



Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group



Kinji Akagawa: Artistic Journey from the Egotistical Self to the Eco-Tistical Self: Shifting the Focus from Maker to Relationship

Author(s): Hannah Higgins

Source: *Art Journal*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Spring, 2006), pp. 76-77

Published by: [College Art Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20068449>

Accessed: 17-02-2016 21:59 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. and College Art Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Art Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

[We] must become part of an art of living . . . lived by all concerned so that the distinction between teaching and learning disappears. Being, doing, and making are much more useful concepts. Art is a process. At the limit, everything is art, everybody is an artist. Meanwhile professional artists must participate in the collective dreams.

—Robert Filliou, 1970

What if teaching and learning are artforms? Robert Filliou asked the question in 1970, and it came up again in the afternoon workshop of the CAA Eco-tistical Art session in a conversation among Kinji Akagawa of the Minneapolis College of Art, myself, and a group of participants. In a world of shifting cultural, social, and natural ecologies, the best art education is instrumental by being linked through disciplined creativity to shared imagined and projected futures—Filliou’s “collective dreams.” Questions about educating professional artists and art teachers follow from this simple observation. How is skill measured in future terms? What is the role of aesthetic experience in the art or education produced by this approach? How can students function in the galleries and art schools with this experimental approach? Do we run the risk of bad science or sociology, or even bad art, when we move away from the institutional and practical mandates of the disciplines of fine art and their traceable histories and theoretical constructs?

Our conversation generated some provisional answers. Skill depends on the successful realization of artists’ intentions as recognized by their elected audiences—whatever the form of expression. This is as true of reclaimed land, as in Mel Chin’s *Revival Field*, as it is of a traditional painting or sculpture. Aesthetic experience can be obtained in nature or culture, depending on the preparedness of the viewer-participant and the ability of the artist to create a zone of concentrated awareness that can be visual, ecological, social, political, or corporeal. Experience does not favor any particular sensory mode, but it does require absorption. John Dewey calls this the rhythmic nature of experience—and art fails when the possibility for that experience is missing, regardless of the ethical dimensions of the art. Finally, the risks of making bad art are as real in the eco-arena as in any other. The best intentions are no guarantee of a viable experience as art.

Two historical figures were enlisted in the conversation as offering pedagogical models for the problem of educating for this broader ecology—these were Joseph Beuys and Allan Kaprow. Beuys wrote that “To be a teacher is my greatest work of art,” since the social, political, and creative dimensions of pedagogical exchange actually form the social sculpture.¹ Likewise, Kaprow would educate “un-artists” for “avant-garde, lifelike art.”² Ideas like performative pedagogy and lifelike and life-linked art engender the broad problem of finding and solving potentials of art, whatever its form. Contemporary terminology is calling this social dimension *relational*, a term that lacks the utopian associations of the terms *activist*, *community-based*, and *institutional* used by earlier generations.³ This is a loss, since it reflects a lack of faith in the broader impact of artistic experiences. Nevertheless, the term *relational* suggests that the social nexus of institutions and environments can form the basis of a broadened ecological aesthetic. From the relational standpoint, the entire educational experience would be experimental

Hannah Higgins
**Kinji Akagawa—Artistic Journey
from the Egotistical Self to the
Eco-tistical Self:
Shifting the Focus from Maker
to Relationship**

The epigraph is from Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Cologne: König Verlag, 1970), n.p.

1. Willoughby Sharp, “An Interview with Joseph Beuys,” *Artforum* (December 1969): 44.

2. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I (1971)” and “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II (1972),” in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 97–126.

3. Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon, France: Les Presses du réel, 2002). This book was handed around the discussion group in Atlanta.

Kinji Akagawa, *Remembering*, 1997, installation and exhibition, St. John's University Art Center, Collegeville, Minnesota (artwork © Kinji Akagawa)

Working with community members, Akagawa harvested an old, fallen oak tree in the woods on the campus. From it, they produced benches and stools to create a gathering place in the art center. The artist notes, "Seating was produced for people and rocks."



in the extreme—outcomes would be unknown and unscripted—driven only by the curiosity of the learners, their total context, and the context engendered by the educator and school. At least on some occasions, the disciplined expert would be replaced by the facilitator of community invention and creativity.

In summary, as our group discussed it, a broadly conceived ecological curriculum is a recurrent idea. The conversation was engaged and intense in a way that is almost impossible to find within the standard twenty-minute, single-session format of the CAA conference. By the end of the day, real work had been accomplished. Attendees left with much to think and talk about. The classroom must have felt a little different to the teachers and learners in the performances they engaged there in the following weeks. And I left with a new sense that the CAA conference might sometimes be something other than the job and condensed-research supermarket that it is.

Hannah Higgins is an associate professor of art history at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Higgins has lectured widely on the avant-garde and Fluxus in the United States and Europe. Her book, *Fluxus Experience* (University of California Press, 2002), contains an exploration of the pedagogical implications of Fluxus, some of which are explored here. The interdisciplinary nature of Fluxus has led to work on a second book, *Life of the Grid*, to be published by MIT Press in 2007. Higgins is the daughter of Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles.

Kinji Akagawa creates public art and is a professor at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. His work combines the simplicity of traditional Japanese art with a deep concern for the impact of art on public places. His commissions include sculptural works for the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Walker Art Center; the Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis; and Tettegouche State Park.