



LIQUID EDUCATION

Reflections on the educative processes in museums from the experiences of the Pinacoteca's Education Department.¹

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Introduction

The Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo is the oldest museum of the state, being inaugurated in 1905.

Belonging to the Sao Paulo's Culture State Secretary, since 2006 the museum is administrated by the Associação dos Amigos da Pinacoteca, a cultural social organization, and its collection currently contains approximately 8,000 artworks, mostly national, from the 17th century on. Of these, about 800 artworks are in display at the institution's long-term exhibit, and can be approached by continuing educative processes. The Pinacoteca also hosts about 35 temporary exhibits per year, and those tend to establish a dialogue with our collection. To many of them we develop educative initiatives.

The centenary history of the museum includes also its building's: architectonical landmark of the city, given the construction grandiosity and the memory of its apparent bricks. The building was originally designed and built to be the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios (School of Arts and Crafts), part of the extinct Sociedade Propagadora de Educação Popular (Propagator Society of Popular Education), which, created in 1875, offered free professionalizing courses aiming to train craftsmen and workmen.

¹ Part of this text was published at the set of reflective texts about the educative processes developed by cultural institutions, a work produced by the 29th Bienal de Sao Paulo's educative curators.



From 2004 on, Pinacoteca incorporated another historical building, the Estação Pinacoteca, and it amplified the possibilities of cultural and educative initiatives developed by the institution. Currently this building hosts also the Resistance Memorial.

Throughout the museum's history, there were many different directions and priorities given by its management, which impacted on the institution's trajectory. In the same way, there were also dissonant educative structures and initiatives.

From 2002, one of the institution's priorities became implementing and consolidating the Educational Initiatives Department, which needed to be able to deal with the Pinacoteca's Collection multiplicity and richness, as well as the variety of visitors.

This challenge was faced with basis on the New Museology proposals and with the perception of the museum as a space that not only can contribute to a culturally active live but also have a decisive participation in the society.

About the museums

The museums are defined by the ICOM (International Council of Museums), as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."

However, the museum's product isn't all of the human production but a selection, of which its collection is built.

This selection made by the museology is concerned with the information carried by the objects from its documental aspect. As a document, we mean something that says and teaches something else; its testimonial aspect, that is, how much it attests a feeling of being



there on a certain period of time, being present at the place of fact it documents; and its fidelity, as veracity or reliability².

In that way, the objects belonging to the museums' Collection are the result of a human material culture selection, therefore, through them we can understand part of *who* we are, and see *how* we are.

For that reason, their preservation is crucial, because these objects are capable of *giving us meaning*.

Why preserving? Because these objects have, for us, a meaning (...) When these objects enter our value hierarchy, that is, they go from being simple "things" to becoming "goods", they transform themselves in patrimony (a set of goods) and in cultural heritage.³

But why getting in contact with these objects? Why investing in their meaning potentialities? Just for getting to know them better?

On the contrary, we understand that the owning, reading and attributing meaning to the objects safeguarded by the museum have a relevance that goes beyond these initiatives, beyond the space-time experienced by the museum. The reading, signification and appropriation of the objects by the museum impact, at the same time, the individual who reads them and the world around it, establishing a meaning attribution flow between object, individual and world.

² GUARNIERI, Waldisa Russio Camargo. "Conceito de cultura e sua inter-relação com o patrimônio cultural e a preservação" [Culture concept and its interrelation with the cultural heritage and preservation], in: *Revista do Instituto Brasileiro de Patrimônio Cultural*, n. 3, 1990, pg. 8.

³ Idem, *ibidem*, pg.8.



[...] it is through the incorporation of objects, sets and landscape by the museums, which constitute signals, images and symbols, that the Museum allows the Man the reading of the World.

The main task of the contemporary museum is, therefore, enabling the clarity in this reading, so it can stimulate and allow the emergency of a critical conscience (where it doesn't exist), in a way that the information passed along by the museum can facilitate the transformative initiative of the Man.⁴

In that way, the objects that belong to the museum don't have their relevance reduced to its physicality or to its placement in the collection but project themselves to the outside, to the world, to the society's life.

In this perspective, the museum can be understood as an institution that aims not only to preserve its patrimony assets, but an institution that has its focus on the society.

The comprehension of the museum as a space fundamentally focusing on conserving and protecting objects, intended for preserving the elite knowledge⁵, is gradually being transformed into the perception of the museum as a more open space, facing the construction of knowledge and focusing on the society as a whole. One of the main landmarks of this movement is the document proposed at the 1972 Santiago del Chile Roundtable, which historically originated the New Museology.

⁴ Idem, ibidem, pg. 8.

⁵ "...while the museums of the nineteenth century were intended for the people, they certainly did not belong to the people, meaning that they did not show some interest in the lives, habits and customs of the pre-industrial societies' working classes. If museums were seen as providers of lessons about things, its central message was to materialize the power of the ruling classes..." Bennett, Tony. *The birth of the museum*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 109. Although the text refers to the museums of the 19th century, it's still up to date when concerning the museums now.



This document proposes the *Integral Museum* concept, that is, an institution that should perform a decisive role on the communities' education. Having the situation of the Latin American museums as a starting point, it points out to the need of transforming these institutions, thinking "*that the museum is an institution in the service of the society of which it forms an inseparable part and, of its very nature, contains the elements which enable it to help in moulding the consciousness of the communities it serves; through which it can stimulate those communities to action by projecting forward its historical activities so that they culminate in the presentation of the contemporary problems*"⁶

For this matter, the authors of the document understand that is necessary for the museums to develop themselves in order to better serve the society. They realize that "*The transformation in museological activities call for a gradual change in the outlook of curators and administrators and the institutional structures for which they are responsible.*" For that reason, they recommend to the UNESCO the concretization and diffusion of a new concept for the museum's activities, affirming that: "*the integrated museum (is) designed to give the community an overall view of its natural and cultural environment*".

Echoing these proposals, the posterior Quebec Declaration (1984) reiterates this position, stating that the New Museology is a movement that affirms the museum's **social role** and the **overall character** of its activities.

The difficulties implied in this transformation processes, already foreseen at the time of these documents' enunciation, are still being perceived. The population still has in their memory the subjacent idea that the museum accumulates old objects, frequently valuable but silent and distant; also, internally in the museums still resists some mentalities that prioritize the institutions' relations with their collections and that has little contact with the its audiences.

⁶ Declaration of Santiago 1972/ The Round Table of Santiago, Chile - ICOM, 1972. It can be downloaded at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0002/000236/023679eb.pdf>



The transformation process, although emphatically proposed and reiterated, is still occurring, which is clear by the finding of the former ICOM International president, Hugues de Varine-Bohan⁷, thirty-eight year after the elaboration of the Santiago Declaration: he says that, although new kinds of museums are proliferating, which are more focused on the relationship with the society, like the communitarian and eco museums, the more traditional museums are still shy on their transformation processes, and sometimes even inert. Sometimes the transformations appear more on their initiatives than on their structures and, therefore, they don't develop, instead of the guided visits, mediation exercises that consider the live demands of their visitors, sometimes even transforming their exhibitions based on their audience diversity.

It is possible to perceive by the New Museology's propositions the intention of constructing a concept of museum as a space part of the social environment in which it is located, contributing to the development, acting on and accompanying its transformations. One could ask itself if it is the museum's role to act in the society. In other words, does the museum have any relation with the reality around it, beyond its mnemonic attribution?

It is certain that there is no intrinsic connection between the museum and the social development. It is necessary to build this relation, in a bet that contributing with solidarity to the social development is a task of all (school, family and institutions).⁸

The *Integral Museum* expression, coined in Santiago, carried this expectation, that is, the expectation of the museum being able of considering the society in its entirety, and itself as a part of it, putting the institution in its service and rearranging itself constantly because of it.

⁷ Varine-Bohan, Hugues de, "Museus e desenvolvimento social: um balanço crítico" [Museums and social development: a critical balance], in: Bruno, Maria Cristina Oliveira e Neves, Kátia R. Filipini (coord.), *Museus como agentes de mudança social e desenvolvimento: propostas e reflexões museológicas*, São Cristóvão: Museu de Arqueologia de Xingó, 2008.

⁸ Idem ibidem.



In consonance with these affirmations, the I Brazilian ICOM National Meeting, “Museus e comunidades no Brasil – realidade e perspectivas” (Museums and Communities in Brazil – reality and perspectives), which occurred in 1995 in Rio de Janeiro, proposed that the museums must be *referential spaces* of collective memory; knowledge catalyzing and socializing agents; places where the past and the history might work as a support for the debate of the societies’ crucial issues, providing instruments for the exercise of critical thinking of the contemporary reality; spaces that promote the multiplicity of worldviews, stimulating therefore the critical spirit in individuals and communities.⁹

The recent constitution of the Ibero-American Network of Museums¹⁰ also reiterates these proposals, while stimulate their respective governments to adopt strategies for the implementation of public policies for museums and the museology in the Ibero-American countries, pointing out, among other things, that is it necessary to:

“To conceive museums as strategic tools for the proposition of sustainable and equitable development policies between countries and as representations of diversity and plurality in each Ibero-American country; To value cultural heritage, memory and museums, understanding them as strategic social practices for the development of Ibero-American countries and as representation processes for ethnical, social, cultural, linguistic, ideology, gender, creed, sexual orientation and other diversities; To assure that museums are territories for the safeguarding and diffusion of democratic and citizenship values, placed in service of society, with the objective of favoring the strengthening and manifesting of identities, the critical and reflexive perception of reality, the production of knowledge, the promotion of human dignity and leisure opportunities; To understand the museological process as an exercise of

⁹ I Brazilian ICOM National Meeting, “Museus e comunidades no Brasil – realidade e perspectivas” (Museums and Communities in Brazil – reality and perspectives), May 1st to 5 [1995], Museu Imperial, Petrópolis/RJ: Final document was not published.

¹⁰ The Declaration of the City of Salvador was made during the First Ibero-American Meeting of Museums, occurred between June 26th, 27th and 28th 2007, and ratified at the Ibero-American Conference of Ministers of Culture at Valparaiso, in July 2007, and at the 17th Summit of Heads of State and Government, in November 2007, when the initiatives IBERMUSEUS and turning 2008 into the year for the Ibero-American museums were approved.



interpreting the world which enables social subjects to interpret and transform reality for the construction of a democratic and cultural citizenship favoring the community's active participation in the design of museological policies and to reaffirm and amplify the educational capacity of museums and cultural heritage as strategies for transformation of social reality.”¹¹

In that way, it is fundamental that museums and cultural institutions perform their educational roles going beyond their educative departments, amplifying the responsibility of this primordial role to all of its departments, and also exert it out of its physical limits, establishing bridges with the surrounding reality.

However, this is not the scenario in most of the national museums, which act sometimes in a disconnected way from its educational role and the initiatives performed by the educative departments, on which falls the responsibility of “making” the museum an educative experience.

“In many cases it still persists, in the museum field and outside it, a vision that overrides the functions of preservation, documentation, research and communication, as the ultimate goals of museums. According to *Sandell, in his book “Museums,*

society, inequality” (Routledge, 2002): “many museums still see the processes of collecting, preserving and exhibiting, not by roles through which the institutions generate social values, but the ends in themselves. Following the same logic, the link in the museological operation chain that would be capable and responsible for answering to the social demands directed to the museums are the departments related to communication and, in particular, the educational, since those are the direct interlocutors of the visiting and potential audiences, therefore they would be the responsible for making the knowledge produced by the museum accessible. However, such approach simplifies not only the educational role of the museums but also their

¹¹ Declaration of the City of Salvador Bahia, 2007. Available at: <http://www.ibermuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/declaration-of-the-city-of-salvador-1.pdf>



roles as agent of social changes and development, since for this it becomes necessary a broad institutional effort involving all departments.”¹²

Education in museums

Usually, when we think of the educational initiatives in museums, the image of a group of students being led by a professional of the institution through its spaces comes to mind. Maybe this is the most typical image of the field. These guided visits, mostly performed according to the educator’s own demand, are the most visible part of the educative processes in museums to the public.

The close connection with the formal education systems, to which the museum’s educational departments are sometimes subjected, creates a misunderstanding about each of the educational areas’ scope, which are, in themselves, different. It doesn’t mean that synergy, cooperation and joint constructions shouldn’t be encouraged between these two educational areas, but it is important to distinguish its specificities to avoid simplistic situations, like the substitution of the classroom by the museum’s space, transforming the visit to a cultural institution in a normal class time.

Generally, we can distinguish the non-formal educational processes from the formal education by a larger flexibility in time, space, content and working methodologies. Normally, the non-formal educative process can adapt the contents to each specific group; they offer a larger possibility of working on different knowledge areas at the same time; they don’t need or presupposes a certification; they focus on the learning from aspects of the public’s previous knowledge, culture and daily life; they value the orality; they imply in the development of

¹² AIDAR, Gabriela, “Perspectivas da formação de educadores sociais para a educação em museus” [Perspectives about the social educators training for the museum’s educational initiatives], Revista Museu, Articles of May 18th 2008 – Museus agentes de mudança social e desenvolvimento, <http://www.revistamuseu.com.br/18demaio/artigos.asp?ano=2008>



educational processes that meet the most immediate needs of the groups; They look for creating a pleasant learning experience; they do not imply a legal control; they work with diversity (of age, ethnicity, gender, economical, of social classes etc.) and enable the voluntary participation on its proposals.¹³

The education at museums is a non-formal educational process and it should be, ideally, seen as autonomous projects, even though it has pre-organized goals, principles and methods, which means it should be performed accordingly to the groups and individuals' expectations, to the process evaluation (even during its occurrence) and the new interests that might arise from the initiative, rearranging itself constantly.

Because of its non-cumulative character, being an activity performed most of time in unique opportunities, during the public's visit to the institution, the educational initiatives in museums must be thought from the institutional characteristics and the variety of expectations and profiles of the audience, having its primordial contents oriented for the construction of meanings concerning the institution and its patrimonial assets, testimonials from the societies' material culture¹⁴.

¹³ Fernandes, Renata S. and Garcia, Valéria A. "Algumas orientações para navegadores e principiantes na navegação: relacionando a pedagogia de projetos com a educação não-formal" [Some orientation for experienced and first time sailors: relating the project pedagogy to the non-formal education], p. 03. Von Simson, Olga Rodrigues de Moraes; Park, Margareth Brandini; Fernandes, Renata Sieiro (orgs.) *Educação não-formal: cenários da criação*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp/Centro de Memória, 200, pages 10 and 11. And FERNANDES, Renata Sieiro and GARCIA, Valéria Aroeira, "Algumas orientações para navegadores e principiantes na navegação: relacionando a pedagogia de projetos com a educação não-formal", Unpublished text, 2005.

¹⁴ Aidar, Gabriela and Chiovatto, Milene, "Ação educativa em museus" [Educational activities in museums], in: Park, Margareth B.; Fernandes, Renata S. & Carnicel, Amarildo (orgs.), *Palavras-chave em educação não-formal*. Holambra/Campinas: Ed. Setembro/Unicamp-CMU, 2007.



Education at Pinacoteca do Estado

The Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo is an art museum whose centenary history mixes itself with the growing processes of the Sao Paulo City and State. The forming of its collection accompanies the development of the visual arts during its existence, in the same way that its initiatives, departments, activities, structures and conceptual propositions changed over the time, following the worldwide museological lines of thought and also the different proposals by the technical directors who, along the years, were in charge of the institution.¹⁵

The educational initiatives performed by the Pinacoteca, in the course of its history, went through moments of more or less emphasis, also in consequence of the impetus and the vision of the professionals responsible for them. If rescuing the history of a centenary institution is a challenge, given the so much information that got lost amid the daily dynamics and the passing through of people, initiatives and documents, therefore finding out about the microuniverse of the educative initiatives developed through out the remote past becomes even more challenging.

At the Pinacoteca it was possible to rescue some pieces of memory through the older employees, who recall some initiatives that, although not explicitly educational, are based somewhat between the vertex of culture and education that is so important to the museum. The idea of former directors announcing lecture-visits, which meant to be the accompanying of groups through the exhibition rooms while lecturing about art history and the artworks, in a mixture of roles, could be curious today.

It is also impossible not positioning the Pinacoteca among the innumerable education institutions that, one way or another, acted in consonance with its history. Since its beginning,

¹⁵ About the directors' succession and their proposals to the museum's collection and its institutional activities, see the "Material de apoio à prática pedagógica Século XIX/XX" [support material about the pedagogical practice on the 19th and 20th century] – Almeida Junior and Cândido Portinari, 2009; produced by the Pinacoteca's Educational Initiatives Department and reedited in 2009.



when the institution took over the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios building, or shared the space with the Faculdade de Belas Artes (fine arts school) and the Escola de Arte Dramática (Drama school), the Pinacoteca do Estado was always directly related, in different occasions, to educational institutions that served each time and society's interests.

In the scope of these institutions, the Pinacoteca and its collection had an educational role, which meant subsidizing the specific learning for the professional training, being for the qualified workforce for the construction and remodeling of the city during its industrialization process, when concerning the Liceu, being the educational process of artists and art academics, when concerning the Faculdade de Belas Artes. However, for this text's purpose, the essence is the educational initiatives developed *at* and *by* the museum in search of a broader communication and education about its artworks and exhibitions. A research at the Centro de Documentação e Memória (Documentation and Memory Center) and the museum's library pointed to a path of pioneer initiatives among the scarce existing documents.

Among the many competent professionals that coordinated educative initiatives in the museum¹⁶, the most famous, probably due the large quantity of documents he left, and maybe because of his still strong presence in the population's memory, is the artist and educator Paulo Portella Filho, currently a member of the museum's Artistic Orientation Board.

In this productive period of time, training activities for teachers were performed and initiatives focusing on the artistic production, through the implementation of several different workshops, since the painting of landscapes at the Parque da Luz to the drawing of live models at the amphitheater, which occupied the central space of the building then. The latter initiative became a profound emotional memory of the city of Sao Paulo, and its not rare to find people who remember it dearly.

¹⁶ Among others, there are documental registers of the following professionals' passage by the museum: Paulo Portella Filho, Denise Grinspum, Sonia Guarita do Amaral and Victoria Daniela Bousso, all of them professionals of undeniable relevance for the current artistic and educational scenarios.



It was also performed educative visits for several distinct audiences, including young adults from reformatories, like the former FEBEM; and talks with the institution's employees, which aimed to bring them closer to the contexts by which they were responsible.

Several artists, engaged in the effort for the greater educative penetration of their work, joined forces to propose art workshops; among these artists are Regina Silveira and Marcello Nitsche.

In that way, the implementation of the current Education Department of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, in 2002, was generated from the responsibility of reconstructing a powerful performance in education, aiming to deepen the understanding and enjoyment of the artworks belonging to this institution's rich Collection to an even broader, more varied and assiduous public.

In 2002, from the preliminary research, which aimed to recognize the institution's visitors profile - the spontaneous and those part of organized groups -, we acknowledged some of educative needs for these audiences but, mostly, we found out which were the groups that wasn't part of the our visitor's universe.¹⁷

From these findings, the priorities of the Education Department's (NAE in Portuguese) were defined, as well as its focus on the development of educative activities related to the Collection's artworks, promoting the quality of the visitor's experience in contact with art, assuring the broad accessibility to the museum¹⁸, besides including and making more assiduous the public that would not usually be a visitor of the museum.

¹⁷ Survey about the Pinacoteca's visitors profile - "Você e o museu" (2002). Available for consultation at the Cedoc and at the museum's library.

¹⁸ We use the denomination *accessibility* in the broader sense of the term, involving not only the *physical* aspects, which means the promotion of physical access by assuring the circulation and the afflux to the institution, but also – and mostly –, regarding the more intangible aspects of the contact with museums, like the *cognitive* access, that is approached by the



The Education Department is organized through systematic activities or programs, which focus on different audiences. Besides the educative visits, which are available upon previous request for every organized group, it also performs preparatory encounters for teachers, with the purpose of providing them with pedagogical subsidies related to the themes and content of the Pinacoteca's Collection and specific temporary exhibitions. It is also the department's responsibility the Educational Program for Disabled People, which aims to better serve the physically, mentally and sensory impaired visitors by the use of multisensory approaches; the Sociocultural Inclusion Program, which has the goal of promoting a qualified access to the cultural assets of the museum for groups in situation of social vulnerability, with little or no contact with official cultural institutions, contributing therefore to the transformation in the quality of life of these groups and the enlargement of the museum's audiences; and the

Staff Training Program, which promotes the continuing training of the museum's employees, especially from the reception, maintenance and safety departments, concerning heritage education and other aspects particular to museums. Other than that, the department also produces series of publications and resources for mediation, for both educators and teachers, which can be used in their practice outside the museum, and also by spontaneous visitors. The materials include games, guides and informative labels for specific works.

Our educative activities, although formulated as autonomous programs and focusing on different audiences, act in synergy, constantly exchanging experiences and acquired knowledge, and following a common pedagogical line.

Liquid Education

The articulation between the different educative programs currently developed by the Pinacoteca's Education Department has as one of its main conceptual reference the philosophical propositions of John Dewey, which talks about an education capable of

development of the exhibition speeches' comprehension, and what we can call *attitude* access, which means developing an identification with the production systems and the enjoyment and trust by the insertion in the museum's space.



promoting significant experiences at the visitor's contact with art. The American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) influenced the thinking of art education by defining The Experience and affirming that Art is an Experience. To sum up, for Dewey, the Experience concept implies a significant experience that is inserted in the life flow even though it differs from it. The Experience is, therefore, a flow in itself, which is characterized by going from one point to another and being composed by articulated parts that form a unique whole, permeated by a qualifying emotion. Its end is a conclusion (and not a ceasing) and what makes it a reference is the conscience about the process¹⁹.

Transposing these ideas to the educative initiatives in museums means the elaboration of propositional articulated activities, which are developed temporarily and in a specific space (into the visit period and at the museum's area), observing that the visitor can perceive himself and the others, and is aware and conscious of the process he is living and also its results, even though they are subjective.

We also reflect on making the museum's educative processes a significant experience from the proposals of Jorge Larrosa, a professor of Educational Philosophy of the Barcelona University and Doctor of Pedagogy, even though his "pedagogical proposals" refer mostly to the act of reading.

To Larrosa, instead of something that happens, the experience is something that happens *to us*. Many things happen everyday, but experiences are rare. The experience, when happening to us, forms *us* and transforms *us*. Therefore, the "knowledge of experience" is what one acquires from reacting and responding to the happenings of his life and in the way meaning is attributed to what happens, configuring a continuous process.

¹⁹ DEWEY, John. *Having an Experience. Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee books, 2005.



For that reason, the knowledge of experience is a particular, relative, subjective, contingent and personal knowledge²⁰.

These concepts of experience are applicable only if we consider the knowledge, and the learning processes that derive from it, in an also more specific perspective, including and being performed accordingly to the apprentice's subjectivities and particularities.

“The question ‘What is knowledge?’ has puzzled humans for the full history of recorded philosophy. Does knowledge exist externally, independent of individuals, or does it reside only in our minds? (...) If knowledge is external, how do we come to know it? If it resides in our minds, how can we share it? There is no simple solution to this philosophical dilemma (...) what is unavoidable is that an educator takes *some* position about what the “it” is that people learn.

(...) Theories of learning can also be organized on a continuum with two clear contrasting positions at the extremes. One end of this continuum consists of the transmission-absorption notion of learning: people learn by absorbing information that has been transmitted to them. They do it in small pieces, step-by-step, by adding individual items to their storehouse of information (...) The image of the vessels to be filled has also been used by a number of educational writers to describe transmission-absorption theories of learning.”

Toward the opposite end of the continuum is a constellation of learning theories based on the belief that people construct knowledge. Much of recent educational theory, following the writings of John Dewey, the empirical work of Piaget and his followers, and the socially situated theories of learning by Vygotsky and others, emphasizes the active participation of the mind in learning, and the recognition that the process of learning is not a simple addition of items into some sort of mental database but a transformation of schemas in which the learner

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



plays an active role and that involves making sense out of a range of phenomena presented to the mind.²¹”

Therefore, the way we believe the knowledge is created determines our perception of the learning and teaching processes; impacting on the larger or smaller participation of the learner in these. Besides, we also determine, by our beliefs, the educator’s role as well as the meaning of the educative institution in which we work.

“During the 19th century and a significant part of the 20th, the education was mostly understood as the transmission of information to learners, whose task was to absorb to a maximum. The knowledge was considered the goal, external to the connoisseur, and transferable. In the museums, this assumption originated authoritarian didactic messages, frequently proposed to illustrate hierarchies and conventional epistemological classifications. Currently, we have theories on learning that affirm that people are active on the construction of their particular interpretation of the educative experiences, according to their previous knowledge, abilities, background and personal motivation. From this perspective, the knowledge is relative, is revised and used in a subjective manner, and the learning itself is unpredictable. The learning responsibility falls more on the learner; the educator’s responsibility is setting a learning favorable environment, acting as a mentor, assisting the development of the learning abilities and promoting opportunities for testing and modifying meanings and individual interpretations²².”

In relation to museums, changing the comprehension of knowledge to something under construction, of subjective, social and shared character, implies in altering the institution’s role, not believing it anymore to be a propagator of unquestionable, absolute and authoritarian truth, but as a place for “negotiating meanings”.

²¹ HEIN, George E.. *Learning in the museum*. London: Routledge, 1998. Pgs. 16 and 21.

²² HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean. *Educational Role Of The Museum*. 2nd Edition (Leicester Readers In Museum Studies). London: Routledge, 1999. pg. XI



“Currently, the education role is not only interpreting objects but also deciphering interpretations – in other words, anticipating and negotiating between the meanings constructed by the visitors and those by the museums²³.”

If we think of the mediation processes in museums from the parameters and the questionings discussed above, and also consider the variety implied in the museum’s “general public”, as well as the immediacy of the museum’s educative strategies, we realize the enormous challenges faced by the institution.

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.

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 ideas²⁴.

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 virtual world; or the family’s social

²³ Roberts, Lisa C. *From knowledge to narrative: educators and the changing museum*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, pgs. 02 and 03.

²⁴ 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 collaboration with Gabriela Aidar. *Pinacoteca 100 Anos*. São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, 2007



structures and the relationships, which nowadays need a redefinition in virtue of the loosening of once defining structures²⁵.

The idea of the liquidity as the face of contemporaneity, defended by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his innumerable publications, brings in itself the idea of a “solid modernity”, more suitable for denominating the times when people “believed in the existence of stable concepts and relationships”, while in the contemporaneity, that is, in times of liquid modernity, the individual would be more relevant, due to the weakening of the relations, what reinforces the singularity and the diversity in opposition to the previous situation, which put its efforts in the universal, from unifying categories, species and rules²⁶.

“According to Bauman, the contemporary society’s innumerable spheres (public life, private life, human relationships) go through a series of transformations and the consequences stretch and rip the social fabric. These alterations (...) make the social institutions to lose solidity and liquefy them, making them become amorphous, paradoxically, like liquid. The liquid modernity, therefore, is the time of detachment, temporariness and an individualization process; a time of freedom and simultaneously a time for insecurity. As a response to this freedom possibility, the men of this time, in the metropolis’ anonymity, have an unprecedented feeling of impotence, since, yearning for this freedom, they find themselves alone amid so

25 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 virtual 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.

26 MRECH, Leny Magalhães e RAHME, Monica. *A roda de conversa e a assembléia de crianças: a palavra líquida e a escola de educação infantil* [The talking roundtable and the children assembly: the liquid word and the children schools]. *Educ. rev.* vol.25 no.1 Belo Horizonte Apr. 2009, dossiê Psicanálise e Educação. Accessible (in Portuguese) at http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-46982009000100016

much concrete. The responsibility falls on the individual energies, favoring the biographic solutions for the systemic contradictions²⁷.”

Although the ideas affirmed by "Liquid Modernity", when applied to the educational field, 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 structures²⁸ –, 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 the “liquid” some positive aspects, such as the malleability, the possibility for new articulations, adaptability, lightness and so on.

“Fluids travel easily. They ‘flow’, ‘spill’, ‘run out’, ‘splash’, ‘pour over’, ‘leak’, ‘flood’, ‘spray’, ‘drip’, ‘seep’, ‘ooze’; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped – they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still. From the meeting with solids they emerge unscathed, while the solids they have met, if they stay solid, are changed – get moist or drenched. The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associated them with the idea of ‘lightness’. (...) We associate ‘lightness’ or ‘weightlessness’ with mobility and inconstancy: we know from practice that the lighter we travel the easier and faster we move²⁹.”

Thus, the idea of liquidity can be associated with fluidity, with what is elusive, that drains and escapes. 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 as an

²⁷ TFOUNI, Fabio Elias Verdiani and SILVA, Nilce da. *A modernidade líquida: o sujeito e a interface com o fantasma*. Rev. *Mal-Estar Subj.* [online]. mar. 2008, vol.8, no.1 [cited in January 29th 2010], p.171-194. Available at: <http://pepsic.bvs-psi.org.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1518-61482008000100009&lng=pt&nrm=iso>. ISSN 1518-6148.

²⁸ Julian Webb, for example, develops an idea of liquid education as characterized by internationalization, massification, knowledge explosion, performativity, production of moral uncertainty, changing academic identities. Available at <http://zeugma.typepad.com/zeugma/2009/06/o%C3%B1ati-workshop-on-legal-education.html>.

²⁹ BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000

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

“Every text, as the world, as the man himself, is fluid, is a becoming that never get complete because there is no being, a movement that never gets close to the truth, because there is no truth³⁰.”

The term's choice, therefore, is about 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 continent³¹. 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 character. 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.

³⁰ ³⁰ LARROSA, J. *Nietzsche y la educación*. 2002.

³¹ 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.



“(...) this transformation in the learning practice and theory might be directly related to the cultural changes from the modernism, with its monolithic metanarratives, to the post-modernism and its more fragmented and diverse approach³².”

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 enjoyment 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, 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. This should also be associated with the continuing training processes guaranteed the institutions, which promote the realization of oriented research; the reading of selected texts and meeting with experts for the deepening in aspects related to both the museum’s collections and the educational practice itself.

In the text “*L’Educazione liquida*”, the Italian professor Rita Vittori³³ proposes an essential differentiation of the educational methods and systems to be adopted nowadays, highlighting the liquid character of the current way of life, in which nothing can have the same format for long, everything gets older precociously and every act, even before consolidating

³² HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean. *Educational Role Of The Museum*. 2nd Edition (Leicester Readers In Museum Studies). London: Routledge, 1999. pg. XI

³³ Rivista CEM Mondialità. *Tra Bene e Male? Il conflitto*. No. 6. Giugno-luglio, 2006.

itself, becomes obsolete. The author affirms that in the contemporaneity, when the new seems good and desirable, when one easily coexists with the chaos and the fragmentation, when happenings doesn't have a definitive end but a series of concomitant beginnings and endings, what gives the current time a strong sense of instability and precariousness, it is possible to see that the individuals no longer move towards a pretense definitive truth, but easily go intertwining itself in a network of possibilities; it is, therefore, necessary to think about the education in terms of "dynamic staticness", in which the reciprocal listening is privileged.

The positive character of this fluidity idea, a metaphor for the educational processes we propose, finds resonance still in the aspects Italo Calvino foresaw as essential values for the 21st century. The author defined Lightness, Quickness, Exactitude, Visibility and Multiplicity as the characteristics essential for the texts to be meaningful and respond to the new millennium's values³⁴. Although they focus – a priori – on the literature field, these memos can be perceived as basic aspects for all knowledge fields of our time, and are being re-read and reinterpreted in the light of both psychology and industrial productivity. We highlight that some of these values foretell the liquid fluidity qualities we intend to give to education when, for example, associate lightness to not only with the refuting of weight (mimicking also the weight of history and the past, that is, connected to the creation of the new), but also the idea of exactitude, the fight against excesses, valuing what is precise, exact³⁵.

Within the proposal of quickness is the idea of economy as shield from excess: "(...) The secret of the story lies in its economy: the events, however long they last, become punctiform, connected by rectilinear segments, in a zigzag pattern that suggests incessant motion³⁶", but also the fluidity because, according to the author, the quick text is the one that flows and in which there is the perfect enchainment of narratives, that is, something that is concise, essential. In the exactitude, Calvino cites two models for the life formation: the model of the

³⁴ CALVINO, Italo. *Six memos for the next millennium*. Harvard University Press, 1988.

³⁵ Idem ibidem, pg. 28.

³⁶ Idem ibidem, pg. 48.



crystal, which constitutes the regularity and invariability of the composing structures, and the flame model, which possesses a recognizable external form and an internal agitation, both constant, congregating structure and malleability. To the latter is that I associate the liquidity.

It also incorporates the multiplicity principle “as a method of knowledge, and above all as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world³⁷”, in the various points of view of the same fact or object, in the constant conscience of the different and the simultaneous.

Calvino’s last proposal for the millennium would be Consistency, about which we know nothing but can speculate that, assuming any human process (the education, for example), some of the memos he enunciated as referential to the contemporary world, proposing the lightness of the educational situations, subtracted from the weight of the structures; the quickness of the adaptation, agility of expression and thinking; the conciseness and exactitude of its processes; and the guarantee of multiplicity; than it would be the consistency – not in the meaning of solidity but as density – that will assure its quality.

Therefore, this is why we believe that the liquidity metaphor, seeing from its positive aspects, is a good solution for representing the adaptability; the necessary sharing of control; the establishment of dialogue and the shared construction of knowledge that happens everyday in the museum’s educational processes. In that way, we appropriate ourselves of the metaphor of the liquid’s fluidity to designate the education that is not attached to pre-established methods, systems and/or contents but instead uses different methods, systems and contents in response and in a dialogical construction with each of the visitor’s profiles and according to the multiplicity of appeals and interests that arise from this practice. Especially in the practice of non-formal art education in museums, the multiplicity and variety of audiences and artworks, as well as the dynamicity of the experiencing of art and of the contact with the

³⁷ Idem ibidem, pg. 121.



museum's spaces present a dimension that escapes the objective predictability of the pre-established methods, normally designed to serve the educational format used in schools³⁸.

We choose to privilege the dialogical constructions of meaning, from the encounter of the individual with the space and the objects in it, organizing our activities according to the audience profile, in a way that it promotes the deepening of the educational processes.

“No interpretation is ever complete. ‘The discovery of the real meaning of a text or of a work of art is never finished: in fact, it is an infinite process’ (Gadamer, 1976:24). While errors in comprehension are eliminated, new sources of knowledge emerge; therefore the construction of meaning is a continuing process of modification, adaptation and expansion. (...) The learning process is influenced by motivation and attitudes, by previous experiences, by culture and background, and – especially in museums – by the design and the physical presentation of objects. When we talk about learning – especially learning processes in museums –, we are not talking only about learning facts. Learning has to do with facts but also with experiences and emotions. It requires an individual effort but is also a social experience³⁹.” When proposing the Liquid Education, as we see it, the initiatives search for an adequacy of both contents and methods to reach the 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.

In order to contemplate this possibility, the Pinacoteca’s Education Department opt for proposing stimuli that can establish dialogues with its visitors, having as a starting point their

³⁸ Due to space issues, we’ll refrain from the necessary debate about the current state of the formal education and its reformulation.

³⁹ HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean. *Educational Role Of The Museum*. 2nd Edition (Leicester Readers In Museum Studies). London: Routledge, 1999. pg. 19 and 21.



perception, interpretation and comprehension about the focused contents, building *from there* the possible meanings for the artworks and the concepts, which configures not as a pre-determined method but as a possible architecture for the relation between the components of the educational process.

“The view that knowledge is objective and verifiable has been widely challenged by the notion that knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by individual’s particular interests and values. Language about facts and certainties has been replaced by language about context, meaning, and discourse. [...] This shift has important implications for what museums are and do. It would appear that these onetime Towers of Babel comprise, as foretold, not a synopsis of wisdom but a multitude of voices. Objects, it follows, hold multiple stories and meanings, and, depending on the context, all of those stories and meanings are potentially valid.”⁴⁰

In short, the Pinacoteca’s Education Department, in search of a liquid education, promotes for the visitors meaningful encounters with art and with the museum through the necessary rupture with the rigid mediation structures and the flexibility to assume different systems, recombining them accordingly to the visitors’ and the artworks’ needs and particularities. It means, also, not looking at learning with hierarchy, judging a priori what is more or less important to be learned, incorporating its own expectations and life stories into a place full of possibilities and information, in an afflux of constant movement. Therefore, in each educative initiative, method and process should be mutually built. Accordingly to Elliot Eisner⁴¹, 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.

⁴⁰ ROBERTS, Lisa C. *From knowledge to narrative: educators and the changing museum*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, pgs. 02 and 03.

⁴¹ 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.