A natural order of things

by

Andreas Jari Juhani Toriseva
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Abstract

Idea and matter have both an important function in the arts and this thesis will treat the connections between them and try to discover through examples from my own work and other artists how this interface constitutes itself. Looking at the transformation of the material before and after Marcel Duchamp’s paradigm shift to an autonomous art world it will analyze what implications the construction of hierarchy between material and concept have made to artist’s practice. It will deal with categorization systems and how they are implemented in and about, art touching on the subject of museums and history. In addition the concept of nature and its use by artists will act as a backdrop to an analysis of the object world and of how materials behave, transform and present itself. The theories of Heidegger will be a support for my investigation where the ideas of arts origin will be discussed and leading up to an analysis of contemporary art, infused with a critique of certain aspects of the contemporary art scene.
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There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you its going to be a butterfly

What can be said about art in writing that cannot be said with a physical encounter? Well, it just doesn’t compare. An explanation with words cannot clothe the work in a fitting suit because it is like an animal, complete in it’s being with fur or scales, not needing anything extra. Writing about art is to make an interpretation about art which in turn is an interpretation of the world seen by the artist. Its context is then further removed from its original state and loses some of the integrity. But when one is aware of this phenomenon one can treat the subject on its own terms, not having to explain that which cannot be perceived. So writing about art has its own qualities that can be of good use if you know how to use it right.

The age of technology and information has begun and I am a part of the first generation to have been brought up with internet, mobile phones and digital cameras for a domestic use. With that comes a new way of engaging in society, both how to cope and deal with external data and how to process and filter the intake. Perhaps most important is what you do with it all. It might be for this very reason I am searching for analogous ways of interacting with the world as you will see when reading this paper. It is in our time to write, handle information and read. Never before have we had access to so much knowledge and with that come an obligation to equip oneself with the skills necessary. To make oneself understood for instance, or to take a well formulated stance, to have a well founded idea of why you are saying what you are saying. As the Swedish poet Esaias Tegnér (1782-1846) wrote: “What is unclearly said is unclearly thought”.1

Thus a theorization of reality is needed to justify what you are doing. Especially in the arts it is not longer enough to let art speak for itself, it has to have more, a concept or at least a theoretical aspect. So in the next coming 20 or so pages I will try give a cross section of my brain and the art I’ve made to tell you what you are actually looking at and how it came to be what it is. Perhaps I might even be better at writing a thesis than I have been creating artwork.

As the title of the chapter suggest, by quoting the clever R Buckminster Fuller (American inventor and self taught construction genius, 1895-1983), things cannot be foreseen or predicted based on how they appear to us now. By being open minded, attentive and critical one can learn a lot from the world. The word “world” is a vast concept that we usually toss around as we please but if we think about it is an almost overwhelming concept. One way of defining it says that it is constituted of the things, (the object) that we (the subject) relate to through language and thus create our mental concept of what it is to exist. It is extraordinary that we can interact

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1Swedish translation: Det dunkelt sagda är det dunkelt tänkta. From Tegnér’s epilogue at his masters ceremony in Lund 1820.
with such incredible things such as nature, constantly surprising us with all its complexity and yet it all seems so thought out and complete in its beauty and just “there”. I strive for this in my art, to create complex entities that come as a clear image to the viewer. Looking for that thing which makes me marvel at great art or other phenomena, that moment when the encounter transforms into amazement that makes your neurons tingle or gives you goose bumps. For that to work it is important to have “something “that enables an encounter, that is an artefact. A piece of material processed by the artist and cultivated according to his/her idea and then presented for someone else. I find great joy and engagement when working with something physical in my hands and give little pieces of myself into the object thus shifting the order of structure. That is, re-shaping or re-purposing the state of the object when I engage with it, creating small worlds within the world. And it is full of innate possibilities even in the most inconspicuous things like the transformation of a larva into a butterfly. Beauty and wonderful things can emerge from within whatever and it is the artist’s mission to be the excavator and uncover these and show them to the world.

Transformation of material is one of the main ideas upon which I build my work. There is some kind of transcendental notion in the shifting of physical and mental properties to something else. Take for instance an idea into an object (manifestation), a piece of wood into a lever (functionality) or when combining materials to create something else, a sum bigger than it parts (aesthetics). What possibility does the combination pencil and paper constitute? Practically endless combinations created by one of the most abundant naturally occurring organic materials, namely trees. Graphite in the pencil is made from a variation of charcoal and clay which is compressed organic material, millions of years old (most likely trees) and paper made from cellulose derived from trees. How amazing it is that something with such simple components can create such a multitude of outcomes. The history of the world in the grip of my fingers can create something entirely new and never seen before. All that is needed is myself as a mediator, a facilitator of variables.

But what of the contemporary artist who solely works with ideas and makes other people perform or produce their pieces? Below I put forth a certain perspective on arts which have its essence in the craftsmanship, some kind of artisan skill that invokes admiration in the beholder and the joy of an aesthetic encounter. As Roger Caillois (1913-1978) so romantically describes it in the following quote where he refers to universal beauty that we may come in contact with through lapidary work. He formulated the same idea as Heidegger distinctively pins down with a more academic vernacular in the fifties when he talks about the thingliness of things. This position might well be deemed outdated today in the contemporary arts where a diminishing
amount of practical skills are taught in art schools while theory and conceptual thinking is prioritized. Have we surpassed this creational aspect of art and is it just an old fashioned idea?

These consist of subtle and ambiguous signals reminding us, through all sorts of filters and obstacles, that there must be a preexisting general beauty vaster than that perceived by human intuition - a beauty in which man delights and which in his turn he is proud to create. Stones - and not only they but also roots, shells, wings, and every other cipher and construction in nature - help to give us an idea of the proportions and laws of that general beauty about which we can only conjecture and in comparison with which human beauty must be merely one recipe among others, just as Euclid’s theorems are but one set out of the many possible in a total geometry. In stones the beauty common to all the kingdoms of nature seems vague, even diffuse, to man, a being himself lacking in density, the last comer into the world, intelligent, active, ambitious, driven by an enormous presumption. He does not suspect that his most subtle researches are but an exemplification within a given field of criteria that are ineluctable, though capable of endless variation. Nonetheless, even though he neglects, scorns, or ignores the general or fundamental beauty which has emanated since the very beginning from the architecture of the universe and from which all other beauties derive, he still cannot help being affected by something basic and indestructible in the mineral kingdom: something we might describe as lapidary that fills him with wonder and desire.²

Here is a clear notion of the world as something surrounding us, containing information and beauty that we can extract by interacting with materials. Today there has occurred a disengagement with material in the arts and instead we are left thinking about and contemplating it, putting forth philosophies and theories and complicating its nature instead. But what is then the material for a substance that can be used in art? Is it just things from the material world or can it be abstract such as sounds or video, i.e non-tactile forms as well? According to Heidegger man gets knowledge from the world by working it, realizing it as the consciousness comes into contact with the physical aspects of its being. In his book The Origin of Work of Art from 1950 he tells us that:

Every work has this thingly character. What would they be without it?...Yet even this much-vaulted “aesthetic experience” cannot evade the thingliness of the artwork. The stony is in the work of architecture, the wooden in the woodcarving, the colored in the painting, the vocal in the linguistic work, the sounding in the work of music. The thingly is so salient in the artwork that we ought rather to say the opposite: the architectural work is in the stone, the woodcarving in the

wood, the painting in the color, the linguistic work in the sound, the work of music in the note. “Obviously,” it will be replied. What, however, is this obvious thingliness in the artwork?³

This point of view takes on a rather concrete way of describing the art piece. It has certain attributes and a thingliness (dingheit) combined with something else. The maker’s spirit perhaps? Heidegger goes on to say that:

This something else in the work constitutes its artistic nature. The artwork is indeed a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself... The work makes publicly known something other than itself, it manifests something other: it is an allegory. In the artwork something other is brought into conjunction with the thing that is made... It seems almost as though the thingliness in the artwork is the substructure into and upon which the other, authentic, element is built. And is it not this thingly element which is actually produced by the artist’s craft?⁴

Take for example two of the biggest names of the minimalist movement who had very different ways of working but still were put under the same label, Richard Serra⁵ and Donald Judd⁶ who each can represent one side of the dilemma. The first is known for his massive metal planes bent with enormous force in huge machines using gigawatts of energy and a whole stable of technicians. The labour is done in the factory without Serra but is in the end his creation. He does not choose to be a bystander, but can’t participate due to safety regulations and lack of competence for that level of engineering. The work is an extension of his idea and body. Judd on the other hand is not interested at all in the material; he seeks ultimate form without any attachment to physical properties. He therefore wants material that does not show any trace of human intervention and thus orders specifically from factories were robots do the manufacturing. Which in the end is nothing but an eternal defiance of the material world, if something is to show the absence of material a certain “something” still needs to be made in order to present the idea. Materialisation is unavoidable in the arts; however the true question is about how it is being made.

The postminimal had its origin in the renaissance conception of an artwork as an autonomous object expressing universal truths produced by the unique sensibility and talent of the individual artist. The term postminimalism was conceived by the critic Robert Pincus-Witten in 1971 and described an era of the arts in America from the mid-60’s to mid-70’s and included other movements such as body art, land art, performance and conceptual art. That which connected the postminimalists and separated them from minimalism was the de-centralization of

⁴ Ibid p.3
⁵ See image p.23
⁶ See image p.23
objects, the questioning of autonomy. Postminimalism opened up a more flexible approach for creation and gave way for a more process based work attitude which used different techniques, methods and materials. The body became a part of the art piece and the relation between object and context was dissolved, incorporating natural environments and absorbed femininity to the aesthetics not just as an object in a historical patriarchal tradition (the minimalist movement was mainly dominated by white western males) but as an active producer and subject.

By referring to Postminimalism and minimalism with Serra and Judd I want to adhere to my line of thought, namely that the order of creational processes within the arts has been led astray. It doesn’t have to be as categorized as it is today, much like science and art have become closer again after about 150 years of separation, why is there a rift between concept and crafts? I think this can be derived from a parasitic organism that has come to influence, if not dominate the art world today and which I will talk more about in chapter four.
Chapter II

The artistic explorer

We need the tonic of wildness...At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature.  

I like to see myself as an explorer, and not only in the arts but in life. I may not be as courageous as Magellan or Amundsen with ventures into the uncharted West Indies or the North Pole. But regarding myself as an explorer of the world makes life a lot more interesting. I might not have a legacy after death or a name written down in the encyclopaedias but I sure made the most out of the time I had on this spaceship earth, as Mr Fuller describes it, travelling through the cosmos at 390 kilometres per second. 

The area of greatest focus for my exploration right now is my artistic practice. In it I compare myself to an observer who gazes at the world through his keyhole. He sees the whole picture but that view is only a glimpse of an overall reality. He has a quest for knowledge, wants to know about the world and why he is in it. He uses his vision because it is his primary sense. You see he is a visual artist. Not a scientist, not an author and nor is he a theoretician. How will he gain access to all that is available out there and what will he learn from it? When he observes the material of the world he is searching for connections, links that will somehow in the end align and create patterns. Hopefully he will have the wit to understand that which has been cloaked from his view from all those investigative examinations. An uncloaking to discern the truth as Heidegger would put it. But this is not a guaranteed ending, it might well be that all that looking just ends up in an unfulfilled utopia but it will not have been in vain because it is not possible to get a complete understanding of existence, the point is in the voyage itself and the goal is just an illusion to keep you exploring.

Bringing your attention to a sauna I built in the spring of 2013 I will explain the underlying ideas and structure of the work that will uncover some of the aspects mentioned earlier in the first chapters. Apart from being a sculpture it is also a research project and an investigation into my level of skills and craftsmanship. The aspect of learning from my work is something that I cannot understate since it is the key to progress and new ideas. Doing things that you already know won’t get an artist very far. The piece has a multifaceted level of input but the main ideas from which it is created is the notion of how social interaction is constituted

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8 http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=how-fast-is-the-earth-mov (referenced 2014-01-10)
10 See image p.24
within society, childhood and the concept of nationalism. Starting with the first: In what way do
human relationship relate to space, tradition and culture? Is any platform/forum different from
any other? The sauna is in its uttermost existence a space for reflection, be there one person or
twenty people in it, and there is something about heat and sweat that make you think. How a
confirmation of a physical object can express the state of something abstract such as human
relations is a thrilling subject that connects to architectural themes. The sculpture addresses this
by the reduced scale, 1:4 that puts the subject as an observer instead of a participant. This is a
sauna built for no one. The miniaturizing signals a deficient function of purpose. What meaning
does it has when the function is no longer available to us? Is it in some way useless? I will leave
these questions unanswered because I feel it better to have an open ending.

The miniature sauna is also based on a childish joy in building derived from playing with
Legos as a kid and always wanting a bigger and more complex set. I remember that the fun was
in assembling the pieces and when that was done a bit of a hollow aftertaste emerged since there
were no more pieces left, no more problems to solve. The play was not that important and I
usually kept them on a shelf were they ended up as dust collectors (like most art pieces made in
school as well). That my sculpture would be in the shape of a sauna has strong connections to my
childhood (and connects to the third topic of nationalism) since I used to go on weekly visits
with my dad to an old sauna close to where I grew up. Built by Finnish working immigrants in
the sixties it had been a part of my dad’s upbringing too and was unfortunately incinerated 2012
by some stupid teenagers. So perhaps it is reconciliation, a post mortem tribute to my Finnish
heritage.

Returning to my father I felt that I had something to prove for myself, to get acknowledged
in a father-son relationship by building something that constitutes our bond. Realizing myself as
an adult and stepping out of my father’s shadow by creating something of my own since he is a
self taught mechanical wizard and do-it- yourself man. I wanted to question and experience the
notion of the Nordic stereotype about becoming your own adult man via building something like
a house or sauna. So when the first part of highly individual research had taken place the next
obvious step was to gain information about how to build a sauna. So I set out combing the web
for all kinds of solutions and DIY guides. After doing this for some weeks I had accumulated
enough knowledge to feel comfortable that I could start the construction. Parallel with this I had
made blueprints and drawings trying to visualize and make it easier for me to get help at the
wood workshop. And then it was mostly learning by doing and during the construction I had to
get advice from more experienced persons so I got my dad to give me some feedback on the state
of the sauna so far. Also Santeri, a Finnish classmate and thus naturally a sauna expert, came and
gave some pointers and all of this research was equally important.
By using research I was able to build this myself and it made the whole difference. The toil and sweat together with hard earned knowledge cannot be traded for any money. Although it is a conceptual piece I wouldn’t have wanted it built by a carpenters hand just based on my blueprints. That idea is thought pretty much standard today and taking Jeff Koons\textsuperscript{11} as a formidable example it is possible to see that even the production of art can be questioned and problematized into art and he is more engaged with the syntax of art and not the artefact. He can be likened to the CEO of a big company producing different products. He doesn’t really care about what’s being put out of the factory as long as it raises the stocks of his investment. So he is actually abstracting the production and treating the market as his medium. But to me it seems that something has been lost along the way. The proximity of the correlation between mind and skill is of importance to me in my creation process and to be able to craft something that carries my touch and intentions into the world and will linger on without me is encouraging.

\textsuperscript{11} See image p.25
Chapter III

Taxonomy and art

When I am working on a problem I never think about beauty. I only think about how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.  

Nature is more complex than we usually believe and it is not something separated from humanity. The objectification and distancing of nature occurs regularly and we also use it as we see fit, both in a practical concrete way when obtaining resources such as coal or oil and as a tool in political discussions when issues are raised about global warming etc. Artists use nature as well because it has a powerful charge and they treat it as motif, canvas, tool or as a cause among other. The mediated image of nature is most of the time overly aesthetized, dramatic or staged. It can be at times cruel, unforgiving and ugly also (a fact usually neglected). But therein lays the attraction to me and I find the schism between reality and image a big asset in my practice. I admit that I am a bit of a romantic but growing more alert and concerned the farther I go with it. Trying to put myself into a bigger perspective and acknowledge my place in the universe makes things more comprehensible. To find joy in the little things and not get upset over details that are but miniscule in the grander scheme of events. I find nature the most important source of inspiration that I can work with, it is so full of extraordinary elements that I could never be bored. In nature there is something so independent and self-sustaining that without having a goal or purpose it create the most elaborate designs and structures – from the micro-biological level of systems such as photosynthesis to the global tectonic plate movements which creates the imposing roof of the world, the Himalayas.

Realigning my thoughts to the shift in society and the emergence of history writing and art as a concept in the enlightenment era, I would like to address the concept of institutions and the effect of classification systems on knowledge. I have made two pieces related to this phenomenon which to me is an interesting field for critique and research. Systems and structures of rules are something that everyone has but they can look immensely different depending on who you are, how many are involved, what agenda there is and a whole lot of other factors. Sometimes they are self-regulating like nature but more often they are defined and framed when applied to humans.

My sculpture Container is a fragmented view of all the components that constitute a tree, de-assembled and put into generic glass cubes that display them in isolation, separated from each other. It is much like an entity system or type of measurement that allows different parts of the same origin to be equally compared in a neutral state. A cubic decimetre of any substance could

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12 Hal Box, *Think Like an Architect*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2007 p.81
13 See image p.26
be stored, viewed and studied. Weight, colour, density and other qualities can easily be perceived through the transparent casing and invites a closer examination. Each unit is sealed and cannot be opened without breaking the glass and so it also acts as a kind of time capsule, recording the state of the material inside at a given moment in time and place. Apart from the glass cube units there is also a wooden box construction that functions both as a presentation platform that can display one glass cube at a time on a pedestal or securely hide it within by a simple turning of the design. The versatile function of this is meant to be an efficient feature for a field explorer in any environment where a specimen might be taken out of the habitat and be instantly secured in an empty glass cube and upon arrival at a desired location act as an exhibition device. This multipurpose instrument is designed with both practicality and aesthetic value in mind, much like the showcases and presentation booths at museums are fashioned, together forming a visual language that is readily recognizable and almost stereotypical.

This is a part of why I am using the visual vernacular of museums because I can contextualize it within my practice, to show that there is a thought behind it and how it is used for different purposes. A common factor among the variety of scientific fields is that of classification and how to filter and distinguish certain objects from others by looking at the individual qualities. It’s much like a work done by this year’s representative in the Finnish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Antti Laitinen in the Alvaro Alto pavilion\textsuperscript{14}. His installation is titled Forest Square (2013) and it relates to my piece in many ways. He took a 10 by 10 meter section of forest and cut everything down along with the top layer of soil and moved it into his studio where he organized everything into different piles according the nature of the object. When this was accomplished and all the twigs, leaves, stones and everything was in order he arranged them in a pattern system based on De Stijl theories to make nature abstract.

By using a taxonomy we can somehow get closer to the true nature of existence, putting more and more branches on the tree of knowledge that hopefully in the end will have grown to reach the edge of cosmos itself and offer us total understanding. I think artists do this in a similar way to scientist but it differs in method not in goal. Because art as an image of the world is striving for the same goal as science do, namely to give an image of the worlds true essence. What they both are looking for is (in science very defined, in art highly varied) beauty through nature that enables us to relate to the world.\textsuperscript{15} And if you are not Kantian this is a subjective thing that is relative to the spectator and thus poses a very difficult problem for scientists who are often looking for simplicity, clarity and symmetry that works the same way for everyone, a general rule you might say. Artists however, discern it through complexity and constant shifts, through subjectivity and entropy, thus enacting a personal relationship with truth. According to Kant we

\textsuperscript{14} See image p.27
\textsuperscript{15} http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-mind/ (referenced 2014-01-10)
can never truly understand the true nature of things because they are hidden from us by our perception, we cannot know more than we can extract with our minds or tools. Or you can, as in the tradition of Plato and Descartes, see it as the world being there through our perception of it, so all we know now about the world is the world, constantly expanding the limits. The important divider between the arts and science is that art focuses on the act of perceiving whilst science is about the object being perceived.

I recollect the works of Susan Hiller at the Freudian Museum in London (1994)\(^\text{16}\) where she arranged a setting based on her own personal ontological system trying to expand the Freudian universe through non-epistemological research and aesthetic presentation and coherence.\(^\text{17}\) Using the framework of the museum is nowadays a common concept within the arts where it keeps pace with the postmodern ideas of questioning history, truth, identity and the hegemonies set down by modernism. Looking at the systems that allowed art to be what it is today and putting them under the autopsy knife to see what might happen when they are fiddled with. Nothing is holy anymore and it is important to scrutinize these opinion-making apparatuses before taking them as a given precondition.

Collecting and keeping objects is, I think, a fundamental human drive. To possess something from the world and make it to one’s own, whether it is for caring reasons or greedy reasons it is all in the end an egocentric act. The museum serves this purpose on a grander scale where nations or rich individuals gather objects of a certain interest for a greater audience. So here I am trying to show my particular field of interest to a possible crowd that might agree with my way of categorization. But I haven’t yet figured out if it is about me trying to make sense of the world or making the world make sense of me.

Another project of mine was one called *Misread History*\(^\text{18}\) at NYLO 2012 and was a site-specific installation dealing with a terminology and visual presentation commonly seen in historical and cultural museums today. The foundation of this installation came from a project created some time before and was partly fictional and partly real. I created an umbrella concept for my ideas under which I could gather and examine aspects of both my artistic works and of my interests in science. It took the form of an organisation that went under the name of ATSAS which is an acronym for Andreas Toriseva Society of Art and Science and whose main goal was to diffuse the borders between the two worlds of art and science. As it is now I can see a stronger connection between them and cross fertilization is more common than not in many fields but there are still some situations where reconciliation is difficult such as when we raise the question about cognitive value in art, the credibility of creative research and the rigid classification

\(^{16}\) http://www.freud.org.uk/exhibitions/10535/after-the-freud-museum/ (referenced 2014-01-10)

\(^{17}\) See image p.28

\(^{18}\) See image p.29
systems.

So in creating my own organization I could choose to do what I wanted and play with the concepts of both worlds to see what the outcome would be. (See appendix for the ATSAS statutes) The first step in realizing this society was to create a physical toolbox with the necessary equipment to deal with any given situation in the field into which I was to venture. This is of course a ghost project because all I would ever need was inside my head already or could be incorporated the more I got exposed to the environment. But anyhow, I built a wooden box with some technical features, such as an extractable handle and hidden drawers, then put a brass plate on it with the ATSAS logotype and this was to be the first piece in the installation. With it I also created a written entirely fictional history about an old and unknown civilization, created tools and objects that had been excavated by the ATSAS and so put on display at NYLO as such.

By doing this I wanted to ask the audience about the credibility of museums and what facts and history actually are. How does one know for sure that a shard of clay displayed at Þjóðminjasafnið comes from the first human settlement in Iceland for example? I wanted to urge the visitors to think twice before taking information for granted and with a totally mocked up archaeological show this installation might do so. This work connects in many aspects to that of the artist Mark Dion whom I have been looking at a lot and went to see in Sittard, down south in The Netherlands. He opens up a possibility for narratives through objects that somehow have been gathered by different methods. By personally arranging the objects he is referring to the phenomenon of the Wünderkabinett (Cabinet of Wonders) and the human urge for categorizing one’s surroundings. What differs here is that I gave a predetermined narrative and played on the audience’s willingness to believe instead of the audience creating stories themselves.
Chapter IV

Evolution of the object

“The realization of the passage of time is somehow made concrete through the object, which outlive us”. 19

A way of approaching history and the arts is to look at it chronologically as is usually taught at art academies and there it states that in the beginning there was the world and then there was man. Man made use of the world by shaping it according to his own desire. Mans greatest skill is that he can make tools to perform tasks which he cannot. He can extend his mind into things by crafting them and giving them a purpose. This is fundamental for human beings. But the extraordinary thing is that it is not enough to achieve functionality or purpose alone but that the object made has an aesthetic. And this is the ultimately defining attribute for us humans, to make objects pleasing, beautiful and desirable. At the farthest point beyond this is a creation of objects with only aesthetic properties, without a practical purpose. We nowadays call this phenomenon “art” and since first appeared 60,000 years ago in cave paintings it has expanded greatly into many different fields of human activity.

Humans in early civilizations, e.g. the Greeks or Chinese, didn’t make a rigid distinction between objects and art. A craftsman highly skilled in his trade was all he could be renowned for but he still made clay pots or fireworks. In western history this developed further under the influence of the Catholic Church during the middle ages and here, pictorial and sculptural depictions made great advances with artists like Caravaggio, Velázquez and Rembrandt Van Rijn. But it was still not an art form but a profession much like the baker or taxman. Then something happened that made painters and sculptors free from the clutches of the church, namely science. It thwarted the foundation of Christian dogmas and made the human soul and mind free to do what it pleased. Many artists now started to work with everyday reality, for example in still lives and portraits. Then in the 18th century the enlightenment came and category systems were beginning to be implemented in all the fields of knowledge mankind had at its disposal.

A distinction was made between “art” and “non-art” and museums were built to house pieces of works of art and the foundations were laid for art history to be written. And it is from here we can derive a rather clear line of art development up until today through various changes in the world with reactions and counter actions: Political art, decorative art, environmental art, and the list goes on. One thing that had been a constant all the way through art history and human culture is that aesthetics had been the primary core of art creation which confined it to objects which can manifest it for our sensory perception. Suddenly aesthetics had nothing to do

with art anymore because all this changed at the beginning of the 20th century with a man called Marcel Duchamp who demonstrated the idea that whatever an artist calls art is art. This is a shift from the traditional viewpoint that an audience defines what it is to the act of intention by the artist.

Arthur C. Danto (1924-2013) explains this well when he defines the boundaries of art in his writings, among others, in the essay *The Artworld* from 1964. I will boil it down to a few headers to make it short and clear. Art is about **representation** since it always refers to something whether it is a feeling, the act of painting itself or a social state. It has also an **expression** that comes from the artist. This is unavoidable if not created by a robot and it tells the viewer what the artist believe or think about the subject concerned. It does so solely by using **metaphors of representation and expression**, which always depend on **historical** context. **Interpretation** is that of the audience reading the artist representation and expression and will perhaps understand his/hers intention with the piece.

This lead to a change in what subjects or objects could be seen as art, to the so called de-materialization of the art object. It was now no longer the artefact that possessed the qualities of art but rather the concept of its creation in the artist’s mind. Now the body, events, social interaction and hired contractors building works from an artist’s notes could be called art if that was what the artist intended it to be. Gregory Sholette bring the event up to date in his text *DARK MATTER Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere* that is published in the collection Visual Worlds where he discusses the impact of the so called dark matter of the art world, that is, all the people that act as the foundation for the high art that get the most exposure, for instance museum workers, Sunday painters, art students, gallery workers and the such.

However, while this apathy regarding authorship sweeps away several previously valued artistic qualities, including personal expression and the uniqueness of a particular object, it also eliminates from the process of artistic valorization an measurement of the artist’s technical capabilities...Just what is it that prevents this sort of non-professional creative activity from directly entering the value structure of the elite art world? Or, to ask this question in reverse, how is it that the products of art remain “high” or “elite,” when cigarette covered lawn gnomes are scrupulously placed on display by leading, metropolitan art museums? The same question might be posed of artistic authorship...However, in order to answer these questions we first need a working model of the way artistic value is normally produced within the contemporary art world, one that can explain why not just any tobacco encrusted dwarf gets to enter such an elite domain.21

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21 Gregory Sholette, *DARK MATTER Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere*, internet release, 2004 p.7
A phenomenon called ready-mades was implemented by Marcel Duchamp and they are simply objects taken from reality without alterations made by the artist but rather re-contextualizing them for instance in a gallery space. Take a bicycle wheel and mount it on a stool and now you have a sculpture.22

I think a lot of this comes from a figure that I’ve come absolutely to detest in the history of recent art, Marcel Duchamp – a man who achieved everything and who achieved nothing. I suppose art would not have the shape it has now without Duchamp. But I find that Duchamp made a great deal toward the bourgeoisation of art.23

I have to agree on this with Carl André and nowadays I feel that Duchamp’s legacy has come to a point where art no longer has any self respect and that contemporary art only revolves around its own vain image, art for artists and this is most clearly visible in a field commonly termed as “slack art” that is the continuation of the YBA in the nineties who also are referred to sometimes as neo-conceptualists. This is a sort of aesthetic that is somehow a lack of aesthetics. I can see this trend in Listaháskóli Íslands that is strongly influenced by Arte Povera and Fluxus with a dash of Dadaism. By the start of the intellectual and linguistic paradigm that conceptual art delivered there was no room left for art which expressed emotions on the strictly controlled scene of theorist, critics and institutions. The opinion shifted to the deconstruction of the artwork, the nullifying of messages and a complete indifference to the value artefacts as such. To an extent I think that art loses its mainstream public about every 20 years, or say a generation. Before an art can succeed into the history books, critics need to acknowledge it, a distinction has to been made to distinguish it from other art and it has to have something benevolently reproductive about it to reach the masses (or this was at least before the internet). When great shifts happen they tend to happen radically, say for instance the impressionists who did not appeal to the general public but now is probably the most liked art-ism. People who don’t have an art education, haven’t read art history or been fortunate enough to have parents interested in art have, I think, difficulties with contemporary art. They don’t know what it is, how to interact with it or what is good or bad art. All these problems set up a threshold that only the most vigilant surpass.

In this light I think Duchamp can retrospectively be seen as the protagonist (although he was probably unaware himself) of an elicitation of the arts since it only affected the art world who knew the impacts of his elevation of objects / devaluation of art objects in regards to art history and criticism. Before there had only been art and not art, people knew what was what. Then they got confused, and I think this ghost still lingers over contemporary art. But however I

22 See image p.30
am not saying that art needs to be explained or that it was an entirely bad thing but that a jargon rules the scene today that can be likened to a group of cubicle employees with a distinct humour, taste and fashion that works in a company building. The other members of the staff recognize them as a weird, self-secluded club and don’t feel that they belong in their presence when they keep making inside jokes.

This is one interpretation of the development of art but the original intention that came from the Dadaists was rather different from the outcome. Instead of a new concept of art where anything could be art an even more distinguishable system was later on invented. The market changed/ intervened and engulfed the whole anti-art concept and later became a part of the art institutions. So the market distorted the essential unity of material and artwork. This is the parasitic organism I mentioned earlier on in chapter I and I think one can clearly see the impact of it today were money is the main medium in the art world, sadly enough to many a poor and striving artists. The gap is immense between an icon like Gerhard Richter and a newly graduated artist from Listaháskolan Ísland.

The idea of elitism was something the Dadaist strongly opposed and believed in a non-hierarchical art world where they wanted to destroy boundaries between high and low culture through using a non-logical approach with satire, gibberish, jokes and utter nonsense in order to clear the earth of the agony of World War I. By eliminating art as it was they wanted to liberalize it so the common man could use it to deal with his pains. All in all, the Dadaists advocated a non-art and wanted no connections to anything that had the suffix –ism. Their ideals were very much honourable and make much sense although the methods of carrying them out were everything else but conventional. They used writing combined with collage, used chance and randomness in their works as well as all kinds of performances and social interactions. But in the endt this joyful and righteous movement had little real effect on the giant capitalisms body. Anti-art will sadly forever be a contradiction because being against the system means that you are feeding it something new which it will later on engulf. But the fight never ends, stand tall and walk your own path and in time you will be rewarded.
Chapter V

Conclusion

When talking about creating and producing, the discourse often tends to slip into crafts, or rather the current term applied arts, and that is somehow looked down on from the fine arts perspective. This in turn brings up the question about outsider art and art being made without institutional guidance (reforming). I find it amusing that going to art school is said to be one of the more liberating educations one could go to but this is unfortunately not the case. I can sense strong pressure and influence from contemporary artist and their collaborators galleries, collectors and such who are the opinion makers. An unformulated air of preferred conduct is somehow always just above my head telling me what to make, a sort of global group pressure that can also be sensed when going to modern art museums and looking in magazines like *Frieze* or *Art Forum*.

The state of art today is social/alone, contemporary/eclectic, inviting/excluding, scientific/aesthetic among a lot of other things. It is not, however, functionless, at a standstill or retrogressive. It does carry a whole lot of junk in its baggage and it is not always a fun thing to carry as an art student. Being educated in the fine arts brings both freedom and constraints. In this essay I have shown the duality that constitutes my practice and consider that both concept and crafts plays an equally important role in my creation.

So I am putting up a personal protest against the dominating hegemony about the conceptual value over the value of craftsmanship today within the art scene and stand for a romantic view where original creation and the artist’s touch still matters. There is no such thing as a split between craft and concept, there never was. It was only implied by the market that saw possibilities to enter a new playing field and thus distorted the equilibrium.

The great test for me graduating as a fine artist is to work against this illusion and try to make people more aware of the situation. Perhaps through art, perhaps just by living.
Sources

Books


Sholette, Gregory, *DARK MATTER Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere*, 2004.(Ebook)


Internet


http://www.sciencemag.org/content/225/4674/1269 (referenced 2014-01-10)

Appendix a.

Purpose and goal of ATSAS:

ATSAS aims to shed enlightenment about the state of objects condition and affinity in the modern society’s discourse. By focusing on the objects around the modern man we hope to describe her place and relationship to the environment in which she dwells. It is as important to ask questions as giving answers and work as a conductor between subjective judgements and statical objects.

History and Foundation:

In Reykjavik 2012 the framework for this institution was made and I took on the office as unanimous and constant chairman of the board. This individual institution (that is the person Andreas Toriseva) functions through several controlling bodies and governing agencies that together forms ATSAS

Practical work:

A lot of energy is put into concrete application such as production, conservation, research and marketing. A more theory based department is working alongside and reflects upon the effects and consequences of art and in practice. Investigation is mainly put into cognitivism in art, ontological approaches to aesthetics and scientific methods.

Research:

Is constantly practised by it existence. Reflections and self-criticising studies are blended with detailed material investigations and aging processes.

The collections:

Began autumn 2012 and has so far gathered a small amount of objects but is under continuous growth. They are collected by supervision of the Gathering committee were objects are being audited and gone through quality control judged by a set of criteria’s concerning aesthetics, history, cultural value among others.
Appendix b.

Richard Serra
*Between the Torus and the Sphere (Toruaren eta esferaren artean)*
2003-2005
Weathering steel, four torus and four spherical sections, each section: 14’ × 50’ (4.27 × 15.24 m); overall: 14’ × 50’ × 53’ 11 3/8” (4.27 × 15.24 × 16.44 m); plate thickness: 2” (5 cm).
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa
Photo: Erika Barahona-Ede

http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/17147

Donald Judd
*Untitled*
1980
Steel, aluminium and perspex
22.9 x 101.6 x 78.7 cm

© Donald Judd Foundation/VAGA, New York and DACS, London 2002

http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/judd-untitled-t03087
Sauna
2013
Wood, paint, lava rocks, metals, rockwool, tar, glass.
72 x 80 x 130 cm
Den Haag
Jeff Koons
*Balloo Dog (Blue)*
1994-2000
high chromium stainless steel with transparent color coating
121 x 143 x 45 inches
307.3 x 363.2 x 114.3 cm
5 unique versions (Blue, Magenta, Yellow, Orange, Red)

http://www.jeffkoons.com/site/images/cel14_sm.jpg
Container
2013
Wood, glass, silicone, mould, bark, needles, roots, water, pinecones
Wood cube approx 12 x 14 x 12 cm. Glass cube 11 x 11 x 10 cm
Reykjavik
Susan Hiller
*From The Freud Museum*
1991 – 1996

Misread History
2012
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Reykjavik
Marcel Duchamp

*Readymade: bicycle wheel*

1913

Diameter 64.8 cm, mounted on a stool, 60.2 cm high.

Original lost. Replica. Private collection.

http://www.marcelduchamp.net/images/bicycle_wheel.jpg