

# Summary of the book «A Cultural Animation: conceitos e propostas», by Victor Andrade de Melo

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**Abstract:** Cultural Animation is a pedagogical tool that can be used in different contexts and social venues with the clear purpose of intervention. It is established from the desire to change reality and from understanding that an intervention within this perspective can be an important tool to achieve this goal. Its strategy of action is based on the idea of mediation, seeking to build a society that is fairer, more egalitarian and democratic, where people learn to respect and mediate their differences, acknowledging and exploring their creative possibilities and taking an active and critical stand in society

**Keywords:** Animation. Art. Culture. Recreation.

Part of the studies carried out by author Victor Andrade de Melo focused on Cultural Animation studies. The book *Animação Cultural: Conceitos e Propostas* (Cultural Animation: Concepts and Proposals) published in 2006 attempts to present a cohesive approach on the subject. The purpose of this study is to address some of the important issues and presenting it summarized. The first chapter presents the concepts and definitions applied to cultural studies and cultural animation.

The author defines Cultural Animation as a learning tool that can be used in different contexts and social venues, which has a clear social intervention purpose. Although reluctant to

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give a precise and definite definition, Melo defines it thus:

In order to satisfy any need for a clearer and more direct definition, I defined Cultural Animation as an educational technology (an intervention pedagogical proposal) based on a radical mindset of mediation (that should never mean imposition), which aims at fostering the comprehensive understanding of cultural meanings (taking into account the tensions in place within this milieu), conceding to the concretion of our everyday life, built from the principle stimulus for community organizations (that presupposes the idea of strong individuals to ensure the actual construction of democracy), always aiming at questioning the social status quo and helping to overcome it in order to build a fairer society (MELO, 2006, p. 28-29).

Melo notes that cultural animation is a theme that is much discussed in Europe (where it is called sociocultural animation, while in Brazil, despite the fact that many authors consider the subject – which in his opinion certainly sets back the theoretical advancements in the field – it is still in its early stages. He understands that Cultural Animation associated with his studies on recreation share peculiarities and certain features with Cultural Studies and for this reason discussions on this subject can be important and useful to address recreation and cultural animation. One of the similarities pointed out by the author is the fact all these fields of study require interdisciplinary mobility (post-disciplinary in some cases), i.e. to break away from the traditional “academic disciplinary bureaucracy”, given that technical support is a stand-alone subject that lacks the means to reveal and understand the complexities that encompass cultural processes.

According to the author, Cultural Studies are theoretical perspectives that arise from the concerns of E. P. Thompson with the education process of night school. Both taught English students from the working class in the 50s and discussed pedagogical intervention alternatives and

possibilities that would overcome the mere reproduction of syllabus and effectively contribute to the education and formation of the individual in society. This field of study initially focused on debates that addressed the culture of minorities, politically concerned with social change. Later, although the focus was always on political and social intervention, these studies were disseminated to diversified academic and cultural contexts and discussions became more comprehensive.

The discussion of Cultural Animation and Cultural Studies is set into place based on the wish to change social reality and the belief that actions within cultural animation can be an important tool to attain this goal and a means for this change. The objective would be to establish a fairer, more egalitarian and fair society where individuals could live freely and with more dignity, respecting and mediating their differences, acknowledging and exploring their creative possibilities, taking an active and critical stand in the face of society. To this end, recreation would be one of the social venues that would enable the cultural entertainer to reach these objectives:

[Cultural animation] is a Social Pedagogy proposal that is not limited to a single field of intervention (it can be implemented within the scope of recreation, school, unions, family; ultimately, in every education venue possible), nor can be understood only by one area of knowledge (MELO, 2006, p. 29).

In different parts of his work, the author shows the limitations of cultural animation intervention on recreation, avoiding possible utopic or overvalued considerations about this subject, e.g. how this type of intervention would be the main or only one to build a new social order. Just the same, he notes its importance.

But how can this practice intervene directly on social reality to the point of changing it? How can the pedagogical practice of Cultural Animation help in this quest?

The change in society takes place with the change in the individual:

[...] a fairer social construction can take place only when we have Strong and active individuals that can express themselves and take a clear and explicit stand.[...]

Hence, it is necessary to make room for the individuals' self-discovery, which will be possible only by questioning the excess of discipline and control (MELO, 2006, p. 65).

It is possible to observe that Melo is concerned with showing in his study not only the way how this process of “strengthening”, education and overcoming of the individual could be stimulated, but also how it should not be carried out. He shows it by commenting on the ongoing misconception of many intervention proposals that instead of encouraging individuals, which will lead to understanding phenomena based on their own interpretations, unconditionally try to inculcate preconceived values that are idealistically determined by educators as “right” or “correct”:

[...] defending the idea that more than being concerned with building uniformity in values supposedly revolutionary, the cultural entertainer should value and highlight the differences, the different perceptions of reality based on mediation and dialogue within different representations, always aiming at encouraging each individual to seek the enjoyment of their expanded senses (MELO, 2006, p. 66).

Melo provides an interesting option to intervention on recreation when he breaks away from concepts that wish to disseminate “supposedly revolutionary values” via recreation-related practices and to establish *a priori* what should or should not be done, and what is or is not right. His interventionist proposal focuses on enjoyment, which we believe is a core feature of recreation-related activities.

We understand that what the author proposes is to offer an intervention program to the target subjects, rather than “uniform” pre-determined values that follow the wishes and ideals of educators supposedly right and detaining moral sense, nor only certain types of limited recreation activities from which the individual can obtain enjoyment and through which he or she can develop their sense of discernment that will enable them to judge for themselves which values they wish to assimilate.

Melo admonishes the current state of recreation-related intervention proposals:

My concern also has a measure of provocation to the many current Recreation and Cultural Animation interventions. I perceive that there is an exaggerated concern with “developing new values” (e.g. building a new ethics which often comes with a heavy load of morality issues) and a subtle lack of consideration with the training of a new mindset, new feelings and new sensitivity (MELO, 2006, p. 39).

Based on Cultural Animation studies, the most important strategy suggested by the author is mediation. The cultural entertainer would be able to drive the acquisition of knowledge without necessarily having to disseminate it unilaterally. Melo notes that this should be done carefully lest it fall into the trap judging what should or should not be stimulated. Hence, according to the author, the cultural entertainer must not aim at controlling, “but rather to establish the theme and encourage the loss of control” (MELO, 2006, p. 63). Thus, the education process would occur not by building ideas but by “deconstructing perceptions and mindsets”. The cultural entertainer’s mission would be to awaken in individual a new way of understanding reality, stimulating thinking and driving questioning about the context that he or she is part of.

[...] the notion of mediation seems to be really fundamental to deal with culture-

related intervention. I have pondered on the idea of establishing a modicum of \ “disorganization”; the learning process would occur via creating a situation of discomfort.

[...] Ultimately, Cultural Animation is a learning proposal that operated from the principle of “unlearning” and loss of stability ensuing from breaking unilaterality in the communication process (MELO, 2006, p. 43-44).

In the second chapter of the book “*Animação cultural e aesthetics education*”, Melo opens a discussion on how aesthetics education could (and should) assist pedagogical actions, mainly in terms of cultural interests.

Perceiving aesthetics as one of the ways by which individuals claim reality; Melo believes it is fundamental to adopt a behavior that drives sensibility and the awareness of individual, as these factors are conducive for developing new ways of perceiving reality. According to the author, the aesthetics education process where sensibility is educated by offering new ways of interpreting and experimenting with reality would expand the individuals’ ability to evaluate situations, whereby they would exercise better sense of criticism and be more tolerant, possibly strengthening their sense of enjoyment.

The cultural entertainer should be first and foremost the driver of new aesthetical experiences; someone that in mediation and dialogue process presents and discusses new ways of communicating; a professional that drives learning by causing discomfort and informing the possibilities to better acquire, access and create different disturbing perceptions.” (MELO, 2006, p. 60).

The author purports that when aesthetics education is carried out to the full the individual would be able to exercise his or her good judgment by developing subjectivities, e.g. the most beautiful work of art, the most interesting movie to

watch, the most enjoyable recreation-related activity, and even the “right” behavior. Within this context, the role of the cultural entertainer via aesthetics education would be necessary and indispensable.

He advocates recreation-related pedagogical education in this sense, reminding us that this case also requires attention, as the “applied” subjectivity should not be idealized, but rather provide venues and possibilities conducive for individuals to build their own subjectivities.

The role of the cultural entertainer is more than to lead individuals along the so-called road to happiness; he or she must awaken and expand in each individual the subjective discovery enjoyment as a life changing principle. It is obvious that each individual is able to experience enjoyment and to make choices, but would that be a life principle? Would this possibility not be reduced, restrained and diminished? It is the Discovery of new life principles with less restriction and more poetry and art in the day-by-day, supported by different, expanded and divergent aesthetical perceptions, rather than standardized and restricting (MELO, 2006, p. 67).

When addressing art-related issues, Melo reaffirms how important it is to educate sensibilities when he purports that “art would be what people perceive as art. The issue is under what conditions individuals would be able to develop or not, their potential for feeling” (MELO, 2006, p. 36).

He criticizes the hasty and biased judgment of artistic value of a given artistic manifestation. All in all, he defends that art is not only the manifestation defined by the ruling classes, but any manifestation perceived as such. Hence, the concept of art needs to be expanded.

The author also points out that it is up to the cultural entertainer to question and raise problems about the concepts of art and aesthetics that are determined in by a tradition based

on the interests of a dominant ideology. However, admonishes the author, this does not mean that the famous and classical works of art should be denied or underestimated. Only individuals who have been exposed to these cultural assets and educated to fully appreciate them are apt to doing so, as this process requires ongoing stimulation and opportunity. Therefore, individuals need to be stimulated to understand how and why these cultural assets have been determined as such and how the process took place. Furthermore, the most important thing is to raise the awareness of individuals so they can acknowledge themselves as potential producers of art and culture “[...] we have working with the idea that the issues is always to drive a productive stand, which also means the possibility of engaging in a critical dialogue about what has been produced historically” (MELO, 2006, p. 32).

According to this discussion, the author considers artistic experience indispensable to the development of the human being and his or her sensibilities. Thus, he thinks that art education (also included in recreation-related education) would be fundamental end even more important than educating via art, as art does not need to be a means of education in that it already plays a social role:

Art fulfills its social role when the individual can exercise his or her sense of discernment and choice; when it leads to the kind of discomfort that expands the perception of reality; when it educates for the need of carefully perceiving (that is so important in a world of signs and symbols); also when it triggers enjoyable experiences (although these should not be considered the only standard by which it is judged: often this is not artist’s intention). When art does fulfill these roles it extrapolates its existence beyond itself. When it fails to do so the work of art is a mere amorphous object enjoyed by a privileged minority. (MELO, 2006, p. 36-37).



In relation to mass culture produced by the culture industry, Melo admits to its impact on modern society and advocates that just like other cultural manifestations, it cannot be merely denied or underestimated. Not everything that is produced by mass culture can be considered cultural garbage, although this is often the case – not everything is necessarily disposable.

In opposition to this installed model of production and reproduction, the author advocates that the cultural entertainer should use their sense of discernment based always on mediation and moving away as much as possible from authoritarianism or impositions on what should and what should not be consumed. When all is said and done, the goal is for individuals to judge and make decisions based on their own sensibilities and sense of discernment:

[...] it is not about replacing one type of alienation that favors social order with another supposedly against social order, nor to deny to the public the possibilities of enjoyment, well addressed dynamically by mass culture. If the culture industry is successful it is because it can also spark enjoyment at the same time it introduces a representation of enjoyment that serves its purposes. This can only be opposed if we are able to gradually awaken new possibilities and new representations of enjoyment (MELO, 2006, p. 62).

Melo affirms that it is necessary to move away from the common understanding that recreation-related activities are necessarily a linear and opposing form of activities that resist or reproduce the dominant system. He also states that one should not believe that everything produced and disseminated by the culture industry is necessarily consumed by individuals, passively lacking in sense of discernment. Therefore, whatever is produced by the culture industry can very well be used within the context of culture as a means of resistance.

A good example of this condition is his perception that the media is not bad for society in itself; the problem lies on how they are used by the culture industry. The means should not be mistaken for the ends, admonishes the author:

[...] a strategic mediation project seems to arise from mass culture, where it is not “demonized” or judged linearly or simplistically. Is the media bad, or could it be that most part of modern society misuses it? Is it uniform or are there other options? How is it possible to handle possible emancipation potential built by mass culture based on the idea of reappropriation and re-significance? (MELO, 2006, p. 44-45).

In his attempt to improve discussions on cultural animation, in chapter four, “Cultural Animation and films: cinematographic comments”, Melo establishes the connection between cinema, art and aesthetics education, starting to create a methodology to use the concepts of cultural animation in films. He explains that films are one of the most disseminated cultural manifestations in the modern world. Over the last years, this has been a much sought form of recreation that has direct impact on the dynamics of culture, which is on turn impacted by it. It is a powerful tool of representation that via the values, norms and principles it disseminates interferes in the moral formation of individuals and society.

He believes that this art form can be used for educational purposes and regrets the poor intervention and acknowledgement of films as a teaching, going as far as advocating that films should be part of the syllabus as a specific classroom subject. He states that: “extreme rationalism that permeates the pedagogical milieu is conducive to reducing the concern with educating the sensibility, which is a fundamental dimension for the building the individual and society, where art it relegated to a secondary position.” (MELO, 2006, p. 94)

Within this context, where he insists on the significance of a recreation-oriented education, he addresses the means

how cultural animation can foster film-oriented education. A crucial issue is his concern with the quality of the film that is watched and consumed, given that:

If a film carries a certain representation of values, its repercussions on society cannot be denied, if when considered linearly. For sure, a film is just a film, not reality, but unquestionably it carries notions and intentions that affect society, where there is a Strong potential to influence the formation of mindsets (MELO, 2006, p. 96).

Once again he admonishes the danger of determining *a priori* what should and what should not be watched, as the cultural entertainer's role should be guided to driving and developing the individual's sensibility so he or she can make their own personal and free choices that are not arbitrarily guided.

The individual should be able to choose from new films in order to compare the content with other notions constantly disseminated in a limited way by the culture industry/media. He emphasizes that the goal is not to take a stand against the content typically disseminated by the culture industry (especially the North-American film industry), but to offer possibilities for individuals to establish their own sense of discernment and exchange with the film, not simply absorbing its content.

Melo believes it is important to comment and address some elements within this educational process, e.g. the technical aspects of each film (features related to the cinematographic language: camera work, lighting, sound, edition) and of films in general (creation process and execution of a film: script, shooting, editing, distribution, exhibition); the historical context under which was film was produced, as well as the different trends and manifestations of cinematography in the history of film making; the discussion of the ideas presented by the film, the dialogue using sense of discernment and the pondering on the film's emotional impact,

the feelings it brought about and the expectations and satisfactions it provoked. He believes that a proposal focused on art as a means of driving and developing sensibilities can expand the possibilities of recreation, and consequently, of enjoyment:

I believe that one of the roles of every pedagogical intervention should be to educate sensibilities. This does not mean just educating to build new values, but to understand that building aesthetics education is as important a need as any other performance perspective. We should understand that there is coordination between values and sensibilities when individuals and societies are formed; hence the need for a coordinated action at all levels (MELO, 2006, p. 122).

When sports, which is one of the most disseminated and assessed cultural manifestations of the twentieth century is perceived as an art, similar to films, it can also help in the process of educating sensibilities. But how can sports be considered an art form? This is the discussion addressed in chapter five of his book, called “Sports and art: a Cultural Animation proposal”.

The author states that it is not uncommon to observe different art manifestation where the main theme is sports. There a many films, for example, where sports is the main theme or is used as the backdrop for the plot<sup>1</sup>. It is also easy to observe “[...] the comparison between athletes and artists, master performance with works of art, or making use of art terminology to describe some features of a sports game or match” (MELO, 2006, p. 123). Contemporary changes to the concepts of art and sports help to bring both even closer together. On the one hand, the definition of art has been expanded to include many of the objects and

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<sup>1</sup> There is an interesting discussion between films and sports in the research report: MELO, Victor Andrade de. Sports and films: dialogues. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 2004. Research Report (Post-Doctor of Cultural Studies). Published in: [http://www.lazer.eefd.ufrj.br/cinema/docs/cin\\_esp\\_rel.pdf](http://www.lazer.eefd.ufrj.br/cinema/docs/cin_esp_rel.pdf).

manifestations that used to be considered non-artistic. On the other, sports is permeated by art manifestations and it is clear that aesthetic elements are valued, where they are important for certain modalities, or even mandatory for a good performance. The author points to other shared elements:

The great number of similarities between sports and art cannot be neglected, including how both are organized, full of symbolic elements, and their performance in specific venues with their own rules, e.g. theaters, museums, movie theaters or stadiums. Both are fascinating to the public because they offer identification elements that bring them closer to the aficionado. The difference is that sports is a more popular form and easier to understand and to be enjoyed (MELO, 2006, p. 126).

Therefore, Melo believes that sports can have an educational goal via art and as a pedagogical tool for art education. Combined to other art manifestations, i.e. films, literature, poetry, etc., sports can be applied as a specific subject, which the author calls “the use of art to discuss sports practices. This discussion can be used to broaden the scope to the social, historical, and political milieu, i.e. using art to broaden the discussion via the practice of sports, and to discuss these art manifestations that are being used to address sports, i.e. using art via a sports modality for art education.

He concludes that a fairer society is built by fostering the actual and effective possibility to feel, see and experiment reality. Summing up, Vitor Melo’s proposal for a coordinated articulation for recreation education puts aesthetics education in the limelight, i.e. the development and improvement of taste, sensibility and aesthetical enjoyment. If it were possible to summarize in a single sentence the recreation-oriented intervention proposal that involves aesthetics and cultural animation presented by Melo, it would be simplified as follows: to offer multiple possibilities for cultural basic

learning, and consequently to foster the development of aesthetic enjoyment. Instead of determining the rules for recreation education, the right path to follow by limiting what should and should not be practiced; his proposal focuses on the idea of offering a wide range of option with different roads and the associated knowledge to explore each of them.

We are living in a society that has more to offer in terms of choices and options in recreation compared to others in the history of humankind, so it only seems fair that everyone has the same chance to enjoy all these possibilities and develop their sense of discernment thereof. Melo (2006) presents his ground-braking and daring ideas under his intervention proposal. In this sense, his book *Cultural Animation* is a ‘must read’ for anyone who is involved with recreation studies, and almost mandatory for physical education professionals that work with recreation education.

**Resenha do livro «A Animação Cultural: conceitos e propostas», de Victor Andrade de Melo**

**Resumo:** Animação Cultural é uma ferramenta pedagógica que pode ser empregada em diferentes contextos e espaços sociais e que possui uma finalidade clara de intervenção. Instaure-se a partir do desejo de modificar a realidade e da compreensão de que uma atuação dentro desta perspectiva pode ser uma importante ferramenta para essa conquista. Com a estratégia de ação fundamentada na ideia de mediação, visa a uma formação societária mais justa, igualitária e democrática, com os indivíduos respeitando e mediando suas diferenças; reconhecendo e explorando suas possibilidades criativas e de obtenção de prazer; e posicionando-se de maneira ativa e crítica perante a sociedade.

**Palavras-chave:** Animação. Cultura. Arte. Recreação.

**Reseña del libro “A Animação Cultural: conceitos e propostas” de Victor Andrade de Melo**

**Resumen:** Animación cultural es una herramienta pedagógica que puede ser utilizado en diferentes contextos sociales y tiene un propósito claro de intervención. Se establece desde el deseo de cambiar la realidad y el entendimiento de que una intervención dentro de esta perspectiva puede ser una herramienta importante para este

logro. Con la estrategia de acción basada en la idea de la mediación, con el objetivo de construir una sociedad más justa, igualitaria y democrática, con la gente aprendiendo a respetar sus diferencias, reconocer y explorar sus posibilidades creativas y de puesta en forma activa y crítica hacia la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** Animación. Cultura. Arte. Recreación.

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Received on: 10 Feb 2009

Approved on: 5 May 2009