

Infants, Museums and Mediation: from the aesthetic dimension to relationships

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ABSTRACT – Infants, Museums and Mediation: from the aesthetic dimension to relationships¹. This article is part of the master's dissertation 'Babies in the Art Museum: Processes, Relations and Discoveries'. From the analysis of sessions of the program No Colo (On One's Arms), from the Instituto Tomie Ohtake, in São Paulo, we aimed to understand the inclusion of infants in education programs in art museums. Based on the investigation and analysis of the practices in question and dialoguing with the adopted theoretical framework – Vygotsky, Trevarthen, Vecchi – we observed that the contact with artifacts, collective experiences and proposals for sensory experimentation can be significant for infants' social, emotional and cognitive development and insertion in culture. The inclusion of this audience can provide new ways of being and thinking about exhibition spaces, contributing to its democratization and broadening of the mediation repertoire.

Keywords: Art. Museums. Education. Infants. Aesthetics.

RESUMO – Bebês, Museus e Mediação: da dimensão estética às relações. A pesquisa apresentada neste artigo é parte da dissertação de mestrado 'Bebês no Museu de Arte: Processos, Relações e Descobertas'. A partir da análise de sessões do programa No Colo, do Instituto Tomie Ohtake, em São Paulo, buscou-se compreender a inclusão de bebês nos programas de educação em museus de arte. Com base na investigação e análise das práticas em questão, em diálogo com o referencial teórico adotado – Vigotski, Trevarthen, Vecchi – constatou-se que o contato com os artefatos, com as experiências coletivas e com as propostas de experimentação sensorial pode ser significativo para o desenvolvimento socioemocional e cognitivo dos bebês e para sua inserção na cultura. A inclusão desse público pode oportunizar novas maneiras de estar e pensar os espaços expositivos, contribuindo para sua democratização e ampliação do repertório de mediação. **Palavras-chave: Arte. Museus. Educação. Bebês. Estética.**

Introduction

Studies focused on the early years of life have been increasing and presenting surprising results since the 1970s. However, in Education, studies that specifically approach children aged from zero to three years still appear in smaller numbers. These studies are relevant due to the importance of understanding the experiences lived by infants in different social and educational contexts (Buss-Simão; Rocha; Gonçalves, 2015). Rocha (2008) highlights the importance of studies that dialogue with other fields of knowledge – such as Arts and Aesthetics, Sociology of Childhood and Philosophy – to deepen the theoretical perspectives regarding the investigation of structural, social and cultural dimensions of early childhood education.

Art and its investigative processes have been indicated as powerful allies in the instigation of imagination and crucial in the comprehensive process of knowledge (Girardello, 2011; Vecchi, 2010). In addition, artistic languages are a powerful means for children to express emotions and ideas, especially when it comes to very young children. From these stimuli, children express themselves with their entire body and relate to the world through an intensely sensory way (Malaguzzi, 1999).

In this same perspective, cultural experiences – which cover those that take place in museums and cultural centers – have been defended as fruitful places for exchange of affection and construction of a critical and empathetic look towards each other and the world (Kramer, 2001; Carvalho, 2016). The contact with the collection of works, with experiences that stimulate group exchanges, and with interactive and sensory experimentation proposals are significant for children's social, emotional and cognitive development (Lopes, 2014).

However, there is still resistance and prejudice when it comes to mediation for young children in museums. Even with the debate about the educational role of these institutions and their contribution to the construction of a critical, sensitive and empathetic look, in general, the presence of children is seen as a risk to the collection and the peaceful environment desired by managers and adult public (Pol; Asensio, 2006).

Still, in response to the audience's growing demand and in dialogue with studies demonstrating infants' perceptive and social ability, some cultural institutions have been developing – on a timely or ongoing basis – exhibitions for infants and their caregivers. Keeping in mind the importance of accompanying, understanding and contributing to the strengthening of these actions, this article aims to analyze the inclusion of infants in the education programs of art museums and cultural centers. To this end, this study will analyze the proposal *No Colo (On One's Arms)*, from the Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, which started the program for infants in 2016. Among other aspects, *No Colo* is part of an accessibility project of the institution, which is a data of interest for this study because it directly highlights the need for inclusion of this audience through proposals specifically designed for infants. For this

study, researchers attended to five monthly sessions of the *No Colo* exhibition and interviewed the two educators responsible for the proposal and 12 caregivers; they also analyzed the reports caregivers granted the *No Colo* team on video and institution's images of this exhibition.

Art and Aesthetics and their Strategies of Seeing the World

Cultural centers and museums are privileged spaces for meeting artifacts – objects, concepts and social practices – that carry the history of human culture in their most diverse manifestations. In this regard, Kramer (2001, p. 205) mentions the reflections of the philosopher Walter Benjamin, especially those with regard to the act of excavating/remem-bering to think about the collective dimension of the rescue of memory and history. The researcher associates the act of excavating with walk- ing through the galleries of a museum, because “[...] what we see in each piece, in each painting, in each work stored here is a condensed history that brings together contradictions, says and silences, values and omits, tells”.

This study considers artistic productions as symbolic artifacts, as creations permeated by subjectivity and personal interpretations, which has the urge to communicate what often is taken as a metaphor. In the same sense, Tomasello (2003) presents the metaphor as a way to satisfy a complex demand to express something. Therefore, symbolic artifacts carry a strong potential for one to find the other and oneself as they embody countless ways of interpreting the world and events.

The metaphor is based on a process of reference to a certain el- ement of reality – which may be an emotion, a certain socio-political situation or an event of nature, for example. Metaphorical transgression reaches meanings not pursued by habitual language, leading to new ways of perceiving and thinking the world and things (Hoyuelos, 2013). The relationships established in this process enrich the experience and knowledge since they meet a demand of thought for new conceptual and formal constructions. Unexpected connections in metaphors are not only possible through the word, but can also occur non-verbally, by images, sounds, materials or forms.

Aesthetics: an empathetic and challenging look

Aesthetics as a field of knowledge, a branch of Philosophy, reflects on art and beauty. To bring up questions like corporeality and the re- lationship between humans and the world that surrounds them physi- cally and symbolically causes disturbances and even conflicts in the ra- tionalist order. Something aesthetic is currently presented as a category of analysis that has its importance recognized not only in art research, but also in several areas such as Sociology, Anthropology and Semiotics (Meira, 2011).

Although not so contemplated, Aesthetics, in the field of Educa- tion, is thought as a dimension, occupying and provoking reflections

mainly in the last decades. In this context, the philosophy and pedagogical practices of Reggio Emilia schools emerge as an approach that considers the aesthetic dimension as their essential component. This approach invites adults to bring to everyday actions with children a sense of aesthetics that is linked to the artistic making, but that also permeates the various disciplines, such as Mathematics and Physics. According to Vecchi (2010, p. 5), the aesthetic dimension is what makes us have an attentive, conscious, sensitive look at the world:

[...] a process of empathy relating the Self to things and things to each other. It is like a slim thread or aspiration to quality that makes us choose one word over another, the same for a color or shade, a certain piece of music, a mathematical formula or the taste of a food. It is an attitude of care and attention for the things we do, a desire for meaning; it is curiosity and wonder; it is the opposite of indifference and carelessness, of conformity, of absence of participation and feeling.

Therefore, Aesthetics is presented as a dimension that goes beyond the field of art and is present in the various areas of life. According to Vecchi (2010), one can consider the aesthetic dimension as a meeting point between reason and imagination, between cognition and expression, tensioning them. To face the aesthetic attitude as a sensitivity, as an attention to connections implies having a look at life and the various fields of knowledge that does not separate them into rigid and isolated categories (Vecchi, 2010). Therefore, the aesthetic sense is presented in actions as an empathetic and intense mode that relates things and ideas, contemplating an investigative attitude that experiences thought and reality from unusual angles.

For Vygotsky (2009), the human creative activity is not restricted to the manufacture of objects, but can also be configured into a feeling or even a construction of the mind. The author emphasizes the crucial ties between lived experiences and the capacity of human creation. For the imagination to develop (which is embodied in creation), a broad and diverse repertoire of experiences is required. Girardello (2011) contributes to this debate by bringing imagination as a central element in the knowledge process, also linked to emotions. The mistake of assuming a distance between the affect and the intellect, between art and science is pointed out by the author as harmful to a broader understanding of the role of imagination in childhood, nevertheless in adulthood.

Mostly, in its history, Philosophy has bet on a Cartesian separation between the sensible and the reason. At the end of the 18th century, the Aristotelian thought that there is no thought without image (that is, thought arises from a sensible basis) finds an interlocutor – Alexandre Baumgarten – who provides new insights into the discipline. Baumgarten defends Aesthetics as a science that seeks to integrate the sensitive to intellect, to understanding (Camargo, 2011). However, it is not until the late 20th century that the debate on Aesthetics as a science will intensify. Although there is the persistence of a philosophical com-

mon sense that supports an opposition between aesthetics and logic, aesthetics is understood as a knowledge producer. According to Camargo (2011, p. 8), what happens is that “[...] the knowledge produced by aesthetics differs qualitatively from that established by logic, because besides their cognition formally diverging, they demand a series of diversified instruments and processes”.

In this sense, relating aesthetics to knowledge and seeking to make it present in educational actions with children from an early age requires an understanding that there are different ways of facing a problem and, thus, understanding this problem as an issue that mobilizes thought.

Seeing the World with the Meanings of Art

Art and artists can contribute to the process of interpretation and reflection about reality. However, the artists’ works must not be viewed as formal models to be followed, but as provokers of an unusual and often contesting attention to events.

In order to discuss the artist’s look at reality, Meira (2011) alludes to the words of Italo Calvino when referring to the myth of Perseus and Medusa. Through the Greek myth, the visibility is discussed as an indispensable issue in art:

In this myth, the shield was the device that allowed [Perseus] to look at the figure that embodies reality [Medusa]. It is impossible to look straight at her, no one can stand terror at such a close range. Looking through the shield shows the artist’s resource that, with his cunning, establishes a biased relationship with life. It is a tactic that, being aesthetic, is equally ethical and political. The lessons that Calvin learns from the suggestive power of image reinforces the idea that art irreducibly creates its own methods of apprehension, comprehension, and reflection as the extraordinary ‘pedagogical and relational situation’ it is (Meira, 2011, p. 103).

Therefore, the art is seen as a field in which the relationship with reality occurs through an indirect look that questions and sees beyond the most superficial appearances, thus creating sensitization experiences. Man-made symbolic systems give rise to the urge to understand what was experienced within its complexity and inexplicability. The symbolic universe, which is formed by words as well as images with an “organizing plasticity”, produces knowledge and meanings of reality that affect and are interpreted from the context of the one who looks (Meira, 2011, p. 106).

The artists create little conventional connections in their works because artistic processes are closely related to divergent thinking, which combines unusual elements and is so dear to children (Rinaldi, 2012). For Dewey (2010, p. 84) “experience is art in its germinal state”; thus, art, as a product of the intense interaction of a subject with the

world, is presented as intensification and “enlightened development” of attributes belonging to the experience (Dewey, 2010, p. 125). Thus, the investigations carried out in the artistic universe can be precious companions to listen and expand the comprehension of reality in an expressive, unsettling and graceful way. The artists’ contestant and indirect look is also evoked because it is indispensable of intention, assisting in an aesthetic path that is not empty, but full of attention and provocation to reality. Artists are fascinated by the things of the world: they have, like children, a special empathy for objects and materials, and it is from them and in them that they can weave their thoughts, their ideas.

Infants, Aesthetics and Cultural Dimension of the Sensitive

Already in the first months, affective exchanges and interactions with the environment and with other people affect and enrich the childhood experience, its gradual understanding of symbolic artifacts and historically elaborated materials in culture (Tomasello, 2003). Infants seek not only to imitate actions of their more experienced companions in an attempt of conquering a repertoire of practical skills, but mainly to feel that they are part of a community of meanings. Such an urge for compliance has been extraordinarily potent in findings from comparative studies that shows that when a child cannot clearly understand the goals of a particular gesture or action, he/she tends to imitate it even more precisely (Tomasello, 2016).

Although the attention provided for children under the age of three has long been focused on their care and protection needs (Trevvarthen, 2011), recent studies has revealed infants’ social and sensitive abilities. If there is, to some extent, a consensus that infants do not think with concepts in the same way as adult subjects, their sensitivity to the aesthetic dimension may surprise even the most skeptical ones.

According to Trevarthen (2011), from an early age children have an urge to learn by narratives, seeking to learn new ways to express and communicate their experiences. In this understanding, the development of the Self is related to the sharing of meanings that happens constantly in family relationships in the community. One’s aesthetic preferences for colors, shapes and sounds seem to be especially connected with the actions and emotions of those around such one. Affective relationships and emotions are therefore strongly associated with the aesthetic sense, infants’ sensitive dimension.

Newborns already establish proto-conversations with the exchange of basic emotions with their interlocutor (usually the mother). According to Trevarthen (2011), these small exchanges of gestures, facial expressions, sounds and looks are part of a mutually enjoyable transaction simply because they are communicated and recognized by the other – a mutual engagement that occurs in sympathy. These affective exchanges are often accompanied by a musicality from which the infant perceives the different qualities of shared sounds. Such examples of affective sharing tangent to aesthetic perceptions reinforce

the idea of development and learning as processes related to the aesthetic dimension, to a relationship with the world – its things and its events – which is built on children's ontogenesis, but also on narratives that are woven and molded into the history of each culture. Our ways of thinking and being in the world are communicated through gestures, sounds, rhythms, combinations of smells, touches, tastes and colors, constituting the aesthetic dimension of the human cultural experience. The infant is not strange of such a dimension, but rather connects to his/her community through it.

***No Colo* – welcoming new looks**

No Colo was created from the inclusion project *Manhãs de Histórias* (*Storytelling Mornings*). Established in 2015, the project was initially focused on storytelling about the current exhibitions for visually impaired children, including audio descriptions and other resources. Gradually, audiences other than blind children began to attend the storytelling sessions, such as children with cerebral palsy and siblings of children with disabilities².

According to the reports collected in interviews, instead of facing the audience's diversification as a deviation, the team of the Culture and Participation Center responsible for elaborating the project understood such a diversity as a power of the *Manhãs de Histórias*. The general coordinator of the Center understood the infants as another way to approach the diversity that the project contemplated. It is noteworthy that this coordinator had accompanied the *I Seminário Bebês no Museu*³ (1st Infants at the Museum Seminar) organized by Museu Lasar Segall and Casa das Rosas, in addition to the work held by Museu Internacional De Arte Naif (MIAN)⁴. An educator⁵ who had already had experiences with this age group at São Paulo's Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) was then invited to develop *No Colo* with the coordinator of *Manhãs de Histórias*⁶.

Thus, *No Colo* was born in 2016, already with a path taken and opened by some other experiences, bringing with it news and new challenges. The certainty that an exhibition for infants within an inclusion project really made sense came from participants' reports collected at the end of each session. Although the word *inclusion* was absent from the dissemination of the activity, it was often used by mothers who highlighted that they had felt included, because exclusion was a feeling that accompanied them along with the fear that crying, breastfeeding, exchanging of diapers, etc., were problematic in cultural spaces⁷.

Wartofsky (1999) states that childhood is built across times and in different societies as a cultural artifact. Thus, the spaces in which their presence and ways of acting and being are well regarded are part of a culturally established construction. Even today, art museums are spaces socially intuited as unsuitable for young children; rather, these spaces believe that infantile and neonatal behaviors do not fit those expected from such an environment. Even though the demand for cultural exhibitions for infants and their caregivers exists, an official in-

vation was required for this group to attend the cultural center space more systematically.

The *Manhãs de Histórias* project as a whole expanded in 2016, covering storytelling at different times, accessible workshops, courses for teachers and lectures. Within this set of actions, the *No Colo* program stood out, being “side by side with the main activities”⁸. In the first meeting of *No Colo*, the program had a waiting list with 80 interested people.

In 2017, in order to cover the developments of each program, the *Manhãs de História* project was renamed as *Programa de Acessibilidade* (Accessibility Program) and, according to the Institution:

In this updated vision of accessibility, the processes seek to integrate the welcoming of people with disabilities and social vulnerability to the general public, creating spaces for encounters and diversity.

Regarding the inclusion of infants with disabilities in this exhibition, the coordinator points out:

And in this context [of disability], the families that get too focused (or are working, or are taking the child to multiple treatments) have another time on this agenda, for enjoyment only. To attend an exhibition, to know a new place, of tranquility. And not the ‘look, now you take your leg and put it like this’, because this happens a lot with a baby with disabilities... to get examinations and attend physical therapy. Physical therapy uses a lot of artistic elements, which is a very positive factor. But *here we propose a meaning other than physical therapy*. Our meaning is not that of physical rehabilitation, *it is of social interaction with other babies, a moment of affective approach*.

The educators expect that the reception of people with infants is not restricted to sessions of the *No Colo* program. To this end, an important part of the project is the internal training of employees, such as security guards’. Besides gradually seeking to break down symbolic barriers from the cultural center *to* and *with* groups who do not feel invited to attend their activities, some access strategies are also taken into account, such as free admission to exhibitions, unimpeded respect for the right to breastfeed in public, and structures with baby changing stations in the bathroom.

The Propositions: conception, relationships and discoveries

No Colo visits usually followed a pattern in their structure. During the field research period, the meetings took place, with some exceptions, monthly on Saturdays in a single session. Public participation at each meeting was usually through open registration for the community⁹. The visit, which lasted one hour and thirty minutes, on average, was divided into two different moments. The first was the exhibition, in which participants could look at the works as well as interact with the materials and objects placed next to specific works. In the second moment, the participants were invited to try a practical proposition. Such a workshop was designed by educators with the intention of enabling a

dialogue with the exhibition, which happened through the technique used by the artist, formal aspects or conceptual connections.

The strategy developed by the educators was to focus their mediation on curating the objects and materials placed next to the works, choosing the presence of musicians, and preparing the practical proposal. There was an effort not to pass too much information, such as historical aspects and other data about the artist/works. The aim was that through the strategies they developed, adults would be able to mediate the visit for infants, creating an experience.

Figure 1 – Building blocks arranged in the gallery



Source: Photo by Instituto Tomie Ohtake/Activity Record.

Figure 2 – Elements Inspired by Ernesto Neto's Work



Source: Photo by Researcher.

The educators responsible for the activity understand that to propose to the family to do something together, to the adults to participate in the activity and not just oversee it, is an important aspect. In addition, for the team, the fact that the companions already know the infant and his/her particularities facilitates this mediation and enables the reception of children of different age groups (0 to 18 months) and also children with disabilities (each with their own specificity) in the same group. Still, during the visit, the educators, especially the consultant, interacted with the participants, playing along in games that were already happening, or suggesting something new.

Figure 3 – Practical Proposal Environment at the Institute *Hall*



Source: Photo by Instituto Tomie Ohtake/Activity Record.

Figure 4 – Environments of Practical Proposals in the Institute *Hall*



Source: Photo by Instituto Tomie Ohtake /Activity Record.

Interactions: fragments that reveal the encounters

Regarding the conception and preparation of a proposal, the attention to detail, the care, as well as the clarity in choosing materials and strategies are considered aesthetic and ethical issues (Vecchi, 2010). However, the line between intentionality and the attempt to determine the unfolding and reverberation of a proposal can sometimes be quite blurred. In this study, we opted for an approach that perceives in aesthetic experience the possibility of uncertainty, of profusion of meanings and relationships to be established. We consider that the aesthetic dimension brings important contributions to child development. However, the didactic instrumentalization of contact with art lead the educational process toward a direction almost opposite to the creative, sensitive and questioning contribution of an aesthetic approach committed to humanization and critical thinking. Reflecting on the field of cultural production and shared culture experiences with children, Kramer (2000, p. 11) states:

I have emphasized the need to educate children and youth against barbarism, understanding that childhood

policies that enable cultural experiences can be one of the strategies. However, when thinking about culture and its humanizing role against barbarism, I know that the nations so-called scientifically and technologically educated and developed have given the world a legacy of barbarism. I am not naive; *I just believe that in that case conformation and obedience was taught, deforming the humankind, and what is at stake here is the critical rescue of culture for transformation.*

The educational actions that intend to embrace the aesthetic dimension also have the challenge of creating situations in which the experience can happen not only as an experience of entertainment or consumption. Within the uniqueness of their ideas, both Benjamin (2012) and Dewey (2010) saw the integration of aesthetics into everyday life as a way to deal with and extrapolate the poverty of modern experience. But could it be possible to plan the accomplishment of experience? An experience that, in the Benjaminian sense, goes beyond the lived moment and is constituted in the intertwining of time, “[...] a practice that produces a ‘felt reflection’ [...], a shared practice – even if with the author – of what we think, feel or live; which causes the action of thinking and feeling the things of life and death” (Kramer, 2000, p. 10).

It does not seem feasible to assure or define that an educational proposal will consist of an experience for each of its participants. Perhaps the closest that we can achieve is, as Benjamin’s ideas suggest, the construction of a space in which adults and children meet each other in a significant way (Imai, 2003). One possible way seems to point to the proposition of situations that enable interaction, the affective exchange of discoveries; environments that entice participants to embark on the invitation made by the artists in their works – a material that evokes senses and, sometimes, the unspeakable – just as in the invitation present in the children’s relationship with the world and its things. That is, the invitation to transgress an anesthetized state and experience the child or art wonders.

To report on all the small events witnessed while observing the sessions is a difficult task to be fully accomplished. Therefore, this item will present fragments of these meetings with the intention of understanding the progress of the proposals. The images aim to contribute to the communication and reminiscence of interactions with the collection, with the other participants and with the materials and objects selected by the educators.

FRAGMENT I

We enter the exhibition and the coordinating educator talks a little more about Picasso’s blue and rose period that are presented in some works of the first part of the exhibition. He uses as a playful resource a frame that is illuminated with blue or rose, attracting the attention of infants and adults. Babies and parents have fun with the luminous frame and with small paper frames of blue and rose gelatin filters¹⁰, creating a kind of photographic filter.

A baby walks through the gallery with a rose filter. He goes towards a mother who is crouching and playing with her daughter with the blue filter (the baby is putting the blue filter on the mother's face). Then the baby who was walking with the rose filter on his face puts it on the face of this mother, while the daughter puts the blue filter on her own face. Then he leaves and goes his own way, the other baby watches him. A baby lies down on one of the tissues [with a pattern similar to the clothing of the character in the painting] and pretends to be asleep. The scene provokes laughter from adults and the attention of other babies. He repeats the gesture a few times (Field Notes, June 4, 2016/*Picasso: savant hand, savage eye*).

In the proposal of the fragment above, one of the paths chosen by educators was to emphasize Picasso's expressive use of colors – particularly what is called his blue and rose period. The solution found was to manufacture small blue and rose lighting gelatin filters, so that participants could see the works and other people through color filters. Another strategy was the use of a luminous frame (Figure 5) that bathed the participants with color. Such elements brought concepts from Picasso's work to a concrete experience that could be experienced in a variety of situations (I see the work, I see the other, I see the space).

The fragment and the images also reveal the relational character of these proposed objects – I see and share this experience with the others, including and making them see as well – (Figure 6).

Figure 5 – Participants with luminous frame



Source: Photo by Researcher.

Figure 6 – Participants interacting in the exhibition



Source: Photo by Researcher.

On the same occasion, references to the figurative elements in the image were used: fabrics with a pattern and colors similar to the pattern of the boy's clothing represented in one of the works, as well as a tulle skirt that alluded to the collar of his clothing. Besides the visual reference, placed there as a tactile and relational possibility (in hide-and-seek games, for example), the fabric ends up evoking other meanings and relationships, such as the action of sleeping. Such actions/reactions occur in a sharing environment (I have my impressions, I share them with the other, just as I observe the other's actions and emotional manifestations).

The opportunity in mediation of spaces for exchange permeated by affectivity and aesthetic dimension enrich the sharing of narratives of meaning between infants and adults. One can risk thinking about this urge to tell stories, to share an experience present in children from an early age, with Benjamin's concept of storytelling (2012). The child senses are constituted and *shaped* in the relationship with the others, by their looks, by their expression. Moments like these are crucial for children's development, gaining new colors in the unusual context of art exhibitions (Leite, 2014).

Artistic mediation for young children is a challenge for educators, as it requires the search for new ways to communicate and construct meanings present in works and artistic processes with the public. The intention is to cover various interpretations (coming from the different contexts of each participant) and to enter with some depth in the processes, questions and search for aesthetic achievement involved in artistic work. In general, the basis of mediation rests on verbal dialogue; thus, in projects focused on infants and their caregivers, a different repertoire of strategies must be build.

No Colo educators created very interesting strategies, such as stations in the exhibition space, presence of music and workshops. However, in the context of the observed proposals, not always the materials chosen to compose with the exhibition space proved to provoke so many developments. At exhibition *Gaudí: Barcelona 1900*, architecture was the concept explored by educators, who made available stacking

games. The building blocks are a clear reference to the act of building and thus their choice is relevant. However, what concept in Gaudí's architecture, a singular artist in the way of conceiving his architectural works, could be explored by the participants?

FRAGMENT II

Second space [in the exhibition]: under a maquette/replica of the architect's structure (vault) there are some 'pillows' in different geometric shapes that resemble the cube building toys. [...] In this same place, a mother shows the baby the piece that is above them. The baby follows the mother's look and starts showing the structure to other people by pointing it. A mother lies on the floor with her baby to better observe the vault structure. Other mothers do the same, but some babies do not like to lie down and observe the piece sitting. The musician approaches and the baby dances and claps his hands. He stops for a moment, points to the ceiling showing it to the musician who looks up and points to it too, as if she was saying 'I see it too!'. Both of them smile, sharing and enjoying this little aesthetic discovery (Field Notes, December 4, 2016/Exhibition *Gaudí: Barcelona 1900*).

Figure 7 – Participants under replica of architectural structure



Source: Photos by Researcher and Instituto Tomie Ohtake/Activity Record.

The report presented highlights the sensitivity of infants to the conceptual arrangement of space provided by a replica of a vault of the Catalan architect, Gaudí. The structure, with its forms conceived through rational observation of the aesthetic patterns of nature, modifies the environment spatially by its forms and also by illumination, forming a play of light and shadow (Figure 7). Starred by one of the infants and by the musician, the scene described in the fragment reveals a moment of sharing a discovery. At first glance, it might seem that the arrival of the musician would distract the infant, change his focus of attention and make him forget what he was watching. In fact, the infant looks away, engages with the music, dances and claps his hands. But after enjoying the music and exchanging glances with his performer, he points to what previously making him interested, and shares his wonder.

Interpersonal relationships, affective exchanges, observing the behavior of others are actions crucial for early child development (Tomaseello, 2003). This complex system of emotional exchanges involved by its own aesthetics is implicated in the perception and relationships established by infants with the world. According to Trevarthen (2005, p. 55),

Infants take initiative in their learning and have rich intersubjective powers. Descriptive studies of infant communication with any persons who offer sympathetic human response show that, from the moment of birth, other processes are active besides those that seek protection and regulation of vital state. There is a mental engagement between interests and purposes and an emotional evaluation of the quality of concordant activity to discover and use experiences. Developments before language show that meaning is discovered in playful collaborative friendships, and that its discovery is motivated by pleasure in dynamically responsive company. The young child seeks a place in a community of 'common sense', not just security in attachments.

The sharing of meanings is also considered in interactions where the "responsive company" expresses an antagonism. What we intend to highlighted here is the relevance of interactions because they show some kind of sympathy¹¹, that is, the inversion of indifference (Trevarthen, 2005). Perhaps a kind of empathetic attention quite close to that evoked in the aesthetic dimension. Thus, the museum seems to present itself as a fruitful space for emotional exchanges and the sharing of meanings, since the encounter with works of art can trigger reflections, aesthetic perceptions and emotional responses. Similarly, for the contact with artistic aesthetic and symbolic productions, or artifacts, the museums offer resources for a gradual understanding of their own and the community, their shared values and contradictions (Goble; Wright; Parton, 2015).

Figure 8 – Participants share findings at the exhibit



Source: Photos by Instituto Tomie Ohtake/Activity Record and Researcher.

During the observation period, the researchers witnessed other moments where interactions – conversations, smiles and exchanges of

glances – showed involvement with the works on display. Sometimes the pieces observed by children deviated from what might at first be considered attractive to the child gaze. In one of the meetings held at the exhibition *Picasso: mão erudita, olhar selvagem* (*Picasso: savant hand, savage eye*), the educators invited the group to meet another part of the exhibition. The consultant highlighted that this in room “there are some owls that we think they will like”. The visit to this part of the exhibition was much faster, but the parents were interested, looking at the essays for the *Guernica*, among other images. This part of the artist’s production has a rather dark palette, and perhaps that is why educators have indicated owls as pieces of potential interest to children. But contrary to these expectations, researchers could see an infant pointing to the pictures and his companions talking to them; another infant stared at the painting *L’enfant aux colombes* (1943), for example. Such moments indicate that direct interaction with the collection – that is, without the materials and objects selected by educators – can also happen with shared attention.

Understanding that children are subjects who are not unaware of the so-called adult culture, but that their experience is crossed by cultural events and manifestations of society as a whole (Pinto; Sarmiento, 1997), one can perceive that it would be naive to want to circumscribe their experiences only to what would belong to them. The vulnerability of these subjects is recognized as well as the care that should permeate the actions proposed to them. However, would not the contact with art be a way of speaking also of what can be suffered, such as war, for example? Would not it be a possibility to recover in art the previous experiences of humanity and recall them so that barbarism does not recur (Kramer, 2000)?

Besides, it is important to think that no aesthetic expression is too complex for a child. Each subject will elaborate the contact with an artistic expression based on their modes of perception and elaboration of what has been lived (Vygotsky, 2010), which does not mean that he/she is not sensitive and unaffected by events. Throughout the observations made at the *No Colo* sessions, the researchers could perceive the early sensitivity of children to the aesthetic dimension that permeates the pieces of art (in their different languages) and its enjoyment by a group of adults and children.

Another point of note regards the caution to not make the audience understand that access to the exhibition must necessarily pass through the objects and materials arranged by mediators in the exhibition space. Even though this was clearly not the intention of the educators – who emphasized the contact with the collection in the initial speech of the visits – sometimes the companions tended to limit themselves to interacting with the materials, paying little attention to the exhibited works.

Figure 9 – Painting ‘L’enfant aux colombes’ by Pablo Picasso



Source: Photo by Researcher.

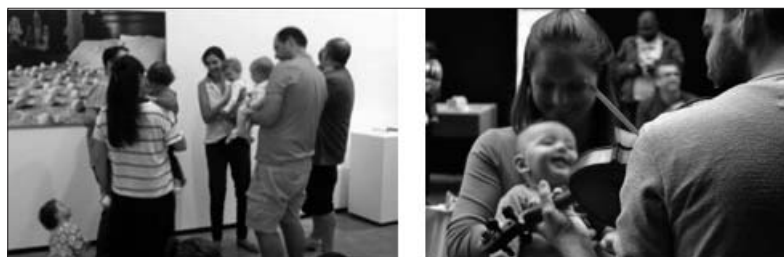
Figure 10 – Ceramic owls, Pablo Picasso’s ‘Chouttes’



Source: Photo by Researcher.

In the exhibition *Os Muitos e o Um – Arte Contemporânea Brasileira (The Many and the One – Brazilian Contemporary Art)*, in one of the sessions of *No Colo*, most of the companions did not walk through the exhibition, going straight to where the sensory stimuli prepared for the infants were. When the group was in one of the *arenas*, one of the infants would walk through the participants and materials, and, from time to time, contemplate the photographs by the artist Ana Maria Maiolino. Accompanying the activity and perceiving that the researcher had noticed this attitude, the mother commented: “I find it impressive how she is looking at the pieces”. In the following session (on this day two sessions were extraordinarily held), an attitude of the musician changed the families’ trajectory through the exhibition: he moved around the gallery, as if inviting participants to explore it, and the invitation was accepted.

Figure 11 – Participants interacting with musicians



Source: Photos by Researcher and Instituto Tomie Ohtake/Divulging.

The meetings used to have the participation of musicians, a presence always noticed by infants. The curatorship of the music style and instruments was performed by the musicians invited by the educators, seeking to establish aesthetic connections with the exhibited works. Although they have no instruction, infants are able, for example, to discriminate rhythms, tones, timbre, harmonies and melodies of vocal and instrumental sounds (Trevvarthen, 2011). At *No Colo* sessions, children were attentive to changes in sonority, especially when a new instrument was played. The musicians were receptive to the infants' looks and calls, smiling and playing with the rhythm and sounds to provoke those who sought them. Thus, the professionals were sensitive to children's intersubjective capacity and aware of the importance of a responsive and provocative attitude.

These relationships occurred both individually and collectively. Often, the staring at the instrument was followed by exchanges of glances with the musicians and their caregivers. During the observation period of the activities, the sound curatorship was very interesting, with a variety of instruments and musical styles related to the exhibitions.

FRAGMENT III

A father has a great time with his daughter painting her hand. The baby spills the paint and uses her hands to feel it. The father tries to avoid the 'mess' and the educator says 'yes, that's right', encouraging him to allow the baby to experiment with her body (Field Notes, June 04, 2016/Exhibition *Picasso: mão erudita, olhar selvagem*).

The workshops, or practical propositions, generally took place in the central hall of the Institute. Many passing visitors seemed curious and surprised to find this scene there: infants and adults among boxes, paints or other materials. However, not only were visitors surprised, several times the caregivers also demonstrated that they were trying something new. Painting on a large surface with unusual paints (made with natural elements like curry or spinach); getting to know the achio-te; articulating gesture and painting by listening to the rattles hidden in pillow cases; and playing with cardboard boxes seemed new experiences. The children's reactions also seemed to be surprising, especially when the companions realized that they did not need to obey certain behaviors, as can be seen in the highlighted fragment. Infants experi-

mented with their own bodies, observed the marks of their attitudes on the other's reaction and the response of materials: a stain on paper, the texture of a surface, the sound of a rattle, the occupation of another space, or the looks and responses from other participants.

Father: I didn't expect that we could really make such a mess with everything. *This is the first time I've had the opportunity to directly deal with the achioté* [...] I think this is undoubtedly a part of the child's educational, mental and psychomotor development. [...] Besides everyday life and some traditional toys, I find it very genial this idea of being able to play with the paint and make a mess. Because this is an atavistic thing, it's something she's going to feel, she's going to interact in a free and spontaneous way.

Mother: I think I went back to my old childhood, I love to participate. This issue of being her example makes her motivated too. What I liked most was painting with the... natural paint. She really enjoyed it, she likes to feel the texture, to see different objects.

In one of the meetings, a physical therapist (who accompanied a group from a rehabilitation center for children) comments that the various textures present in the space of the exhibition *Os Muitos e o Um* [...] provide meaning to the repetitive movements of one of the children with disabilities. One of the mothers with an infant in the rehabilitation center comments on the activity:

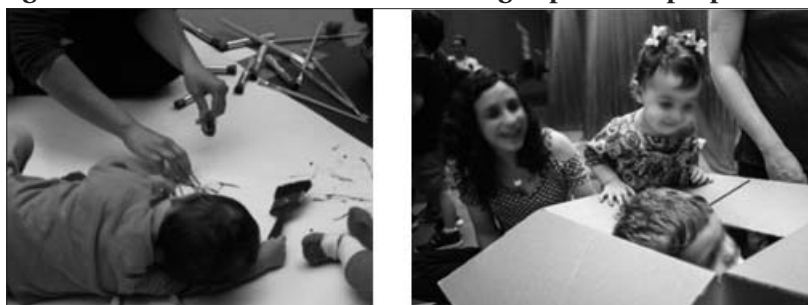
Mother: [...] The materials, the kids too that they put in the same place. *This is not only a proposal for this group of children with disabilities only, no, they put all children, with and without disabilities, in the same place.* This is very good, it's wonderful, because the child without a disability has much more skills, so the child who with a disability will mirror the one who can play, move, seek, and interact more easily. This is what I liked.

Regarding the accessibility of people with disabilities in museum spaces, Tojal (2010) emphasizes the importance of thinking about access issues beyond physical barriers to buildings, also considering the attitudinal, cognitive and social dimensions to really walk toward a socio-cultural inclusion of people with disabilities. The educators of the Institute propose the inclusion of infants with special needs in *No Colo* proposals beyond the "medical model", providing activities that seek to enable access to pieces on display and interaction with other children. Thus, they provide an environment of diversified exchanges, proposing to break sensory but also attitudinal barriers, since they affirm the possibilities of this public to relate to art and to share experiences with other participants.

Going back to the report, some proposals were made by educators at the meetings, such as massages with water-filled balloon, or invitations to participants to discover the paint-free brushes first. The paintbrush turns into a brush and brushes become paintbrushes, boxes become a house and architecture. The established relationships are many, and some parents mediated the experimentation, presenting the different paintbrushes and how to use them, for example. Sometimes

this mediation was indirect, happening through infants' observation or other participants' actions. There were many exchanges of glances, smiles as well as small disputes over materials. Some infants dipped themselves in the paints, tasted it, others did not like to get dirty, and only used paintbrushes or brushes to paint. Some refused the massage and wanted to massage their parents or other children.

Figure 12 – Infants and adults interacting in practical propositions



Source: Photos by Researcher and Instituto Tomie Ohtake /Activity Record.

But some questions also emerged when following the activities. Sensory experimentation with natural paints can be perceived, but we highlight that their texture and consistency often did not contribute to the records of child gesture, an important aesthetic response. Another point to be discussed is how the aesthetic characteristics of the pieces were related to practical propositions. During some actions, the lack of a more intense reference of the conceptual and formal characteristics of some exhibitions was found. Although in Picasso's exposition the relation with the exposition in the workshop was solely by the painting technique, the elements available in the gallery satisfactorily reflected an aesthetic relation with the exhibited works. On the other hand, in exhibitions *Os Muitos e o Um* and *Gaudí* [...] the workshop proposals could have further explored the context of the exhibition, even if the coordinators had to select the pieces to be contemplated in exhibitions with several works by different artists.

Specifically in relation to Gaudí's exposition, the game of volumes and occupation of spaces was present, causing many interactions and relations with spatiality. However, the cardboard boxes with geometric cuttings that evoked stained glass windows brought little relation to the architect's singular thinking. Regarding *Os Muitos e o Um* [...], the proposal was very focused on the carpet inspired by Lygia Clark's therapeutic studies. Even with elements that pertinently evoked Ernesto Neto's work, there was nothing present that would make the experience more complex with the different textures or set a more intense dialogue with the works by Lygia Clark (or other artists) on display.

At the beginning of this study, we approached the idea of art pieces as symbolic artifacts that communicate in their materiality unusual worldviews, questions and possibilities of relating things and events.

The act of communicating demands the presence of the other and the human relationship with reality takes place in a dialectic, in a way that each person will experience it in a unique way (Vigotski, 2009). In their works artists can express feelings and personal reverberations of facts; besides, they often pose problems and point out possible paths. The problems may be from Art History itself or more directly connected with its contemporaneity. When speaking about art to the children, Salles (2008, p. 9) proposes this reflection in an interesting way:

This is the reason why it is so hard to explain to someone else what we found in an art object, or what has touched us in the song we liked. The painter Pablo Picasso, when asked for an explanation of a painting he had made, asked: 'Do you ever know what the birds are singing?' The art object speaks a different thing for each person and one should not consider as a definite truth what one says about what a work of art is or is not. [...] What the art object does is to reveal to the person what his/her own self answered but he/she could not hear, because the answer was lost in its source of words. [...] The painter Paul Klee explains differently. He says: '*Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes it visible*'. [...]

Looking and thinking about art can come in many layers of meaning, from the first impressions that come with fruition, to an interpretation based on Art History and/or the contexts of its production. The idea of mediation is not to fully account for the multiplicity of readings and sensations that a work of art can provoke in the viewer, neither the research of an artist. Having the works exhibited as a starting point for the curatorship of objects and proposals, educators have a vast aesthetic and symbolic vocabulary. The challenge is to find ways to transmute them into proposals that enhance participants' sensory/aesthetic, expressive and intersubjective experience. For this, elements of the artistic process in question must be elected. Some suggestions that artists give in their works, which go beyond figurative and formal elements, can be explored by educators (Vecchi, 2010).

To bring different aspects of the works into a sensory and relational proposal can be seen by educators as a space for creation, as a possibility of establishing new relationships and imagining metaphors that partly reflect the symbolic universe evoked in the artwork. Such an exercise in transposition can be done by exploring the material of the work – wool, paper, paint, rock, everyday objects, evocation of elements of nature, etc. – or by qualities and relationships evoked by it – temperature, stiffness/malleability, opacity/translucency, weight, shape etc. Another way is to identify possibilities for dialogue with figurative and/or metaphorical elements through sensory aspects that evoke culturally shared sensations – color temperatures; sounds, texture, luminosity – as well as translate provocations about balance, gravity, tension, volume, dimension, among others, from games and materials that bring to the body the experience of these concepts.

Final Considerations

The *No Colo* propositions proved to be fruitful opportunities for establishing relationships – infants/caregivers, infants/infants, infants/other adults – characterizing affective exchanges and sharing of meanings. The researchers observed interactions both during the visit and in the spaces where sensory experiments were proposed. Games and individual and collective investigations were also present at various times. We emphasize that the proposals had the purpose of being connected with the pieces on display. The dialogue with artistic productions indicates an understanding of the sensitivity and ability of very young children to relate to and benefit from direct interaction with these artifacts, as well as with developments of the concepts and/or formal aspects articulated by educators.

The Institute educators' work seems to point to possible contributions that mediation strategies for infants can offer to the work with children with disabilities in cultural institutions, as families of children with disabilities have reported in *No Colo* sessions as interesting possibilities for interaction with other children and artistic languages.

On the other hand, the data analysis points to the possibility of deepening the design of proposals. To consider the modes of perception, relationship and learning of children aged from zero to three years does not mean a need for simplification of concepts in order to make them properly communicable. Although this study found a search to establish relationships between propositions and works, sometimes important aspects of artistic works seem to have been left out of the proposals.

Finally, we consider that the *No Colo* experience contributes significantly to the extension of the welcoming of infants and their caregivers in cultural institutions. The practices developed contribute to the broadening of the repertoire of educational strategies aimed not only at this audience, but also at the other spectators, expanding the mediation beyond the exchange through verbal language, achieving other meanings, forms of apprehension and creation of meanings. In this sense, mediation for and with infants is a possibility for institutions, their staff (from curatorship to security and educators) and the general public to glimpse new possibilities for the exhibition space.

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Notes

- 1 This article was written based on the dissertation of Maria Emília Tagliari Santos (2017), *Bebês no Museu de Arte: Processos, Relações e Descobertas (Babies in the Art Museum: Processes, Relations and Discoveries)*, presented as a partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree by the Graduate Program in Education of the Education Department of PUC-Rio.

- 2 Coordinator of the accessibility project named Manhãs de História/Instituto Tomie Ohtake.
- 3 I Seminário Bebês no Museu (1st Infants at the Museum Seminar) held in 2014, in São Paulo. For further information: MUSEU LASAR SEGALL. I Seminário Museus e bebês (1st Museums and Infants Seminar). São Paulo, 2014. Available from: <<http://www.museusegall.org.br/mlsTexto.asp?sSume=53>>. Accessed on: Jun. 28, 2018.
- 4 Museu Internacional de Arte Naïf do Brasil (MIAN).
- 5 The consultant of the project *No Colo* has a degree in Artistic Education and a master's degree in Arts. The educator also has specialization in contemporary artistic languages in which she developed a research project considering the educational practice in the museum, as well as other complementary courses. She works with art education in schools, social projects, museums and cultural spaces since 2007.
- 6 The coordinator of the project Manhãs de História, in which *No Colo* was inserted at the time of field research, holds a degree in Fine Arts, is a specialist in inclusive education and has been working with education in cultural institutions for over 14 years.
- 7 Consultant and educator at No Colo/Instituto Tomie Ohtake.
- 8 Coordinator and educator at the accessibility project Manhãs de História/ Instituto Tomie Ohtake.
- 9 At each meeting different families formed the group of participants. A possible development of the research would be to conduct an investigation more focused on the socioeconomic profile of participants in activities aimed at infants. A study with this focus would make it possible to better understand the scope of these activities and identify which are the missing audiences, in order to propose ways to reach them.
- 10 More or less translucent colored material that resembles cellophane and is used for show lighting.
- 11 Trevarthen emphasized that he uses the term *sympathy* in the sense from its Greek root: *to feel with*.

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