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I.

Art works' on display in art museum galleries are situated in an historical and cultural context when viewed by visitors. Objects on display in art museums are the key element in producing the meanings of an exhibition when viewing these objects. Artworks on display in art museums are not suggested in a single meaning, but produce multiple meanings for the visitors who come to art museums. Conversation between 'subject (visitors)' and 'objects (artworks)', that is, endless conversations between the viewers and the viewed are part of the educational experience when people visit art museums. Thus, this paper examines the role and function of art museums as a place of communication, that is, the relation between the subjects and objects.

II.

Objects displayed in the gallery space of art museums are one of the communication systems possessing material characteristics. Here, the communication system refers to the medium which delivers certain meanings to visitors whatever artworks or objects are installed in art museums. However, such installations as communication system are the same to the word as communication system. Exhibition displays composed of various materials such as wood, pigments, soil, and fabrics have certain height, scale, and color. Such objects composed of various materials are the medium which produces a discourse among visitors.

Objects on display in the gallery space are the material

things which visitors can see and touch. Such displays in the exhibition space are the target of emotion and action elicited by visitors. In other words, objects in art museums are considered to be interpreted educational materials. Especially, learning about objects on display in museums has been the significant issue in museums in the United States as well as Europe. The method of teaching and learning based on objects displayed in museums is discussed in relation to the objectification of experience. However, the new museologists maintain that the objects displayed in museums have living history, and visitors could read the meanings embedded in the objects installed in the exhibition space of museums. Objects are the material things that visitors can touch and see, and have important meanings in everyday life.

Each object displayed in the gallery space of art museums elicits the visitor's own unique experience and memories, and realizes the power of individual experience and emotion. Art works displayed produce strong responses in the beholders of this art and holds different meanings for each visitor. It is sometimes unpredictable, and simultaneously produces various meanings in the various contexts the artworks are placed in. Therefore, diverse meanings of objects in an exhibition can be produced depending on how beholders meet these objects in their own individual context. And objects that can deliver meaning to an individual have strong power in the contexts of every day life and education. Therefore objects displayed in the gallery space facilitate visitor's subjective learning.

Visitors' viewing artworks in gallery spaces is different to the process of visitor's encountering the idea and conceptions of this artwork. Ideas, concepts, and words are

abstract and non-material. These demand verbal and linguistic skills in their understanding. Ideas need to be placed within intellectual frameworks of intelligibility and comprehension before they make sense. Thus, cognitive processes are necessary. Meanwhile, the relation between objects and beholders in the gallery are different from those cognitive processes. A meeting between objects having materiality and viewers produces the intuitive and immediate responses. Viewers' immediate responses to the objects are touchable and impeditive responses rather than linguistic dimension. Viewers construct the meaning of objects in the gallery according to their previous knowledge and experiences that are constructed culturally.

When viewers understand the objects in the gallery, they involve the body more through demanding an immediate close presence. Embodied responses are influenced by the scale of things. Cognitive and emotional responses to objects are affected in subtle ways by their size in relation to viewers' own body size. Levels of viewers' emotional comfort may relate to the relationship of the human body in the environment. At this point, the process of learning occurs. According to Howard Gardner, professor at Harvard University, he asserts that minds and bodies are understood to be interrelated. The behaviors of the body cannot be separated from the mind and emotions. Equally, mental activity (cognition) works in partnership with bodily responses. Thus, for Gardner, learning includes bodily, kinesthetic, spatial, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, as well as linguistic, musical, and logical mathematical characteristics.

The materiality, the physical quality of the objects, presents itself as of a stable character. However, this materiality is subject to change and modification through time and contexts. Gardner emphasizes the materiality of objects in the gallery space of art museums, and opens the

horizons of leaning in his learning theory. Materiality of the objects in art museums is changeable according to time and contexts, and reading the objects is different from reading the texts about these objects.

III.

Interpreting the objects installed in the gallery space of art museums is diverse according to a viewer's encountered situation. The process of interpreting objects is related to hermeneutics and learning theory. Objects in art museums are uncouncted initially through the senses and the body rather than by linguistics and mathematical dimension. Much of the way objects in art museums are known is through being tacitly felt. Tacit knowledge can be understood as all that is known by individuals, minus all that can be said. Tacit knowledge remains at an emotional, reactive level, and as it remains non-verbal and unarticulated, it cannot be analyzed and assessed. Tacit knowledge produces gut reactions, mobilizing feelings and emotions, but in a non-examined way.

Additionally, objects in art museums can also be read, spoken, and written about, and encountered through verbal knowledge. Verbal knowledge enables an examination and evaluation of what is known, facilitates comparison with the ideas of others, and enables sharing and discussion. Without verbal knowledge, it is more difficult to make changes in what is known, or to develop complex concepts. Verbal knowledge is textual knowledge, that through the written, spoken or heard text.

Viewers' experiences in art museums through objects could be both verbal and tacit ways of knowing. This process calls 'inter-artefactuality' by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill.¹ Tacit ways of knowing include handling, smelling, hearing and seeing. Each of these has specific historical and cultural dimensions.

At this point, viewer's understanding of objects in art

¹ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p.116.

museums can be reached through the process of interpretation. Understanding is a process by which people match what they see and hear with pre-stored grouping of actions with what they have already experienced. Interpretation aims to uncover the meaning of a work through a dialogic relationship between the detail and the whole. Gadamer mentions this point:

we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole. This principle . . . [is applied] to the art of understanding.²

Hermeneutics suggests that processes of interpretation work dialogically between prejudices or foreknowledge, and openness to new information, experiences, and objects. Learning theory confirms that man's brain does not simply take in new matter, it always processes it, and this processing is carried out on the basis of already existing 'schemata'. Cognitive frames, schemata store and organize everyday knowledge. It is created automatically. As new knowledge is encountered it is either assimilated into existing schemata, or the schemata are reorganized to accommodate the new information. Perception and memory are therefore inextricably linked.

Each viewer has their own mental maps of knowledge (schemata) depending on their prior cultural and biographical experiences. Each viewer will process new matter in ways that are specific to them as individuals. Each viewer also exhibits variable preferred learning styles which can be positioned along two main axes. Abstract or concrete apprehension of experience, that of reflective or active processing of information and experience, and so on. Any interpretation regarding objects in art museums is never fully completed. Thus discovering the true meaning of a text or artworks is never finished. It is in fact an infinite process.³ As understanding of artworks grows and as new sources of knowledge emerge, so meaning is a continuing process of modification, adaptation and extension. The hermeneutic circle is never fully closed, but remains open to the possibilities of change. There is always

more to say, and what is said may always be changed. Meaning is never static.

The meaning is partly constructed by prior knowledge and experience, and by how the past is related to the present. All interpretation is necessarily historically situated. Viewers' positions in history and culture affect the constructive meaning. Meaning is constructed through and in culture. Perception, memory and interpretation are cultural constructs.

In this context, constructivist-learning theory insists that visitors make their own active interpretations of experience. Individuals search for meaning, look for patterns, try to invest their experiences with significance. Across the humanities and the social sciences it has come to be acknowledged that there is no knowledge outside the knower: knowledge is brought into being by the meaning that each individual makes of the experiences that s/he has. This is constructivism in learning theory; interpretation in literary theory. Objects of art museums are interpreted through a reading using the gaze which is combined with a broader sensory experience involving tacit knowledge and embodied responses. As mentioned previously, the process of interpretation is complex and active, and visitors search for their meanings and develop their experiences through the objects displayed in the gallery spaces of art museums.

IV.

Nineteenth-century public museums had the task of producing and disseminating authoritative knowledge. Museums could offer opportunities for self-education and self-evaluation at a time when schooling was not available for all and when there were few other opportunities for self-

² Gadamer, H. G. *The Historicity of Understanding*, in Connerton, P. (ed.) *Critical Sociology*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 117.

³ Gadamer, *Ibid.*, 1976, p. 124.

improvement. Although the idea of the museum as an educational institution had emerged some time before, the Victorian and Albert Museum was the first national collection in England to be explicitly founded as an agent of instruction. Such modern public museums were based on the idea of the possibility of the realization through objects of universal laws that could be taught in the same way at all times and in all places. The visual culture of nineteenth-century museums illustrated those universal laws in the arts and the sciences that could be construed from arrangements of material things. Such form of notion is the form of modern museums.

Modernist museum pedagogy was based on an understanding of objects as sites for the construction of knowledge and meaning. A view of knowledge regarded as unified, objective, and transferable. The conceptualization of the museum and its audience was regarded as separate spheres, with the museum as a place for learning that was held apart from the popular culture of the everyday.

In the context of modern museums, objects displayed in the gallery spaces produce various narratives and discourses. Cameron discusses the communicative relation between visitors and artworks. The communication approach has been discussed since the 1970s in museum studies. A debate between Cameron and Knez and Wright about how to understand communication in museums coincided with the discussion of communication as information-processing in relation to computer technology. The basics of the model are straightforward. A communicator (sender, or transmitter), sends a message through a medium to a receiver. This approach to communication is a particular view of knowledge and of learning. Knowledge is seen as factual, objective, singular and value-free, and therefore able to be transferred from those who are knowledgeable to those who are not. The transmission model of communication understands communication as a linear process of information transfer from an authoritative source to an uninformed receiver.

In compare to Cameron's communication theory, the communication theory based on Hermeneutics and constructivism is much more multiple and openness. Interpretation is dialogic and relational between the viewers and artworks. Constructivist learning theory points out that learning is both personal and social. Meaning is mediated through interpretive communities. Meanings are in large part controlled by the validation accorded them by the relevant interpretive community. It is the authority of the interpretive community that enables meaning. At the same time, interpretations may differ between interpretive communities. In this approach to communication, the focus is on how meaning is constructed through social life by active individual agents, within social networks. Meanings are understood to be negotiated through cognitive frameworks, interpretive strategies and interpretive communities, and are plural, contingent and open to challenge.

Within this approach to communication and learning, communicators such as curators and educators act as enablers and facilitators. While in modern museums, art objects on display in gallery spaces transmit authoritative and immutable knowledge to viewers linearly, in postmodern museums knowledge is regarded as relative and changeable. Here knowledge is constructed and reorganized by the conversations between the viewers and artworks. At this point, education in the museum is focused.