# Interventions, experimentation, markets

## Art education and cross-disciplinary creative practice

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Summary: This paper begins by re-examining two major traditions - one intellectual, one vocational - which have historically defined art education in the West. In recent years, however, contemporary art and design have seen the emergence of cross-disciplinary work forms, which are rapidly becoming the norm in creative practices and industries, locally as well as internationally. The curricula of established art academies, implicitly based on traditional concepts of art and design, do not yet reflect these changes. In this light, the Willem de Kooning Academy’s 2013 curriculum reform is a radical one.

## Idealism and fine art

### Plato

In Plato’s conception of academia (Ἀκαδημία) there is no place for visual artists. In book ten of *The Republic*, Plato, expanding on the classical Greek concept of *mimesis*, rejects artistic representation as “third from the truth”[^1] - in other words, an imitation of an imitation (the true original existing only in the metaphysical spheres). Rather than conveying ideas, painters offered nothing but mirrors and shadows, which could only distract from the philosophical truth. Such notions would eventually inspire the iconoclastic movements of later centuries, in Christian as well as Islamic cultures.

A partial exception was granted in the case of music: while Plato banned most harmonic systems from his ideal Republic (as well as all instruments except for the lyre and the harp), music was at least recognised as the creation of beauty.[^2] Here, Plato was indebted to Pythagorean thinking, with its discovery of corresponding laws of symmetrical beauty in music, mathematics and macrocosmic nature. This exception would have far-reaching consequences for the very definition of the arts in the European Middle Ages. Music was included in the canon of the *septem artes liberales*, the seven liberal arts, together with grammar and rhetoric (as the precursors of linguistics and philology), dialectics (as the precursor of philosophical logic), and arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. On the other hand, those disciplines which prefigured what would eventually become the art and design professions (including weaving and architecture) were relegated to the canon of the ‘lower’ *artes mechanicae* which also included agriculture, cooking, blacksmithing, martial arts and trade.

### Middle ages and renaissance

This normative divide has persisted to the present day. In fact, it can be plainly noticed in the field of art and design education: on one hand, we have the ‘liberal arts’ model, as the humanist continuation of the *septem artes liberales*; on the other hand, we have the model of vocational art and design craftsmanship, as an (often class-conscious) continuation of the ‘lower’ *artes mechanicae*.

The Italian neoplatonist Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino attempted to break through this divide when he founded his new Platonic Academy in 15th-century Florence (financed by the House of Medici and working in close collaboration with contemporary painters such as Botticelli). Through its complete integration of Pythagorean thought, Renaissance neoplatonism was fundamentally based on aesthetics, and on an aesthetics-centred metaphysics. Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, and later Raphael’s *School of Athens* and Leonardo da Vinci’s geometrical drawings of the human figure, are all clear examples of visual art striving for that same level of beauty (both transcendental and mathematical-harmonic) which Plato had recognised only in music.

### 20th century

From the Renaissance to the present day, much of the history of Western visual arts can be interpreted as a continuous struggle for emancipation from the ‘lower’ crafts, and acceptance into the ‘higher’ liberal arts. Through the break with scholastic science in the anti-university academy movement of the 17th century, the liberal arts were transformed into the modern humanities and sciences. In this respect, contemporary notions such as ‘concept art’ (a term coined in 1961 by the philosopher and artist Henry Flynt, who was fully aware of these historical issues), [^3] ‘dematerialisation’ or ‘artistic research’ do not really describe anything new.[^4] At their simplest level, they express a desire by artists to emancipate themselves from the ‘lower’ crafts, and to have their work accepted as intellectual labour; or, figuratively speaking, to be accepted as thinkers in Plato’s republic. In this light, ‘concept’ (or ‘conceptual’) art is in fact straightforward idealism, with an agenda that can be traced as far back as Hegel, who wrote in 1828: “[...] art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place.”[^5]

The notion of artistic research still carries the potential to break through the confines of conceptualism: rather than merely implying that artists should conform to academia and standard notions of intellectual labour, it offers a way of cutting through idealism, and of emancipating artistic practice itself as an act of thinking. A similar notion was pursued in Western continental philosophy, by Martin Heidegger and later others such as Jacques Derrida; in East Asian intellectual traditions, such ontological and deconstructive thinking goes back much further, to the earliest beginnings of Taoism (interestingly, in the same century as Plato). Therefore it is not surprising that this divide between fine art and applied art does not exist in countries like China and Japan, except as imported Western culture.

## From metaphysics to ontology, from arts to crafts

Rather than being resolved, the dualisms of Western art seem only to have shifted: from ‘mechanical’ versus ‘liberal’ arts, to ‘applied’ versus ‘fine’ arts; or, in the 19th and 20th centuries, ‘design’ versus ‘visual art’; and finally, in the 21st century, ‘creative industries’ versus ‘artistic research’. After the recent sweeping cuts in public funding for the arts sector in the Netherlands (which, incidentally, have equally affected many ‘commercial’ designers who are in fact largely dependent on commissions from subsidised arts institutions), art school students today see ‘creative industries’ and ‘artistic research’ as their two major career options.[^6] The question remains as to whether the two are in fact mutually exclusive.

From a sociological viewpoint, the desire by artists to be recognised intellectually in Platonic academia may be understood as a class struggle resulting in upward social mobility. The notion of the Renaissance painter as an independent maker, researcher and entrepreneur is arguably the earliest manifestation of what Richard Florida calls the ‘creative class’ - a description that applies not only to creative industries, but may include almost any type of high-skilled labour.[^7]

Another type of class consciousness could be observed in artist-designers who refused this ‘intellectual’ career path, choosing instead to preserve and continue the medieval crafts and workshops model, while gradually transforming its organisational system: from guilds into cooperatives. The Arts and Crafts movement of the 19th century, guided by the socialist ideas of the art critic John Ruskin and the artist and writer William Morris, was more than merely a counter-reaction to the industrial revolution; it can also be understood as a practical-minded opposition to idealist notions of art, including Hegel’s assertion that art had lost its significance because it had “rather been transferred into our ideas”.[^8] Martin Heidegger’s shift from metaphysics to ontology (or, in the terminology of contemporary philosophy, from purely speculative to object-oriented practice[^9]) was in fact understood and applied by the Arts and Crafts movement long before it was theoretically formulated by Heidegger.[^10] Interestingly, Heidegger was profoundly inspired by expressionist artists such as Vincent van Gogh, as well as by the Lebensreform (‘life reform’) movement which began in the late 19th century in Germany and Switzerland and remained influential well into the 20th century. (Retrospectively, the life reform movement may also be seen as a historical bridge between anti-intellectualist practices such as Arts and Crafts, and the shift in early 20th-century continental philosophy away from Platonist and Hegelian idealist thinking and towards fundamental ontology. In all of these movements and schools of thought, practice is valued just as highly as theory.)

The influence of the Arts and Crafts movement’s practical-minded philosophy can be found in various 20th-century art movements, often in unexpected places. The direct legacy of Arts and Crafts in Bauhaus and De Stijl (also known as neoplasticism) is well-known and has been extensively documented.[^11] Both De Stijl and Bauhaus adopted Arts and Crafts’ anti-industrial programme and applied it to modern industrial design. Even more significantly, they also envisioned, through the (literal) equality of ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’, a radical fusion of fine art and design. Theo van Doesburg’s 1917 Neoplasticism (‘Nieuwe Beelding’) manifesto addressed on equal terms “the painter, the architect, the sculptor as well as the carpenter”, as visual designers of every aspect of life, for whose work the same principles should apply.[^12]

This blurring of the boundaries between fine art and design has remained an important characteristic of the arts (and of visual culture in general) in the Netherlands. It has also characterised Dutch art education which, with a very few exceptions, was modelled after the 1922 Bauhaus curriculum: a foundation course (German ‘Vorlehre’; Dutch - by way of Classical Greek - ‘propedeuse’) is followed by introductory instruction in composition, colours and materials. The main instructional method consists of material-specific and media-specific workshops, on location in the school. Just as Arts and Crafts was a counter-movement to 19th-century fine art, art schools with Bauhaus-derived curricula were a counter-programme to classicist art academies (modelled on the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which was founded by Cardinal Mazarin in 1648, at a time when France was still living under absolute monarchy).

What is less well known, is that the core ideas of both the Arts and Crafts movement and the Bauhaus school were later embraced by two art movements of the 1960s, which are usually associated with quite opposite notions of conceptualism and dematerialised art practices: the predominantly American (but also European and Japanese) Fluxus movement, and the continental European (predominantly French) Situationist International. George Maciunas, the founder and central organiser of Fluxus, urged artists (in his 1963 Fluxus Manifesto) to “purge the world of bourgeois sickness, ‘intellectual’, professional and commercialised culture, PURGE the world of dead art” and to “FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action”.[^13] Regardless of the apparent contradiction between the ‘beauty’ ideals of Arts and Crafts on one hand, and the countercultural audiovisual aesthetics of Fluxus on the other, Maciunas (an architect and graphic designer by trade) obviously followed Ruskin’s and Morris’ lead in several respects. Like them, he envisioned Fluxus as affordable art for the common people. Hence Fluxus’ focus on street theatre actions, small-edition artists’ books, and small objects and boxes produced as multiples and sold inexpensively in ‘Flux Shops’ in New York and Amsterdam. Maciunas’ elaborate *Expanded Arts Diagram* combined popular amusement (such as American Vaudeville) with avant-garde art, design and music into an integrated alternative vision of contemporary art. Significantly, Fluxus was also the first 20th-century Western art movement to include non-Western (namely, Japanese) contemporary art.

The Fluxus programme has been characterised (in its own time as well as in retrospect) as ‘total art’, where art and life are one. While such tendencies certainly did exist within the movement, there is also a danger here of reducing Fluxus to just another romanticist art programme. In 1798, Friedrich Schlegel described a vision of romanticist poetry as “a progressive universal poetry” whose “destiny is not merely to reunite all of the different genres, and […] make life and society poetic”, embracing “everything […] all the way down to the sigh, the kiss that a poeticizing child breathes out in an artless song”.[^14] By the late 19th century, this idea had further evolved into the late-romantic concept of the ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ or total artwork (referenced in Maciunas’ *Expanded Arts Diagram* as WAGNERISM / “whole art”).[^15] But the performance scores typical of Fluxus (such as George Brecht’s *Word Event*, consisting of only the word ‘EXIT’) certainly invalidated any grandiose Wagnerian expectations. Their extreme minimalism and their explicit absence of any higher or metaphysical meaning, made them rather ontological exercises - inspired by Western existential philosophy as well as Japanese Zen Buddhism. Also, Fluxus objects, such as Maciunas’ extensive diagrams, defy any simple classification as art, graphic design or (anti-academic) research.

The Situationist International movement went even further, operating under the guise of a research organisation: its main activity was the publication of a quasi-academic journal. One of the precursor groups which eventually led to the foundation of the Situationist International organisation was the ‘International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus’, established by the Danish painter Asger Jorn after the breakup of the artists’ group COBRA. The essential question for this ‘Imaginist Bauhaus’ was the same which had been central to both Arts and Crafts and Bauhaus: in Jorn’s words, “WHERE AND HOW to find a justified place for artists in the machine age.”[^16] Accordingly, Jorn characterised the original German Bauhaus as an “answer to the question: What kind of ‘education’ do artists need in order to take their place in the machine age?”[^17]

In Jorn’s view, post-war functionalism, as exemplified by the design school of Max Bill, had twisted the original ideas of Bauhaus (which Jorn credited to Ruskin, among others) and reduced them to mere utilitarianism. His 1957 Imaginist Bauhaus manifesto is likely the first document to literally call for artistic research: “We want the same economic and practical means and possibilities that are already at the disposal of scientific research, of whose momentous results everyone is aware. Artistic research is identical to ‘human science,’ which for us means ‘concerned’ science, not purely historical science. This research should be carried out by artists with the assistance of scientists”.[^18] In other words, the purpose of artistic research is not to elevate or promote artists to the ‘higher’ level of academia, but rather to save science from blind technocracy. In the same year, Jorn published a collaged subjectivist map of Copenhagen, *Fin de Copenhague*[^19] (with a credit for his Situationist comrade Guy Debord, as “Technical Adviser in Détournement”). Within the Situationist International movement, Jorn’s programme converged with the group’s concept of ‘unitary urbanism’ - a method of mapping cities through subjective experience, rather than top-down functionalist urban planning. This concept particularly attracted the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys, who was a member of the group from 1959 to 1960.

In contrast to American Fluxus, Jorn’s Imaginist Bauhaus and the Situationists’ unitary urbanism embraced some elements of European romanticism: from the notion of artists as humanist ambassadors (which Debord rejected, eventually leading him to expel all artists from the group) to the concept of *dérive* (drift): the intuitive exploration of the urban landscape, an idea borrowed from the Surrealists (and, going back even further, from the romanticist *flâneur*, strolling smartly but aimlessly through the streets).[^20] Conversely, Situationist unitary urbanism may be seen as a direct precursor of contemporary service design: perceiving a built or designed environment, not merely as a structure, but more importantly as a (customer) experience. In fact, the methodologies of Situationist unitary urbanism and service design mapping have a great deal in common, as the service and interaction designers Bill Gaver, Tony Dunne and Elena Pacenti pointed out in their much-cited 1999 paper *Cultural Probes*: “For instance, our maps are related to the psychogeographical maps of the Situationists, which capture the emotional ambience of different locations.”[^21]

## Since 1970

The above examples of 20th-century art and design all share the following characteristics:

\* Distinctions between ‘art’, ‘design’ and ‘research’ have become increasingly meaningless, except as traditions or points of reference;

\* Innovation takes place in cross-overs: in Fluxus, design thinking is adopted by an art movement; in Situationism, artistic experiment is applied to social research and social intervention; in service design, artistic research is a tool for product/service development;

\* Art is no longer by definition only ‘for art’s sake’; design is no longer (purely) functionalist; research is no longer (purely) academic.

\* Even cross-over concepts can suffer from limitations inherited from their constituent disciplines - such as the Bauhaus curriculum, with its sole focus on materials.

Also, the standard vocabulary of art/design history and theory is often inadequate for the analysis of these tendencies. Art theory is constrained by the analytical categories of 19th-century philosophical aesthetics, and defined through idealist terms such as ‘conceptual’, ‘dematerialisation’ and even ‘hybridisation’.

In all the previously discussed examples, as well as more recent cases which we shall introduce in the next section of this text, artists/designers have been investigating new relationships between visual culture, social intervention, globalisation, new economies, and experimental forms of research and education.

## Case Studies

### 1. Art as social intervention: *Food* and *RAAF*

*Food* was a restaurant founded in 1971 by a group of artists in New York’s SoHo district: visual and performance artists, filmmakers, musicians and poets, loosely gravitating around the main initiators, Gordon Matta-Clark and Caroline Goodden. The restaurant was, first of all, a neighbourhood business; perhaps more significantly, it was the main precursor to what the curator Nicolas Bourriaud has called the ‘relational’ art of the 1990s. Matta-Clark, in his letter *A MATTA’S PROPOSAL* (alluding to Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*, which satirically advocated cannibalism as a means of solving the Irish famine), described his “mission […] to restore the art of eating with love instead of fear”.

The difference between *Food* and other performative art projects (Fluxus, happenings) is the complete absence of any symbolic framing. The restaurant simply *was*, deriving its meaning entirely from its social and economic function: sharing food, creating an artists’ community space, and financing artists’ projects. Unlike the usual restaurant jobs which artists often must take on in order to support themselves, the work was not perceived as some alienating day job with no connection to the artists’ own work, but rather as an art project (or social installation) in its own right. In this way, cooking food was elevated from the lowly *artes mechanicae* to the level of contemporary art. At the same time, *Food* dispensed entirely with the notion of art as something different or separate from crafts and social activism. *Food*, as an artist-run space designed for enabling processes, social dynamics and experiences, can be seen as an early example of what we now know as ‘social design’.

*Food* became the prototype for all economically self-supporting artist-run social spaces, which typically generate income by selling food and drinks. In Rotterdam, the small venue *RAAF* (‘Rotterdam Art Adventure & Food’) is a perfect contemporary example of the concept originally pioneered by *Food*. *RAAF* was founded in 2009 (originally under the name *Kunstplatform de Kapsalon*, ‘The Barbershop Art Platform’, in a former barbershop in South Rotterdam) by students of the Willem de Kooning Academy. Running the venue, which unequivocally combined art with globalisation-critical political activism, became their graduation project for the Bachelor Fine Art programme.[^22] Later on, moving the venue to another location in South Rotterdam and transforming it into *RAAF* involved some major changes in its programming and economic model, since the makers wanted the venue to be able to sustain itself without government art subsidies. *RAAF* is now a multi-purpose space, with more emphasis on its café and restaurant function. Besides small exhibitions from Rotterdam artists and other residents of South Rotterdam, *RAAF* also hosts music concerts and open mic poetry readings, attracts a steady audience, and serves as a young artists’ community hub for the neighbourhood.

*Kapsalon/RAAF* is in fact a typical example of the post-graduation projects and careers of many of today’s artists. Although the project did not entail visual or fine-art work in any traditional sense, the teaching staff of the Willem de Kooning Academy’s Bachelor Fine Art programme was forward-looking enough to accept their effort as a fine-art project, and to reward it with a positive assessment. However, there was nothing at all in these students’ curriculum which supported or prepared them professionally for their undertaking - no electives or minors to train them in interdisciplinary project organisation, no curriculum options for systematically studying art as social intervention or for acquiring the business administration skills needed for running a self-organised project or venue. Until now, students who chose to work as social designers, community artists and non-traditional educationalists had to rely on their ‘natural’ project organisation talent or some additional training in order to mature into professional entrepreneurs in these fields.

### 2. Art as radical autonomy: Atelier van Lieshout

Joep van Lieshout is likely the most prominent living artist to have graduated from the Willem de Kooning Academy.[^23] Operating with his studio workers under the corporate moniker Atelier van Lieshout (AvL), he describes his work as “objects that balance on the boundary between art, architecture and design”.[^24] These are often monumental sculptural installations which embody dystopian factories of social engineering: hospitals, restaurants, living spaces and brothels, where humans are reduced to anonymous cogwheels in machineries that recycle their waste and feed it back into their food chains. AvL builds these environments as sculptures, architectures and designs to be actually used by real people; for example, the office spaces of the media-experimental arts venue WORM in Rotterdam.

AvL’s work is characterised by seemingly extreme contradictions. While the environments depict humans as tiny parts in machineries beyond their control, AvL in 2001 declared its studios in the Rotterdam harbour a free state (with its own currency, legislation and national flag) and spent most of that year focusing its efforts on practical experiments toward achieving economic and ecological self-sufficiency. In this respect, AvL has taken the Western notion of the autonomy of art and artists to its logical extreme (an idea first formulated by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*, and formalised as government policy in the Netherlands in the late 19th century by the liberal politician Johan Rudolph Thorbecke). However, AvL also undermines the established values of autonomy in fine art by sacrificing the individual names and signatures of its artists in favour of a collective corporate identity, and by disregarding - much like constructivism, Fluxus and Situationism in the 1920s and 1960s - any distinctions between art, design and architecture.

Autonomy, in this sense, is an issue of intellectual freedom, which goes far beyond any automatic assumptions that contemporary art by definition exists purely for its own sake and on its own terms. (It is worth noting here that the term ‘autonomous’ is also, in the Netherlands at least, a fairly recent synonym for ‘fine art’, ‘visual art’, etc. For example, prior to the 2013 curriculum reform, the Dutch title of the Willem de Kooning Academy’s Fine Art Bachelor programme was ‘Autonome Beeldende Kunst’; literally, Autonomous Visual Art.) AvL’s works, on the other hand, reflect the concept of autonomy in a dialectical way, with the constraints of alienating machineries as the price one must pay for self-sufficiency.[^25]

Thus, ‘autonomous’ practices are no longer by definition the privilege of ‘autonomous’ fine art programmes - as Theo van Doesburg already implied a century ago in his *Nieuwe Beelding* manifesto. For art schools, this means that the ‘autonomy’ of the arts must first of all be questioned in its real-world limitations, and secondly be regarded as a challenge for creative practitioners of all disciplines - regardless of whether these disciplines traditionally were classified as ‘fine art’ or as ‘design’. Prior to the Willem de Kooning Academy’s radical 2013 curriculum reform, the ‘Autonomous Fine Art’ programme (which, incidentally, only accounted for about 2% of the student population) often served as a refuge for students who could not find their place in any of the school’s design programmes. For example, students often switched from a design programme to the fine art programme at a later stage of their studies. This in itself is a serious indication that fine art is not necessarily a creative discipline in its own right, but rather a radically experimentalist - often even political - attitude, regardless of the practitioner’s chosen discipline.

AvL’s work shows us that any creative practice which explores and insists on autonomy, is by definition a social practice. However, unlike the practices of community artists and social designers, autonomy is not necessarily socially constructive; it may just as well be anti-social. This is not to advocate the romanticist (and bourgeois) cliché of the artist as sociopathic genius. Fluxus street actions and Situationist psychogeographical drifts, for example, were anti-bourgeois provocations in their day; nevertheless, community artists and service designers later discovered how these strategies could be applied to socially and commercially oriented creative practices. Conversely, radically autonomous practices such as those of AvL are also unapologetically commercial: AvL is one of Rotterdam’s major ‘creative industries’ enterprises, along with Rem Koolhaas’ architectural firm OMA and Marlies Dekkers’ fashion label. If ‘autonomy’ means that an artist project (such as *RAAF*) should be able to survive without government funding, then a viable business strategy becomes an absolute necessity.

### 3. Commercial practices: Piet Zwart, Kurt Schwitters, Fabrique

In 1923, the German collage artist and poet Kurt Schwitters toured through eight Dutch cities, performing Dadaist sound poetry with Theo and Nelly van Doesburg (and with riotous audiences providing the necessary scandal and spectacle).[^26] Schwitters lived from the proceeds of his performances and his collage paintings, which he sold cheaply out of a suitcase he always carried with him. Through Van Doesburg, Schwitters was introduced to Piet Zwart, who had been trained as an architect in a period when Arts and Crafts dominated Dutch design culture. In the year of Schwitters’ tour, Zwart had his breakthrough as a graphic designer with his constructivist advertising campaign for the Nederlandsche Kabelfabriek (NKF), a electrical wire and telephone cable manufacturer based in Delft.

Zwart and Schwitters soon became close friends. Schwitters visited Zwart every summer from 1925 to 1928, and again one last time in 1936, before his emigration to Norway and later England. Zwart inspired Schwitters to work as a commercial graphic designer and to set up his own advertising agency, Merz-Werbe, in 1924. In that same year, influenced by Zwart and Van Doesburg, Schwitters switched to constructivist design and painting. In 1927, Schwitters founded the *ring neuer werbegestalter* (‘circle of new advertising designers’) whose membership included Zwart as well as the German typographical designer Jan Tschichold and the Bauhaus professor László Moholy-Nagy. Tschichold’s seminal 1928 book *Die Neue Typographie* (‘The New Typography’) includes examples of work by both Zwart and Schwitters.

What makes this biographical fragment so illuminating, is the way it defies various common assumptions about commercial artistic practices. Zwart and Schwitters were not specialists, but rather multidisciplinary practitioners. In Schwitters’ case, exposure to new commercial work fields did not result in less radical artistic work; on the contrary, it played a positive role in renewing his work and positioning it within the avant-garde visual culture of its day.[^27] Engaging with everyday visual culture made it possible for artists like Schwitters to not only influence the development of mass media, but also to broaden the cultural impact of their own work.

Commercial application of the ‘new typography’ compelled artists to confront the new technologies of their time. In 1928, Piet Zwart, then still a teacher at the Academie van Beeldende Kunsten en Technische Wetenschappen (the school which is now known as the Willem de Kooning Academy) wrote in the newspaper *Het Vaderland*: “In fact, the fine art painting programme will have to be shut down completely, in as much as this is still understood as that primitive method of applying colourful matter to a canvas, using a bundle of pig hairs tied to a stick. Instead, there should be a great deal of emphasis on synthetic and visual drawing, advertising, modern reproduction technologies, typography, photography and its visual possibilities, film, and the use of colour in architecture and in the urban space”.[^28] With this article, Zwart scandalised his colleagues and superiors, setting off a controversy within the Academy that would eventually lead to his forced departure five years later. In 2013, Zwart’s vision has finally been realised. But as Aldje van Meer, head of the Willem de Kooning Academy’s interdisciplinary media lab CrossLab, demonstrated in a recent empirical study, the new digital communication technologies which dominate contemporary everyday life now face very much the same kind of resistance within Dutch art education.[^29]

In 1994, the Dutch design agency Fabrique was, in all likelihood, the first design agency to receive a web design commission in the Netherlands. Yet Fabrique’s founder and director Jeroen van Erp describes Fabrique as a ‘hyperdisciplinary’ agency, offering a holistically integrated brand communication service “in which the traditional boundaries between graphic design, industrial design, interior and retail design, and interactive media are sometimes nearly unrecognisable”.[^30] Fabrique’s approach is to design a total customer experience, incorporating product/service ecosystems characterised by synergy of product and brand. [^31] This design practice is, in Van Erp’s words, research-driven and based on the assumption that the impact of the digital revolution in changing the interaction of customers with products and services, is as profound as the impact of the industrial revolution was in its day. Just like Gaver’s, Dunne’s and Pacenti’s previously quoted 1999 paper on ‘Cultural Probes’, Van Erp’s design philosophy corresponds with Situationist experience strategies as well as earlier romanticist aesthetics, privileging aesthetic experience (aisthesis) over production (poeisis). Consequently, Van Erp thinks of the designer not as a maker, but as a strategist.[^32]

Fabrique currently employs about a hundred people at its two branches in Amsterdam and Rotterdam; it is one of the few design agencies managing to grow in the current economic climate. Dutch polytechnic education - which includes art schools - tends by default to think of monodisciplinary vocational training as suitable job training. Yet, Fabrique is a striking example of a contemporary employer that expects its designers to think in radical multidisciplinary terms. Clearly, traditional monodisciplinary art and design education no longer prepares students for the contemporary work field. This means that cross-disciplinary, project-oriented and theme-oriented creative work is no longer merely a niche for experimental or activist art; rather, is has become a mainstream skill requirement for the commercial market. Cultural changes, brought on by new information technologies, are now introducing this development into relatively conservative work domains, such as product design, retail design and fashion design.[^33]

## Conclusion

This paper began by identifying Platonic academicism and Arts and Crafts as two opposite poles which have traditionally defined the practice and education of fine art and design in the West. Then, examining cutting-edge 20th and 21st-century creative practices which focused either on social intervention, autonomous experiment or commercial orientation, we observed that:

\* these practices have rendered the division between ‘art’ and ‘design’ either arbitrary or obsolete;

\* further disciplinary specialisations (graphic design, media design, interior design, etc.) have become increasingly problematic as well. The study disciplines no longer correspond to work disciplines;

\* cross-disciplinary categories such as social intervention, autonomous experiment and commercial orientation can be helpful in order to understand cross-disciplinary creative practices - but in the real world, any practice in one of these three fields will invariably involve the other two as well.

The initial question of this paper was whether art/design students nowadays face a choice between ‘creative industries’ and ‘artistic research’ (which are in fact no more than new terms for ‘design’ and ‘fine art’ respectively). Using the broader term ‘creative’ instead of either ‘art’ or ‘design’ provides an opportunity to embrace both, leaving the old dichotomy behind. Conversely, as the example of Fabrique demonstrated, research has become just as much a requirement in the commercial domain as it has in activist and ‘autonomous’ fine-art practices. The fact that the term ‘artistic research’ has become worn out through recent overuse[^34] does not in any way change this reality.

The Willem de Kooning Academy will be the first art school in the Netherlands - in all likelihood, one of the first in the world - to implement a new curriculum which structurally addresses the issues and challenges described in this paper. The school’s reform is a radical one. But, to conclude with a subjective assessment: if students are expected to find their place professionally within the types of artistic practices described in this paper (rather than other creative niches), then this radical break with the past is a matter of sheer necessity.

[^1]: Plato, Republic, book X, 602.

[^2]: Plato, Republic, book III, 403.

[^3]: Henry Flynt, *Concept Art*, Essay, 1961, in: Jackson Mac Low, La Monte Young (editors), *An Anthology*, 1962.

[^4]: Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, University of California Press, 1973.

[^5]: G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 10.

[^6]: Observation based on the author’s tutoring of Bachelor and Master students of the Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam.

[^7]: Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, New York: Perseus Book Group, 2002.

[^8]: G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, op. cit.

[^9]: The contemporary philosophical movement of Speculative Realism seeks to reconcile these two; Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Open Court, 2002. In Rotterdam, Speculative Realism inspired the recent exhibition ‘Blowup: Speculative Realities’ organised by V2\_ at Roodkapje, Dec. 8, 2012 - January 11, 2013.

[^10]: Martin Heidegger, *On the Origin of the Work of Art*, in: *Heidegger, Basic Writings*, New York: HarperCollins, 2008, pp. 143-212.

[^11]: Elizabeth Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1991, p. 166.

[^12]: Theo van Doesburg, *Ter inleiding*, in: *De Stijl, vol. 1, no. 1*, pp. 1-2. The original Dutch: “Zoowel de schilder, de architect, de beeldhouwer, als de meubelmaker”.

[^13]: George Maciunas, *Fluxus Manifesto*, 1963, reprinted in: Hans Sohm, Harald Szeemann (eds.), *Happening & Fluxus*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970.

[^14]: Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1958, pp. 37-38.

[^15]: Astrid Schmidt-Burckhardt, *Maciunas’ Learning Machines*, 2nd revised edition, Vienna/New York: Springer, 2011, p. 190.

[^16]: Asger Jorn, *Notes on the Formation of an Imaginist Bauhaus*, in: Asger Jorn, *Against Functionalism*, 1957, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/bauhaus.htm>.

[^17]: ibid.

[^18]: ibid.

[^19]: Asger Jorn, *Fin de Copenhague*, *Édité par le Bauhus* [sic] *Imaginiste*, 1957.

[^20]: Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

[^21]: Bill Gaver, Tony Dunne, Elena Pacenti, *Cultural Probes and the Value of Uncertainty*, in: *Interactions*, January/February 1999, pp. 21-29.

[^22]: Referring to their project ‘The Mobile Kapsalon’, the group writes: “During the trip the economic crisis will also develop itself. Not only in the Netherlands, but in the whole of Europe the governments are trying to reduce government debt by letting the innocent civilians pay. Therefore demonstrations, manifestations and other solidarity actions are on the program as well.” Ashley Nijland et al., *Kunstplatform de kapsalon*, Rotterdam (self-published book), 2009.

[^23]: Joep van Lieshout is currently ranked by *artfacts.net* among the top 300 contemporary artists worldwide.

[^24]: Source: <http://www.ateliervanlieshout.com/pressAboutAVL.htm> (accessed on April 19th, 2013).

[^25]: This is precisely what Adorno and Horkheimer have described as the ‘Dialectics of Enlightenment’ - with fascism, Western consumer society, and the writings of the Marquis de Sade as their main examples.

[^26]: Friedhelm Lach, *Der Merzkünstler Kurt Schwitters*, Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1971, p. 56.

[^27]: Before 1923, Schwitters’ visual language was still very much influenced by cubism; in 1919 the Berlin Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck dismissed him as an “abstract Spitzweg” (referring to the German Biedermeier painter Carl Spitzweg).

[^28]: Piet Zwart, *Nederlandsche ambachts- en nijverheidskunst*, in: *Het Vaderland*, May 31, 1928: “Feitelijk zal de schilderkunstafdeling geheel moeten vervallen, indien men daaronder wenst te verstaan de primitieve methode waarbij met een bosje varkensharen, die aan een stokje gebonden zijn, kleurige materiën op linnen worden uitgeborsteld. Daarvoor in de plaats zou veel aandacht besteed moeten worden aan synthetisch en beeldend tekenen, reclame, moderne reproductiemethoden, typografie, fotografie en haar beeldingsmogelijkheden; film, kleurgeving in de architectuur en in het stadsbeeld”.

[^29]: Aldje van Meer, *I would rather design a poster than a website*, 2012-2013, <http://iwouldratherdesignaposterthanawebsite.nl>.

[^30]: The original Dutch: “[...] waarbij de traditionele grenzen tussen grafisch ontwerpen, industrieel ontwerpen, ruimtelijk ontwerpen en interactieve media soms nauwelijks nog herkenbaar zijn”, <http://www.ccaa.nl/page/4031/nl>

[^31]: Van Erp cites Nespresso as an example of such a brand; Jeroen van Erp, lecture at CrossLab evening *Dynamic Design*, De Unie, Rotterdam, March 27, 2012, published in the e-book <http://extra.wdka.nl/crosslab/2012/07/02/epub-dynamic-design-2>.

[^32]: Ibid.

[^33]: Van Erp cites the example of window shops in South Korean subway stations, where customers can order goods for home delivery by scanning them with their mobile phones.

[^34]: This is at least the unanimous opinion of the course directors of several fine art master programmes in the Netherlands; *Dutch Masters*, in: *Metropolis M*, No. 2, April/May 2013.