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Integrative and Disintegrative Art

Ossi Naukkarinen

Abstract

This article compares and analyzes two seemingly opposite approaches to visual arts that can be called integrative and disintegrative. They are usually seen to be contradictory, and the latter is often favored in contemporary art discourse. The article suggests, however, that the integrative approach can still be quite as favorable to art as the disintegrative one. Both views are useful for certain purposes and in the context of individual art works they are often actually intertwining. Especially from the perspective of art education, it is easy to understand the different implications of these views. This is because in that context the approaches are typically sharply accentuated and thus clearly visible. In this article, special focus is therefore placed on the means by which these concepts may be raised in visual art schools and universities, although the issue has much wider relevance.

Key Words

art, comparison, conflict, disintegrative, event, experience, integrative, object, process, visual arts, work of art

1. Introduction

One way to analyze the world of art is through comparisons and juxtapositions. In recent decades and in many contexts people have differentiated or have even seen a conflict between an "integrative" (work or object-oriented) and a "disintegrative" (event, action, process or experience-oriented) view of art. This distinction is still applied, for example, to the historical study of land and environmental art: "Artists working in sculpture, conceptual art and land art, such as Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, Roger Ackling, Dennis Oppenheim or Douglas Huebler, broke the object-centricity of a work of art and disintegrated it spatially, temporally and instrumentally....The process of making the work of art began to be emphasized, which undermined the object-centric view. The permanent object piece was challenged through live corporeal acts, events, situations and conceptual processes which integrated language to the visual and spatial art."^[1] In addition, some contemporary artists, such as the internationally active Austrian group WochenKlausur, explicitly emphasize the difference: "The existing art business is still propped up by the marketable artwork, by the original and the commodity. The most effective critique of the traditional position is the constant advocacy of a new conception of art that also gets by without material artworks."^[2] In my experience, the division is also frequently taken up by students at art schools and universities, even if on an informal basis that is not easy to track through the use of exact citations.

When discussing contemporary art, the integrative thinking easily seems crude and outdated, like something mostly suited to historical study, after the disintegrative art and theory maneuvers which took place in the 1960s and 1970s and even earlier. However, on closer inspection, the sharp polarity of the

views is often spurious, and art today can be approached from both views in parallel. Both views are fruitful. Moreover, in the light of current art discussion the integrative approach may sometimes (or again) even be more favorable to art than the disintegrative one. It can clarify the position of art in a situation where there is a desire to dissolve it, at least partially, as part of corporate marketing and government strategies. In this article I intend to elaborate on the implications of these points of view, and specifically how they may manifest themselves in art schools and universities.

I will explore the questions in the framework of visual arts. The aim is not to offer a detailed historical analysis of visual arts discourse but to raise two conceivable approaches to art as a subject of discussion. I do not aim to prove that one is superior to the other. Instead, I see them, like many other topics in the art world, as points of reference to thought, action and discourse to which various views are related but whose definitive interpretation is hardly ever found. My view has been formed based on discussions with visual artists and visual arts students, and the article has been shaped into its particular form largely from this starting point.[\[3\]](#)

2. Accentuating Differences to Attract Attention

It is obvious that art is perceived in very different, even opposing, ways in different contexts. "Art" is like the free-form field in a questionnaire where anyone can fill in their definition of choice.

The pluralism prevalent in the art world can be explored in many ways. The systematic introductions to art philosophy typically explore the potential approaches to art and evaluate the (philosophical) fruitfulness of the various views. Striving towards a comprehensive coverage, art can be viewed from the perspectives of work, artist, experience, and context, for example. The sociology of art, for its part, can explain which views of art are most popular in a given population, which are perhaps completely rejected, and how the views are maintained and expressed. The ways of thinking and acting can be elicited, for example, through interviews. Further, the research on the history of art and ideas illustrates when and where these approaches were created and how they evolved. Doing a historical study of the era during which today's characteristic pluralism gradually emerged will produce a summary mainly of the art worlds of the twentieth century. By combining philosophical, sociological, historical, and other analyses, you can produce, seriously or in parody, diagrams or genealogical trees categorizing the various art forms. Some of the more famous of these include the clusters of arrows depicting the evolution of the visual arts by Alfred H. Barr from the 1930s and the works, *How to Look at Modern Art in America*, by Ad Reinhardt from 1946 and 1961.[\[4\]](#)

The fact that there are so many divergent views on art is a testament to its being so important and appealing that people actively want to form opinions on it and even defend their supremacy over those of others. At the same time, works and processes that are seen to live up to these ideals are created and critiqued. This is taking place in artists' workshops, galleries, concert halls, art schools, and the culture sections of newspapers. In the worst case, the result is forbidding:

declarations that only condone one type of art. In the best case, we get fascinating art and insightful, open-minded criticism. Needless to say, art education should be helping students find the latter path, and that is why it is necessary to identify and analyze a variety of theoretical concepts in art schools and universities.

The divergent views about art co-exist relatively peacefully most of the time, at least in the Western countries. However, the diversity does not mean that everyone would consent. Theoretically you can perhaps assume a meta-level on which all views are equal, but in practice the advocates of the various views argue and compete with each other, at least at intervals. For example, in summer 2007 there was an extremely heated debate in Finland, my home country, once again on which is the superior form of music, classical or popular, and the sides went at it ferociously calling each other pigs or fundamentalists.[\[5\]](#)

When discussing how people recognize art as art, Noël Carroll uses the basic notion that recognition always takes place by relating new works of art to previous ones. If this is the case, one key question is in what ways can new art be related to past works. According to Carroll, there are three main variations: repetition, amplification, and repudiation. Some new works are relatively similar to preceding works, some distinctly divergent. If the similarity is dominant, recognizing a new piece as art is easy as there is little innovation in it. Some creative avenues may have been explored or variations made but not in an unparalleled way. Most art will be like this at any time and place. If the will and ability to reform take over, revolutionary art that radically challenges previous works will come into existence. This kind is rarer. But even then, art with a link to tradition will have been created. If *no* link exists, the piece or event cannot be recognized as art at all.[\[6\]](#)

Some of the writing on the history and theory of art has expressly considered as most interesting the radically reformist art that positions itself in conflict with the preceding as well as contemporary works. (Granted that the same principle is also valid in other fields, not just art history.) The thinking has run along the lines that by constantly seeking new solutions art will evolve, go forward, and break new ground: the leading themes of the avant-garde. The heroes will be those who are believed to have invented something unparalleled and that have had others imitate them. Such thinking is still rather strong in art schools, but it is probably strongest in the introductions into art history intended for the general public, such as the *Guide to Art*, edited by Sandro Sproccati and published originally as recently as 1991, which is surprising considering the mindset of the book. According to the book, the history of the visual arts begins with Giotto, who was "undoubtedly the greatest artist of the [14th] century" because "he ended the reign of medieval tradition by creating with his paintings a new relationship between the individual and the universe!"[\[7\]](#) The last chapter of the book, discussing the end of the 20th century, restores painting as "the most important vehicle of expression" in the field of visual arts, with the likes of Anselm Kiefer and Mimmo Paladino hailed as masters.[\[8\]](#)

Viewing art as something evolving from one pinnacle or revolution to another has, of course, been repeatedly disputed in postmodern, feminist and post-colonial art-theoretical discourse and in the field of art, but this has not entirely removed the fascination with conflict-seeking. The front lines of the conflicts have only been re-drawn: they are no longer simply about the new overriding the old but generally about what is overriding what and why. Or is anything overrun at all or is it just a continuous ongoing battle between different views, such as feminine and masculine, Western and non-Western, traditional and reformist, central and peripheral, canonized and non-canonized, popular and elitist? Such discussion is, of course, incessant and lively in art schools.^[9]

Even though Carroll stresses the historicity of art recognition and other artistic activity, that is, that in art a new work is inevitably linked to a previous one (ultimately according to the personal history of each observer), the act of linking does not have to be considered only as a mechanism for creating a historical continuum. Namely, similar links also describe the relations between concurrent phenomena. Works created and received at the same time may reproduce, broaden, or override each other's underlying ways of thinking and doing. The disagreement between integrative and disintegrative art views is one form of relation both historically and contemporarily.

Irrespective of the particular views among which a conflict or other significant disagreement is seen to form, stirring such tensions still seems to be one general way of attracting attention and guiding discussion. Without the emphasis on the disagreements and the validity of one's own view, it is apparently harder to get attention and recognition. Since the confrontations and milder contrasts obviously still have a role to play in the art world, and at art schools and universities in particular, it is useful to analyze examples of these. The interesting thing is that on closer inspection even the sharp confrontations begin to unravel and prove at least partly spurious.

3. Work and Event, Object and Experience

I will focus here on one confrontational stance that has been relatively common in art (school) discourse over the last few decades and deserves attention for that reason alone. Moreover, the integrative work or object-oriented art view as a counterpoint to the disintegrative event, experience, or action-oriented thinking is still a topical issue. But let me be clear: I do not consider integration (work and object) or disintegration (event, experience, process and action) as synonyms but only as intersecting terms, approaching each other in meaning. I do not provide definitions for them but only refer to their various uses in this article, as this is common practice in other visual art discourse and I do not consider it detrimental.

I will explore confrontation specifically in the context of visual arts, broadly viewed, and therefore the observations cannot be applied as such to other art forms such as music, literature, or dance. It should also be borne in mind that the summations below are unlikely to be endorsed as such by many students or artists, nor is that necessary. They are rather better

understood as some form of caricatures of art: some views may approach one extreme, some the other extreme. Or art may be seen to distance itself from one or the other extreme. Caricatures are tools for analyzing the views, not descriptions aiming at strict realism. But they are just the sort of tools used in conflict-seeking discussion, so in that respect they are just as real as other discursive devices.

The simplified work or object-specific view of visual arts emphasizes a few central topics. First, visual art is considered to exist as physical objects that can be seen and touched. This is not to say naively that a sculpture would be *just* a lump of bronze or a painting merely a canvas covered with colorant whose value could be measured by the price of the materials; the message of, or the discussion spurred by, these material objects is equally important at the same time. Nevertheless, it is important that art can be pinned down to observable physical objects. You can point your finger to a painting by Gerhard Richter or a photograph by Elina Brotherus and say that this object is art. Typically, it is relatively easy to say how a work such as this is delineated: where it starts and finishes, what it includes and excludes. The frames, pedestals, and showcases make observing this easier. In addition, the pieces are frequently individualized by names, such as *Self-Portrait*.

All this is easily combined with the fact that at some point a piece is considered to be completed. Afterwards it no longer changes, and if changes are imminent, careful storage or restoration strives to prevent these. The worry is that if a material object is destroyed, art is lost in the process. In case of a parade piece, it is expressly emphasized that this is a unique original and that only one copy exists (or at the most, a carefully numbered series). An imitation is not art at all, and a variant is a new piece altogether.

It is easy to consider this way of thinking naive in many ways. There is reason to dispute the decisiveness of a physical object even for fundamentally categorizing something as art. For example, the well-known basic dilemma in art philosophy presented by Arthur C. Danto where two physically identical objects are compared and one found to be art and the other not proves the complexity of this view. If art was simplistically material (visible in materials and forms), both of the physically identical objects would inevitably be art (or non-art). The ready-made works at the very least taught us otherwise. It is more meaningful to also consider important all the things that occur around a physical object for categorizing, understanding, interpreting, and approaching it in other ways, even if you were not taking a stand on whether this context-based method of *defining* art, for example, is valid. The "artness" is not necessarily visible on the outside, and the same object can be art in one context and not in another. Therefore, the existence of art cannot easily be reduced to the physical, material characteristics of an object. You also need conceptual operations, interpretations, perhaps even theories. This is a way of thinking art students adopt very quickly in one form or another. [\[10\]](#)

A philosophically simplistic way of thinking does not make it impracticable; often quite the contrary may be the case. However sophisticated the constructs you develop on the

ontology of works of art and other topics, they may not necessarily be relevant outside philosophical discourse.

Applying more straightforward views to art is related primarily to its trade and exhibition in galleries and museums. Galleries offer you rewarding experiences and insights precisely because of the works displayed, which is why people go there. The works bring joy and unfold the surrounding world in a new way. However, if you take a slightly different view of galleries, their operation is based on objects hung on walls, floors, and sometimes also in the air and on the ceiling that are replaced with others at regular intervals in exactly the same way as clothing stores replace their collections and grocery stores their yoghurt or sausages. When successful, these replacements will put money (or however you want to read the character strings on your bank statement nowadays...) on the bank accounts of the gallery owner and artist, just as is the case with a clothing or grocery store owner. The exhibited pieces have been transported there from the workshop of the artist or from another gallery or museum, and when the exhibition ends, they go on to other places: galleries, private homes, storehouses. It is handy if the objects are easy to transport, not prone to breaking or getting spoiled, not too big or heavy, and easy to place in the gallery space on a tight schedule. It is even more splendid if their physical characteristics make them equally suitable for private homes, public spaces, and museums. These factors simply make the circulation of the pieces on the art market easier, whether or not the artist had consciously thought about this when making them.

When talking about the art markets, we also talk about property and ownership, about a painting or sculpture belonging to someone, which at the same entitles that person to certain rights. Artists have their rights; collectors buying paintings have other rights. In many countries the goal has been to secure for artists the right to be acknowledged as the author or creator of a work, the right to control any changes made to their works and the right to access their works. The judicial system considers it crucial that artists have the right to benefit financially from their efforts and control what happens to the works. The collectors, on the other hand, have the right to decide where to place the work they have bought, and to resell the work. Without going into the details and interpretations of (copyright) law that further specify and restrict the rights mentioned above, it can be said that at least with regard to visual arts the legal questions often boil down to the physical works, objects: who gets to decide whether a piece can be altered and how, who gets to sell it, who even gets to see it? As regards these questions, it is irrelevant what the message of the piece is, whether it evokes emotions or whether it is any good, although these issues may well be most important in other contexts.[\[11\]](#)

For the purposes of this article, suffice it to say that the thinking described above characterizing the object-oriented view is in many ways well suited to the art markets where copyright questions are a reality. Here, it is most important to see that *one level* of art market thinking treats works as physical objects that are shuttled around, lifted, hung on walls and, further, bought and sold as commodities. On this level, it makes no difference what the works portray or whether they

reform the concept of art.

This is one reason why a work or object-oriented view of visual arts has been criticized and why many art students seem to be biased against it: the fear is that it reduces works to material things whose value is measured in money, and when this happens, the essential characteristics are believed to be overlooked. The more important characteristics may include the experiences or thoughts produced by the works, the joy of making them, the creation of new readings of the world, changing the world for the better through art, and pushing the concept of art further. These dimensions, again, are something immaterial, hard to pin down, dynamic, tied to personal emotions and experiences, immeasurable in money; something impossible to own or sell. When viewed in this way, the essence of art approaches something emerging, a process, or an experience.

Presumably, this is why some visual artists, or at least artists operating on the borders of the visual arts world, have consciously created art that one would find difficult to consider as composed of objects. (This naturally also presents challenges for copyright law.) These pieces would be ill-suited to move from one gallery or museum to another and sold. So as not to make this too easy, terminologically these are also usually called works. Artists have ended up creating works not clearly separated from the rest of the world, either temporally or physically; works about which it is difficult to say who the creator is; works so tied to a specific location that they are impossible to relocate; works that change continuously or vanish altogether after a short while; and works that are verbally expressed instructions and therefore closer to literature. For example, land, spatial, conceptual, community, Internet, and environmental art, as well as the tradition of performance and Happening (partly reworking older art movements such as Dada) have, since at least the 1960s, continuously operated from a stance that actually questions the meaningfulness of the entire concept of work, while at the same time retaining a link to visual arts. Variations of art to defy objectification have been created in addition to those mentioned in the introduction to this text, by the artists Helen and Newton Harrison, Yoko Ono, and Mierle Ukeles. The group WochenKlausur mentioned above is very clear about this: "Since then [nineties] visual art has developed in two directions: into an art that is defined by economic interests and bottom-line thinking that lures the masses with spectacles and lots of horn-blowing. And conversely into an art that acts – independently of profit and populism – in possibilities, that seeks to examine and improve the conditions of coexistence ... The use of this potential to manipulate social circumstances is a practice of art just as valid as the manipulation of traditional materials. The group WochenKlausur takes this function of art and its historic precursors as its point of departure."^[12] In the critiques, theoretical support for the non-objectifying artistic efforts may have been sought from the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas.^[13] This is likewise the form of art that many art students are very eager to support.

4. Borders Are A-blurring

The object-oriented and event or experience-oriented views may be seen as opposing each other. But really this is mainly the opposition of caricatured views, since the confrontation appears less obvious when you move on to study the actual works and events. Does the object-oriented view lead to philosophical simplifications, commerciality or works reduced to instruments only? And does dispensing with objectification help avoid these? Not necessarily. There are at least four reasons for this.

First of all, taking an objectifying view to art does not mean that works would have no other connotations or that nothing besides their tangible materiality would be significant. The object-level approach is often related to analyzing ownership and the market. This involves information more on how many units are sold, what they are made of, which category they fall in to who owns them, and how much they cost, and less on emotional reception or action. But one and the same "art" may be a piece of canvas and colorants costing some \$6,000 on the one hand and a source of life-shaking experience on the other. This is obvious. If an artist creates a painting in a traditional form, which is therefore in that sense easily objectifiable, it does not mean that the output could not be experientially very rewarding and that its creation and analysis would not constitute an event or process valuable as such. Or that it could not be critical towards simple-minded commercialism. In fact, it is hard to believe that works succeeding in the art market, often quite easily objectifiable, would not also be fascinating on other levels. After all, if the pieces were not interesting on a number of levels, why would they be shuttled around, hung, watched, bought, and sold in the first place? Besides, experience or event-likeness often emerges *precisely because* the work is perceived as a specific object or material with specific colors, structure, texture, and form. Nothing else has its particular material existence.

Second, it should be remembered that the intention to make works that are not in any way easily identifiable as objects and at the same time convertible into commodities is absolutely no guarantee that their experiential or some other side would be strong and impressive. The most process-like and immaterial visual art may be boring and spiritless, and questioning the objectified or integrative view is not an easy point of approach to the more relevant issues; yet, somewhat surprisingly, this still seems to be the unspoken desire of some students. Neither has the anti-object approach had any real news value of late.

Third, and perhaps even more importantly, you can objectify the most non-objectified event. I would even claim that if visual artists want to attract any attention in the art world at all, some form of objectification of their artistic endeavors, their attachment to more or less concrete works, is necessary. The objectification does not always mean that the created objects would exactly fetch high prices or that this would be the goal. But art objects must be created simply to get noticed and remembered.

Once it is over, a non-documented performance will really no longer exist or be restored. A work of land art cut in grass will quickly vanish. A temporary installation will disappear after it

is dismantled. Rescue comes in the form of photographs, written descriptions, reconstructions, videos, and websites. All these are means to salvage works of art from complete oblivion. At the very least, they act as references to works, at their best as keys to experiences, even if they do not constitute works themselves.

But at the same time these references are objects displayed in museums, galleries, and elsewhere: photographs from a journey the artist has personally considered the most crucial art; video recordings of a performance; written description of a community art project; sketches for an installation. If desired, these can also be sold and treated as concrete objects that are carried around, lifted, hung, and restored. On the other hand, these concrete objects, not just the "original" event, can at the same time be appreciated as sources of experiences or ideas. And the reason they work as such is precisely because they are perceivable as physical objects in that particular form! It is evident that, when educating future artists one should have a clearly defined focus: is it to be teaching how to create art works and events, or how to produce high-quality documentation of them? Both approaches require their own specific skills, and it is not clear at all that artists themselves should have a good command of the latter.

Yet whenever concrete works are created in the world of arts, they will have these two sides, two ways to approach them. And it is very difficult to operate completely without objects in the world of visual arts. All artists do not necessarily actively think about this aspect and it may not motivate them, but for the public, galleries, museums, and many other practitioners in the art world it is absolutely vital. Visual art as we know it simply does not exist without perceivable, material objects, even if the significance of art cannot be reduced to viewing it in an oversimplified way.[\[14\]](#)

In some cases, the concrete object is the artist. When an artist creates art that cannot be transferred and is not necessarily recorded, such as processes, conversations, and community art experiments, the only transferable, and in some ways permanent, object remaining is the creator. Work and creator begin to fuse, making visual arts come closer to performing arts, such as the theatre, music, and dance. Miwon Kwon has noted how the practices in today's art world, as it were, also mobilize art intended to be ephemeral and location-bound and at the same time partly objectify it.[\[15\]](#) There are many examples of works in the field of land and community art not transferable precisely in their original form, or even reproduced elsewhere by varying them, but art museums or galleries may still want an artist with a particular artistic style to create something similar in very diverse environments. They want that *certain something* that can be moved around, sold, and exhibited within the sphere of art. Disintegrative works are reassembled again and again. Kwon mentions Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser as examples of famous "itinerant artists" whose personas are relatively easy to treat as brands or art service providers, and the list could easily be completed with, say, HA Schult or the WochenKlausur group. WochenKlausur even describes its own "method," which the group has used in several countries including Japan, Sweden, and the U.S.[\[16\]](#)

Again, if art students are educated along this direction, they need a very different type of training from painters; they will need to be educated in communication, marketing, performance, and social skills in their own schools or somewhere else. This is a range of skills that not all visual art schools can actually teach, and that are not even always recognized as necessary elements of the educational process. Still, many students know that they need them, especially if they are inclined toward disintegrative art.

According to Kwon, this mode of operation and thinking, adopted also in art, is linked to a broader cultural situation where the active movement of objects, information, and people is considered a prerequisite for achieving attention and success. The rationale seems to be that being involved and visible in the international flow of goods and people is just as much a measure of success in art as it is in other fields, and this, on the other hand, requires that certain concrete objects – works or artists themselves – physically move from one place to another, and on which a staggering amount of information is transferred.^[17]

This observation is backed up, for example, by a visit to the web page of Artfacts.net.^[18] The pages analyze the global art markets based on the exhibition activity of the various artists. The more exhibitions an artist has had in different countries and galleries, the higher the place on the ranking list. Topping the list of several tens of thousands of quoted artists are famous names, such as Andy Warhol and Pablo Picasso, artists who produced many works of art that are still actively circulating around the world. It is interesting that there are artists placing very high on the list, such as Joseph Beuys, whose artistic activity was in many ways hard to objectify. Nonetheless, the system has managed to objectify him and have his works circulating fast and efficiently. Still, placing high on the list is a result of the works having interesting content; not just any old art gets to tour the world but some objects simply are more meaningful and rewarding than others.

Perhaps community art is an area of art that is easy to consider as having little to do with object orientation or the art markets. Breaking away may be possible. Fitting the bill are community art projects where no one individual clearly rises above others as the key creator and where no objects are produced, and conversations not documented in photographs, texts, or videos and not clearly separated from the other goings-on in the community may be the sole outcome. Very little in these remains "whole," static. Strictly speaking, you obviously cannot even give examples of these projects precisely because all traces of them have disappeared at the time of their termination and the only people aware of them may be the participants. On the other hand, for example, Grant H. Kester has documented and analyzed art projects of this kind in writing and photographs and thus, inadvertently, in fact has also objectified them.^[19]

It should be stressed that this form of "light" objectification is hardly a threat of any kind to the other dimensions of the projects. The conversation projects of the WochenKlausur group, aimed at improving the lives of drug-addict prostitutes

in Zurich while at the same time operating within the framework of art, have not become more commercial or simplified along with (the integrative activity of) Kester's publications. At any rate, in such cases the publications enable the identification and documentation of the artworks. The ability to produce such documentation can be considered an essential skill if one wants to work in the field of art, and it would be good if art schools could make their students intending to take the disintegrative path aware of this and even offer education in such skills.

WochenKlausur's own web pages describe the interaction between art and documentation in this way: "Powerful institutions like museums, schools and media are decisive for what becomes art. The economy has an influence as well as politics and scholarship. All of these factors establish the appellation art. WochenKlausur's work is thus not a priori art or non-art. It becomes art through its recognition, and that comes about within institutional mechanisms."[\[20\]](#)

Fourth, even the fact that some visual and other artists are creating art which in some cases cannot be objectified at all, not even in any documents, does not automatically mean they are distancing themselves from thinking in market terms or even attempting to do so. It is interesting that sometimes also the extremely disintegrative artistic activity, one that is not analyzed or documented in concrete form even afterwards, can have a high instrumental and market value in spite of its non-concreteness. In some contexts, art has been approached as a way of acting or thinking, a creative existence, a skill, something no longer a cultural sector of its own, but an aspect or dimension attached to any kind of activity. Art of this kind naturally cannot be realized as objects or even events, processes, or experiences that would be *strictly* art.

In Finland, this way of thinking is visible, for example, in the government art and artist policy proposal *Taide on mahdollisuuksia* ("Art is Possibilities") which says: "For a community, art is social, cultural and financial capital." Further: "Responding to the future challenges requires broadening the scope of Finnish innovation policy and understanding art as a strategic resource for development".[\[21\]](#) Displaying the same spirit, the report *Suomalainen unelma* ("The Finnish Dream") created by the internationally known IT philosopher Pekka Himanen for the Technology Industries of Finland Centennial Foundation in its epilogue raises as a prime example of all-embracing creative expertise the Tuusulanjärvi artist colony, dating back a hundred years.[\[22\]](#) Both publications attach much weight to art and consider artists as people endowed with specific creativity that can be used in various contexts, even though their definition of creativity is somewhat vague and they do not really tell how the ideas could be changed into practices.

Similar views in international discussion have been collected, for example, in the books *Creative Industries*, edited by John Hartley, and *Artful Creation*, by Lotte Darsø, which do not only provide ideas but also practical examples and even concrete recommended actions for merging art and business. Darsø writes that "I will argue that business will also have to pay attention to qualities such as energy, imagination, sensitivity

and expression, which can all be learned from the arts" and analyzes companies like Bang & Olufsen and Volvo that, according to her, have managed to realize this. In practice, this often means hiring artists for planning, design and marketing processes in which they co-operate with other kinds of professionals and help them to find unconventional solutions and working methods. In some cases art is seen as decoration or entertainment for employees but it can also function as a strategic tool transforming a company's ways of operation. [23]

This approach seems to fit seamlessly with the largely market-oriented creativity and innovation rhetoric. It is especially noteworthy that the non-objectified and disintegrative art thus emerging is even better suited to the service of the markets than object-oriented art, even if the *former* was previously considered particularly economy and market-critical. The basic idea is that in order to be a financial success on the global market you have to be creative and innovative, and creativity is in some, often unspecified way linked to art. Therefore, art is to be valued, not as a separate cultural field wrapped up in itself, but as a form of competence and resourcefulness infiltrating other fields of life. This competence, of course, takes various material forms (mobile phones, DVDs containing computer programs, cars, portions of food) but in a way that renders art indistinguishable from the non-art objects. The objects are, as it were, saturated in art; their production has required artistic competence but you cannot pin down art anywhere in the objects or the production or consumption processes. Joseph Beuys was not probably referring to this in his lecture-based literary work *Creativity = Capital* (1983), but it is hard to avoid this interpretation from a contemporary viewpoint! This is the aspect of disintegrative art that is still probably least recognized at art schools, despite the fact that it has such potential either for positive or negative influence on future artists.

When art is viewed in this ontologically challenging way, like a flavor added to commodities, it is tied to a way of thinking that is much bigger and more thoroughgoing in its market orientation than the works traded on the traditional artwork-centric (visual) art markets, which are, in global terms, relatively small compared to many other market sectors. If pushed to the extreme, this train of thought would mean that art would cease to exist as an independent entity possessing any kind of intrinsic value. Art would dissolve into anything and at the same time lose its chance to diverge into a cultural field of its own. It would also not be identified as art in the sense we are accustomed to or discussed taking into account the values and ways of thinking emphasized in the tradition of art. There would be no art objects or art institutions. Should this happen, not only would cultural diversity most likely suffer, but art education would likewise undergo major changes. Indeed, the question of how this possible trend should be dealt with in art schools is already a subject of debate. For example, should we have more teaching of communication and marketing skills and less hands-on working with materials? If yes, would art schools be changed into some kind of up-dated and one-dimensional versions of the Bauhaus? How would an ideal curriculum look like? There are no simple answers to such questions.

Whether seen as a threat or opportunity, the usefulness and success of the "artification of non-art"[24] and the conforming concrete practices remain to be tested in the future. Even if it is unlikely as the dominant approach, it still raises the thought that art may sometimes be better off if, from now on, strictly dedicated display places and objects are also assigned for it and enough emphasis is placed on the orientation that works of art can also be seen as objects delineated as relatively independent entities. This may be *one* way of keeping alive and distinctly identifiable some aspects of the traditional and still useful thinking and acting art. This does not only mean commercial objectification but also means creating objects that provide pleasure and intellectual inspiration, and that call for special skills and material innovation in their production. An "artified" mobile phone will never be a painting; a community art project will never have a fascinating surface of a sculpture.

If nothing else, this approach may help us clarify certain points of view in the discussion of questions whether and how, if at all, visual art can be something of its own kind not to be mixed with other phenomena. This, again, is necessary at least if we want to offer alternative views of the world and art: if there is only one approach, there are no alternatives. This does not mean, of course, that disintegrative art would now be out-dated or something purely negative but only that the object-oriented approach which has been criticized for decades is still not quite so useless either, although it is obvious that the view should not be interpreted naively.

It remains to be seen what the relationships between the integrative and disintegrative views will evolve into in the future. It seems they both have their niche and both can be rewarding, in commercial, critical and many other ways depending on the case. Art students who are the future artists must be helped to perceive this in the proper perspective. The issue bothers them in any case.

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Endnotes

[1] Johansson's quote is originally in Finnish in Hanna Johansson, *Maataidetta jäljittämässä. Luonnon ja läsnäolon kirjoitusta suomalaisessa nykytaiteessa 1970–1995* (Helsinki: Like, 2005), pp. 13–15. Similar historical developments have been witnessed also in other branches of art (and science), and they are often related to the pre-modern-modern-postmodern discussion where the complexity and fragmentation (sometimes "openness", as opposed to "closedness") of the works and their reception are typically seen to grow when moving towards the postmodern. Several variations on the same basic theme are presented, for example, in Wolfgang Iser, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*.

Dritte, durchgesehene Auflage (Weinheim: VCH, Acta Humaniora, 1991) and Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996/1987).

[2] WochenKlausur's statement is in www.wochenklausur.at/texte/faq_en.html (4 June 2009).

[3] Most of the key concepts and many of the topics I raise have been analyzed from different angles in various publications. My choice is to stick with only a couple of key texts. If necessary, additional sources are also easy to find through them. Not all the roots of the thoughts have been itemized with references, and I use the passive voice in places; this is expressly indicative of the article being based more on hard-to-trace discussions than on written sources.

[4] In the philosophy of art, an example of the categorization described above can be found in Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Basic Issues in Aesthetics* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1988), but there are also many others, such as Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. An Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005), relying on similar approaches. A well-known presentation on the constructs produced in the sociology of art is Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art. Second Edition* (Houndmills etc.: Macmillan, 1993). The most famous example of combining the history of art and ideas is the classic Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," in *Problems in Aesthetics. An Introductory Book of Readings*, ed. Morris Weitz. Second edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970/1951 and 1952), and Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A short History* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) also displays a similar orientation. See also Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art. A Cultural History* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2001). For a many-sided discussion on the application of tables and genealogy trees to art history and the visual arts, see Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Stammbäume der Kunst. Zur Genealogie der Avantgarde* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2005).

[5] You can also question whether it is possible to achieve a theoretical meta-level. When creating such a construct you may be blind to many alternatives and I do not intend this text to be a neutral and extensive description of the meta-level.

[6] Carroll has gathered his texts relevant to the current theme and included examples of artists and works to part II of his collection *Beyond Aesthetics. Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). One aspect of Carroll's view is that the concentration on the identification principles is a way to avoid the problems related to the attempts to define art. Although basically sound, this notion has no special significance for this text. The relationship of Carroll's views to other art philosophers employing a historical perspective to art, such as Jerrold Levinson, is also irrelevant here.

[7] Loretta Secchi, "Giotto ja 1300-luku," in *Opas taiteen maailmaan*, ed. Sandro Sproccati, translated into Finnish by Elina Suolahti and Martti Berger (Helsinki: WSOY, 1992/1991), 11. Page numbers mentioned refer to the Finnish edition of

Guide to Art.

[8] Paola Jori, "Uusimpia suuntauksia," in *Opas taiteen maailmaan*, 263.

[9] This discussion has been lively since the 1980s. A much-quoted collection, clearly showing the revolutions and changes in the ways of thinking in the late twentieth century, is Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900–2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 2003).

[10] Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 120–122 and *passim*. Of course, the precise determination of what the physical and material characteristics of objects in general are is a challenging task in the light of contemporary physics; that is a job I gladly leave to the physicists. Suffice it to say that, besides Danto, there are many other well-publicized figures questioning the "physical" view of art. One of the more famous of these is Nelson Goodman, who prefers to change the question "What is art?" to "When is art?" See, for example, Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978), 57–70.

[11] Of course, in many cases the legal questions related to the works of art also pertain to ideas that cannot be traced back to the physical form of the pieces in any straightforward way. They may, for example, be related to the plot of a story, irrespective of whether the story is expressed as a literary work, radio play, or movie. You cannot make a movie based on a book without permission from the book's copyright holder. In other words, copyright is not limited to handling physical objects. In general, it is quite unclear anyway when a work of art is unique enough that it can legally be described as an "original work of authorship" and not, for example, an illegal copy. In visual arts many themes are varied endlessly without any copyright law problems.

[12] www.wochenklausur.at/texte/kunst_en.html (4 June 2009).

[13] Hanna Johansson, cited at the beginning of the article, employs the exact thinking of Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida when analyzing the art of the Finnish conceptual artist Lauri Anttila (Johansson, *Maataidetta jäljittämässä*, 184–217). Grant H. Kester, on the other hand, leans on Jürgen Habermas when analyzing community and conversation art (for example, Stephen Willats) in his *Conversation Pieces. Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), 108–114.

[14] I will not take a stand on what the ultimate relationship between materiality and "artness" is, for example, from the viewpoint of the ontology of art. This requires a separate analysis. Here, I only want to emphasize that it is necessary to consider materiality.

[15] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another. Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2002), esp. chapters 2 and 6.

[16] www.wochenklausur.at/texte/arbeitsweise_en.htm (4 June 2009)

[17] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*. Although the movement of art and artists is nowadays more vigorous than before and makes discussing the topic all the more important, the entire phenomenon has also been studied from a historical perspective. See Deborah Cherry and Fintan Cullen, eds., *Location* (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). For a general view on culture accentuating mobility and its aesthetic aspects, see *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Special volume 1 (2005) on www.contempaesthetics.org.

[18] www.artfacts.net (4 June 2009).

[19] Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

[20] www.wochenklausur.at/texte/faq_en.html (4 June 2009).

[21] *Taide on mahdollisuuksia. Ehdotus valtioneuvoston taide- ja taiteilijapolitiittiseksi ohjelmaksi* (Helsinki: Ministry of Education, 2002), 6.

[22] Pekka Himanen, *Suomalainen unelma. Innovaatoraportti* (Helsinki: Technology Industries of Finland Centennial Foundation, 2007).

[23] Lotte Darsø, *Artful Creation. Learning-Tales of Arts-in-Business* (Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur, 2004), 149, and *passim*. John Hartley, ed., *Creative Industries* (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

[24] On the concept of "artification" see www.artification.fi (4 June 2009).