

THE IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION OF THE PERSON WITH DISABILITIES

LIA FERREIRA*

Body sensitivity is the first factor in the accessibility world.

M. Merleau-Ponty

This sensitivity acquires body and expression in art and culture and generally museums are documented deposits, archives of the most diverse art forms.

Museums are also a social school in which prejudices show the path to more informed concepts.

The human figure is understood as the ultimate way to relaying states of soul and social/behavioural patterns. Thereby, museums throughout their existence, have been accumulating a vast collection of representations of the human being.

The disabled person emerges associated with intense emotional loads, assuming representative forms that go through the image of the beggar and the Divine. The striking symbolism they represent, prevents them from appearing as innocuous figures of meaning or significance.

The duality between the social perspective affected by the concepts and prejudices of the «normal» human and the reality felt by the human with disability is a theme which deserves an endogenous reflection led by experiences in the first person.

* Architect and Former Provider for Citizens With Disabilities of Porto City Hall, Porto, Portugal. liaferreira@gmail.com.

In this meeting it was presented a set of reflections that look forward to analyse the identity of the person with disabilities, exploring the association between them, society and museums. The theme granted an appearance of several questions that invite us to the perception of a holistic vision.

The Exterior Perspective

What is the load associated with the disabled person? What role does society attribute to this person? What causes the figurative load carried by the disabled person?

Yet, in the external perspective it is important to understand how to organise an exhibition and what motives lead to certain decisions of exposition of the Museum estate.

The Identitary Perspective of the Disabled Person

How does this person see itself? What is the image it has about itself before the world and how does it put itself in this world? Does it see itself according to its physical limitation or does it have an idea of itself regardless of its limitation? Does it see itself as an integral part of the social world or does it feel excluded?

The Sequence of this Reflective Effect allows you to Deepen into the Subject

How does it feel about what it seems to be to other people's eyes?

What does it perspective on the world and its role in society?

What is its identity as a social and individual being?

How would it organise an exhibition about the human figure with disabilities? What would it decide to prioritize, how would it prefer to arrange the contents to be exposed?

What's its pattern and what does it understand by normality?

To the ideological dialogue of Patrícia Roque Martins (CITCEM/FLUP) — «The representation of disability in the collections of the Museum of the DGPC: discourse, identities and sense of belonging. Introduction and presentation of the research project»; is added the optics of Emma Shepley (London Museums of Health and Medicine) — «Reframing disability: Exhibiting difference in the medical museum».

The discussion about what can be understood by normality is opened.

In the museological world where art is the social voice, disability marks with its presence. Not always in the foreground, that's true; however, due to the intense symbolic load, it almost assumes the protagonism in all representations.

Figures of beggars, prisoners, shapeless beings and circus freaks... These figures can represent the negative social contrast and also divine figures, although these have a less assiduous presence than those previously mentioned. All with some type of visible

disability compose the scenario in which they are represented, therefore carrying the social message.

In the utopian world we would have a young, athletic and warlike population (ready for all challenges and without any kind of disability/inability). In the real world there is no more expressive pattern than that of biodiversity and the importance of interdependencies, which are our greatest richness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MERLEAU-PONTY, M. (1994) — *Fenomenologia da Percepção*. Tradução de C. Moura. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, p. 31. Original text published in 1945.

NÓBREGA, T. P. (2008) — *Corpo, Percepção e Conhecimento em Merleau-Ponty (Estudos de Psicologia)*. Natal: Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte.



[No title]

©Constança Araújo Amador, 2017