

A Museum of the Portuguese Language at the Luz Station

Pedro Mendes da Rocha^a, Felipe de Souza Noto^b

^aArchitect and Urban Planner, Master's Student, ^bFAUUSP, Architect and Urban Planner, PhD Professor, FAUUSP

Abstract

To operate within the building of the most remarkable train (and subway) station in the most populous metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere: to restore, reoccupy, and re-signify a listed heritage site, and there establish a museum of intangible heritage, in homage to the language spoken in the country. The hyperbolic description conveys the scope of the design challenge represented by the implementation of the Museum of the Portuguese Language in the Administrative Building of the Luz Station, emptied of its functions, in São Paulo. This article offers a critical account of the process of development and implementation of the architectural project, led by Paulo Mendes da Rocha and his team, with special attention to the particularities of an endeavor involving preservation, but above all, the programmatic and spatial updating of the building. An urban museum, an extension of the public circulation logics consolidated in that city center, discovered within a historic and unique volume, in an action that required constant and constructive negotiation with memory.

Keywords: Luz Station; Museum Architectural Design; Restoration and Adaptation Project.

In the year 2000, the Roberto Marinho Foundation was entrusted with developing a project to implement, within the administrative building of the Luz Station—designed by British architect Charles Henry Driver and constructed between 1895 and 1901—a Museum of the Portuguese Language. This challenging intervention, inaugurated in 2006, required the re-signification of heritage in both its material dimension (the building) and its immaterial one (the language itself). The architectural project was developed by a team led by Paulo Mendes da Rocha e Pedro Mendes da Rocha¹. The concept for the new museum, in turn, was devised by a group of intellectuals led by sociologist and filmmaker Isa Grinspum Ferraz, with the consultancy of New Yorker Ralph Applebaum, who directs an office specializing in the design of institutions that house intangible content—such as the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia / PA, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the New Museum both in Washington / DC. The team faced the challenge of conceiving a museum without precedent in the world. The collection, immaterial in nature and presented through digital media, was intended to portray the language not according to the canons of the formal standard, but rather to offer a depiction of the spoken language in everyday life—constantly invented and transformed—with its grammatical “errors” and diverse accents. In this article, the process of conception and implementation of the museum will be critically described, twenty-five years after its initial steps. Inaugurated in 2006, sixty years after a fire that had significantly altered the building's configuration during its reconstruction, the museum was struck by a second fire in 2015, later rebuilt under the direction of the same team and reopened in 2021. This text discusses the outcomes of these two stages of the project. A prior academic disclaimer is warranted before proceeding with the reading: the participation of one of the authors of this article in the project team transforms parts of the text into a testimony of the process, and justifies references to remembered remarks from various participants—which, although lacking precise academic rigor, are preserved here for their documentary value.

Methodological Options

This notion of untouchability is what restricts intelligent attempts to make use of vacant historic buildings. There is no middle ground: one either intervenes or does not; the recommendation to ‘intervene just a little’ cannot be taken seriously. (Lemos 2004, p.03) Intervening in the principal

example of English railway architecture in the city of São Paulo²—and confronting its unquestionable referential status—is no trivial task, especially in light of the substantial transformation demanded by the new program and the requirement to maintain the functioning of the building as a station, with its specific uses and circulation patterns. “To intervene just a little” was, therefore, never a viable alternative: the implementation of a museum within the administrative areas of the Luz Station building had to be a carefully controlled action in terms of heritage preservation, yet assertive in the transformations required. In defining the strategies for occupying the building, a decisive factor was the recommendation of the technical teams from the three heritage preservation agencies: the design approach to be adopted should emphatically consider the division of the original 1901 building into two sections. The east wing—comprising two-thirds of the building—had undergone significant modifications in 1947 during the reconstruction following the first fire. The west wing—the remaining third—had remained preserved in the configuration from the time of the building’s inauguration. Architect José Saia, a technician from IPHAN, stated³ unequivocally that this wing should be preserved in its original condition, with those elements of the program most compatible with the original offices to be located there: board of directors, curatorship, educational services, administrative management, courses, etc. The east wing, by contrast, could undergo more significant interventions to accommodate the more demanding components of the new museum. This recommendation was followed in the project, except in the few cases that will be described and discussed throughout the text. It is worth anticipating here, as a reflection of the theoretical framework that guided the project, the statement by Paulo Mendes da Rocha regarding the limits of preservation: “I am in favor not of preservation per se, but of a continuous transformation that does not contradict our ideals.” (Quoted in Lupo, 2024, p.195). The position of Paulo Mendes da Rocha—an inescapable figure in Brazilian architecture in recent decades—was well known at the time of his engagement in the project. Just a few meters from Luz Station stands the Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo, an eclectic building designed by Ramos de Azevedo in the early twentieth century and restored by Paulo Mendes da Rocha, Eduardo Colonelli, and Weliton Ricoy Torres in 1998. The project—now regarded as a contemporary canon of intervention in pre-existing⁴ structures—eloquently embodies the architect’s unique understanding in addressing the challenge of preservation. This much-studied operation subverts—or, more accurately, updates—the circulation logic of the building: the expansion of Avenida Tiradentes and its conversion into a high-traffic artery heading toward the city center necessitated the relocation of the building’s main entrance to its southern side. This condition determined a new axis of circulation, traversing the building’s two interior courtyards in a renewed configuration. The additions to the building—metallic walkways, staircases, and elevators—comprise a set of artifacts that are immediately identifiable with the building’s new usage, and explicitly recognizable as belonging to its present. Likewise, new steel and glass roofing systems reconfigure the potential of the central courtyards, now suitable exhibition spaces. Consequently, it is understood that the window frames which once protected the courtyards from rain and cold are no longer necessary. Without unnecessary scruples, and maintaining the same theoretical rigor, the remaining window frames of the building are evaluated individually, restored or replaced according to the new use requirements. At the Pinacoteca, Paulo Mendes da Rocha writes his own manual for intervention in preexisting structures, articulating his criteria with remarkable clarity. The building must be considered as an entity in transformation, within a process that should, above all, maintain coherence among all its parts—giving equal importance to both the existing elements and the proposed actions. There are no predefined hierarchies guiding decisions: the actions must be deliberate and precise, but the sole limit should be the quality of the final result. This theme will be revisited in the conclusions of this article.

The Preexistence: The Luz Station Building

To understand the criteria for the insertion of exhibition spaces in the new museum, it is essential to revisit the building’s history. Inaugurated in 1901, the complex occupies a long volume measuring 120 meters in length and 14 meters in width, built over the railway line, between Rua Mauá and Parque da

Luz. Both of its extended façades were originally quite closed off, as described by Paulo Mendes da Rocha: “When one thought of a railway station, at that time, it was about hiding it, presenting the city with an adorned palace, since the locomotive of that era was a sort of poorly wrapped bundle from hell—it howled, released soot and sparks. Nowadays, with electric trains, silent and non-polluting, stations are merely open shelters, integrated into the cities.” (Text reconstructed from the author’s memory, freely rewritten from numerous conversations held during the project’s development.). It is important to describe the ingenious circulation solution for boarding and disembarking trains, highlighted in the heritage listing processes at the three possible levels—municipal (DPH/CONPRES), state (CONDEPHAAT), and federal (IPHAN). The strategy adopted, to prevent the railway line from dividing the city, was to submerge it in one direction and surface it in the other, placing the tracks in a trench so that, with the platforms located one level below street level, three footbridges, continuous with the urban floor, could cross the platforms—ensuring that the station’s implantation would not interrupt the city’s continuity. A measure that did not sever the city’s *piano nobile*. At the time of its inauguration, the building was a uniform two-story block along its entire length, divided longitudinally into three equal sections, made explicit by the treatment of the thick brick walls. Following symmetrical compositional principles, the two outer sections were split into two floors (ground and first), while the central module housed only the main hall, with a double-height ceiling and a balcony on the first-floor level that encircled it, forming the only connection between the two office wings. From this layout, the eastern wing (closer to Avenida Tiradentes) and the western wing (closer to Júlio Prestes Station) are defined—these terms are referenced multiple times throughout this article. Crowning the void of the main hall, a truncated pyramid ceiling rose to the internal limit of the zinc sheet roof, resulting in an elevation of the central volume on the façade. Completing the composition were six decorative towers symmetrically distributed between the two wings. However, next to the pyramidal roof of the main hall, one of the towers broke the symmetry and extended upward—an exception marked by the installation of a clock at its top, reminiscent of the Big Ben tower in London⁵. In 1946, an event altered the spatial and compositional relationships of the complex: a fire consumed two-thirds of the building, and in its reconstruction, a (highly questionable) design was adopted that essentially added an additional floor to the eastern wing and over the central hall. The fire began in the eastern wing and advanced to the western edge of the main hall, destroying all floor structures, ceilings, frames, and roofing elements. The reconstruction of the damaged section, based on a design by Felisberto Ranzini, adopted reinforced concrete technology, omitting the ornaments and details such as ceilings, wainscoting (boiseries), and wooden balustrades. In this operation, a second floor was added above the central hall, allowing for a connection between the two office wings; on the other hand, the ceiling height of the hall was lowered, bringing it down to the height of the first-floor ceiling, thereby compromising its original volumetric condition. To support the new slab—ribbed in both directions with a robust 40-meter span grid—eight columns were added in a layout that defines a square on the parapets at the hall’s access to the platform. This space had been the most powerful and expansive in the complex, the one that counterbalanced a vertical, interior component against the building’s horizontality — a condition that was also destroyed by the addition of a new floor. The radical symmetry (elegantly unbalanced by the elongation of one of the six decorative towers) was marred. A critical reading of the process justified, within the project team, the defense of a proposal—in the initial discussions with heritage preservation agencies—to restore this original condition of the building by removing the annex over the east wing, built in 1946. The committee established specifically to oversee the projects—composed of two specialists from each of the three heritage preservation agencies (municipal, state, and federal)—did not, however, support this suggestion. The post-fire intervention was maintained as a valid pre-existing condition.

Results and Discussion

The architectural proposal to be discussed here must be understood as the result of the interaction between two complementary entities: the program—defined by an intangible collection and

the stimulation of interaction between visitors and content—and the existing building, with its particularities that shaped all intervention decisions. The pre-existence of the building and the guidelines of the heritage preservation bodies have already been presented as the starting point for understanding the framework of the new museum; the program, in turn, was shaped through constant interaction with the architecture team or, more precisely, with attentiveness to the spatial possibilities revealed or consolidated during the process. For this reason, the description of the program is, in this case, presented as the result of the process rather than as a premise, as is usually the case in experiences of this kind. In this section, therefore, two outcomes of the museum implementation process will be presented: the program and the project.

The Program: A Museum of Language

“The people are the language-inventors, in the cunning of mastery, in the trickery of wonder. The glue of improvisation, feeling its way through the crossing, lubricated the sun’s axis. [...] The people are the greatest artisans.” (Veloso 1991, on a text by Campos 2004, incorporating verses by Vladimir Mayakovsky). Language is a malleable entity, adaptable to countless agents and their contributions. It is the passage of time materialized in words, which connect multiple cultures and affirm the identity of one or more peoples. It was with this in mind that the content design team for the museum worked—without physical collections and open to the commission of a digital, interactive museum, a platform for celebrating a core value shared by the entire community. “To reflect, to listen, to let oneself be carried by silence and enter into poetry. A celebration of Language—that’s what we wanted.” (Isa Grinspum, quoted in Lupo 2024, p.202). The Celebration Calls Upon Two Vectors: Origins and Exemplary Usage. On one hand, the museum presents and invites deeper exploration of the cultural roots that shaped the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil: from the original triad (Portuguese settlers, Indigenous native nations, and enslaved Africans) to the contributions of more recent immigrant waves (Germans, Italians, Japanese, etc.). On the other hand, it highlights the cultural melting pot from which notable speakers emerged—and their even more remarkable contributions—whether through written, sung, or performed works. Visitors are invited to encounter João Cabral de Melo Neto, Dorival Caymmi, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, among others, through historical records, or to listen to some of our greatest artistic figures—such as José Celso Martinez Corrêa, Chico Buarque, and Juca de Oliveira—reciting works by Camões, Murilo Mendes, Machado de Assis, and more. This universe of possibilities is presented through multiple media: projection rooms or surfaces, audio booths, informational panels, interactive tables, informational totems—all carefully designed to respond to the content and spatial reality of the museum, as directed by the architectural plans⁶.

The Project: A Museum of Language at the Station

With the description and critical interpretation of the building’s existing condition and historical constraints established, along with the delineation of programmatic demands, we can proceed to discuss the implemented project. The initial constraint in the project’s development was the proposal of a circulation system that would allow for the independent and non-conflicting operation of the two resulting uses of the complex: the train station and the museum. Contrary to the celebrated example of the Gare d’Orsay in Paris, which ceased functioning as a station and was converted into a museum in 1986, Luz Station—whose number of users, already nearing 100,000 passengers per day, tripled with the inauguration of the Luz Metro Station—remains one of the city’s main railway hubs. The proposed solution maintained the central foyer of the building open to pedestrian flow between the station and the avenue, preserving the existing crossing over the tracks and the connection to the boarding platforms. To that end, the museum’s entrances were positioned at the eastern and western ends of the building, transforming the previously underutilized twin courtyards into public reception halls, adapted with the installation of steel and glass canopies⁷. Text reconstructed from the author’s memory, freely rewritten based on numerous conversations held during the development of the project. In addition to his experience with the Pinacoteca and the Museum of the Portuguese Language,

the architect would go on to repeat this solution at the Museum of Mines and Metal (in Belo Horizonte, MG) and at Casa Daros (Rio de Janeiro, RJ). A new path was defined in an inverted “U” shape, with the east courtyard (closer to Avenida Tiradentes) designated as the museum entrance, and the (symmetrical) west courtyard as the exit. Circulation was ensured by the symmetrical installation of two pairs of large elevators (with a capacity of 33 passengers), accessible from each of these two end courtyards. Paulo Mendes da Rocha described this intervention in poetic terms, emphasizing that the movement enabled by modern machines that transported people horizontally (trains and subway) was now complemented by the museum’s new vertical machines⁸. The placement of the elevators at the four corners establishes a relationship with the original design, serving as a reference to the original turrets—whose functional role had already been surpassed—now considered exclusively in terms of volumetric and figurative composition. In accordance with this layout, a fifth elevator, connecting the station’s foyer to the terrace, was installed inside the clock tower. The alignment of the elevator shafts with the decorative towers revealed an additional technical virtue that underscored the precision of this solution: the pulleys that operate the elevator cabins were accommodated within the pyramidal crowns of the towers, meaning that these components—which would not have fit anywhere else in the building—fit perfectly into that space. This new access configuration revealed the possibility of creating a 120-meter-long gallery, analogous in length to the train hall itself. Paulo Mendes da Rocha stated that “it would be interesting to display, once again, the full length of the station hall. The gallery, in this way, is neither too big nor too small; it has exactly the same length as the station.” (Grunow 2026, 45). The gallery, created by the removal of partitions from the original floor plan with its successive offices, evokes successful precedents such as the Cour Napoléon III at the Louvre Museum and the long gallery of the Altes Museum in Berlin, designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Davi Arriguchi—a member of the museum’s original conceptual team and currently Professor Emeritus at the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Social Sciences of the University of São Paulo—similarly referred to the Corridoio Vasariano in Florence, which connects the Galleria degli Uffizi to the Palazzo Pitti along a one-kilometer path⁹. The intervention did nothing more than reveal the spatial potential of the building, originally oriented by the linear condition of its original program (a train station), which coincides with the needs of the new program: directed circulation or free wandering are foundational elements of the exhibition and visitation experience. This gallery represents a contribution of the architectural concept to the new museum’s program, enabling the presentation of content to treat the Portuguese language as something living and in motion, with its diverse oralities and constantly shifting accents. According to Isa Grinspum Ferraz: “the architects arrived before the content.” (Lupo 2024, 209). The intervention required the removal of successive partitions perpendicular to the Jardim da Luz on the upper floors, thereby revealing a space that had previously been enclosed. It allows one to see and traverse the entire pavilion, exposing—face to face—the elevator at the easternmost point and its counterpart to the west. However, the gallery created on the second floor required shielding from external light and sound in the section that corresponds to the windowless areas, a result of the spatial alterations carried out during the 1947 renovation. On the other hand, composing a kind of symphony of opposites that transcends the dialectic between vertical and horizontal transportation, this discursive effort is reaffirmed through the clearance of four arches between the outer courtyards and the concourse balcony—a measure that reveals the platform to the courtyard users—those waiting for the elevator—and the courtyards to the concourse users—those waiting for their train. While the grand gallery demands the containment of external stimuli, the ground floor and the first floor are called upon to coexist with the building’s other functions and, above all, with the city. At this point, the central design guidelines have been described: a scheme of vertical and horizontal circulation with elevators at the ends of the building, defining the route of entry and exit; the operation of clearing a continuous space for the grand gallery on the second floor, meeting the technical requirements for the planned exhibition’s functioning; and the assignment of the remaining floors to uses with less stringent environmental control demands. To this equation, several requirements of the new program were subsequently added, formalized through suggestions by Ralph Appelbaum,

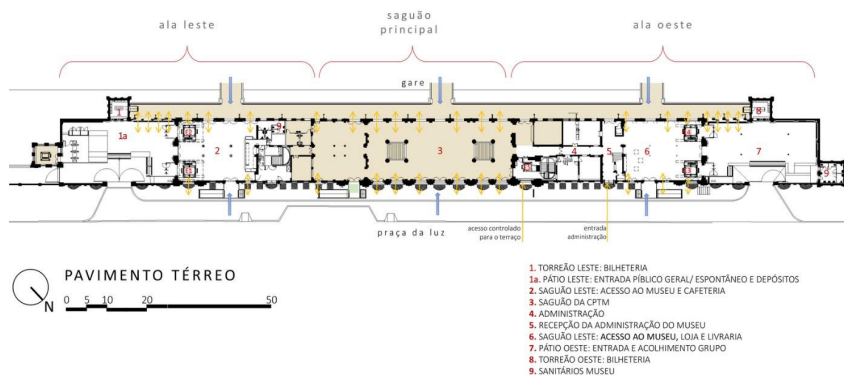


Fig. 1. Ground Floor Plan. Pedro Mendes da Rocha Collection

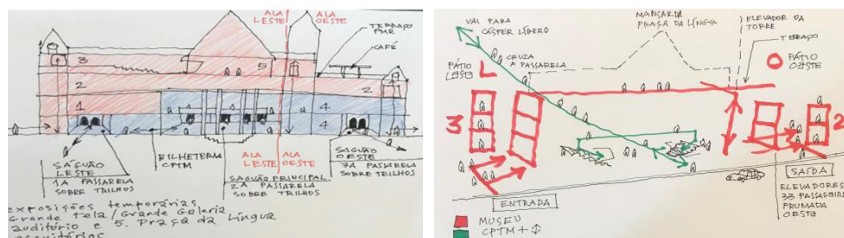


Fig. 2-3. Proposed circulation scheme (sketches by Pedro Mendes da Rocha)

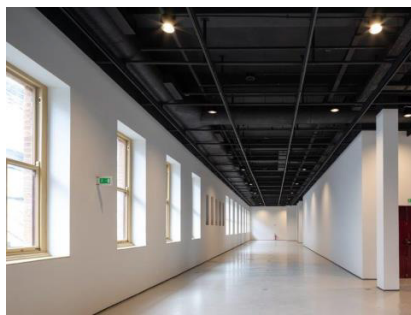
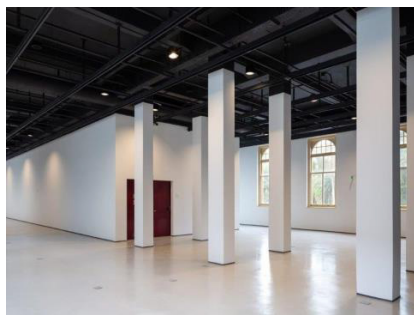


Fig. 4-5. First Floor, temporary exhibition room (photos by Pedro Mendes da Rocha Collection)

who was integrated into the project teams. Appelbaum, a New York-based professional—not an architect—coordinated a multidisciplinary team and acted as a *metteur en scène*¹⁰, installing both material and immaterial content within the museum spaces. From the preliminary definition of the spatial layout onward, the two teams began to work in a symbiotic manner. As his first impactful contribution, Appelbaum proposed that the museum visit should begin in an auditorium, assigning to the architecture team the task of installing it on the museum's top floor. This suggestion, which reaffirmed the vertical circulation ensured by the elevator system, required a particular effort to adapt the floor plan in the east wing—a process described in the brief account that follows. On the first two floors, the existing compartmentalization defined a symmetrical layout: two longitudinal corridors (2 meters wide) along the external façades, and a line of offices (6 meters wide) opening onto an internal corridor. This condition is expressed structurally: on the ground floor, as four metal columns in the east and west halls; and on the upper floors, as masonry lines that define the transverse closure of the offices. This layout was repeated on the top floor, despite the presence of transversal roof trusses spanning the full width of the building, concealed by a thick plaster ceiling. The proposed solution was the removal of the entire package: ceilings, masonry walls, and non-structural columns—which were confirmed to bear no loads. This made it possible to create a hall with a clear span equal to the full width of the pavilion, i.e., 14 meters wide and 6.5 meters high at the ridge points—a space evidently suitable for the installation of the auditorium. To achieve this, the clear height beneath the trusses (4.20 meters) and the height of the window sills (1.20 meters) were assessed. A raised floor was proposed, transforming the sill-height windows into floor-to-ceiling openings while still allowing unobstructed circulation beneath the trusses. The elevator stops were adjusted to this new level, and a foyer for the auditorium was created; being elevated, it also allowed for the stepped configuration of the seating, thus providing improved comfort. On this same third floor, another space was reclaimed—this time beneath the mansard roof of the central section of the building—offering the greatest clear height thanks to the removal of elements that had previously compromised it. In this newly voluminous space, the New York-based consultancy team suggested the installation of a projection system that would emphasize the revealed spatial geometry: a kind of “language planetarium,” in their words—later officially named “Language Plaza” by the museum team. This space complements the visitor's reception experience: after an introductory projection in the enclosed environment of the auditorium—constrained by the very nature of its function—users are invited to enjoy the expansive space, a tribute to the expressive power of language embodied throughout the volume¹¹. This space, nicknamed the *linguetaurium* by Applebaum, continues, in his words, the Pantheon of our language with its greatest treasures — which he may not have known specifically, but conceptually understood as the most powerful space in the building. Celebrating the idea of a museum where language is vibrant, alive, and in constant transformation under the curatorship of experts, Arthur Nesterovski and José Miguel Wisnik were tasked with the selection of content. Here, Applebaum's role as a *metteur en scène* is fully expressed: one who envisions spatial occupation and curatorial direction as the act of taking possession of places in the realization of a curatorship. As a conclusion to this inaugural journey, visitors can access the terrace, where a café invites them to linger, offering an unprecedented view of the Jardim da Luz. A fifth elevator was installed in the clock tower and opened directly to the terrace, allowing independent access to¹² The deliberate interaction between the two projection spaces is reinforced by the fact that the auditorium screen, at the end of the session, opens outward on a hinge, integrating the room with the plaza, where the voice of Mateus Nachtergaele can be heard reciting “enter silently into the realm of words,” from the poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1948), inviting the audience to leave the auditorium seats and settle more informally on the bleachers of the adjoining space. the café apart from regular museum visits¹². This separation of uses enhances the museum's integration and dialogue with the city. Once this first stage of the visit is completed, the route continues along the main façade, where the original windows provide views of the Jardim da Luz—in contrast to the two preceding exhibits held in spaces with total control of light and sound. Descending by elevator to the first level below, visitors reach the grand gallery, established on the second floor, and return to a

condition of light control, allowing for the efficient installation of the electronic systems that present the museum's content. Descending one floor, the visit transitions into smaller halls, as the double-height ceiling of the central station hall partially occupies this level. On the east wing, demolition revealed a sequence of columns that defined the layout of the 1947 project, with a central corridor of 2 meters, now appropriated by exhibition devices¹³. Beyond the void of the station's main hall, one reaches the west wing, where the original 1901 compartmentalization was preserved, following guidance from heritage preservation agencies. This section was designated for temporary or short-term exhibitions, as such uses could more comfortably coexist with the preserved condition of the building. Finally, the visit nears its end; from there, visitors take the elevator down to the west courtyard, which opens onto the street. It was also the responsibility of the design team, as part of an *aggiornamento* process, to revise and implement new systems (servant spaces) for restrooms, emergency staircases, elevators, and HVAC equipment stations. These were dimensioned in accordance with various updated building codes regarding safety and occupancy, to serve the new museum spaces (served spaces).

Conclusions

Although it may not be the most appropriate criterion for evaluating the success of a project, this conclusion section begins by noting that the implementation of the Museum of the Portuguese Language at São Paulo's Estação da Luz was awarded by the Brazilian Institute of Architects (2006) in the category "Built Work, Restoration, and Requalification," and received an honorable mention in the "Premio Ibero-Americano a la Mejor Intervención que Involucra el Patrimonio Edificado," organized by the Centro Internacional para la Conservación del Patrimonio (CICoP, Argentina) and the Sociedad Central de Arquitectos (SCA). Nonetheless, the project received both general and specific critiques—a major intervention in the center of the largest city in the Southern Hemisphere was, understandably, a public showcase open to healthy debate. In general, these critiques converged on a particular point: the project's partial deviation from the heritage agency's recommendation to maintain the west wing in its original configuration. It is worth stating that this decision was considered thoroughly within the limits of the project's internal coherence, in negotiation with the logic of the existing building and the transformative demands of the new program: the grand gallery (second floor) was extended across the full width of the building, reaffirming the proposed spatial logic and the scale of the station; and a pair of elevators was installed in the west turret to efficiently complete the intended circulation logic. From the outset, the architectural team understood that the intervention should, in essence, recover the original design intent of the building—which had always conceived the station hall as the defining spatial volume. Interrupting this dimension—the 120 meters that the gallery reclaimed—would constitute an affront to the building's foundational spatial concept, an essential condition (and thus hierarchically more significant) of its heritage value. The use of the term "essential" in the previous paragraph brings us to Viollet-le-Duc: «To restore a building is not to preserve it, repair it, or remake it; it is to reestablish it in a complete state that may never have existed at any given moment» (Viollet-le-Duc 2006, 29). It is precisely the interpretation of this complete state that justifies the intervention—the consolidation of a continuous gallery, scaled to the building's full extent. Two additional issues contribute to this argument. The first, more evident, compels us to assert that the restriction of the gallery to the east wing and the displacement of the elevators outside its end would render the proposed circulation scheme unfeasible, and with it, the virtue of creating a visitation route that would make use of the entirety of the building. The second involves a reflection on a specific aspect of preservation processes, which is the (necessary) guarantee of maintaining the historical evidence of the listed asset as a form of documentation. We elaborate: the spatial condition of compartmentalization, under similar material conditions, was repeated on both the first and second floors of the building; the design team argued that preserving the first floor in its original condition would be sufficient as a documentary record, thereby eliminating the obligation to maintain a redundant condition on the second floor. In other words, the equation at hand was qualitative: the proposal aimed to ensure the preservation of the original conditions, in their full documentary value,

on the first floor, while, enabling the spatial configuration necessary for the new museum through the transformation of the second floor. Glauco Campelo, who issued an opinion on the project, appears to agree. It becomes evident, therefore, that interventions in listed architectural assets do not rely on pre-established criteria ‘a priori,’ as they depend on the assessment of two factors: the actual—not idealized—conditions and characteristics of the asset; and the relevance and quality of the intervention, which includes the new use, the restoration, and the new values that will inevitably be added to the object of intervention. That said, if knowledge of restoration norms and theories is not applied ‘coldly,’ without critical consideration in architectural interventions, then such interventions must also not be evaluated based on an ‘orthodox’ reading of normative provisions and recommendations. (Campello 2004, 3) To relinquish the gallery on the second floor would therefore be to impose a new understanding of the built complex and to forgo a virtue identified by the architectural team as a founding element of its implementation. We thus argue that the criticisms directed at the project are grounded in this new understanding, which places the original design approach as a matter of lesser importance. Preservation, as a methodological process, demands the handling of weighted hierarchies and decisions that will not be unanimous; it is, fundamentally, an action of artistic nature, involving the positioning of its operator as the agent responsible for the actions taken. Here, we may turn to the thinking of Cesare Brandi, for whom intervention in pre-existing structures must begin with the recognition of the object in question in its condition as a work of art. A work of art in the broad sense, but one that conditions the interaction between object and observer (or user, in the specific case of architecture), by requiring an awareness of the object. It will then become apparent that the special product of human activity to which the name “work of art” is attributed is such by virtue of a singular recognition that emerges into consciousness: a recognition doubly singular, both because it must be made each time by a singular individual, and because it cannot be motivated in any way other than by the recognition that the singular individual makes of it. (Brandi 2004, 27). If an intellectual movement is indeed necessary to materialize the so-understood quality of the work of art, then the act of restoration—renovation, intervention, or alteration, in more precise architectural terms—may be fundamentally regarded as a discursive action, one that reconstitutes the equation of the ensemble, even if such a condition has never existed (Violet-le-Duc 2006). It is from this awareness that the architect’s freedom of action emerges, provided that it is carried out with “critical and scientific awareness of the moment in which the restoration intervention takes place.” (Brandi 2004, 100) From this, it follows that unanimity regarding an intervention must not be taken as a criterion for its validity. Criticism arises according to the individual understanding of the work of art, calibrated by the conceptual awareness of its interlocutors. It is thus the purpose of this article to reaffirm that, having presented the criteria of the proposed equation, the intervention must be considered valid and legitimate, and it is with this conviction that the authors of this text align themselves.

Notes

1. Team: Carla Seppe, Juliana Suzuki, Daniela Marcondes, Bartira Ghoubar, Francisco Gitahy de Figueiredo, Eduardo Spinazzolla, Pedro Milan (collaborators)
2. The building is listed at all three levels of historical heritage protection: municipal (DPH/Conpresp), state (Condephaat), and federal (IPHAN)
3. Statement made during a regular work meeting involving six specialists from the three Historic Heritage Preservation Agencies, with two representatives from each level
4. The building was awarded the Mies van der Rohe Prize for Latin America in 20005
5. Architect Helena Saia, the first person responsible for the building’s restoration and rehabilitation project, emphasized that this was the first tower in São Paulo with a secular character, since the previous ones were associated with monuments of faith that define the vertices of the historic hill: Pateo do Colégio, Largo de São Bento, and Largo de São Francisco

6. See FERRAZ, 2020

7. “The solution for this roof is exquisite and, I can say without hesitation, it is the FAUUSP [Faculty of Architecture of the University of São Paulo] building roof revisited in steel and flat glass (which were not used in Vilanova Artigas’s beautiful work due to last-minute budget cuts). Furthermore, as it is a successful solution, there is no reason to venture into new ideas.” (Text reconstructed from the author’s memory, freely rewritten based on numerous conversations held during the development of the project)

8. The reasoning of Paulo Mendes da Rocha, once again recalled from memory for the purposes of this article, established two complementary actions in the formation of the cities we live in: “occupying the territory” (a horizontal movement) and “occupying the heights” for housing and offices

9. Remark made during an informal conversation in the course of the museum’s implementation management, recalled from memory by the authors of this text

10. Term used in French theater to describe the responsibilities of the stage director

11. The deliberate interaction between the two projection spaces is reinforced by the fact that the auditorium screen, at the end of the session, opens outward on a hinge, integrating the room with the plaza, where the voice of Mateus Nachtergaele can be heard reciting “enter silently into the realm of words,” from the poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1948), inviting the audience to leave the auditorium seats and settle more informally on the bleachers of the adjoining space

12. Paulo Mendes da Rocha often referred to the image of the Albamar Restaurant, in Rio de Janeiro, located atop the only remaining tower of the old Praça XV market, which offers a privileged view of the port area

13. Ralph Appelbaum’s team proposed that the building’s pillars be identified as the pillars of the Portuguese language as spoken in Brazil (Indigenous peoples, Portuguese settlers, and enslaved Africans, and later, Japanese, Italian, German, and other groups)

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