

Ko Ko, an Adventure Through Art Museum: Interpreting the Educational Activities in Art Museum

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Summary

“From Nature to Art” was a half-year art exhibition organized by Taipei Fine Arts Museum from December, 2010 to May, 2011. The exhibition focused on the theme of nature and the artists showcased the way nature and landscape interacts. Taipei Fine Arts Museum also organized several educational activities for children and their parents to explore and experience the relationship between art and nature. This paper will focus on two main purposes: First, we aim to understand the process of the parent-kid experience of art. Second, we explore how the understanding of art becomes possible. This research uses qualitative research methodology including participant observation and interviews. Records of participant observation, field logs, interview data, and other feedbacks from the field are the basis of this paper. All research was conducted from February to May in 2011 with more than 25 on-site observations and recorded interviews.

The authors suggest using Victor Turner’s theory of “anthropology of experience” and “anthropology of performance”, as well as adopting William Dilthey’s theory of hermeneutics, to approach their research purpose. The authors use the anthropologist Victor Turner’s concept of “liminality” and his theory of ritual process to explore how the educational activities can be applied and interpreted in fine arts museums. The activities held during “From Nature to Art” are “seen” and “argued” as ritual processes. Turner’s concept of “liminality” is a useful paradigm to understand the separation state of daily living experience of the participants

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(structure) during educational activities. During the exploring process, participants go through status-transformation (anti-structure). The authors suggest that the exhibition and the art works open up a “hermeneutical space,” according to William Dilthey’s theory of hermeneutical circle, during this liminal state. Dilthey’s hermeneutics contributes to our understanding of how we understand the others through different life-expressions. Dilthey’s theory outlines the hermeneutical circle through expression, experience, and understanding. Turner obviously uses “performance” to replace “experience” in Dilthey’s theory and ritual performances are seen as life-expressions. In this way, the authors draw parallel conclusion juxtaposing these two theories to argue that the performance the participants go through during the art exhibition activities can be seen as life expressions which induce participants’ new understanding from. In other words, following Turner’s understanding and Dilthey’s theory, art in the educational activities were seen as the “life-expressions” of the artists. When the participants “live through” the artists’ works in the educational activities that were designed by the museum, the process of the educational activities was then formed into “an experience” for the participants. In other words, the participants would have gone through a hermeneutical circle, in Dilthey’s hermeneutics. That is, an understanding was thus completed.

In summary, the liminal state during the educational activities allows the participants to form “an experience”, as described by the late Victor Turner from William Dilthey’s hermeneutics. “An experience” leads to the understanding of the participants into the world of the artists and their works. Consequently, through art appreciation, the participants in the educational activities bring the arts back to their lives through the “ritual performance” of themselves by means of experiencing the artists’ works in the process and in the liminal space of the interactive educational activities. Thus, an adventure of art experience and understanding is completed. Many descriptive observation notes of participants’ responses are gathered as evidence to prove the above arguments of the authors. Some necessary description of the activities in terms of its process and ways of interacting with the participants have also been thoroughly presented in this paper for the readers to clearly understand how the activities have been executed to achieve the anticipated results of formulating liminal ritual performance which then consecutively construct possible new understanding through life expression of the participants stimulated by the art exhibition activities.

Keywords: Victor W. Turner, art museum, ritual process, liminality, art education