

Instructional Resources as Permission

JORGE LUCERO, Instructional Resources Coordinator

On the occasion of becoming the Instructional Resources Coordinator under the editorship of Dr. Robert Sweeny—and under this issue’s umbrella theme of “new”—I’m presenting an Instructional Resource (IR) not for a specific K-12 designation, but rather for the art teacher. This is a gesture that has not—at least not in the recent history of *Art Education*—been performed overtly in the pages of IR. Arguably the purpose of the IR is to introduce art teachers, alongside their students, to artworks that propose a certain kind of permission for art practice by showcasing under-examined forms (making) and content (ideas). In addition, IRs have the potential to present artists’ processes and their “modes-of-operation” (Lucero, 2012, p. 107) as permissions for new ways-of-being by the artist/teacher in the classroom, the museum, the studio, the exhibition, the performance, or the presentation.

This IR is for the art educator who understands himself or herself as a creative practitioner, active or otherwise. It is for creative practitioners/educators who find themselves crunched for time, money, energy, and external dialogue. This IR is for those of us who want to have a larger conversation about how our art practice and art education practice coexist. Creative practitioners/educators (as I see them) encompass individuals studying in certification programs; BFA or MFA students who are considering teaching in some capacity; art education graduate students; K-12 art specialists; teaching-artists; college professors/artists/researchers; museum educators; artists who are interested in social, relational, or civic art practices; and—dare I say—non-art teachers who nevertheless are interested in making, theories-of-making, and making-pedagogies.

As I will explain in a moment, this IR is intended to present the work of one artist as a specific type of conceptual-art-permission. That permission is an introduction to a more streamlined everyday practice that is not only inclusive of a person’s creative and pedagogical tasks, but also manifestly engaged in a robust contemporary art conversation about “the everyday” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 12). The “everyday” as an art gesture is arguably rooted in Marcel Duchamp’s revolutionary *readymade* gesture (Roberts, 2007). At the same time, following the motivation of the *readymade* gesture may prove to be more valuable in the long run than paying any type of credible homage to the *readymade* itself by simply replicating it. In other words, although the everyday-gesture-as-art

may begin with Duchamp, it stands to argue that thinking too much about Duchamp while trying to bring everyday life and art together can be somewhat un-Duchampian. It’s paradoxical indeed, but since Duchamp’s original gesture was an anti-art gesture, referencing Duchamp (or copying him) in this day and age is decidedly an art gesture.

The way of working that is proposed by this IR’s artist is not media-specific; it is primarily idea-driven or what can be broadly understood as “conceptual art” (see Goldie & Schellekens, 2010). This simple, but crucial shift from object to idea, opens up the possibility that a creative practice can include forms as far as the individual’s imagination and courage will allow, including immaterial forms (see Lippard & Chandler, 1968/1999; Bois & Krauss, 1997) such as pedagogy and other types of relationality.

The shift from the object maker to the artist as philosopher that is presented in this IR opens up pedagogical moments, gestures, and tasks as a material that can be played with, manipulated, and ultimately entered into the greater contemporary art discourse. The conceptual artist determining *what is* and *what is not art* is a relatively old idea, but in art education it is an underutilized and under-recognized mode of operation. As a member of the art education community, I believe that our collective attention to these more conceptual practices can have an emancipatory effect on the proverbial question I’m continuously asked by creative practitioners who are also educators: How do I continue to make art, while teaching?

Polyglot of the Everyday: Alberto Aguilar

JORGE LUCERO



Figure 1. Alberto Aguilar, 2012. *Portal* (Esther Grimm).

Alberto Aguilar

The Chicago-born artist Alberto Aguilar enacts his artworks through video, performance, sound recordings, cooking, photographs, participatory events, drawings, installations, interior design, writing, collage, singing, teaching, conducting interviews, curating, mail-art, being on the Internet, writing, and personal social exchanges (e.g. conversations, meals, gift-giving, visits to strangers' homes, being with his family, being a tourist, playing games, doing favors, telling jokes, etc.). Aguilar practices without a studio, that is to say, his projects—usually worked out on a notepad, on the computer, through social networking (both actual and virtual), in conversation and collaboration with others, and through mostly ad-hoc means—are first conceptualized and then brought to fruition in the space, time, and through the material that the concept requires.

Aguilar can be seen as a polyglot artist. Although it is a minor difference, a polyglot is different from a polymath, or what is commonly referred to as a “Renaissance Man.” The polymath (the old-school Renaissance Man) is a figure who purportedly knows about many things, yet may choose to express and investigate them through the same form; whereas the polyglot (like Aguilar) may be “saying” the same thing over and over again, but does so through multiple “languages” or forms. Aguilar’s polyglot conceptual practice involves multiple ways-of-being and making, which are unified by the ideas behind the work, not necessarily any devotion or consistency with a specific media. This is a critical distinction to make as we examine Aguilar’s process in relation to the creative practitioner/educator’s demanding challenge to sustain two seemingly different practices—the teaching job and the art practice—at equally integral levels.

What Aguilar’s practice proposes are everyday gestures—including the teaching gesture—as material. Aguilar’s intertwined art/life practice proposes that a teacher’s tasks—even the mundane and arduous ones—can be moved around, played with, presented, and theorized as sophisticated contemporary art practice. It is important to note here that although the term “sophisticated” can create an undesirable and contentious hierarchy, I’m actually reverting to the term’s root (*sophism*), to point to the unpretentiously inquisitive—almost quotidian—and generous philosophical undertones that come across in Aguilar’s work.

In some of Aguilar’s work such as his *Domestic Monument* series, this generosity of ideas points toward the hyper-local or what Duchamp (1945/2008) called the “infralim” (p. 90) to the extent that what is usually recognized as art begins to disappear and what is usually considered “the everyday” begins to appear as art. Take for example

Portal (Esther Grimm) (Figure 1), a work that now exists as a photograph, but which was created serendipitously during a visit to Esther Grimm’s home. Esther Grimm, Executive Director of 3Arts, a Chicago organization that focuses on supporting the work of “women artists, artists of color, and artists with disabilities” (<http://3arts.org/pages/about/>), invited Aguilar to her home to host a version of his *Personal Dinner Invitation* (see below). Aguilar says, “[the *Domestic Monuments*] are a way of engaging with people and their stuff to get to know the person, but it all started off as mischief-making and leaving little surprises in people’s homes or studios” (personal communication, September 1, 2012). During Aguilar’s visit to Grimm’s home, he literally found this hula-hoop in a room, thought that it would fit the mirrored end table and proceeded to bring them together. It is a gesture that has similarly been described as “banal” (Sollins, Dowling, Tatge, Shaffer, & Ortega, 2003) in



Figure 2. Alberto Aguilar, 2012. *A Personal dinner invitation*, Fenn House, Hyde Park (Chicago, IL).

the work of Gabriel Orozco and which the art critic Lori Waxman (2011) succinctly underlines in Aguilar's work as, "monuments [that] appear to have been muddled right out of the heady mash of home life" (¶10).

It may seem unusual to get too personal with the biographical details of an artist whose work is being examined, but in the case of Aguilar it is important to share these facts, because it is not just his art objects—as compelling as they are—that can be useful in opening up the permissions I'm proposing for the creative practitioner/educator's enhanced understanding of their own blended artistic and educational practice. Aguilar is an art teacher at Harold Washington College in downtown Chicago, a parent (with his wife) of four children, a very good friend, and an involved citizen in a number of other—unavoidably—resource-consuming ways. Like many teachers, he is an artist who can't spend expanded periods of time in a studio and therefore Aguilar has diligently tackled the challenge of constructing an art practice from all of his other activities.

One of Aguilar's works that has garnered significant attention is his ongoing *A Personal dinner invitation* (Figure 2). This is a work that has seen more than a dozen incarnations; some held at Aguilar's home, some in "official" art spaces, some in other people's homes or community spaces. The form of what Aguilar does can be temporarily suspended for the purposes of this IR since my aim is not to have Aguilar's form examined and then imitated. Rather, I'm proposing that it might be more important for us to understand that even though Aguilar has invited hundreds of strangers to these orchestrated dinner events, it is not as important how he did it, unless it helps us to understand how this type of conceptual exercise can change the way we engage with our everyday practices as potential moments of creative practice/art.

Aguilar uses social media to engage the communities where he holds dinners; he advertises, communicates with, scopes out, and eventually invites a diverse handful of local participants to these 4-hour events. The evenings usually include a three- to four-course meal which Aguilar cooks with his wife Sonia; orchestrated games spearheaded by his children; invited lectures or performances by other artists; music contributed

to the event by all the attendees; and parting gifts donated by other artists, Aguilar's mom, and himself. Bringing together young, old, professional, community activists, visual artists, business people, dancers, teachers, laborers, chefs, writers, and students, Aguilar takes one of the essential—yet admittedly difficult—aspects of being a professional

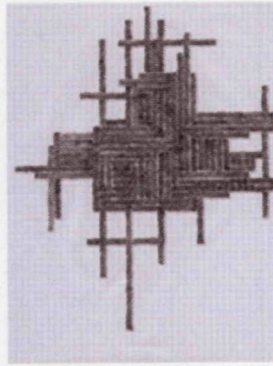
artist (networking) and mashes it together with the most basic of human activities: conviviality, or living alongside each other. A few days after the dinner Aguilar contacts all the of the dinner guests and asks them to please send him a mailing address so that he can send them an additional gift. Being that they just spent 4 hours with him and



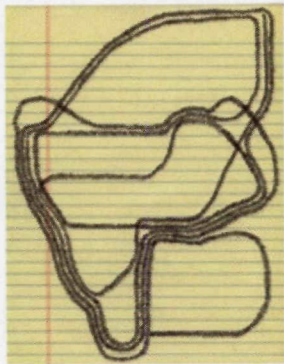
Figure 3. Alberto Aguilar, 2012. *Collage*.

Aguilar's polyglot conceptual practice involves multiple ways-of-being and making.

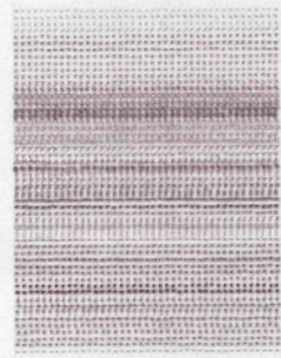
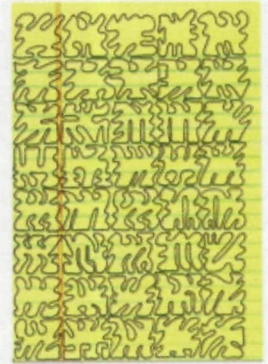
full circle empty
 stomach milk light
 candle dinner insect
 lining plastic mask
 tape record player
 beach sand rock
 solid hand wood
 floor flower winter
 fade barber flat
 top block head
 oval circle full



I will end by stating my feet were
 I have allowed for errors.
 I will use cushions.
 I will skip lines.
 I do this for the sake of clarity.
 This is the center line.
 I am more than half way done.
 This is a drawing.
 I have allowed for repetition.
 I have allowed for error.
 I Repeat by marking the center.



this is a drawing made on
 february 12, 2011. it looks like
 writing but it really is a
 drawing. someone gave me this pen
 and i was excited cause i thought
 it was a good pen. it is not
 as good as i thought it was.
 it is not that fluid and it stills.
 I must make my marks slowly
 in order for the ink to come out
 regularly. this allows me to think
 about what i write before i write it
 but it hurts my hand. this drawing
 is now coming to an end
 because I am near out of space on
 the paper.



town crier preacher
 teacher singer passer
 by bye
 baller guitar host
 deliver common goon
 wood metal stone
 voice sound wave
 brain stimulator ginger
 take move shake
 furniture armature armchair

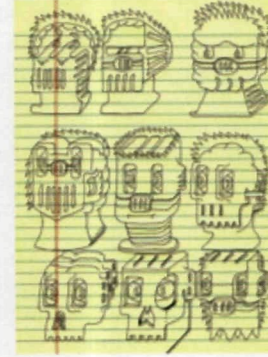
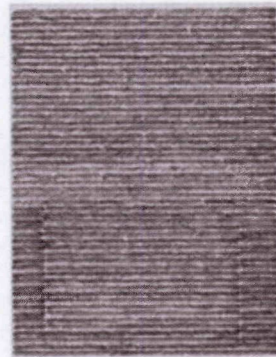


Figure 4a. Selection from the series: *Drawing in Passing*, 2010-2012.



This is the cursive that I learned as a boy. Today I return to it as a grown man. I can not go back to those days but right now I can retace my steps.

I think that most of those who have been introduced to me in the past few years are people who have been introduced to me in the past few years. I think that most of those who have been introduced to me in the past few years are people who have been introduced to me in the past few years.

I will write until I come to some sort of resolution. I tried drawing but it did not feel right, it just was not happening. In writing I don't have to try to make a good drawing. I just have to write until I reach some sort of resolution or until I run out of space on the piece of paper.

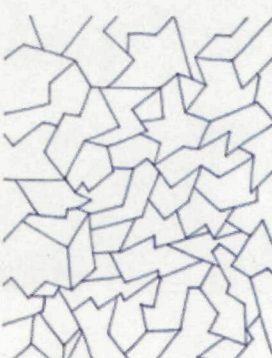
THIS IS A
REHEATED REARRANGEMENT OF
THIRTYTHREE WORDS THAT
WERE ORIGINATED WITH
PRECISION BY ME
IN RACER TO
EXPLAIN THEIR REASON
FOR BEING DEFEAT
TO YOU ON
THIS DAY BY
THIS VERY HOUR.



earth quake move
shake solid make
take quite blind
deaf hear ears
eyes see see
cree tower square
fave just must
mesty bary foggy
borely risible ability
stable sound ground
seed plant grow

gold minor space
surveyor measure ruler
dictator leader just
cause rebel revolt
vulgar culture mourning
bunge anger building
tower light house
seer afar doctor
monument remember memory
reverse recovery holed
miracle testimony tested

Altogether THEIR ARE
NINETEEN YEARS IN
BETWEEN THESE TWO
SIGNATURES AND THEIR
ARE NINETEEN WORDS
IN BETWEEN THEM
AS WELL. *2012*



This line is filled with words. The lines above and below are empty. Empty is on this line twice. I capitalized twice on accident. I have allowed for error. Error appears twice on this paper. Now error appears three times. The time is six sixteen pm. What does pm stand for? I have allowed for questions.

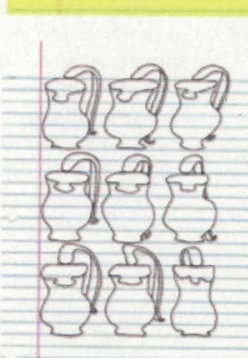
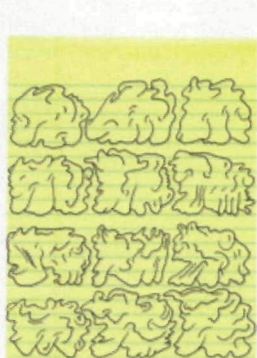


Figure 4b. Selection from the series: Drawing in Passing, 2010-2012.



Figure 5. *Othello 8m40s*, 2011.

presumably found him trustworthy, they send the address and then they receive in the mail an original collage (see Figure 3).

The collages are not overly involved, although they are overtly considered, and this helps us to understand something else about Aguilar's method: nothing is overly worked. Aguilar puts more trust in his ability to edit from an array of quickly produced works, than to force something to emerge from intense, prolonged labor. The term "produced" may be used loosely here, because the way that Aguilar's process has unfolded points

more to the likelihood that the work isn't as much "made" as it is identified in—and then re-presented to—the world. With a Duchampian sincerity—which is necessarily irreverent in the most profound manner—Aguilar has managed to bracket multiple aspects of everyday life in order to sustain a more integrated scholarly, artistic, familial, spiritual, and professional existence.

Two other examples of Aguilar's consistent—however pragmatically integrated—method are his *Drawing in Passing* series (Figures 4a and 4b) and the 5-year collaborative

performance and video works he's done under the moniker *We Matter* with his oldest daughter's elementary school cohort. Both of these series primarily follow the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn's dictum, "energy yes, quality no" (in Dronsfield, 2010, p. 132) in that, through the pursuance of energy, a new quality emerges. Both the drawing series and the *We Matter* work can be contextualized for the sake of this IR, through the same lens that Johnathan Dronsfield positions Hirschhorn's energy-chasing work. Dronsfield (2010) suspects that Hirschhorn "is heeding Nietzsche's call to educate the will before anything else" (p. 132) and in the same way Aguilar's drawing series works under a specific set of parameters whose first rule is "work." By "doing," even in a way that seems frivolous (e.g. one drawing every morning on a piece of notebook paper, posted as a status update on Facebook), Aguilar proposes that some artworks get more serious through their accumulation—that is, through their energy.

The videos that he's made with his daughter's class work under a similar device: set up an unpredictable situation, allow elements of chance, take other people's wishes and directions seriously, "roll with the punches," capture it through a form (e.g. video, sound recording, writing, or photograph), then edit it for presentation's sake. In the series of screen captures shown in Figure 5, we see a collection of seventh graders playing with the text and imagery of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Voice tracks are laid over children's animated gestures. The voices are those of the children, but they're disembodied. They run, they play with found props (e.g. a tree's limbs, a bed sheet turned curtain, each other) and follow Aguilar's off-camera open-ended directives (e.g. run, argue, stand, look). He's not attempting to illustrate *Othello*, rather through a collage sensibility he is proposing that the subtleties of being a seventh grader learning *Othello* can be the perfect match to create a different type of energy, one that is poetic—Shakespearean almost—and ultimately left to be interpreted by the actors, the artist, and the audience. Aguilar's work with the children, not unlike his *Domestic Monument* with the hula-hoop, can be seen as a method of bracketing, isolating, and representing the everyday with an intent motivation to not drop any of the many activities "real-life" has him juggling.

Aguilar proposes that some artworks get more serious through their accumulation—that is, through their energy.

Activity

Traditionally at this point in the IR, the author provides a means through which questions can be asked about the artist's works featured. Also, potential classroom activities are laid out as curricular options. What I have done instead is asked Alberto Aguilar to please contribute an artwork in the form of a list for this IR. The parameter I gave him was to please identify tips for making a more fluid integration between one's everyday practice and one's creative practice. This is what he made:

Tips for Integration by Alberto Aguilar

- **Instead of going to the gym**, walk whenever possible and take the stairs instead of the elevator. This will create more time for you as an artist. It also stimulates ideas in your brain as you physically move your body, see things happen on the street, bump into people you know, or find things on the ground.
- **Instead of signing up** your kids for organized sports, play actively with them (e.g. sports, Nerf sword fights, invented physical games). Invent new rules for existing games, or their playing fields and courts. Videotape this when the game or the interaction becomes interesting enough or just videotape it and hope you get something good or funny.
- **Consider household chores** as art compositions or performance.
- **At your child's school, volunteer to make a work** with the students as opposed to just showing them "famous" artists' works and giving a craft project; spend at least a week instead of a day.
- **Make work at work.** Think of your students and co-workers as collaborators. Your office is a studio. It makes being at the office more exciting and you will invest more of yourself into it.
- **Have people over for dinner.** Think of it as a "studio visit." All the organizations in your house (both accidental and thought out) are a work. How you treat your guests is a performance. Did you deliver the goods? This makes having people over more exciting. Show your house as an artwork, a huge collage that you've made with your family. Create a memorable atmosphere and a soundtrack, control the lighting, and give a tour of the home with stories that bring attention to the living qualities of the home.
- **Think of your online presence as a persona**, or a self-portrait. How would you like to present yourself to the world? Be selective and thoughtful. It is an artwork.
- **Your spiritual walk is a work that you make over a lifetime.** It's like carving away at a large block of stone and that takes time. For example, you can't read the Bible in one sitting and expect to understand it. It is something that reveals itself over a long period of time. As you change and grow, your understanding of it changes. This is parallel to having a creative practice and developing as an artist by making many works (over time) rather than just a few.
- **Above all, vacations are a time of rest, but it makes them more fun**—and it makes you more engaged with your family—if you think about your day-to-day itinerary as a creative work. The family photos will also become more valuable and meaningful. Instead of taking a picture in front of a famous monument think of your day as a journey that has potential for bringing forth monumental images. Make images that document a playful engagement with the new environment you find yourself in.
- **Instead of going on an expensive vacation**, think of a walk down the main business street of your neighborhood as an artwork. This is an opportunity to get to know the old shops, their history, and the people that tend them. This is true social engagement. For example, I came up with an idea for something I called "Pizza Parade." I told my kids that we would walk up Archer Ave for three miles and go into all the local pizza places and ask the owners if we could have one slice of pizza. In an official tone we told them that we were on Pizza Parade (see Figure 6) and we were documenting it as an eventual blog. It was a vacation, without spending money. The kids created Pizza Parade pins and one of my sons put on a pizza costume that we happened to have in our box of costumes. It worked! Some vendors gave us a slice and others gave us an entire pizza! The kids were amazed that it actually worked. It was a very substantial experience that stayed with us. It transformed us.



Figure 6. *Pizza Parade*, 2012.

Alberto Aguilar's videos, including *Othello 8m40s*, can be seen in its entirety on his website: <http://albertoaguilar.org/category/work/video-work/page/3/>

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