
IN _THE_ GRAVEYARDS
OF _INTER-
DISCIPLINARITY_(?)

Wherever there is fresh vivacity, it naturally finds its gender of expression (Vydūnas, *Consciousness*)

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Keywords of the Current Art: Interdisciplinarity, Media, and Relational Aesthetics

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Art and theory develop through perpetual change. Some art theorists propose a multitude of terms in order to give an objective description of forms and strategies of contemporary artistic practices, criteria for reading art; others critique them. In the Lithuanian art theory discourse, shaped under specific circumstances of art policies, the most common refrain is a binary classification of art into traditional and contemporary, which usually means art pieces produced within the boundaries of a particular branch/discipline on the one hand interdisciplinary art on the other. Such commonly-accepted classification seems to be quite primitive. One needs a more diverse array of instruments to understand art. In order to grasp contemporary art – evolving in whichever direction, progressive or regressive, unable to contain itself in the traditional, linear modernist art history – I choose theoretical keywords that can feel the pulse of artistic practices at different angles: interdisciplinarity, discourse-specific art, postproduction, relational art.

In the Lithuanian art scene since 1993, probably the most debated aspect has been interdisciplinarity. The term was introduced to the discourse of art practice and theory by artists and art theorists (Gediminas and Nomedas Urbonas, Saulius Grigoravičius) who founded Jutempus TMP (or IAP, Interdisciplinary Art Projects). Eventually, interdisciplinarity as a term has become a useful tool to distinguish new artistic practices in Lithuania that transcended the boundaries of any one art discipline and could no longer be fitted into the framework of the modernist tradition. It served to legitimize the spread of new artistic practices and made a transition to the institutional sphere (1998 saw the founding of the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists' Association, LIAA). As a consequence, however, the term interdisciplinarity has expanded its scope and lost its original meaning. The sphere of art theory and practice borrowed

the term from sciences. Interdisciplinarity, which is much more common in scientific discourse, denotes the practice of adopting and synthesizing methodologies from various scientific disciplines. It comes in handy during collaborative encounters between several disciplines that have not, however, coalesced into one new discipline. Interdisciplinarity is most often used in university syllabi to indicate a multidirectional course, study of methodologies or approaches beyond those specific to one particular subject of choice. International conferences [1] usually discuss interdisciplinarity in today's theoretical field within scientific rather than artistic paradigm. Alongside "interdisciplinary," we get terms like trans-, multi-, meta-disciplinarity, whose subtle differences are discussed primarily within the paradigm of scientific research and methodological particularities of various disciplines. Disciplinary research isolates its subject and object from the wider context. Whereas meta-, inter-, multi-, trans-disciplinarity strives to break such insularity and offers new and wider possibilities for scientific research. The term "interdisciplinary/interdisciplinarity" entered the field of artistic practice and theory at roughly the same time it emerged in scientific discourse – in the early 1960s, responding to a need to articulate changing artistic initiatives and practices since the DADA movement in theoretical discourse. In the 1990s, theory revisited the meaning of interdisciplinarity in both arts and natural or human sciences. Etymologically, the term is a compound of two words: *inter* (between) and *disciplinarity*. *Inter* refers to a conjunction, a being in between one thing and another, with an emphasis on the moment of transgression. Transgression refers to an action that breaks accepted codes or rules. Various dictionaries [2] give rather similar definition of interdisciplinarity in the wider sense – a field of study, research, or other practice that combines or includes knowledge of different academic, scientific, or artistic disciplines [3]. In art theory, discipline is traditionally defined as a branch of art (or medium). The notion of discipline in art is close to the way Clement Greenberg, advocate of the formalist theory, explains "pure art," seeing the purity as an agreement to make art within the legitimate and conventional boundaries of one or another medium [4]. What makes a piece art is a form that is accepted as art. Modernist disciplinarity determines a close and conventional structure for art, one that approaches the notion of

“pure art”: each artistic medium remains pure as long as it stays within its proper boundaries and does not correlate with other artistic media [5]. However, Greenberg himself notes, the more a discipline is defined, the less freedom it has [6] and freedom is one of conditions for creativity. On the other hand, writes Jablonskienė quoting Jacques Derrida, he “has demonstrated that a pure discipline, pure generic specificity does not exist in any area, every purity is inevitably affected by external contexts.” [7] However, distancing oneself from one artistic discipline or medium and employing several media in creative processes does not necessarily make artistic practice interdisciplinary. A more apt description would be postmedium art as expounded by Rosalind Krauss [8]. Julia Kristeva sees interdisciplinarity as a model [mode] of thinking, one where knowledge of various areas intersect – interdisciplinarity happens when one works several disciplines in parallel [9]. In the 1960s, French theorists employed the term polyvalence, which Kristeva calls the initial phase of interdisciplinarity [10]. The term denoted various practices that did not rely on one discipline alone. The so-called practices of “interdisciplinary kind” were soon problematized, their interdisciplinarity questioned. Kristeva claimed that practitioners in sciences or arts often simply abused interdisciplinarity by showing intent to work across different disciplines but essentially privileging just one. According to Kristeva, it is a mistake to assume that one person can specialize in interdisciplinarity as such – it would only result in limited knowledge of various fields and fragmented competence [11]. It should be taken as a hint that interdisciplinarity is more likely to result from collaboration between specific fields rather than one person amateurishly manipulating knowledge from various areas. One can therefore conclude that interdisciplinarity in art is a rather narrow concept that encompasses but a very small fraction of contemporary art or artistic practices whose essential feature is collaboration among specialists of distinct fields; the process of collaboration – and, if it is successful, its result – can be called interdisciplinary, with the term denoting the method of art making. American art theorist Hal Foster thinks along these lines, too. Looking from today’s perspective, Foster notes problems in the status of interdisciplinarity that have emerged over the last few decades simply because there no longer are clear-cut disciplinary boundaries. “To be interdisci-

plinary you need to be disciplinary first – to be grounded in one discipline, preferably two, to know the historicity of these discourses before you test them against each other,” [12] says Foster. According to him, today’s practitioners rush into interdisciplinary practices without proper mastery of any discipline, with results being eclectic – something which is entropic more than it is transgressive. Foster sees transgression as the key feature of interdisciplinary practices. According to Foster’s logic, transgression can be inferred in discursive artistic practices that summon and skillfully employ knowledge of different spheres. Such art creates an interactive/critical/reflexive relation to a cultural, social, political environment, i.e., unfolds in the intersection of horizontality and verticality. It is worth noting, however, that Foster does not claim that a discursive art practice is interdisciplinary; it can merely contain manifestations of interdisciplinarity. In the ever-changing field of artistic practices, Foster points to the general drift of the change: he claims that the essential shift in contemporary art practices is a transition from medium-specific art [13] to discourse-specific practices. Foster introduces and highlights the discourse of ethnographic turn in art, something that Lithuanian critic Birutė Pankūnaitė thinks has the axiomatic quality of interdisciplinarity. Its emergence in contemporary art is linked to transformations in art history since the 1960s: from minimalism, pop art, conceptualism, performance and body art to site-specific art work [14]. Changes in these artistic practices prompted research into the medium and its spatial perception, also triggering shifts in the the notion of art institution and the viewer/observer. Art institution has been dissociated from physical space, undefinable in spatial terms alone (like study, gallery, museum, etc.); it has come to be perceived as a discursive network of various practices, institutions, and communities [15]. Art observer has come to mean a social subject determined by linguistic, economic, ethnic, gender, etc. difference. In the wake of different social movements (civil right, various feminisms, queer politics, multiculturalism) and theoretical developments (confluence of feminism, psychoanalysis, and film theory; the rise of cultural studies, theories by Lacan and Foucault, postcolonialist discourse, etc.), strict definitions of art and artist, identity and community began to wane. All these changes, Foster argues, resulted in art spreading in the expanded

cultural field, studied by anthropology. The ethnographic turn brings change to the siting of art: the artist's gaze moves from the medium surface to the museum space, from institutional framework [i.e., modernist discipline – D. T.] to discursive network, to the conditions of desire or disease as the siting of art. Foster claims that artists have come to “work horizontally, in a synchronic movement from social issue to issue, from political debate to debate, more than vertically, in a diachronic engagement with the disciplinary forms of a given genre or medium.” [16] I believe that in the paradigm of discursive art practice we should discuss several more keyword terms that might help grasp the ever-changing trends – those that, roughly speaking, have come to the fore over the last decade – of contemporary art. One of the first attempts to theorize current art (since 1990) was a collection of essays by French curator and art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* [17], and *Postproduction. Culture As Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. Bourriaud uses the terms “relational aesthetics” and “relational art” to flesh out a concept that could serve as a tool to analyze and critique current art – and gets critiqued himself for doing so. French and English artists and theorists engage in a heated debate whether or not the late 20-century art history will contain one more art movement, one more -ism: relationism. Bourriaud believes we should not look at contemporary art from the “shelter” of the 1960s art history and values, i.e., contemporary art has its own tactics and strategies that must be approached without the prejudice of previous art. Bourriaud proposes the term postproduction to describe processes in contemporary art practice and culture in general, saying it refers to a “zone of activity”: seizing all the codes of the culture, all the forms of everyday life, the works of the global patrimony, and making them function. Art today has less to do with elaborating form from scratch and more with objects that already circulate on the culture market [18], whereby artists operates like a DJ. Bourriaud defines art as “an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects.” [19] All formally heterogenous artistic practices have in common the use of already existing/produced forms: the question of art is not “what new can we make?” but “what can we make of what we have already got?” [20] Under such practice, the contemporary work of art does not

position itself as the termination point of the “creative process” (a “finished product” to be contemplated) but as a site of navigation, a portal, a generator of activities. In this new form of culture, which one might call a culture of use or a culture of activity, according to Burriaud, the status of the artwork undergoes a transformation: traditionally, the artwork was a container of the artist’s vision, but now it functions as an active agent, a musical score, an unfolding scenario, a framework, as the temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives. Art makes culture objects and forms of our everyday life function [21]. Burriaud’s principle of postproduction is essentially related to Foster’s discursive art practice, as the modernist significance of the medium is replaced by the practice of idea, research, action in the horizontal cultural field. The theory of relational aesthetics and art will most probably be considered the only theory of the 1990s that explains the shift in art practices of the time. What is particular to relational artworks is their striving to create a space of actually or potentially intersubjective relations, links, a space where the artwork’s meaning is produced collectively rather than through individual consumption of the art product – the opposite of what we were used to in the Greenbergian modernism [22]. Bourriaud expounds: In the 1990s, “we have seen a growing number of stands offering a range of services, works proposing a precise contract to viewers, and more or less tangible models of sociability. Spectator ‘participation’, theorised by Fluxus happenings and performances, has become a constant feature of artistic practice. [...] After the area of relations between Humankind and deity, and then between Humankind and the object, artistic practice is now focused upon the sphere of inter-human relations, as illustrated by artistic activities that have been in progress since the early 1990s. So the artist sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability. [...] over and above the relational character intrinsic to the artwork, the figures of reference of the sphere of human relations have now become fully-fledged artistic ‘forms’. Meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals, and places of conviviality, in a word all manner of encounter and relational invention thus represent, today,

aesthetic objects likely to be looked at as such, with pictures and sculptures regarded here merely as specific cases of a production of forms with something other than a simple aesthetic consumption in mind.” [23] According to Bourriaud, “art is a state of encounter” and it is art like this that provides space which encourages sociability. By focusing on human relations and the social context instead of asserting the individual and his/her private symbolic space, relational art points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art [24]. Contemporary artwork can no longer be seen as merely a space to be walked through. Contemporary piece of art is presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion. According to Bourriaud, contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue (what is at stake here is art’s function to bring together and strike connections between distant individuals in the society of the image, to create a sense of commonality). On the other hand, one would be rather hard-pressed to determine the value of such art (and what kind of value is it?) which should be in the relation provoked by the artwork. Bourriaud does not propose a method to measure value (it might be more complicated than one would like to think). Artistic processes in Lithuania differ only slightly from those in Europe, therefore theoretical keywords for contemporary art should be tested by critical analysis of motions in the local processes as well. It is noteworthy that interdisciplinarity – usually conceived as the starting point in the strategies of today’s artistic processes in the practices of both artists and curators – often becomes a synonym for progressiveness and experimentation in the art field. However, it tells us little about how this art should be understood. Therefore, Bourriaud’s tools for grasping and critiquing contemporary art might offer a starting point for discussions on how to experience the ecstasy of contemporary art.

- [1] *Rethinking Interdisciplinarity*, virtual conference-seminar, [accessed 10 February 2005]. Available online: <http://www.interdisciplines.org/interdisciplinarity/papers/5/24> Virtual conference-seminar *Rethinking Interdisciplinarity*, moderated by Christopher Heintz, Gloria Origgi and Dan Sperber, was opened for discussion online on 9 February 2004.
- [2] I could only find definitions of interdisciplinarity in electronic dictionaries. The term is yet to be entered into art dictionaries, judging by recently-published art dictionaries available in Lithuania.
- [3] Merriam-Webster Online. Available online: <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary%20?book=Dictionary&va=interdisciplinary>; electronic Oxfordo dictionaries. Available online: http://www.ask.oxford.com/concise_oed/interdisciplinary?view=uk; The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000, available online: <<http://www.bartleby.com/61/53/I0185300.html>> [accessed 22 August 2004].
- [4] C. Greenberg, Towards a Newer Laocoon (1940), *Art in Theory, 1900 – 2000: an anthology of changing ideas*, Ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 566.
- [5] Greenberg uses painting as an example; purity of the medium is determined by its defining features: two-dimensionality, flatness, absence of figurative narrativity, rejection of any illusion (disinterested aesthetics), and colour.
- [6] C. Greenberg, Towards a Newer Laocoon (1940), *Art in Theory, 1900 – 2000: an anthology of changing ideas*, Ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2003,, p. 777.
- [7] L. Jablonskienė, *Paribių problema šiuolaikinėje dailėje*, *Menotyra*, Nr. 2. (31), 2003, p. 95.
- [8] Ref.: R. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of Post-Medium Condition*, London, 1999.
- [9] J. Kristeva, *Institutional Interdisciplinarity on Theory and in Practice* (an interview), *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity: De-, dis-, ex-*, London, 1998, vol. 2., p. 4.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- [11] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- [12] H. Foster, *Trauma Studies and the Interdisciplinary* (an interview), *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity: De-, dis-, ex-*, London, 1998, vol. 2, p.162.
- [13] The Lithuanian rendering of the term “medium-specific” is closer to “discipline-specific,” even though the two terms would be considered synonyms within Greenberg’s theory of pure art, where a discipline – or art branch – is determined by art production within a specific medium.
- [14] Site-specific art work is defined as a piece of contemporary visual art (sculpture, object, installation) intended for a particular natural or artificial environment – as specific natural, urban, or interior place. Unlike traditional monumental art works, it does not serve a decorative or commemorative function. Site-specific art work, in its form and content, relates directly to the singularity of its display site: the piece and the environment complement each other. Such works are usually not permanent and, much like gallery pieces, are displayed for a limited stretch of time. The notion of site-specific art work was developed within Earth art of the 1960s. Ref.: *Dailės žodynas*, Vilnius: VDA, 1999, p. 396.
- [15] R. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, London, 1996, p. 184.
- [16] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[17] We should consider a more apt Lithuanian translation for “Relational Aesthetics”: “relational” (“reliacinis”) is not a widely-used word in Lithuanian and in this case it should refer to the expression of relations, connections, links, between things, processes, and people rather than to relations themselves. A more comprehensible, if not more accurate, translation could be “sąsąjū estetika”.

[18] N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture As Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, New York: Lukas&Sternberg, 2000, p. 7.

[19] N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Reel, Dijon, France, 2002. Available online: http://www.iade.pt/cumulus/%20abstracts_pdf/abstract_05_019_Cumulus%202005.pdf

[20] N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture As Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, New York: Lukas&Sternberg, 2000, p. 10.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

[22] C. Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, in: *October*, No.: 110, Fall 2004, p. 54.

[23] N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon, 2002 (1998), pp. 28-29.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

User Manual: Interdisciplinary Arts

Laima Kreivytė

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I must confess – this essay was inspired by a phone call. The caller suggested that there should be a clearer definition of interdisciplinary art. I was politely asked to give it some thought. I was given a week and assured that nothing would happen even if I did not come up with anything.

I usually avoid taking part in phone surveys. But the caller was not from a bank or a pizza house, it was an artist whom I respect and whose concern for interdisciplinary art was sparked not by personal ambition but a responsible approach to public duty. That is something rare indeed, almost an anomaly. I have always been impressed by this artist's conceptuality and appreciation for complex phenomena and theories. Even in this case – the man could simply “follow his heart” or just shrug it off and waste no more time on it. But he takes interest. Because universal shrugging it off is what bears commercial, kitsch, pseudo-conceptual, official, and modern folk art monsters that get filed by culture bureaucrats in the pile of “interdisciplinary art” projects out of sheer inertia (or resignation). This pile has grown so big that it comes to resemble the Augean stables – and no white curtains can cover it up.

Interdisciplinarity has been written and spoken about extensively, especially in sciences and arts. In the West, since the early 1970s, in Lithuania, since 1990. The postmedium condition has been discussed by Rosalind Krauss, the ethnographic turn in contemporary art (emphasizing discursive strategies rather than the medium and technique), by Hal Foster. In Lithuania, Lolita Jablonskienė has written on the issues of the margins, Dovilė Tumptytė explained key concepts of contemporary art (including interdisciplinarity), Kęstutis Šapoka has presented several comprehensive remarks on interdisciplinary art. Vytautas Michelkevičius, the president of the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists' Association, has had his say as well. Everyone interested in the subject should refer to the above-mentioned authors in order to get a better understanding of historic and theoretical background of interdisciplinary art in Lithuania – all the sources are available online or in libraries. My aim, however, is less an academic analysis of interdisciplinarity than a synthesis of different definitions that (if I am successful) could serve as a simple user manual.

The stakes in this case are not philosophical, but pragmatic ones – under what criteria should project proposals be regarded as interdisciplinary art under the guidelines of the Culture Support Fund? The Fund sets out funding quotas for different arts and occasionally reviews them in light of the number of applications. The share of interdisciplinary art projects has grown significantly in recent years, but the quota has not changed. A greater number of applications points to a trend of growing cooperation among professionals of different fields, but also to a complete “watering down” of the concept of interdisciplinarity. Any event that includes artists of several different fields is automatically termed interdisciplinary. But if a violinist performs at a photography exhibition during a poetry reading session, that does not make photography or literary readings an interdisciplinary project. Under what circumstances, though, can it do so?

First, let us read the list of arts funded by the Culture Support Fund: architecture, circus, fine art, photography, film, museums, cultural heritage, literature, music, dance, interdisciplinary art, folk art, theatre, and amateur art.

Which brings me to *the first point of the user manual*: interdisciplinary art is what does not fall into any other of the categories above: it is not fine art, not dance, not photography, not literature, not theatre, not film, not folk art, etc. That does not mean, however, that we will arrive at interdisciplinary art by substituting the affirmatives for the negatives and adding at least two components together. What is crucial to understand here is that every medium above must be seen from today’s perspective – or, to use Rosalind Krauss’s term, within the “expanded field.” Photography in the expanded field means that it can easily become an installation, photographed objects, etc. In case of literature, that readings can be interactive, resemble sporting events (slam poetry), performances. No one can claim that modern literature is just poetry, prose, and drama. Film and theatre includes collaboration by painters, writers, composers – but they all create within the boundaries of their respective disciplines, albeit using the most contemporary means of expression.

Second. Interdisciplinary art is something more than just a way of performance / transmission in other media (e.g., filmed dance, photographed

circus performers). An interdisciplinary project welds image, sound, text, performance, improvisation into a new integral entity. It goes beyond a simple cocktail of several disciplines, it presents a qualitatively new product.

Third. Interdisciplinary art is also contemporary – it has emerged as an opposition to the purity of modern art as theorized by Clement Greenberg. Interdisciplinary art employs contemporary art language and contemporary techniques. Therefore setting fire sculptures aflame is not an interdisciplinary project – rather, it is a piece of modernized ethnoculture adapted for the society of the spectacle. Or folk art, if sculpture is its central element.

Fourth (related to the third). Interdisciplinary art is transgressive – i.e., it transcends boundaries. Initially, it transcends the boundaries of one discipline, unable as it is to contain itself within even its “expanded field.” Transgressiveness as the key feature of interdisciplinary practices has been pointed out by Hal Foster. “According to Foster’s logic, transgression can be inferred in discursive artistic practices that summon and skillfully employ knowledge of different spheres. Such art creates an interactive/critical/reflexive relation to a cultural, social, political environment, i.e., unfolds in the intersection of horizontality and verticality.” (Dovilė Trumpytė, “Keywords of the Current Art: Interdisciplinarity, Media, and Relational Aesthetics,” www.balsas.cc, 17 October 2005)

Fifth. It is more than art created by members of the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists’ Association. Even though most of them do make such kind of art, others do as well. They are most likely to be art professionals, but can also be amateurs (the Culture Support Fund provides assistance to them, too). Interdisciplinarity draws its legitimacy not from art institutions (the Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius Art Academy, the National Art Gallery, other galleries, etc.), but from creative practices transcending disciplinary boundaries.

If this manual can be of use to those writing project proposals and processing them – great. If it will prompt discussion and new, more accurate, and (especially!) more concise definitions of interdisciplinary art – even better.

I appreciate the call.

Politics of Interdisciplinarity?

Skaidra Trilupaitytė

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Laima Kreivyte's manual of interdisciplinary art, published on 1 April (7md, No. 13), as well as Kęstutis Šapoka's 2010 essay "A Few Notes on Interdisciplinary Art," reproduced on the website of the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists' Association attest to what seems to be the usual crystallizing trends in contemporary art. The two art critics have comprehensively described the field of the new genre (or sub-genre), discussed characteristics of interdisciplinary art (Šapoka in a more historic-empirical manner, Kreivyte more theoretically) and there seems hardly anything left to add on the subject. However, the question of interdisciplinary art (IA), which has resurfaced in the public discourse lately, is gripping for reasons other than polished definitions. Both authors state clearly that the need for a new definition grows in proportion to the number of funding applications to the Culture Support Fund for interdisciplinary art projects. Some projects that try to pass for IA in order to secure funding clearly do not belong there, which points to the problem of a "watered-down concept." According to Šapoka, today "we are talking about this kind of art (field) like an autonomous phenomenon which requires separate funding, even though its very name once meant, at least for a short while, a striving for freedom."

Despite theoretical intricacies, the newly-emerged problem is in fact much easier to grasp if looked at in terms of straightforward competition for limited financing resources. This forces us to turn not just to our own notions of artistic value and other "self-evident" issues (there would be no problems, if the Culture Support Fund simply gave money to "interesting art"!), but also to criteria for setting priorities and quotas. In other words, the IA issue has to be treated in a political or "purely formal" manner, much like the previous near-compulsory classification of art into kinds, genres, or sub-genres. Moreover, let's bear in mind that the way we currently understand IA in Lithuania was shaped under the influence of the imitative arts (as hinted at by the definitions of both the Culture Support Fund and the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists' Association).

I think that the concept of art itself is mostly a political construct (I know that not everyone subscribes to this view), so interdisciplinarity does not exist “in itself” either, as a quality immanent to a piece of art and easily perceptible by every (educated) observer. The “stretching” I have mentioned before is near-inescapable if only because the concept of IA has been imperceptibly turned into a synonym of quality. Alfonsas Andriuškevičius once made a principled attempt to draw a distinction between contemporary art and art of the present. One must admit that such a distinction, even if expedient at the time, was also only conditional, aimed at drawing a once relevant rhetorical line between notions of art expounded by the Lithuanian Artists’ Association on the one hand and the Contemporary Arts Centre on the other. Since art made in Lithuania today gets judged in the light of international context more often than ever before, one could suspect that artworks which were seen as radical challenges two decades ago might not be perceived as “contemporary” in the eyes of today’s public. The pieces might not necessarily have lost intrinsic noteworthiness just because of this; possibly, the most pointed accounts of early Lithuanian artistic actions, happenings, etc. are yet to be written. It is just that what once and under certain conditions might have seemed unusual, has since become a normal, often even stagnant practice.

Attempting to give the “watered down” concept of IA a more structural treatment might give rise to even more questions. For instance, the departmental structure of Vilnius Art Academy is at slight variance with the fields sponsored by the Culture Support Fund, since the academy does not even have either a contemporary art faculty or a separate interdisciplinary department. In general, such variances probably do not merit much attention, individual institutions do not have to “harmonize” their department titles with someone’s understanding of art. According to Šapoka, “today, a certain perspective on an artwork can make a painter be regarded as interdisciplinary artist while video, photo, or performance artist will be classed with the traditionalists.” No one argues anymore that even the most contemporary methods do not always produce a McLuhanesque message; however, I would like to point out certain nuances that are not always visible from the outside.

Just like Kreivyte, I once received a call... The caller, a Vilnius Art Academy professor, asked me to give advice to a student of monumental art (stained

glass) who showed inclinations towards conceptual art. Stained glass and conceptualism? My first reaction was that the two hardly fit together. Though I am not saying they are essentially incompatible. After all, “non-traditional,” “conceptual,” etc. artistic processes in the Academy accelerated back when there was no need for a clear definition of interdisciplinary art, when group initiatives by students from the Sculpture Department or the Painting Department (“The Green Leaf,” “Good Evils,” “Academic Preparation Group,” etc.) shaped a general idea of the new art through their activities alone. Against this background, various contemporary art concepts, thrown around by teachers and students for decades, all too often become liberally attributed characterizations instead of statements of principle.

As the first “insurgents” graduated from the Academy and tried to integrate into the cultural life beyond its walls, there emerged a need for more formalized institutions and definitions. The infant Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists’ Association (LTMKS) wanted to distance itself from the Lithuanian Artists Union (LDA), even though it did initially consult bylaws of the artists union founded in Kaunas in 1935, the predecessor of the “vilified LDA.” When, in 1995, Vilnius Art Academy abolished the Graphics Department and was setting up a new Image Studio (it evolved into the Photo-Video Department in 1997 and later into the Department of Photography and Media Arts), the move was perceived as yet another sign of contemporary art gaining some autonomy. Breaking away from pieces, installations, or murals created across the departments of Vilnius Art Academy was significant in that it pointed in the direction of how the academy students would use the language of contemporary art from then on. The process, of course, was further entrenched by ever closer cooperation between the students and curators at the Contemporary Art Centre.

This communication and cooperation notwithstanding, the Academy’s Department of Photography and Media Arts should not be seen *a priori* as an institution of the new art, implementing a qualitatively novel “approach to creative principles” – in this case, I agree with Šapoka’s above-mentioned distinction between traditionalists and interdisciplinary artists. In this department, much like in all the others, students study traditional subject like photography. However, following the Culture Support Fund’s classification, this department strangely “pulls away” from both fine art and interdisciplinary art, a pull-away that is not purely rhetorical – there is much

talk about the Fund's remarkably big quotas for photography. Therefore, unlike photography, the Fund treats IA as simply one more funded field rather than an "exceptional" feature of visual art. We could find even more formal "variances," not to mention the "matter-of-course" lobbying by creative unions.

I go into the circumstances of young artists' careers only because, while I agree with most of Kreivyte's points, I have some doubts about the fifth one. So far, I simply cannot see any possibilities for notions about IA in Lithuania developing without any institutional backing. Interdisciplinarity and contemporary art is defined by institutions (not so much in the sense of the Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius Art Academy, the National Art Gallery and other galleries themselves as the institutional field shaped by curators and influential critics) to a much greater extent than traditional painting or sculpture. I feel that, within this specific field or theoretic atmosphere generated by changing artistic practices, state funding principles will also undergo adjustments in the long run. Presumably, art genres based around traditional uses of materials and methods will lose significance – for instance, what we call "art in public spaces" will be more to the point than "granite sculpture symposium." We will, in all likelihood, continue to talk about "transgressive" contemporary art (in fact, it would be hard to imagine contemporary artists not claiming to transgress limits of one sort or another), coin terms to describe new processes, even though legitimization of the new art will perhaps follow "logic of modernness" other than what we are used to today. That, of course, will not mean erosion of traditional methods or (traditional) selection processes, nor will it reduce subjectivity of appraisers. On the contrary: experts who process applications for the Culture Support Fund note that applicants grow increasingly skillful at making their project proposals fit perfectly the Fund's stated priorities and requirements; consequently, they must come up with a "complementary" criterion for quality – not always palpable or unambiguously describable – in the face of declining funding.

In the Graveyards of “Interdisciplinarity”

Danutė Gambickaitė

Published in cultural weekly *7 meno dienos*, No. 17 (939), 29-04-2011

I have been thinking, for quite some time now, that the notion of interdisciplinarity is irrelevant in discussions of contemporary art phenomena. It flickers occasionally like a phantom, mostly in academic language or in funding applications. A recent essay by Laima Kreivytė and Skaidra Trilupaitytė, published in “7 Meno Dienos,” where they discuss definitions of interdisciplinarity, has encouraged me to lay out my own reflections on the matter.

Over the last several years (it is how long I have been following developments with any degree of consistency), the concept of interdisciplinarity has had a rather seldom appearance in the textual battlefields dedicated to contemporary art. Seemingly (as one might well have expected), such a situation raised few eyebrows. “Interdisciplinary art” is interdisciplinarity art. The kind we have read about, heard about from our elders (each of the young ones), what else is there to add?

In her essay “Instruction: Interdisciplinary Art,” Laima Kreivytė refers to those who have written and spoken about the subject before: “In the West, since the early 1970s, in Lithuania, since 1990. The postmedium condition has been discussed by Rosalind Krauss, the ethnographic turn in contemporary art (emphasizing discursive strategies rather than the medium and technique), by Hal Foster. In Lithuania, Lolita Jablonskienė has written on the issues of the margins, Dovilė Tumpytė explained key concepts of contemporary art (including interdisciplinarity), Kęstutis Šapoka has presented several comprehensive remarks on interdisciplinary art. Vytautas Michelkevičius, the president of the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists’ Association, has had his say as well.”

It is quite understandable that definitions referring to the art that is being created now tend to evolve. To be more precise, they evolve along with evolving audiences and evolving awareness which is still essentially in its infancy. Understandably, when you hear invitations to, once again and in the light of new conditions, reconsider existing definitions and present new ones, you start reflecting on your own relation to whatever is to be reconsidered.

It is not easy to try and articulate the concept of interdisciplinarity in one’s

own terms without feeling guilt (shame) over having a somewhat different experience of it, mostly coming from texts. One where interdisciplinarity already seems like a given and, nonetheless, exists immanently, while new definitions seem quite unnecessary. The kind of experience that can be (or perhaps is) simulation- and phantom-like. Simulation-like, because many of the young ones have long since ceased using the term “interdisciplinarity” in discussing their own work. They make no effort to reconsider it or make it relevant in any other way.

I do not wish to pass judgements on whether that is good or requires serious thought. It seems that such a state of affairs came about gradually, along with a growing habit of laying stress on the “how” rather than the “what.” Even in the institutional officialese of application forms, interdisciplinarity has become a cold concept used to define the specificity of contemporary art. Just put “interdisciplinary,” and it becomes clear to every bureaucrat that it is neither this nor that and there is no need to waste any more time on clarifications. (?) Such evasions are always faulty, albeit justifiable. It is just that there exists a risk that, once faced with indeterminacy, undefinability, obstacle, we might become hostages to a situation to do with our specific geographic, political, and historic circumstances.

Once, the concept of interdisciplinarity was indispensable, especially in confrontations with the Lithuanian Artists Association. Now, however, a contemporary artist would probably find it hard to conceive of similar confrontations regarding her art. Why confront anyone, if those who must be convinced are already convinced? Consequently, the word “interdisciplinarity” found its way to the bureaucratic officialese and academic terminology as part of art history vocabulary. Come to think of it, even the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists Association is not a very active body anymore.

Reflecting on these shifts of the concept of interdisciplinarity in contemporary art, one should mention philosopher Arūnas Sverdiolas’ notion of phantom existence. It seems that interdisciplinarity is currently going through a condition not unlike the phantom existence expounded in Sverdiolas’ texts, even if he refers to a different historic period. “It is a question of unreal existence and givenness, the existence and the givenness of that which is not real, a question of how is and is given that which is not real, nay, essentially, ‘really’, and ‘completely’ unreal,” Sverdiolas says in discussing the post-soviet existence. A similar (and partially related) suspicion begs itself when one considers the relevance of interdisciplinarity in discussion of contemporary art phenomena. Looking at Sverdiolas’

definition from the future perspective and paraphrasing it a little, what we have is this: “It is a question of unreal existence and givenness, the existence and the givenness of that which was not real, the question of how was and was given that which was not real, nay, essentially, ,really‘, and ,completely‘ unreal.” Thus fictionally distancing ourselves from the present, one of the solutions we have is to forestall, to predict and prepare – most importantly, to simply reiterate once more the crucial need of self-reflexivity. One has to agree with Trilupaitytė when she says that the concept of art itself is, to a large extent, a political construct.

Recently, I have been thinking that being in between disciplines has been replaced by being in between groups (intergroupness or, if you will, interconceptuality). Granted, both have existed for quite some time, it is their relevance that has changed. In discourses on contemporary art, the emphasis has shifted from confrontation with tradition (interdisciplinarity vs tradition) to confrontation/collaboration among groups, different but co-existent in one field. To describe this condition (between groups and concepts), one could use a neologism coined by Kurt Vonnegut in his novel “Cat’s Cradle”: *karass*. The first ones to apply it to Lithuanian realities while discussing the particularity of their generation were Jurijus Dobriakovas and Tomas Čiučelis. A pretty – and symptomatic of our times – literary digression that has been on my mind for quite some time.

“If you find your life tangled up with somebody else’s life for no very logical reasons,” according to Bokonon, “that person may be a member of your *karass*.” Indeed, it seems that everything now stratifies less in between disciplines and more in overlapping and sometimes contiguous or divergent *karasses* (groups of the like-minded). It happens that emphases get relocated from the “what” to the “how.” And this is here that we confront other pressing questions, like openness and closeness, forced and natural commonality, etc. But will the phantom-like existence not catch up with these relocated emphases? Perhaps one has to talk it out to make the phantoms knowable and at least less daunting. As sound artist Andrius Rugys once said: Noise stops being noise once you listen to it.

Comments:

2EASY fashion

If you had but one choice, what would you save from a burning house: a Hirst or a diamond skull? In our opinion, the question is as worthwhile as any other attempts to define interdisciplinary art.

Danas Aleksa

In the Lithuanian art scene, interdisciplinarity, the way I see it, is not just a definition of artistic endeavor, but also an artist's own position. In her explication, Laima Kreivytė mentioned that most union members made interdisciplinary art. It means that not only makers of interdisciplinary art are in the union. There must be additional motives to choose a non-traditional artists union.

Arnas Anskaitis

Imagining Interdisciplinarity

We usually picture interdisciplinarity topographically, as layers of several different areas of knowledge about reality, the so-called disciplines. Distinct disciplines cover one another like different maps and, in their overlaps, propose a new way of relating to reality. We could imagine a different spatial rendering of interdisciplinarity – one that shows the “in-between” of disciplines, maps, territories. Here, infused with significance are spaces and times that divide discipline-bound realities. Where are we to locate art in this? Strictly speaking, it is not a discipline, it does not have a fixed, defined place, but perhaps it can travel along these reality gaps, mark paths and leave its trails?

Jurga Barilaitė

Twelve very long sentences

I agree that we need to name the “in-between” if only for pragmatic reasons, for a project model of culture that, in the first part of the week, I have no power to fight against. It just so happens that Monday to Wednesday I must trust the structure, but starting on Thursday morning I am overpowered by an awful desire to paint a door that I could open and walk through the wall. On Wednesday that wall was really solid, completely impassable and it clearly said “no,” but on Thursday there appeared a “maybe.” A matter of convention. Thursday is the gap, the freedom of choice, I choose the road through the wall and imagine Friday. And on Saturday I discover there is another apartment behind the wall. How am I to show this to someone? At nightfall I am overcome by doubt – why was it so easy to walk through the wall, can it be fake or made of rotten plasterboard or paper? It is not bad to be bound by normal brickwork or, even better, ferroconcrete walls, then at least you can seriously engage in demolition, for example, with that huge weight you see in documentaries. Tearing paper – what kind of demolition is that? A petty fictitious fight, silly comedy. Living through Sunday is scary and hopeless, uncertainty and nothingness envelop you, that’s when and why you have to create something again, having rid yourself of thoughts, with bare soul, empty heart, focusing your mind on the shortest waves, ridding yourself of problems of the planet, calming down, almost happy. Almost, because deadline is tomorrow.

Vitalij Červiakov

Staircases Interdisciplinarity

We don't think enough about **staircases** interdisciplinarity.

Nothing was more beautiful in **old houses** exhibitions than **the staircases** interdisciplinarity.

Nothing is uglier, colder, more hostile, meaner, in today's **apartment buildings** exhibitions.

We should learn to live more on **staircases** interdisciplinarity.

But how?

Rewriting of

Espèces d'espaces: Journal d'un usage de l'espace by Georges Perec

Mindaugas Gapševičius (MIGA)

As I was reading Danutė Gambickaitė's essay "In the Graveyards of Interdisciplinarity," I was pondering several things that I will attempt to lay down in fragments; I suggest that the reader arrange them in any order she likes.

1. The Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists Association could as well call itself the Rejects Union, because it reminds me of the French *Salon des Refusés*. In the former case, young artists of the 1990s were thrown overboard because they did not meet the guidelines of the traditional artists' union. In the latter case, the rejects did not fit into the context of high art and the contemporary conventional perceptions of art. A union of rejects is not at all a bad thing and the word "interdisciplinarity" captures rather well the essence of experimenting artists.

2. While reading the essay, I was pondering Gilles Deleuze's notion of "rhizome" which means being "in between," e.g., being neither a root nor a stem. In botany, an instance of such a being is a ginger root; in cooking, the equivalent might be the sour cream dressing in white salad, or the merging point between sour cream and boiled potatoes. A final example might be potatoes with a little sour cream or sour cream with a dash of boiled potatoes. Such might well be the product of interdisciplinary artists – sometimes it would be closer to paintings, sometimes to video art, sometimes to sound, and sometimes to pancakes (ref. Interdisciplinary Artists' Association's 2012 show "Bendrabūtis").

3. Interdisciplinary art can be divided into strong and weak, similarly to weak artificial intelligence and strong artificial intelligence. The point of strong AI is to create a machine that could solve problems equal to human intellect. For example, everyone has heard of the ELIZA chat room, where a "patient" interacts with a psychotherapist. A more up

to date example is the Deep Blue computer that beat Garry Kasparov in a chess game in 1996. An even fresher example is Watson, the supercomputer that won a quiz game in 2011, beating former champions Brad Rutter and Ken Jennings. To put it in the language of the universe, a strong interdisciplinary art might correspond to dark matter or dark energy which exists in between matter, i.e., in between particles defined by physics, including Higgs boson. Strong interdisciplinary art could also be an object or a phenomenon that does not fit into traditional definitions of art (including those of interdisciplinarity), but raises urgent questions, provokes new solutions.

4. I essentially agree with Danutė Gambickaitė's idea about the collaborative solution to the problem which could describe interdisciplinarity most accurately, yet without attaching too much importance to the question of "how." In fact, it does not matter all that much how one makes art, as long as we do not reduce everything to the process of creating the product. The important thing is to raise questions or challenges and to find unconventional answers or solutions.

5. Recently, I've been working on a new project called "0.30402944246776265" that I presented in Tallinn this year. This figure is my computer's unique number and address, generated on Freenet (freenetproject.org). If I use my computer in traditional network, Opennet Freenet, this number and computer's location do not change. Freenet, however, has a network operating by social rules, Darknet Freenet. Therein, the computer's location and its number changes in response to its interaction with other computers on Freenet. The study I conduct is directly related to conceptualizing artificial life, while its outcome will be a proposition that movement of digital information on Darknet Freenet should be likened to information spread in physical space.

Linas Jusionis

I have to force myself to think of interdisciplinarity. It's merely a concept that arouses no emotion. True, at least for me, this concept has a distinctive air of a historic period, conjuring up insignificant personal associations – for some reason I keep thinking of metal kiosks selling chewing gum and audiocassettes. Although it still seems to contain echoes of attempts at renewal and resistance – which are more resonant (just like the above-mentioned air of a period) if you think of the Lithuanian art field – interdisciplinarity has peacefully sunk into a sort of art taxonomy. And it is a feature of a taxonomy that it is usually either used or ignored without being much questioned. I think now it is most often ignored, because all it can do is name the form of a piece of art, something that does not seem very important. Granted, taxonomies can be of interest in that they well preserves historic contexts that shaped them in the first place.

Therefore, just like Danutė proposes, it is indeed more interesting to reflect on being in between groups and ideas they programme, something that comes to substitute being in between disciplines. Interdisciplinarity could therefore be construed as simply an attempt to transgress the boundaries of one group and its ideology or strategy, at the same time refusing to invest too much significance to issues raised by one group or another.

On the other hand, one can think about interdisciplinarity on a very personal level. One can see it as creativity that appears while one attempts to reflect on very different experiences that touch only on a very personal level. In this case, it matters little what final form the process takes. It is perhaps this definition of interdisciplinarity that is most relevant to me.

Vsevolod Kovalevskij

Tarp discipliniskumas
~~Kaip jį reikviduoti savęs negerbiančis ^{šiuo atveju?} ~~su savimi kovoti~~~~
 greičiausiai

(Būdas pasiteisinti)

Būdas daug apibūti

22

Interdisciplinary

Like every other person who disrespect him self or artist I grabbed

(Way of excuse your self)

manner of outreach a lot

Ignas Krunglevičius

“Interdisciplinarity/interdisciplinary art” – I do not use these concepts to define my practices. I associate this term with older theoretical texts where opposition to the authoritative establishment was significant in defining artistic practices (Danutė’s remark about confrontation with the Artists Association is very accurate in this respect). Today, unfortunately, the only relevant dialogue seems to be the one with the market. Here, “interdisciplinarity” is a trademark rather than a relevant concept to discuss contemporary art processes.

Saulius Leonavičius

Dividing the material, medium, text into smaller and smaller component parts.

Discipline is a method of thinking and practice that operates on binary oppositions.

Dainius Liškevičius

1. I Climb A Mountain

I clamber up the steep slope, climb up towards the sky.
The silence of the gorge fills my heart with joy.
I feel from a fresh breeze where springs are flowing.
And atop the crest vast spaces open up.
Trees surround me – can I be lost?
I hear the song of woodcutters and go towards them.

Ouyang Xiu, from „Travelling to Longmen, Dividing Topics Into Fifteen Poems“. *Senovės rytų poezija*, ed. Sigitas Geda, Vilnius: Vaga, 1991, p. 593. The poem translated to English by Justinas Šuliokas.

Paulina Eglė Pukytė

As you have rightly noted, for members of the union interdisciplinarity usually means the possibility of being in BETWEEN disciplines, being simply a visual artist, take a break from the subjects they studied or work in disciplines they have not studied or that do not officially exist. (Isn't it strange, though, that students who apply to Vilnius Academy of Art still have to pick a discipline and have no possibility, at least in their first year, to simply study visual art or, even more broadly, fine art?) Mine is the transitional generation that needed the most to legitimize this kind of being in BETWEEN disciplines, freedom to make art using whatever means necessary to convey the idea or achieve the desired result. In this respect, interdisciplinarity is not interaction, integration, reversal, etc. among distinct disciplines in a particular piece of art, not a creative principle, not a method, but simply a necessary condition for making art, i.e., freedom. Perhaps that might be the reason why it does not get reconsidered within artists' oeuvre?

Kęstutis Šapoka

Danutė Gambickaitė: *It is not easy to try and articulate the concept of interdisciplinarity in one's own terms without feeling guilt (shame) over having a somewhat different experience of it, mostly coming from texts. One where interdisciplinarity already seems like a given and, nonetheless, exists immanently, while new definitions seem quite unnecessary. The kind of experience that can be (or perhaps is) simulation- and phantom-like. Simulation-like, because many of the young ones have long since ceased using the term "interdisciplinarity" in discussing their own work. They make no effort to reconsider it or make it relevant in any other way.*

K. Š.: I have heard "interdisciplinary veterans" remarking that burials (graveyards) of "interdisciplinarity" are quite premature and interdisciplinary art is still relevant. I agree, in part, that talking about "graveyards" is a bit of a stretch, but the issue itself of interdisciplinarity's (ir)relevance has been in the air for several years now. Besides, it matters who and how raises the question. When it is done by people of the young generation of artists or art critics, it is only natural that they put emphases the way they do. Naturally, this generation takes "interdisciplinarity" for granted, as an accepted idea without any a challenge, any tension, effectively part of the canon. There is little urgency to make it topical, unless as a tradition. Even for the generation which is a little older, i.e., my own (people of circa 2000 who squeezed in between the "revolutionaries" and the current young generation), the notion of "interdisciplinary art" is natural, but not very relevant.

That said, the concept does seem to retain some tension for the generation of "interdisciplinary" pioneers, the "revolutionaries." Granted, "interdisciplinarity" is not as electrifying as it was a decade ago, yet it probably keeps reappearing in the form of a moral choice, a

present-day dilemma for members of this generation who often feel torn between seeing themselves as “classics” and “the avant-garde.”

Danutė Gambickaitė: Once, the concept of interdisciplinarity was indispensable, especially in confrontations with the Lithuanian Artists Association. Now, however, a contemporary artist would probably find it hard to conceive of similar confrontations regarding her art. Why confront anyone, if those who must be convinced are already convinced? Consequently, the word “interdisciplinarity” found its way to the bureaucratic officialese and academic terminology as part of art history vocabulary. Come to think of it, even the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists Association is not a very active body anymore, doing things mostly out of necessity.

Indeed, there might still exist some jaded, hidden confrontation, but it must seem of little interest to the young generation that neither experienced nor took part in those institutional and ideological confrontations. Therefore this confrontation has lost much of its steam and springs back to life only in funding applications. That’s when the faded enmity between “fine art” and “interdisciplinary art” is reignited again, for a short while. This enmity cannot be sustained even here, because “interdisciplinary art” has already won a separate line in state funding papers. The fight could go on about the share of the pie, but little else.

Again, all depends on your point of view. If we take a look at the programming of the National Broadcaster, the public national TV, the so-called “interdisciplinary art” gets snubbed just as vehemently as before...

However, is it a goal of “interdisciplinary art” to become a product for mass consumption, i.e., the new establishment? I think so. Possibly, it is what the greater part of the 1990s “interdisciplinary art” was aiming at all along (in one of the first annual exhibitions of the Soros Contemporary Art Centre, it was said unambiguously that a *new*

establishment was forming), so the concept depreciated very rapidly and became “irrelevant.” Granted, relevance can always be reclaimed, by infusing a concept with new elemental forces or ambitions (even if they contradict the initial meaning of the concept)...

Danutė Gambickaitė: Recently, I have been thinking that being in between disciplines has been replaced by being in between groups (intergroupness or, if you will, interconceptuality). Granted, both have existed for quite some time, it is their relevance that has changed. In discourses on contemporary art, the emphasis has shifted from confrontation with tradition (interdisciplinarity vs tradition) to confrontation/collaboration among groups, different but co-existent in one field.

The Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists' Association, too, keeps dealing with an identity crisis (something the union did not have to face when it was founded) – it is constantly torn between being the “alternative” (to what?) and “academization,” growing its status and institutional weight. So it's hard to say what it means exactly to say that the union works “out of necessity.” If we recalled the period when the union was founded, when “interdisciplinary” essentially meant “alternative,” then the present-day union might indeed look like something existing “out of necessity.”

On the other hand, one should consider the path the union took to grow from an ill-defined, quasi-legal entity into an organization with some standing and popularity with young artists. How can one measure which stage in the union's development was a more or the most relevant one? We enter the wilderness of interpretation.

For example, when some elder members demonstratively left the union in protest of what they thought was its ideological degradation, they were guided by this very notion of “interdisciplinarity” of the 1990s. Meanwhile today's youths can see (or look for) no ethical or political dimension in it. Their guide is the pragmatic logic of utility (e.g., status, social guarantees, etc.). True, these “goods” were not out of sight when

the union was founded, but because of the circumstances at the time, these “pragmatic” goals were closely related to ideological and ethical aspirations.

Despite this “pragmatism,” the majority of “interdisciplinary” youths sign up with the Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists’ Association rather than the Lithuanian Artists Union. Therefore, the concept of “interdisciplinarity,” even though hardly ever used, seems after all relevant in a somewhat paradoxical way... Perhaps the image that was formed back in the late 1990s is still strong?

It still occasionally happens that the union’s council rejects applicants because it thinks their oeuvre is more “fine art” than “interdisciplinary art.” It is a quaint distinction, but it works nonetheless. In what ways – that would be hard to explain.

I agree that the concept and the notion of “interdisciplinary art” has emerged from the “revolutionary” situation of the 1990s, when the opposition between “traditional” and “new” (or “interdisciplinary”) art – formal definitions, to put it simply – was given all too much prominence (or perhaps deservedly so). It was important “how” things were done. The (new) form itself, the medium, plastic solution substituted the content, relevance, concept of a piece of art or project. I’d say that the “how” still exists, maintained, somewhat artificially, by our major contemporary art institutions. The “how,” which was genuinely relevant in the 1990s, has been transferred to the sphere of institutional, i.e., bureaucratic, simulation. What matters is not “how” the piece is made, the project in its formal sense, but “how” flexibly one can function in a particular bureaucratic system. And that, again, relates closely to being in “groups,” functioning against the background of group interests. There is nothing new in that, something quite familiar, say, from the Soviet times and still relevant in the 1990s, but lately resurrecting with a new force and new “tuning.” It is a derivative of “interdisciplinarity,” one we could call “neoestablishmentism,” a situation where the “how” is completely transformed into tactics of bureaucratic functioning. The artwork itself, which was still important to “interdisciplinary” artist,

usually disappears altogether.

In general, though, I agree that our present situation mutates into existence in groups, a sort of “intergroupness.” “Interconceptuality,” I would say, is a concept as hollow as “conceptuality” (which has replaced “interdisciplinarity” that everyone, including me, loved so much at the turn of the century, but has since started sinking into oblivion, too). All art, “traditional” and “contemporary” alike, is “conceptual,” in the sense that it is conceived on one idea or another (that, too, is a worn-out truism)...

However, I think that “The Graveyards of Interdisciplinarity,” in the form of an essay or an exhibition, is an interesting provocation. And provocation, even if aimed at “burying” a concept, can, on the contrary, push it back into relevance and life. In the end, even a graveyard marks the beginning of a new existence.

Marija Šnipaitė

During the process, you keep thinking about the colour and the light, play a music video several times an hour and pick the same book from the shelf over and over again, because your own creation could use the structure of that novel. And the result is merely wood, clay, plaster, a light bulb of some kind or other, and some other trifle. But when someone asks you to tell them something about all this, you start talking about, say, landscape in road movies.

You could hardly call these situations interdisciplinarity. Even if you could, this interdisciplinarity seems natural and operating simply on the personal plane.

Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists' Association
group exhibition
In the Graveyards of Interdisciplinarity (?)

2013 10 17 – 2013 10 31

Artists

*2EASY fashion, Danas Aleksa, Arnas Anskaitis, Jurga Barilaitė,
Vitalij Červiakov, Mindaugas Gapševičius, Linas Jusionis,
Vsevolod Kovalevskij, Ignas Krunglevičius, Saulius Leonavičius,
Dainius Liškevičius, Paulina Eglė Pukytė, Kęstutis Šapoka, Marija Šnipaitė*

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