of catching glimpses of history along the way, pieces of enchantment, worlds of imagination. In one word: experiences. Experiences are subjective events and carry meaning only for those who live it.

The experiences, when passing by *us*, form *us* and transform *us*. The "knowledge of experience" is what one acquires by responding to the facts of life. Therefore, it is a private, subjective, relative, contingent and personal knowledge¹.

Concerning museums, changing the comprehension of knowledge to something subjective, in constant and shared development, implies in changing the institution's main attribution, no longer believing it to be the owner of absolute, authoritarian and indubitable truths, but understanding it as a space for "negotiating meanings"².

From this new position, the mediation processes in museums face enormous challenges because, besides the negotiated and shared construction of knowledge, they should also take in consideration the variety in what is called the "average visitor", and also the immediacy of the strategies for its everyday educational initiatives.

The sum of these challenges led us to propose the term *Liquid Education*, which aims to deepen the way we think about the art educational processes inside museums.

¹ LARROSA, Jorge. "Notas sobre a experiência e o saber da experiência" [Notes about experience and knowledge of experience]. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 19, Jan./Apr. 2002. Pg. 20-28

² HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean, *The Educational Role of the Museum* (Second edition), Routledge, 1999.



The liquidity metaphor is been used currently in different knowledge areas, such as architecture, psychology and sociology, to designate the contemporary structural differences in relation to the modern ideas³.

In a general manner, the liquidity metaphor is used in opposition to the perception of modernity as the heir of the Enlightenment thought, that is, to the clinging to rigid categorization methods and structural systems when perceiving the world. Contemporarily, on the contrary, it seems to exist an interpenetration of the rigid categories, granting more fluidity and dynamicity to the systems that were once strict. For example: the rigid structures of physical architecture becomes fluid and dynamic in the virtuality; or the family's social structures and the relationships, that nowadays need a redefinition in virtue of the loosening of once defining structures⁴.

Although the ideas affirmed by "Liquid Modernity" seem somewhat pessimistic about the new configuration, giving the fluid processes of these contemporary soft structures eminently negative aspects – maybe for lamenting the lost of solidity assured by the known structures –, I believe it is possible to see these characteristics, when applied to the education, from another point of view, more positive and poetic, since Bauman himself attributed to “liquid” some positive aspects, such as the malleability, the possibility for new articulations, adaptability, lightness and so on.

Thus, the idea of liquidity can be associated with fluidity, with what is elusive, that drains and escapes, the unpredictability and constant changes, something that fills the gaps, mixes itself with other substances, runs or simply passes, assuming different speeds and destinies. As a metaphor, in educational activities, it evokes what is mobile, malleable, soft, what is a constant *to become*, never closed, complete or definitive; constituting itself

³ Part of this text was extracted from the chapter CHIOVATTO, Mila Milene. *Pinacoteca e educação: uma relação fecunda [Pinacoteca and education: a fruitful relationship]*, written in coloboration with Gabriela Aidar. *Pinacoteca 100 Anos*. São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, 2007

⁴ For more on this issue, we suggest the reading of the following authors and works: Marcos Novak, for understanding the new architectonic structures in the virtuality field, and *Liquid Modernity*, by Zygmunt Bauman, where the author argues that the immediate modernity is "light", "liquid", "fluid" and infinitely more dynamic than the modernity it supplanted. The passage from one to another led to profound changes in all aspects of human life, making it necessary to rethink the concepts and cognitive frames used to narrate human individual experience and their joint history. BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000.



as an eternally projective act, without affixing itself to the comfort and to the conformation (in here meaning resignation) to the predetermined truths' solidity.

The term *Liquid Education* is about, therefore, exalting the characteristics of constant re-articulation and transformation, given that the water – the universal liquid – for example, is capable of detouring obstacles or, even better, assuming a course that shows itself less painful, that offers less resistance, assuring its potency and fluidity power. It also emphasizes the ability of adapting itself, of conforming (in here meaning assuming a determined form, harmonize itself) to another that is not specifically yours, but one that is given by its continent⁵. Therefore, in the educational field, the concept would implicate in building an educative process in resonance and constant dialogue with the individuals' and groups' potentialities; even more, it assumes the valorization of its unpredictability and its elusive character⁶. It is necessary to realize, though, that opting for an structure fluidity is not an easy choice and implies the responsibility of mastering different strategies and contents, and to use the combination of these subsidies in response to a variety of demands from different audiences, which means a high level of commitment and insight, plus constant reflection on your own educational practice, during the whole process.

When referring to education in museums, this concept might mean the impossibility of holding tight to an specific method, circuit and/or content a priori, since it will become necessary to rebuild, or at least reconfigure, these assumptions while developing a dialogue with the visitors. What would they like to see? What motivated them to visit the museum? What is interesting, in their opinion? What they understand for art? And what they think of the museum? What is the purpose of the visit? And so on. For an educator to be able to work this way, propitiating consistence and conscience, he or she has to have, besides university training and the pleasure of working at a museum, the maturity to recognize the responsibility this works implies, but also must be aware of the connecting points between the visitors, the artworks and the institution to the discussions of the field,

⁵ Here it becomes necessary to differ the perception of an apprentice as a “recipient”, that only receives information, of the one with the apprentice as a modulator of its own formative process, while he determines the characteristics, the form, contents, dynamics and structures his educational processes must have.

⁶ About this subject, see Zygmunt Bauman: entrevista sobre a educação. Desafios pedagógicos e modernidade líquida [Zygmunt Bauman: interview about education, pedagogical challenges and liquid modernity]: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S0100-15742009000200016&script=sci_arttext



searching for this knowledge also in complementary training such as seminars, conferences and meetings; it is important also that the professional has a researcher profile, that is, is constantly stimulated to read, reflect and argue about his practice main themes.

When proposing the *Liquid Education*, as we see it, we mean taking actions that search for different methods, systems and contents as a *reaction* to and as a *dialogue* with each one of the visitor's profiles part of the museum's audience, and the multiple particular qualities and interests that emerge from these initiatives, considering these different audiences' and works' cognitive, perceptive, interpretative, aesthetic, subjective and multicultural spheres, among others. Furthermore, it aims to be an educational process that can happen in a time that seems external to the daily life time and in spaces that are not previously set, like what happens in the museums where the educative process incorporates the group's displacements through out the exhibition rooms and their sensorial information – that is, organizes itself as *a priori* flux.

Like asserted by Elliot Eisner⁷, it is possible to understand “structure” not as a rigid series of goals and procedures but as a set of coherent relations between components. It is in that way, in a structured but flexible manner, that we believe it is possible to developed quality art education processes in the museums.

⁷ Estrutura e Mágica no Ensino da Arte [Structure and Magical at Art Education]. In: BARBOSA, Ana Mae (org). Arte-educação: Leitura no subsolo. São Paulo: Ed. Cortez, 1997. pg.83-4.