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# A Critical Reflection on the Concept of Art and an Innovation of Art Education

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to reflect the concept of art and propose an innovated idea of art education. The reason why the concept of art should be critically reflected is that our ordinary concept of art only signifies institutionalized “fine arts” nowadays, so that it ideologically inclined to high art based on Eurocentrism. In this paper, the problem of the concept of art was investigated and then the extension of the concept was attempted in three different dimensions. The prototypical meanings of art such as “fine arts as an institution,” “*techne*,” “*mimesis*,” “*poiesis*,” “beauty,” “expression,” and “critique” were pointed out and the new concept of art was defined as an embodiment of the acts of *techne*, *mimesis*, and *poiesis* developed by imagination; beauty and expression blooming in there; the living wisdom rooted in bodily experiences; and the way of life in the field where those important matters are generated. The innovated concept of art education proposed in this paper concerns with the idea that art deeply relates to the construction of the world, others and self. It is closely related with aesthetic education, in which *kansei* or sensibility connects with human senses and body, furthermore with “reason” as an active human faculty. Without restricting aesthetic education narrowly to the institutionalized fine arts education, a development of a performer of expression is the aim of this art education.

**Key words:** Art, Art Education, Embodiment, Sensibility, Aesthetic Education

## I

This paper is an English version of the discussion already done in Japanese regarding the topic: the concept of art and an innovation of art education. The contents which had been already published in books in Japanese <sup>(1)</sup> were put together and transformed into an independent paper in English. I have so far published my research somewhat in English <sup>(2)</sup>. This paper is added in them. As so-called globalization is also progressing in the humanities such as aesthetics and educational sciences, this English paper intends to stimulate broader arguments beyond the language barrier. I expect that this challenge would be able to present a part of research regarding a new conception of art and education done in Japanese academic circles to the rest of the world, and would become a novel proposal of the discussion.

## II

I have discussed the problematic situation of the concept of art since the beginning of 1990s <sup>(3)</sup>. In the extension of the research, I was involved in organizing a symposium “Thinking Art and Education: From Fine Arts Education to Art Education” of the Hiroshima Society for the Research of Art in 2013.

This symposium was formed fully accorded with my perspectives of *kansei* or aesthetic education and art education. In its symposium's introduction, I stated as follows:

In the late 1990s, there was a rise of a new theory of learning in the educational science. It was a transition from learning as an internal cognitive process to learning as a self-transformational process under the social relationship with others. If we look at the fine arts education at school, it was asserted that the attention to the acquisition of particular skill and knowledge in the subject of *bijutsu*<sup>(4)</sup> or plastic arts and the subjects of music should be shifted to becoming a person of expression through those subjects. On the other, various changes were observed both in fine arts themselves and in aesthetics as a philosophical study on fine arts since the late 1990s, where an innovative concept of "art" was asserted beyond the concept of "fine arts" that was mostly restricted to institutionalized high arts<sup>(5)</sup>. The aesthetics took a way to the science of *aisthesis* or sensibility in order to extend its research object from the Western modern concept of fine arts. With these situations of culture and academic disciplines, the new notion of "art education" was brought into existence. New attempts of educational practices have already been taken up even based on the traditional way of teaching fine arts, that is, creative bodily production and appreciation of *bijutsu* and music with free senses.

In 1995, I wrote in a discussion on the significance of art today through critical investigations of Sedlmayr and Collingwood's Art/non-Art theories that we would have to think about various "arts," because the age when we could make a privileged distinction between art and non-art would come to an end. The starting point of the discussion was well-known scholar of aesthetics in Japan Ken-ichi Sasaki's article published in a journal, *Aesthetics*, in 1993<sup>(6)</sup>. When we ordinarily say "*geijutsu* or fine arts," it signifies a general term for paintings, sculpture, architecture, literature, music, dance, movie and others. It is an institutionalized concept of fine arts that came into existence in the modern Europe. Sasaki made a proposal to question the *raison d'être* of the concept.

I think the scholars of aesthetics nowadays would be able to share a similar awareness of the issue. A researcher of the aesthetics of music, Hiroshi Watanabe points out that we call different matters such as paintings, theatre, music, literature, and architecture "*geijutsu* or fine arts" as a class today, however, such a concept was not established until the middle of eighteenth century. He regards the establishment of the concept of fine arts as an origin of dichotomies between "classical music" and "popular music," "high music" and "low music." Thereafter, Watanabe insists, "spirituality" was invented as the essence of music, and an unsuitable music appealed to the pleasure of sensation was abandoned as vulgar music<sup>(7)</sup>. Watanabe has been involved in his own research of the possibility of music with being released from such restricted ideology of fine arts and music since then.

A world philosopher Richard Shusterman also stated in the beginning of 1990s that the academic discipline aesthetics had devoted itself to the research into high art, but it should pay attention to popular art<sup>(8)</sup>. Shusterman's *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992) gained the worldwide attention. As its twentieth anniversary in 2012, various memorial events were held mostly in Europe. We would be able to say that the issues of "practicing philosophy"<sup>(9)</sup> and "somaesthetics" showed his attempts for twenty years to transform the academics of aesthetics and philosophy with a positive interpretation of the transformation of the concept of fine arts.

### III

Grappling with these problems is a reflection in which we attend the institutionalized concept of fine arts and we rethink the position of the field of fine arts in the society in order to clarify what kind of value fine arts have. It is a revision of the criteria for the high and low values of fine arts, and an

approach to the realistic potential in fine arts as well. That is to say, it is the first dimensional problem of the extension of the vertical measure of high and low values.

On the other, there is another possibility of an attempt to extend the genres of fine arts horizontally. According to art historian Doshin Sato, arts or *gei* before Meiji signified *rikugei* or six arts including ritual, music, calligraphy, mathematics and martial arts such as bowmanship and horsemanship. *Bijutsu* or fine arts after Meiji was brought into existence with the separation of martial arts from *rikugei*. A process in which crafts excluded from *gei* are incorporated into fine arts would be regarded as an issue of the horizontal extension of fine arts. Martial arts would be a genre adjacent to fine arts. This is the second dimensional problem.

Furthermore, we may be able to add the third dimension to the above mentioned verticality and horizontality. It is brought about with attending an aspect, that is to say, in Japanese traditional arts the creativity was not considered important, and the act of producing was emphasized rather than the work produced. In arts, you should do it by yourself, and watching what somebody else did is just an incidental matter. In this situation, the relation of creative activity – artwork – receptive activity does not clearly emerge. Different from fine arts under the Western theory of aesthetics in which theorizing [*theoria*] an artwork as an object for contemplation, that is a philosophy which finds the state of arts in doing by yourself, e.g. in tea ceremony, flower arrangement or whatever.

To overcome the problem of the modern Western concept of fine arts, we will be able to introduce the concept of art written in Japanese *katakana* アート, which is a different notation to Chinese character 芸術<sup>(10)</sup>. The concept of art is extended in three different dimensions above mentioned. In Japanese, the *katakana* word of art has been already popularly used particularly in the field of contemporary arts such as pop art, conceptual art, and minimal art. This phenomenon is considered as the extension of the first dimension. We, however, take a look at other dimensions as well and go beyond the conventional institution of fine arts, and furthermore, intend to transform the attitude to the traditional fine arts.

In order to consider the concept of art concretely, we can pay attention to a loosened way of using the word art or *geijutsu* in everyday life as a thought experiment. In everyday Japanese, traditional concept of fine arts occupies the core of the word *geijutsu*, but a swelling of the significance of the word is observable.

We have to refer to the genres in the conventional “institutionalized fine arts.” We have no reason that we easily ignore the historicity and the sociality of the classics of fine arts. However, when we reflect their institutional framework, we should attend the prototypes of artistic activities as a method. As human’s fundamental impulse, people would stamp, sing, dance with joy, people would draw, knead with wish. Although those activities could be interpreted in the extension of our current institutionalized concept of fine arts and we would say they could be “artistic,” they are not fine arts in the modern sense. The basic principles such as *techne* or technique, *mimesis* or imitation and representation, *poiesis* or creative making are pointed out for the artistic activities found in those primitive human acts. Furthermore, the connection between art and beauty, the appearance of the notion of expression as a result of modern human’s self-expression came into existence in the process of emergence of modern concept of fine arts. Then, we face the critique in the contemporary art, e.g. found in Duchamp’s *Fountain*. We are able to recognize these moments in the spread of the meaning of art.

The concept of art here speculated is not provided clearly by a definition in the same way as many social phenomena. It is thought that based on the principles and characteristics mentioned above, the terminology of the word art is alive in metaphorical slides of the meaning. When the characters coming from the principles and characteristics are loosely understood and one of the characters or a combination of some of them appear, the matters could be easily called *geijutsu*. Now

let us examine the word *geijutsu* in a Japanese dictionary *Kojien* (the sixth edition, 2008). It states:

[*geijutsu* is] human's activity and its products in which they create values for appreciation with a free use of materials, techniques, and the body. It is a general term for painting, sculpture, craft, architecture, poetry, music and dance. There is a case of restriction to the visual arts such as painting and sculpture [translated by Higuchi].

We do not use the word *geijutsu* according to this dictionary's definition, because we call a skillful beautiful Japanese food on a plate *geijutsu*. By the way, the statement of the word *geijutsu* is slightly different in the same dictionary's fifth edition in 2003. It says human's activity and its products in which they create values for appreciation with a free use of materials, techniques, and style. This "style" was removed and replaced by "the body." I think it is an influence by the popularity of the theory of body.

In this way, we can consider the expansion of *geijutsu*, which touches with conventional fine arts as well, received the contemporary transformation, and was disseminated in everydayness. To positively take this dissemination of the meaning and regard it as art, that is a proposal in this paper. Art (noted in *katakana*) is not what simply embraces the conventional fine arts and other things that have not been considered as fine arts so far. Giving a name art to various things is not important in itself. It is a fundamental significance of the perspective of art that it would open up a possibility to investigate the matters with recurring to the prototypical meaning of art such as "fine arts as an institution," "*techne*," "*mimesis*," "*poiesis*," "beauty," "expression," and "critique." Therefore, we need to discover a basis of the meaning in the field of dissemination of art. What we can consider for the moment is that we accept the embodiment of the human being's existence; the acts of *techne*, *mimesis*, and *poiesis* developed by imagination based on the embodiment; beauty and expression blooming in there; the living wisdom rooted in bodily experiences; and the way of life in the field where those important matters are generated. Such art as a way of life had existed in various areas in the history of human being. So-called "*geijutsu* or fine arts" are certainly located in the center of art education, since *geijutsu* or fine arts are a field in which art as a way of life could be embodied in a unique way. That is, however, just *one* of the fields. We should keep this understanding.

#### IV

In art education, art and education are connected, in which the conception of education is crucial as well as the understanding of "art." Without the discussion on education, it may be said that education cannot be essentially suitable for art, because education always has a particular goal and there is a presupposition of a correct learning or a true understanding. The "education" in art education indicates not only school education, but broader concept of education, rather focuses on "learning" in educational activities.

The understanding of "learning" in this paper is based on the existential viewpoint where a learner as a subject exists with others in the world of life. A subject faces the world through an encounter with various knowledge about the world. An ordinary idea of learning knowledge means this encounter with the world. The significant idea is that man does not receive the knowledge passively <sup>(1)</sup>, but constructs the world. It depends on the constructivist epistemology. Man encounters with others in this world making. Understanding others and building a symbiotic relationship with others are required in a social life so that the acquisition of its skill is also included in the notion of learning. One discovers and understands oneself through these activities. That is a learning of self-construction as well. The concept of art education I propose in this paper concerns with the idea that art deeply relates to the construction of the world, others and self.

Another point of view has an importance as an approach to education in the consideration of art education. That is “aesthetic education.” Schiller’s *Aesthetic Education of Man* is quite famous. “Aesthetic education” has been commonly translated as *biteki kyouiku* in Japanese, but I present here a sort of rereading it as *kansei kyouiku*. There is a recent tendency in the academic discipline aesthetics from *bigaku* to *kanseigaku* behind this challenge.

It is my intention that we get over the ordinary notion of *kansei* or sensibility vs *risei* or reason. It underlies a criticism of the dichotomy of body and mind. *Kansei* or sensibility connects with human senses and body, furthermore with “reason” as an active human faculty, but if the faculty remains inside the subject as a potentiality, we would be never able to take it up. It must be expressed somehow. This notion of expression is a broader one which comprehends ex-press (pressing out), representation and imitation. It is synonymous with acting in various experiences in the world.

*Waza* or skill is necessary in order to adequately perform this expression. Without restricting aesthetic education narrowly to the institutionalized fine arts education i.e. *bijutsu* education or music education, a development of a performer of expression is the aim of art education.

Art education is not restricted to “*bijutsu*,” needless to say. Closer genres are located in human’s legacies of fine arts such as music, architecture, theatre, dance and others. They are extended with the perspective from fine arts to art. Then, sport comes into sight. As sport does not have the inherent moment of expression in its structure, a broad sense of expression needs to be considered as a surrounding characteristic of experiences. Various ways of positioning sport in the life become an “expression” of the person. “Physical education” as art education would provide the opportunities to experience and learn such a way. Practices of the way of life in home economics would be the similar art education. What do you wear; what house or room do you live in; what and how do you eat? Knowledge and theories about those would be mixed with the practices in experiences. That is home economics as art education.

Thereafter this idea comes to “national language education,”<sup>(12)</sup> “English,” “mathematics,” and more. What is “mathematics” as art education? It is certainly the unknown so that it must be created from now on, but we have already noticed that it would not be an absurd claim, because we encounter with a statement “the space science and mathematics are an art.” Its key concept is “creation,” to make something new.

Therefore, we have to ask again what “creation” is. A new conception of creation would be necessary for the practice of art education. A well-known scholar of aesthetics Ken-ichi Sasaki presents his view to undertake an innovative theory of creation in the stream of the discipline of aesthetics from *bigaku* to *kanseigaku*. He showed the idea in his unusual book 『論文ゼミナール [Seminar for Making Treatise]』 (in Japanese) published by the University of Tokyo Press in 2014. Sasaki states how to write a treatise as follows:

If writing a treatise is an art, the writer necessarily requires an acquisition of the skill. It does not differ from swimming, dance, how to plane a board, pottery, driving a car and others.

Even if you delay the start to write it, the treatise does not naturally come up. A long jumper catches her breath, consolidates the image of her performance, then takes an approach run. Writing a treatise is same as it [translated by Higuchi].

How should we create an intellectual product called “treatise” ? Learning how to do it is, Sasaki says, same as the practice of sports skill.

If we could be able to presuppose that all the learning at school is based on art education, we may consider that educational activities themselves would be an art. Yes, indeed. When we regard

the practices at school education as an art, there seems to be three stages. The first is a metaphor of theatre in which a teacher as an actor gives a performance of teaching to students. The teacher's skillful teaching is compared to actor's acting ability, and the teaching is considered as a sort of performing arts. In this level, students become audience. The second is that not only teacher but also students become actor and they together build up the performance. This is also an understanding in the metaphor of theatre. Who is the audience in this case? That is third-party observers e.g. in a lesson study. As this stage is a special situation in which teacher and students have consciousness of the observers, it is not an ordinary style of the class. If everyday practice of education would be an art, both teacher and students have to be artist who act all the time, even though there is no audience. This is a metaphor of theatre as well, but what is formed in the performance is a narrative through the content of the class shared by the teacher and students who had their relation by chance in a class. It is an art of forming narrative among the people in the practice of education. We would be able to declare that educational practice is an art by itself in the sense of this third stage.

## V

In this final section, for the topic of this paper, I would like to make a comment on a book entitled *A Counterattack of Peripheral School Subjects* (『周辺教科の逆襲』 叢文社) written in Japanese and published in 2011. When we open the book, the editor Komatsu's preface catches our eyes. She wrote that the title *A Counterattack of Peripheral School Subjects* might have made a threatening atmosphere, but it had no intention to make main and peripheral subjects conflict with each other and look down on the former and praise the latter. Namely, it is not a story that *bijutsu*, music, physical education and home economics are more important than mathematics, English and others. Komatsu wrote as follows: "Men grew up in the circulation in which they systematize the reality into an abstract knowledge and they live in the reality through learning the abstract knowledge. What we need now is neither learning only the abstract knowledge efficiently, nor shifting to "education of mind" with criticizing too much intellectual education. The need is to connect the abstract knowledge with living experiences in reality. [translated by Higuchi]." "Peripheral subjects" become its medium, Komatsu says. In this book, music, *bijutsu*, physical education, and clothing, food, and housing of home economics were taken up one by one, and the possibilities and importance of children's learning in each subject were discussed. In music, "the power of music" which brings up sensibility is the center of the argument. In the argument, the author Nishijima referred to concrete pieces of music and insisted that music would raise "sensibility" for the interest in various matters, and music had a significant function to intensify people's bonds. Furthermore, the author mentioned the recent problem of educational disparities, and claimed that music in school education would hold an important meaning to reduce the gap of culture depending on the family's income. Komatsu insists that rethinking the position of peripheral subjects gives actuality to the knowledge in main subjects. As the intention of this book would be an approach to the problem of overemphasized abstract knowledge in main subjects, main subjects should face this book, rather than cheering up the people concerned in peripheral subjects. Our conception of art education asserted in this paper would be located in the basis of school education including both of main and peripheral subjects.

## Notes

- (1) They were published in 『諸芸術の共生 [*Symbiosis of Fine Arts*]』 (Hiroshima: Keisuisha, 1995), 『子どもたちの想像力を育む [*Fostering Children's Imagination*]』 (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2003), 『身体教育の思想 [*Thoughts of Body Education*]』 (Tokyo: Keisoshobo, 2005).

(2) See the following:

“Problem Areas of the Aesthetics of Sport: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Sport and a Survey of Literature,” *The Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Hiroshima University*, No.38, 1990, pp.139-149.

“Heidegger’s Concept of Authenticity and Sport Experience,” *The Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Hiroshima University*, No.39, 1991, pp.131-137.

“Liveliness and Personality: The Content of the Aesthetic Object in Sport,” Andre, J. & James, D.N. (Eds.) *Rethinking College Athletics*, Temple University Press, 1991, pp.103-108.

“From Art toward Sport - An Extension of the Aesthetics,” *Aesthetics* (Japanese Society of Aesthetics), No.6, 1994, pp.113-122.

“Violence and Education from the Viewpoint of Mimesis,” *Report of the Research Project*, 2002, pp.183-193.

“Memories of Hiroshima and Soccer” The Organizing Committee of the Symposium of Sendai College (Ed.) *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Soccer and Society*, 2003, pp.85-90.

“Mimesis and Play,” Marsal, E. & Dobashi, T. (Hg.) *Das Spiel als Kulturtechnik des ethischen Lernens*, Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005, pp.33-46.

“Eastern Mind-Body Theory and Somaesthetics,” Imai, Y. & Wulf, C. (Eds.) *Concepts of Aesthetic Education: Japanese and European Perspectives*, Münster: Waxmann, 2007, pp.88-96.

“Ethical Learning and the Problem of Body,” Marsal, E. et.al (Hrsg.) *Ethische Reflexionskompetenz im Grundschulalter: Konzepte des Philosophierens mit Kindern*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007, pp.193-204.

“An Aspect of Undoing Aesthetics: On W. Welsch’s Aesthetics of Sport” *Aesthetics* (Japanese Society of Aesthetics), No.13, 2009, pp.11-21.

“The Politics of Modern Japan: The Fine Arts versus the Martial Arts” *Congress Book II Selected Papers (XVIIIth International Congress of Aesthetics)*, 2009, pp.89-96.

“A Philosophical Reflection on the Disaster and School Education” *Hiroshima Journal of School Education*, vol.19, 2013, pp.279-284.

“Somaesthetics in Japan as Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics” *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics: Critical Perspectives on the Arts*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014, pp.203-215.

“Philosophy for Children in Japan: History and Prospects” *Journal of Learning Science*, No.8, 2015, pp.59-66 (Coauthor: Chie Ashida)

(3) One of my articles about this topic written in English is: Higuchi, S. “From Art Toward Sport: An Extension of the Aesthetics,” *op.cit.*

(4) *Bijutsu* (美術) is the name of a compulsory school subject in junior and senior high school in Japan. In elementary school, the subject is called *zugakosaku* (drawing and handicrafts). The concept of *bijutsu* education covers both of *bijutsu* and *zugakosaku*. The word *bijutsu* was a translation of “fine arts” at the beginning of modern Japan in Meiji Period (1868-1910). However, later in Meiji, *geijutsu* (芸術) became the word for fine arts as a generic concept which contains painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, music, dance, movie and others (About this issue, see Higuchi, S. “The Politics of Art in Modern Japan: The Fine Arts versus the Martial Arts,” *op.cit.*). Under the generic concept of *geijutsu*, *bijutsu* (美術) became a word for the plastic art. Because of this complicated matters, *bijutsu* education cannot be simply translated as fine arts education. It signifies an education of drawing, handicrafts and plastic arts.

(5) This concept of art is different from the concept of fine arts. Art is broader than fine arts, including martial arts as an example. In English, the words of just “art” and “fine arts” could be able to show the difference, however, in the usage of words in everyday life, it is not necessary clear. In Japanese, we make a decisive distinction between fine arts or *geijutsu* (芸術) and art or アート, with using different writing forms of *kanji* or Chinese character and *katakana*. This content of discussion is

- presented in the followings in this paper. Also see, Higuchi, S. "The Politics of Art in Modern Japan: The Fine Arts versus the Martial Arts," *op.cit.*
- (6) Sasaki, K. "[Value Principles of Fine Arts: A Cross Section of the History of Early-Modern Aesthetics]" (in Japanese), *Bigaku [Aesthetics]*, No.174, 1993, pp.1-11.
- (7) Watanabe, H. 『聴衆の誕生 [The Birth of Audience] 』 (in Japanese), Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1989.
- (8) Shusterman, R. *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- (9) Shusterman, R. *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997. This book was translated into Japanese by Higuchi, S., Aoki, T. and Maruyama, Y. (『プラグマティズムと哲学の実践』世織書房)
- (10) See the note (5).
- (11) For example, when we think about learning words, even if students memorized the description of the meaning of the word in a dictionary and became able to write the description exactly on the paper, we would not say students learned the word, if they were not able to use it properly. The problem raised here is such "understanding of words as a knowledge" and "practical usage of words." The construction of the world includes both of them.
- (12) The name of this subject is *kokugo* in Japanese, which literally means national language. The English expression "Japanese language education" is usually used for *kokugo* education. However, Japanese language education signifies another field of education, i.e. Japanese language education for non-Japanese. This terminology also comes from the history of the modern education in Japan. In 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was no standard Japanese language. To establish a standard Japanese language was a problem of great importance to the nation in the same way as standard German for the state of Germany in the same century. The word "national language" had a real function at the time, but people involved in the education did not reconsider the word even though there is no necessity of the ideological state of affairs anymore, so that it became a common word for the school subject.