

RESEARCH ON THE STUDY OF ART AND DESIGN: A STUDY ON THE PARADIGMATIC PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK TOWARDS THE FIELD OF VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to briefly show the paradigm behind the idea of practice-based nature of art and design inquiries and made discussion of some fundamental aspects of art / design, in order to explain and justify its practice-based character as commensurate to research in the higher education context. It is to review recent literature that addresses various issues towards the idea of art and design as a 'practice-based' instead of research-based inquiry which is quite novelty. By considering the importance of the issue and but the same time its depth and complexity comprising of philosophical underpinnings, thorough this article researcher would like to discuss its ontological basis of art / design works *vis a vis* natural fact, followed by showing their epistemic character in comparison to scientific knowledge. This research employed an investigation of the aspects of implicit philosophical assumptions about the view of the nature of the world (ontology) of art and design, and the way to understand (epistemology) artistically and designerly paradigm of inquiry, then finally about its plausible method of art and design in conducting creative research. This study come up with a kind of proposal about re-examination, if art and design subsume themselves under commonly known as a scientific research paradigm. Art and design do not observe and predict existing facts to find a formulation on making and designing. The task of art and design is to invent and innovate creatively, by proposing new meaning and possibilities with respect to many things imaginable, instead of assuming 'universal' and mechanical reproducibility of any research findings. Since art and design endeavors, primarily do not concern with objective fact findings and mechanical predictions of them, but with "making sense of things", otherwise the consequence would be counter-productive.

Key Words: Artistics, Practice-based, Research, Paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, research as the creation of knowledge draws increasing attention to the creative arts field (McNiff, 2006, p.11; Leavy, 2009, p.2). The usual assumption bear in mind attempts research as a form of knowing and explaining. Indeed, Shaun McNiff (2006) suggested that a research task could be preoccupied objectives such as the need to experience, to inspire, or to build a profession collectively. Egon Guba (1990) in *The Paradigm Dialog* imposed that a researcher 'must understand the basic ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of each, and be able to engage them in dialogue' (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 191). Indeed, Joseph A. Maxwell (2005) asserted that underpinning any research, there are some at least implicit philosophical assumptions about the view of the nature of the world (ontology) and the way to understand it (epistemology); and by making them explicit, carefully considering them Gary Potter (2000) believed that will be of practical benefit (p.3). The philosophical assumptions known as worldview or 'paradigm', is significant thought disseminates by Thomas Kuhn (1922 – 1966) concerning our ideas about reality and how we going to gain knowledge out of it (Maxwell, 2005, p. 36). There are many paradigm, which is nothing more or less than a conceptual framework (Garratt, 2005), used in guiding research inquiry. The research paradigm helps to distinguish the inquiry in science, social science, and the arts. Correspondingly, Henk Borgdorff (2006) in *The Debate on Research in the Arts* indicated that what will 'make art research distinguishes and qualifies as academic research in its own right is by scrutinizing the question of ontological, epistemological, and methodological' which means not only following what already been done and without proper knowledge about what the philosophical assumption behind the practices. At least since late 19th and early 20th centuries, key western intellectuals from Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger to Hans-Georg Gadamer and so forth have argued and convincingly showed inadequacies of positivistic framework in understanding human historico-cultural nature, indicated by *singularities* (plurality of uniqueness) as epitomized in the arts.

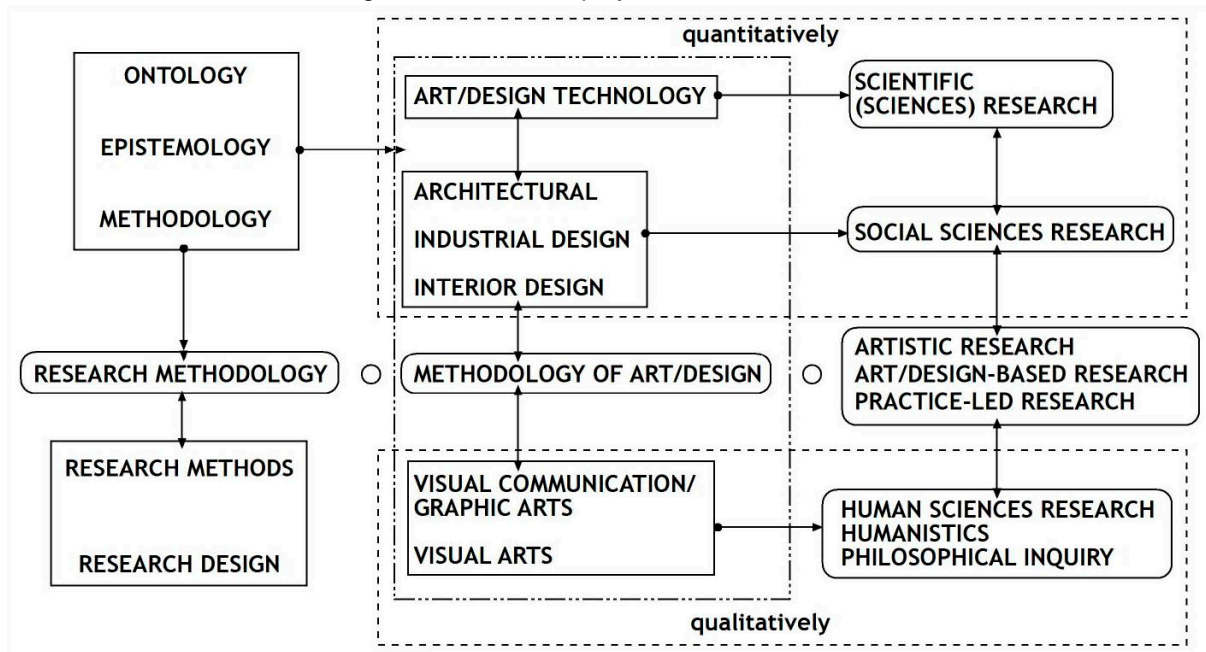
PROBLEM STATEMENTS

Amidst the 'awakening of research universities' in several high profile institution, the field of art and design are now facing an uneasy situation. Integration of art and design into higher education system creates pressure to adapt to structures and regulations that refer to 'scientific research standards,' but in turn inflicting paradigmatic quandary and impediment among creative disciplines. The most prevalent cases are teaching and knowledge (in any discipline) are prone to be defined solely by techno-scientific 'truth' or 'paradigm' (positivism, post-positivism), perhaps unsurprisingly common in many developing countries seeking to achieve prosperity by means of techno-industrial advancements. Certainly there is nothing ill-advised within techno-scientific paradigm in itself, but not every human endeavor shares the same technological 'truth and rationality.' Likewise, if art and design subsume themselves under techno-scientific research paradigm that assumes 'universal' and mechanical reproducibility of any research findings, the consequence would be very counterproductive.

Since art and design endeavours, to paraphrase Klaus Krippendorf, primarily do not concern with objective fact findings and mechanical predictions of them, but with “making sense of things” (Krippendorf, 2007: 69). Science normally studies existing facts such as physical phenomena of colour, then comes up with causal explanations of its nature, hence mechanical prediction and controlled implementation of it would be possible. In contrast, art and design does not observe and predict existing facts mechanically, but instead proposing new meaning and possibilities with respect to many things imaginable. Many movies, even asked ‘what does it mean to be’ in a world where technological control is ever increasingly imposed on every aspect of human life.

An important distinction should be stressed here, that is between facts and meaning. The facts as understood by science are indeed causal-mechanically predictable, but art and design are not merely inanimate scientific objects, but intrinsically related to humanity’s own continual self-disclosure that makes possible ever-continuing self understanding and transformation. Doing art and design, hence have to be distinguished from doing objectively / predictive research. And in conjoining with the emergence of practice-based paradigm within international art and design academia in the past 20 years, there is at present a solid rationale for our higher education not to indiscriminately subsuming art and design under one roof of scientific research paradigm. Nonetheless, the idea of art and design study as a ‘practice-based’ instead of research-based inquiry is a relatively new within our art and design academia wherein preliminary discourses are still much necessary needed. To achieve credible footing of art / design practice as commensurate to ‘mainstream’ research in academic setting, the first route taken here was posing an ontological problem. “What is the nature of the object, of the subject matter, in research,” or more precisely practice “in the arts? (Borgdorff, 2012: 45). Are art and design works exactly the ‘same reality’ as natural things? To what kind of ‘reality’ does the inquiry within the arts address itself?

Table 1 Positing the Research Inquiry of Artistic Practice-based Research



LITERATURE REVIEWS

Nevertheless, considering the importance of the issue and but the same time its depth and complexity comprising of philosophical underpinnings, this article constricted itself to the discussion of some fundamental aspects of art / design, in order to explain and justify its practice-based character as commensurate to research in the higher education context. First aspect to be discussed is ontological basis of art / design works *vis a vis* natural facts, followed by showing their epistemic character in comparison to scientific knowledge. To meet academic requirements, it is also important to discuss the last aspect, that is, methodology. But as already stated by Guba in *Paradigm Dialog* (1990) and later adapted by Gray & Malins, methodology “should be a consequence of ontology and epistemology – that is, methodology is evolved in awareness of what the researcher considers“ reality, hence “knowable” (Gray & Malins, 2004: 19).

To put it in other words, methodology is a logical consequence of our most basic tenet of ‘reality’ and of ‘knowledge’ (or, paradigm is not consisted merely of methodology, but also of ontology and epistemology). If we consider ‘reality’ as consisting of merely inanimate atomic entities shaped by mechanical forces that could be represented in law-like equations, which in turn those laws could be applied back to predict or control that reality, our appropriate method of inquiries should be of observations and controlled experiments. But in the case of art and design ‘reality’ which exhibit an ‘open’ (discovery-led) and ‘hermeneutical’ character (meaningful instead of mechanical), the appropriate paradigm would not be of objective-scientific research. It is the task of this paper to briefly show the paradigm behind the idea of practice-based nature of art and design inquiries.

METHODOLOGY

Since paradigm is not in itself an empirical object, but instead ‘conceptual framework’ through which any research is made possible, the inquiry into it employs literary research and reflective methods. Inasmuch as this inquiry suggests art and design as a discrete discipline in contrast to the natural sciences, it also includes brief comparative analysis. Inquiry proceeded from the discussion of ontological aspect, followed by epistemology and finally methodology of art and design.

RESULTS

Ontology of Art and Design Works

In positivist and post-positivist paradigm commonly employed in mainstream science, research assumes reality exists ‘out there’ as an ‘objective’ mechanical facts where human ‘subjects’ (researchers) could occupy a detached observational position, as they were ‘outside that reality,’ free from any cultural beliefs. This ‘dualistic’ ontology (clear-cut separation between ‘subject and object’ or ‘mind and matter’) originated from 16th century Cartesianism (but now is still widely assumed) has been heavily criticized by contemporary Western Intellectuals, whether from phenomenological tradition

(Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty), hermeneutics (Heidegger, Gadamer), critical theory (Marcuse, Habermas), or post-structuralism (Baudrillard, Derrida). These contemporary critiques (where Heidegger indeed plays a central role) should not be understood as some “crass and vaguely ‘postmodern’ notions that all knowledge is ‘merely relative,’” or as a mutual “attack on the natural sciences. The main target was *scientism*” (Clark, 2011: 11, 21), that is, the belief that only the natural sciences (based on Cartesian ontology) could reach the truest understanding of all reality, and ought to be the ultimate ground of any other. Scientific objectivity here remains intact, but as the paradigmatic standard appropriate for some kinds of inquiry, not as the sole measure of legitimate knowledge of all things (ibid.: 21).

In contrast to those kind of Platonic-Cartesian binary, hermeneutics and phenomenology begin from concrete *lifeworld* or *Being-in-the-World*, roughly holistic ‘web’ of *lived life* before any dualistic interpretation of it. Here hermeneutical view has brought deep yet ‘brighter’ consequences in our understanding of human, art and culture. Being ‘inside’ our own or praxical-linguistical lifeworld all the time (and could never possible to be ‘outside’), art and design works do not primarily present themselves to us some kind of ‘value-free’ objects of scientific scrutiny.

Art and design works initially and for the most part ‘have always already done their work’ within the closest proximity to us, that is, in and through our own wardrobes, buildings, ceremonies, graphical signs, audio-visuals, stories of our ‘heroes and villain,’ an so on. All that have just been mentioned have a deep historical character, that is, transmitted and gets reinterpreted through generational praxis prior to any explicit theorizations. Hence, they rather tacitly constitute our cultural ‘horizons’ in which we live, and through which our outlook gets shaped, before we get a chance to approach them with a detached objectivizing gaze (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2013).

At the same time, artworks once again are not ‘merely subjective’ upshots, precisely because they are closely intertwined with their materiality. And to recall above paragraphs that art / design works are always embedded in socio-historical context, here too materiality means ‘matter insofar embodied in socio-historical praxis,’ not an abstract concept of matter as in physical science. We are indeed experiences more than we can say. And it is precisely on this ground of ‘material-practice’ within particular culture that any ordinary and singular artwork is possible at all.

Epistemology: Knowledge Embodied in the Art and Design Works

Hermeneutico-phenomenological perspective has shown us the ontological character of art and design works, that is, non-subjective nor objective, but manifested holistically within socio-cultural web of praxis and embodied in its materiality. This implies a particular kind of knowledge and of ‘truth’ which now puts the issue within epistemological territory. Hence we may briefly conclude that art bears knowledge and truth of its own, that is, ‘historical’ and ‘experiential truth’ about *who* we are, *how* the world is, and what both of them *could* or *should* be. And artworks disclose this ‘truth’ precisely through its material presence that experienced in bodily or ‘sublime’ way rather than in an analytical way, i.e., through explicit propositional statements.

Once again, this embodied experience does not have to be interpreted atomistically (or subjectivistically), since it exactly 'brings us back to the holistic primal connection' with others and with nature that has been conceptualized segregated by Cartesian-atomistic ontology. In fact, there has never been a completely isolated, subjective mental experience of art at all. These are the 'holistic aspects of bodily experience' carried by 'materiality of the artworks' that has been spoken about by phenomenology, in which there are certainly some knowledge and truth 'at work,' but in an implicit or inconspicuous form, not in an explicit-propositional one. Michael Polanyi called this 'materially embodied' or 'bodily' knowledge "tacit knowledge" (Borgdorff: 163). In fact, this inconspicuous knowledge is presupposed in any human activity including the sciences. But the basic idea of tacit knowledge here is that human beings *never* begins with 'not knowing' in the sense of 'not able' to do something. When we successfully manage to improve our prior tacit capacity consciously, that new 'consciously modified capacity' immediately recedes back into new tacit capacity that keeps growing larger and larger. Hence tacit knowledge is not merely 'an inferior addition' to explicit or propositional knowledge, but instead a very basic one in any human endeavour. And precisely in the field of art and design that this kind of knowledge plays a very distinct role. Artists and designers should possess broad yet deep material/bodily experiences in *first hand* concerning repertoire, styles, medium, equipment, places, values, subject matter and so forth in order to be able to transfigure it all anew into fresh artifacts.

Methodology of Research Through Practice in Art and Design

Having discussed the ontology and epistemology of art and design, it is now 'natural' to discuss its methodology. But given their ontologically holistic and epistemologically tacit character, we must be wary that their intrinsic 'research methodology' could never be separated from their practice, as in clear cut separation between intelligible-sensible, mental-material, subject-object or theory-practice. One more thing to clarify is the term 'research' itself within the context of the arts. Christopher Frayling (1993) identified three kind of research that might be employed with respect to art and design which later adopted by Henk Borgdorff (his version is in parentheses below). First is research *into* art (or research *on* the arts), second is research *for* art (or research *for* the arts), and finally the third is research *through* art (or research *in* arts) (Borgdorff: 37).

The first, *research on the arts* refers to an investigation towards art and its practice through a certain theoretical perspective, mostly from social science perspective. So, what is art and its practice is determined from the domain and perspective of social science. As for the second, *research for the arts*, putting art as the objective. It's a little bit different from the first one which positions art as the object of scientific research. The activity of investigation is more into manipulating and exploring materials scientifically that will result as certain instrument for art practice.

Before continuing to the third type of art research, we will highlight one similarity between the two types of art research mentioned earlier. This evinces that both types of art research apply the objective perspective towards art and its practice. The first one is explicitly showing that art and its practice are an object to be investigated within the categories from social science's frame in order to understand it.

The second one, the art and its practice is determined before hand through objective and scientific material manipulation and exploration. The second type of art research tends to determine 'what is art should be' objectively while the first one tends to look for 'what is art' really from scientific perspective which is considered also objective. In both, art and its practice in both cases is inextricable from scientific domains.

The third type, *the research through the arts*, the conjunction *through* or *in* shows that this research is conducted within the working of creative practice of art and design themselves. It is probably the most controversial among other types of art research. This type of art research considers the artistic practice itself as an essential component of both the process and the result of the research (Borgdoff, 2006:7), it's part of the nature of art research itself. The art practice is understood as the research itself. The *research in the arts* thus aims to describe and articulate the embodied knowledge through practicing art itself that embraces the intertwining of theories, experiences, understanding, and other historical aspects. Art practice as art research is understood in its historical finitude.

This kind of research does not start with clear and distinct research questions and hypotheses. In fact, this is not a hypothesis-led kind of research, but more into discovery-led kind of things. This throws the artist in the open of the unexpected outcomes or surprising insight during the practice; in the open of the intertwining process itself. Unlike the basic scientific research that aims to produce formal knowledge or validated scientific insights and its questions, hypotheses, and methods are commonly intended from the beginning, hypothesis-led (Borgdoff, 2009:3), this is not happening in *research in the arts*. The uncertainty aspect of outcome, not in a form of pragmatic, scientific, and objective knowledge, might be one of the main factors that makes this *research in the arts*, somehow does not suit the criteria and expectation from research definition as mentioned earlier. Donald Schon termed this approach as 'reflection in action' (Borgdorff: 50) and the research performers 'reflective practitioners' (ibid.: 81). As such reflective practice, research through or in art and design does not have any one distinct, rigid and exclusive methodology.

CONCLUSIONS

As historical praxis alongside science and technology, art and design has its own ontological and epistemological character as shown in the article with the aid of hermeneutico-phenomenological perspective. The next step is to come up with methodological insight of art and design practice, which is invaluable within the context of academic research. But as the whole article has shown, objectivist methodologies are inappropriate in art and design practice since no ontological and epistemological gap exist between the observing subject and the observed object, or between 'the research' and 'the practice.' The outcome of practice-based research are not findings that can be exactly duplicated by everyone, but in contrast new experiences, meaning and self-understanding embodied in the singularity of each works and their process.

As a consequence, the appropriate methodology would be reflective material-practice, where the primary contribution of research is concrete enhancements of the artistic universe. Concepts and theories are of course invaluable, insofar they are embodied in the works or functioning as 'interlocutor,' and not to be 'imposed' in hypotetico-deductive, atomistically-linear or mechanically-predictive manner. Since the latter will ironically suffocate creativity in the arts itself. Promoting this view doesn't mean that this article is totally against scientific perspective on art. This is just to show that there's an alternative and different way of doing art research besides through the basic scientific one. It is simply an attempt to bring science, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, *down to earth*.

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