

*Journal of Research Practice*  
Volume 7, Issue 1, Article M1, 2011



*Main Article:*

## **A Nomos for Art and Design**

**Tom McGuirk**

Department of Art and Design, Faculty of Arts and Media, University of Chester  
Kingsway Buildings, Kingsway, Newton, Chester CH2 2LB, UNITED KINGDOM  
[t.mcguirk@chester.ac.uk](mailto:t.mcguirk@chester.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

This article examines the relationship between reflecting and making in the context of the new institutional connection between research and art/design. The article argues that while this new dispensation offers exciting possibilities for fruitful cross- and interdisciplinary development, caution is necessary to ensure that the artistic domain retains a level of autonomy within the broader university.

For elucidation, the article initially looks to the early history of education in our fields and to Pierre Bourdieu's account of the "early moments of the autonomization of the artistic field," in his critique of the "scholastic disposition." Bourdieu recognises "a repression of the material determinations of symbolic practices" within those early developments: in effect, a repression of those embodied, situated, and practical aspects of art and design production. He regards such repression as a trait of the broader academy, both then and in subsequent and recent periods. The article argues that this attitude still provides the impetus for what James Elkins refers to as "the incommensurability of studio art production and university life."

The article further argues that a parity of esteem between reflecting and making is vital not only for the sake of the stability of the fields of art and design but for the ongoing development of the broader university. In this argument the article looks to the work of John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

**Keywords:** epistemology; art and design; discipline; Bourdieu; Heidegger; Gadamer

**Suggested Citation:** McGuirk, T. (2011). A nomos for art and design. *Journal of Research Practice*, 7(1), Article M1. Retrieved [date of access], from <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/261/237>

## 1. Introduction

This article examines the relationship between reflecting and making in the context of what the call for contributions to this special issue refers to as “the new institutional connection between research and art/design.” This new dispensation may be seen as a positive development in terms of both the ongoing imbedding of the disciplines of art and design within the broader university and the consequent increased potential for interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation. It is also significant in *realpolitik* terms, that is, in terms of the positioning of our disciplines within the broader (hierarchical) field of the contemporary university. This article will argue that, to thrive, the disciplines of art and design must achieve a level of autonomy necessary for the stability of their position within that broader arena. It is therefore particularly apt that we address the question of “reflecting and making” now because of the potential this juncture provides for a redefining of the relationship between them, not only within these disciplines, but also with regard to that broader arena. Indeed as we shall later see, a number of commentators urge us to grasp this nettle.

First a word of caution, in what follows reference is frequently made to the disciplines of art and design. However these disciplines are of course quite diverse so that such reference is problematic and therefore a proviso or qualification is necessary. Much of the field of design and design research might be characterised as being within the orbit of science or in Bourdieuan terms, as sharing common disciplinary territory with science; industrial design for example shares considerable territory with the disciplines of engineering. Reference in what follows, to the disciplines of art and design will preclude (if somewhat artificially) these territories. This is necessary because much of the argument outlined below holds only with respect to fine art and those aspects of design, understood in terms of Plato’s category described by Janaway as an “*alognon pragma*, a thing without account, a business without rational principle” (Janaway, 1995, p. 51). To clarify then, reference to the fields of “art and design” here will generally be confined to fine art and to that considerable territory of the field of design research, production, and practice, that shares with fine art this particular aspect, along with a historic indebtedness to practical, embodied, tacit, and experiential modes of knowing.

While it is undeniable that the academic field of art and design has always encompassed both reflecting and making, theorising and practising, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that perennial tensions attend what in some philosophical traditions are regarded as two fundamentally different existential stances. Moreover, these tensions are not only evident historically but also alive in contemporary experience within the disciplines. Therefore it is important that they are analysed, understood, and responded to appropriately in educational and research policy terms. The achievement of an equilibrium in terms of parity of esteem between reflecting and making is, it is argued below, essential not only for the stability of our disciplines internally, inevitably it also has implications for their status within the broader university.

While recognising that the new dispensation brings new challenges and opportunities, let us not imagine that this issue itself is new. In his critique of the “scholastic disposition” Pierre Bourdieu refers to the early modern period of art education as “early moments of the autonomization of the artistic field” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 25). This Renaissance period predates the distinction between fine art and design. It was a period of profound change that gave us, amongst many other things, perspective as well as the various theories of *disegno*. Its apex was arguably the founding of the *Accademia del Disegno* in Florence (1563). Bourdieu’s reference to “autonomization” pinpoints an important issue. As Goldstein explains, “that the academy viewed itself as an agent for professional advancement is made clear, then, by its name and deeds: the whole concept of an academy of *disegno* is inimical to a guild or workshop” (Goldstein, 1996, p. 19). As this account suggests, from the outset the academician’s desire for self-definition and self-determination was bound up with another more negative impulse. If the prize of academic status provided the pull, the related desire to disassociate the fine arts from the socially stigmatised “menial” crafts provided the push. The new academicians wished, then, to associate themselves with reflection and to pointedly disassociate themselves from making.

Bourdieu sees this tendency as not confined to the artistic field but symptomatic of a broader ingrained attitude that he diagnoses as a “repression of the material determinations of symbolic practices” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 20). This impulse is rooted in a deep-seated distrust of the messy business of making. Bourdieu puts it down to a species of “academic aristocratism” that demands an exclusion from “scholastic universes,” of the base means of production unless it be, as it were, by the tradesman’s entrance (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 25).

Goldstein suggests that this perennial tension between theory and practice represents a persistent thread in the fabric of higher education in art and design from this period right through to the Bauhaus. He characterises it as a dualistic “problematizing of the relationship between theory and practice” in terms of a “resolutely dialectical engagement with [theory] as something demonstrably different from practice” (Goldstein, 1996, p. 24). However the origins of this tension are in both philosophical and historical terms more deeply rooted and more persistent.

## 2. The Problem With Production

The “problematizing” dialectic that Goldstein acknowledges resurfaces in current debates regarding the validity and status of practice-based research. This is particularly evident in the animated discourse that has attended the emergence of the PhD degree in the field of fine art (Elkins, 2009). It exposes deep anxieties about what “research” might mean in these contexts, as well as questions concerning the normative requirement that a PhD thesis contribute “new knowledge” to the field. These anxieties inevitably raise questions about the epistemological standing of practice in the sense of production, in other words, questions regarding the truth-claims of art practice as praxis. At the heart of this debate is the issue of whether certain acts of making in themselves function as an uncovering of truth and thereby produce knowledge. Or alternatively whether the epistemological

paradigm represented by the “scholastic disposition” ought to hold sway--a paradigm that regards the production of knowledge as inextricable from textual expression. This issue is addressed below and also elsewhere (McGuirk, in press).

Fiona Candlin’s critique of a report of the UK Council for Graduate Education (Frayling et al., 1997) is instructive in this regard. Candlin notes the report’s assertion that “doctoral characteristics of originality, mastery and contribution to the field are held to be demonstrated *through the original creative work*” (Candlin, 2000, p. 5, my emphasis). However she is critical of the authors’ insistence on an extensive accompanying text to render the work “precise, clear and accessible” and to demonstrate “doctoral powers of *analysis* and *mastery* of contextual knowledge . . . *auditable* by knowledgeable peers” (emphasis in the original). This, she suggests, effectively privileges theory over the production of art, “since it is the theoretical component of the doctorate that [ultimately] gives the work PhD standing” (Candlin, 2000, pp. 5-6). She interprets moreover the report as presuming that: “art practice, no matter how cognitively sophisticated and theoretically rich . . . cannot be deemed research without the supporting apparatus of conventionally presented academic study” (Candlin, 2000, p. 6).

Candlin argues that, rather than “open[ing] out the boundaries of academia to acknowledge different ways of thinking and working,” the report unfortunately actually “reduces art practice to the conventions of academia” (Candlin, 2000, p. 12).

Commenting on the emergence of the PhDs in fine art, Woodfield suggests that the phenomenon was in no small measure a response to “changes brought about by . . . the current [dominant] role of ‘theory’ in fine art practices.” In identifying factors that led to the hegemony of theory and conceptual models of knowledge, which contribute to a disparagement of practice, he notes that from the late 1960s onwards, “Radicalism emerged as a deep requirement of interesting artistic practice and as ideology has to be articulated verbally to become recognised. *Grunt practice* garnered no respect” (Woodfield, 2004, p. 105, my emphasis).

As our disciplines become further embedded within higher education, it appears that this historic disparagement of practice as production, rather than being diminished, is often reinforced. Elkins (2009) recognises that the problem of securing the place of “studio-art production” within the university is still an “immensely difficult” one. He refers specifically to the problematic status of “the experience of making--its exact pedagogy, its methods, knacks, and skills, its feel”; he sees this as the reason for what he starkly terms “the incommensurability of studio art production and university life” and he contrasts this with the far greater acceptance that the theory-based business of “conceptualising” finished artworks finds within the contemporary field of fine art itself and within the broader university (Elkins, 2009, p. 128).

### 3. Nomenclature

With regard to the relatively new practice-based and practice-led PhD in fine art, Elkins has noted that it has become commonplace for the term *research* and attendant concepts

such as *new knowledge* to be considered native to the discipline rather than what he describes as “artificial imports from UK administrative terminology” (Elkins, 2009, p. 111). Elkins recognises such enforcement of policy-driven nomenclature to be an obstacle to the progress of research in art and design. It amounts to taking concepts and epistemological paradigms from the hard sciences and superimposing them on these emerging fields. Moreover Elkins views this process as being animated by a purely administrative logos. In this specific context, Nevanlinna warns us that “transplanting the terminology of a science policy” such as “research . . . into another context is not and cannot be an innocent, value-free process” (Finnish writer Tuomas Nevanlinna, cited in Wilson, 2009, p. 63).

Bourdieu’s work on the interrelationship of disciplinary fields proves an invaluable reference in this matter. He portrays the dynamics of “disciplinary struggles” in territorial terms, where the spoils of “cultural” and “scientific capital” are contested by weaker and stronger, “dominated” and “dominating” disciplines (Bourdieu, 2004 p. 67). Such dynamics are doubtless at play in the context of the new dispensation referred to earlier, as the neophyte disciplines of art and design and their nascent research cultures jostle to gain a foothold and to position themselves in the broader field.

Ever alert to the territoriality of disciplines and the power struggles between them, Bourdieu recognises the relative dominance of science, particularly the physical sciences, in this hierarchy. He suggests, for example, that physics and especially quantum physics is “set up as the sole model of scientificity, in the name of a social privilege converted into an epistemological privilege by epistemologists and philosophers” (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 65).

Given the historical and philosophical biases outlined above, disciplines of practice as well as practice-based and practice-led research-cultures find themselves disadvantaged in terms of Bourdieuan “scientific” and indeed “cultural capital” relative to more established scientific and theoretical disciplines. There is little doubt that this provides much of the impetus for the marginalisation of practice, highlighted by Elkins, in terms of studio-art production within the university. Bourdieu highlights the socio-political dimension to this phenomenon in his remark that “through oppositions like that between theory and practice, the whole social order is present in the very way that we think about that order” is pertinent (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 83).

#### **4. Knowledge as Domination**

Three major philosophers of the twentieth century--John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer--share an unease regarding the disparagement in Western epistemology of the kind of knowledge which is practical and embodied, and the action, application, and production associated with such knowledge. Gadamer identifies this disparagement with the “knowledge as dominion” epistemological stance (Gadamer, 2004, p. 310).

Dewey objects to a related view of knowledge that frames it as something static or fixed, capable of being objectified and stored like a commodity on library shelves. Knowledge, or “learning” is conceived of in terms of stasis and viewed as “an accumulation of cognitions as one might store material commodities in a warehouse.” This is the idea that truth is passive and simply there for the taking, as Dewey phrases it: “truth exists ready-made somewhere” (Dewey, 1930, p. 390). As we shall later see, this insight relates to Heidegger’s framing of his concept of the “present-at-hand.”

Dewey regards the contemplative attitude as essentially aesthetic rather than truly intellectual. He is more favourably disposed to the epistemic significance of making, something he shares with his contemporary in another, very different philosophical tradition, Heidegger. While there are, of course, major differences in their accounts, both Dewey and Heidegger champion in varied ways the epistemological status of production and in particular the production of art. For Dewey the true meaning of knowledge lies in use--what we do with it. He reminds us that in common parlance *learning* is often tellingly used with reference to an accomplishment, something merely decorous, a testament to leisured existence (something analysed by Bourdieu in terms of his theories of *cultural capital*). This view is definitely not Dewey’s epistemological vision, as he forthrightly explains: “Only that which has been organized into our disposition so as to enable us to adapt the environment to our needs and to adapt our aims and desires to the situation in which we live is really knowledge” (Dewey, 1930, p. 400).

Similarly Heidegger regards the dominance of Cartesian objectivism in Western thought as limiting, in that, as he puts it, there is, in epistemological terms, a “*deficiency* in our having to do with-the-world concernfully,” that is in our knowing, when it is at a remove from the world, when it is divorced from, or “holds back” from “producing and manipulating and the like” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 88). If we look at “the Things” merely theoretically, he asserts, we adopt an impoverished way of being in the world--we are “tarrying alongside” concerned merely with representation: how things look (Heidegger, 1962, p. 88). He contrasts this with the kind of knowing that truly belongs to *Dasein* or “being-in-the-world” which is a situated, engaged, concerned, and thereby more authentic, mode of knowing (Heidegger, 1962, p. 88-89). Indeed Heidegger’s core concept, *Dasein* implies just such a stance. As Feenberg explains, “human beings, called ‘*Dasein*’ by Heidegger can only be understood as always already involved in a world . . . The things of the world are revealed to *Dasein* as they are encountered in use . . .” (Feenberg 2005, p. 2).

Heidegger, like Dewey (1930, pp. 306-307), points to the Greek bias whereby the contemplative life “*bios theoretikos*,” so redolent of academic life, is contrasted negatively with “*bios praktikos*,” “the way of life dedicated to action and productivity” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 164). He suggests that the hegemony of this stance in Western culture was reinforced in the Roman period through the translation of the Greek concept *theoria* as the Latin *contemplato*. From this comes the English verb *to contemplate* with all its connotations of withdrawal and detachment. *Contemplato*, he reminds us stems from the Latin *templum*, a translation of the Greek word *temnein* meaning to cut or divide (Heidegger, 1977, p. 164). In existential terms, then, Heidegger negatively associates the

categorising and enframing impulse with the “theoretical attitude” and posits it as a source of a dominant alienating objectivist metaphysics of representation:

In *theoria* transformed into *contemplatio* there comes to the fore the impulse, already present in Greek thinking, of a looking at that sunders and compartmentalizes. A type of encroaching advance by successive interrelated steps, towards that which is to be *grasped* by the eye makes itself normative in knowing. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 166, my emphasis)

He uses an illuminating metaphor to caution against the inherent acquisitive, *grasping* nature that epitomises the “knowledge as dominion” epistemological paradigm, with all the attendant power relations. When it comes to knowledge he warns: “the perceiving of what is known is not a process of returning with one's booty to the ‘cabinet’ of consciousness after one has gone out and *grasped* it” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 89, my emphasis).

As antidote to this stance Heidegger posits a more circumspective approach to knowing--an attitude of care--and he associates this with the Greek concept of *techne*, the kind of engaged careful knowing we find in artistic making (Heidegger, 1962, p. 88). As he explains:

What we usually call “knowing” is being acquainted with something and its qualities. In virtue of these cognitions we “master” things. This mastering “knowledge” is given over to a being at hand, to its structure and its usefulness. Such “knowledge” seizes the being, “dominates” it, and thereby goes beyond it and constantly surpasses it. The character of essential knowing is entirely different. It concerns the being in its ground--it intends Being. Essential “knowing” does not lord it over what it knows but is solicitous towards it (Heidegger, 1992, p. 3).

Heidegger suggests that the contemplative stance has in fact become synonymous with both the “scientific” and “theoretical attitude.” He analyses this in terms of his concept of “presence-at-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*), which he presents as an attitude to “Things” that encounters them exclusively in analytical mode, and regards them as both perpetually available and precisely quantifiable. Presence-at-hand is the stance of the objective Cartesian observer concerned solely with the facts of the thing or concept, rather than being engaged with them in use. He contrasts this stance with “readiness-to-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*). This he identifies with the situated, engaged, indeed transparent way we encounter things in and through use. His famous example is the hammer (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98). We can never know what is essential about a hammer through objective analysis. As Heidegger sees it, “the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98).

And Heidegger constantly emphasises the kind of engagement represented by readiness-to-hand in his analysis of the making of art. He wants to say that we may come to knowledge through such work, the kind of engagement we find in application

(Heidegger, 1993a). He associates this knowledge with care and circumspection, which he “distinguishes from theoretical knowledge” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 7).

George Steiner provides a useful interpretation that gives us an insight into what Heidegger sees as the hostility of the theoretical attitude towards experiential knowledge:

Platonic-Cartesian cogitation and the Cartesian foundation of the world’s reality in human reflection are attempts to “leap through or across the world” . . . in order to arrive at the noncontingent purity of eternal Ideas or of mathematical functions and certitudes. But this attempted leap from and to abstraction is radically false to the facticity of the world as we encounter it, as we live it. (Steiner, 1987, p. 88)

In questioning this stance, Heidegger asserts the legitimacy of practical and experiential knowledge, insisting that, “the kind of care that manipulates things and puts them to use . . . has its own kind of knowledge” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 95). Here he is pointing to the significance of the kind of tacit knowledge of the maker whose knowledge, in contrast to the theoretician, is situated, embodied and thereby integrated within her environment. Steiner’s interpretation of this is also illuminating:

Appropriate use, performance, manual action, *possess their own kind of sight*. Heidegger names it “circumspection.” Any artist, any craftsman, any sportsman . . . will know exactly what Heidegger means and will know how often the trained hand “sees” quicker and more delicately than eye and brain. Theoretical vision [Heidegger says] “. . . constructs a canon for itself in the form of *method*.”[. . .] Here methodological abstraction replaces the immediate authority of “readiness-to-hand.” Heidegger’s differentiation is not only eloquent in itself; it brilliantly inverts the Platonic order of values which sets the theoretical contemplator high above the artist, the craftsman, the manual worker. (Steiner, 1987, p. 90, emphasis in the original)

This description cuts to the heart of the tension between the theoretical, objectivist approach to knowing represented by method and the kind of knowing native to practice in terms of production, and to making. The “incommensurability” of art making with “university life” that Elkins identifies is therefore founded, not in any mere institutional qualm or orthodoxy but in what Heidegger characterises as the “unjustified absolutization of the theoretical” (Heidegger cited in Safranski, 1997, p. 97). The “de-experiencing” of the world that Heidegger suggests is the “theoretical attitude” leads also to a denial of the lived reality of making, as a dealing with the “Things” in all their concrete richness (Safranski, 1998 p. 97).

## 5. Method Rampant

It is a familiar truism that all research must have its method. Indeed *method* has become a key term within the nomenclature to which Elkins alludes. However as we have seen for Heidegger, as Steiner so eloquently explains, *method* is not a simple innocuous term, on



the contrary, it bears the authority of both theory and science's privileged epistemological status, evinced by its claim of a monopoly in terms of the revelation of the "real," whereby it effectively eclipses other non-systematic ways of knowing. While Heidegger wishes to give method its due, he questions this epistemic valorisation which he sees as rampant within western epistemology.

In his essay "Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics," Heidegger (1993b) is at pains to explain this and the significance of the term *method*. To do so, he focuses on an early work by Descartes: *Regule ad directionem ingenii* [Rules for the Direction of the Mind]. From its list of rules or propositions, Heidegger singles out a number for analysis, including *Regula IV*, in which Descartes simply states that "method is necessary for discovering the truth of nature" (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 300). Heidegger's interpretation of this is significant in that he highlights what he regards as the true significance of method and also its ramifications:

This rule does not intend the platitude that a science must have its method, but it wants to say that the procedure, i.e., how in general we are to pursue things (*methodos*), *decides in advance what truth we shall seek out in the things*. [. . .] Method is not one piece of equipment of science among others but the primary component out of which is first determined what can become object and how it becomes object (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 300, my emphasis).

What Heidegger asserts here is that reality--the "real"--responds and reveals according to how we question it. If we question it methodically it reveals itself in very particular ways. Heidegger's fundamental objection is to the "absolutization" of any single particular mode or procedure of revealing. In his view, Cartesian method effectively eclipses alternative valid forms of knowing because it precludes modes of questioning that are not part of its repertoire. Method is oblivious of certain ways of knowing particularly the kinds of knowing arrived at through *techne* as art. Moreover, despite appearances to the contrary, this outwardly detached-seeming attitude to things is in reality fundamentally rapacious in its systematic domination of "Things" and entities:

modern science as theory in the sense of an observing that strives after, is a refining of the real that does encroach uncannily upon it. . . . Science sets upon the real. It orders it into place to the end that at any given time the real will exhibit itself as an interacting network . . . The real becomes secured in its objectness. (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 167-168)

Heidegger recognises that Cartesian method constitutes a *world-picture* in the form of a systematised mathematical conception of the world. Through method, as he puts it, "the mathematical now sets itself up as the principle of all knowledge" and thereby all other forms of knowledge "whether tenable or not" are brought into question (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 301). In Steiner's terms, encountered earlier, theoretical vision "constructs a canon for itself" as "method" (Steiner, 1987, p. 90). Method therefore cannot be regarded merely as some neutral set of practices or procedures. On the contrary, for Heidegger

method is wedded to the short-sightedness inherent in the dominant technological worldview of our era. It is from that authority, in fact, that methodological sciences ultimately acquire their “epistemological privilege.”

It is precisely because certain kinds of knowledge readily associated with making, like tacit, experiential and practical knowledge, are of their nature inaccessible to calculation that they are not amenable to the application of method. Cartesian method, as Adorno and Horkheimer also suggest, is founded on a unitary and exclusive model of knowledge whose paragon is “formal logic,” which they describe as providing a “schema of the calculability of the world” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 7).

Art, they suggest, encompasses forms of knowledge extraneous to the Enlightenment’s “universal” system, knowledge that can accommodate the particular, the contingent and the irrational aspects of the “real,” those precise aspects overlooked by method. The arts do not fit the Enlightenment schema, “to the Enlightenment, that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion; modern positivism writes it off as literature” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 7). Safranski succinctly formulates Heidegger’s almost identical stance: “[what] the sciences call the ‘irrational’,” he tells us in a memorable phrase, is for Heidegger nothing less than “the experience-remainder in the blind spot of the theoretical attitude” (in Safranski, 1998, p. 98).

The difficulty of accommodating practice in terms of art production under the aegis of method is therefore due to what is essentially a *category error*. It is a mistake then to apply methodological procedures where process-based approaches of engagement and participation, more accommodating of the kind of tacit, experiential, and practical knowledge are required. It follows therefore that the problems that ensue are ultimately structural in nature and are therefore not amenable to being overcome by any mere cultural adjustment, nor can they be negated merely for the sake of administrative contingency.

## 6. Method Without Art

To understand the extent to which artistic means and processes of production are low ranking in “cultural” and “scientific capital” terms within the arena of the university, we need look no further than the culture of scientific practice with its fascinating, entrenched taboos. Bourdieu reminds us that science has always employed tacit and experiential knowledge in terms of practical skills and knacks, however scientists go to great lengths to cover their tracks in this regard (Bourdieu, 2004). Bourdieu cites an illuminating passage regarding scientific texts from Peter Medawar:

findings appear more decisive and more honest [when] the most creative aspects of the research disappear, giving the impression that imagination, passion, art have played no part in them and that the innovation results not from the passionate activity of deeply committed hands and brains but from passive submission to the sterile precepts of the so-called “Scientific Method.” (Medawar cited in Bourdieu, 2004, p. 21)

Hans-Georg Gadamer in his defence of hermeneutics also analyses this impetus in terms of the Enlightenment's assault on all prejudice, which necessitated a denial of its own historical roots in traditions other than the rational, as he explains "the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice . . ." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 273). The Enlightenment assault on prejudice obscures its own foundational prejudices towards older traditions that encompass forms of practical knowledge founded in rhetoric and judgement. This represents a refusal to extend epistemic credit to all knowledge that cannot easily be made explicit, knowledge like experiential, tacit, and practical knowledge, forms of knowledge more native to both art and design.

Gadamer critiques what he sees as the inappropriate imposition of methods derived from the natural sciences onto research practices within the humanities generally, whereby from the nineteenth century onward "the human sciences' claim to know something true came to be measured by a standard foreign to it--namely the methodical thinking of modern science" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 21). Jean Grondin, Gadamer's biographer, explains his motivation:

when it came to the *Geisteswissenschaften* [human sciences], people go wrong when they try to force them to conform to the systematic ideal of methodically constructed knowledge, a model that neither can nor should suffice for them. What was involved in the *Geisteswissenschaften* was a completely different kind of knowledge, namely, participation in, not dominion over, the experience of meaning. (Grondin, 2003, p. 268)

The difficulties diagnosed by Gadamer with regard to the humanities parallel many of the current dilemmas within the specific disciplines of art and design and, as we shall see, point to remedies.

## 7. Knowledge, Service, and Application

In crafting his hermeneutics, Gadamer specifically rejects the model of "knowledge as domination . . . appropriation . . . possession" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 310). He suggests that an appropriate model for the kind of knowledge we need in the humanities and the arts is found in "legal and theological hermeneutics" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 310). As he explains, in these fields rather than the "knowledge as dominion" epistemological paradigm there prevails a conception of knowledge founded in service and application whether it be in the service of God or of the community: "To interpret the law's will or the promises of God is clearly not a form of domination but of service. They are interpretations--which include application--in the service of what is considered valid" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 310).

Gadamer here points to a knowledge that is useful, or in Dewey's term, "of avail" (Dewey, 1930, p. 395). This represents a knowledge that is "in the *service*" of human beings, their traditions, their institutions and generally of that which they value (Gadamer, 2004, p. 310). In the case of jurisprudence and theology, validity is ultimately founded on the assent of a community. The meaning, validity, and epistemological value of fine art and design are surely also bound up with, indeed founded on, this service to

that which is “considered valid.” It might be argued that the validity of the truth or the knowledge uncovered by art, and more particularly design, ultimately rests upon judgement. The validation accorded by a community to the truth revealed by works of art and design and the knowledge inherent to them is based on taste and discernment rather than on conformation to an absolutist abstract conception of truth--the kind of truth characterised by Heidegger as mere truth as correspondence, the “truth as correctness” of conventional metaphysics (Heidegger, 1993a, pp. 176-177). Scientific truth, Gadamer suggests, must in any event not be allowed to eclipse the kind of truth described by Vico (1668-1744) in his observation: “the true and the made are convertible (*verum et factum convertuntur*)” (Miner, 1998, p. 53). Vico, an early critic of the imposition of Cartesian method onto the humanities, understood that in these human realms of art, jurisprudence, and theology, truth ought to be regarded as a human--indeed a communal--construct.

## 8. The Scholastic Disposition

Martin Jay describes Cartesian perspectivism, as the “dominant scopic regime of the modern era” (Jay, 1994, pp. 69-70). For Bourdieu, Cartesian perspectivism ushered in the “scholastic disposition.” Ironically the picture of the world it presents is indebted to early developments within the fields of art and design, like pictorial perspective, the *camera obscura* and scientific cartography. Like Heidegger, Bourdieu sees the scholastic disposition as founded on an objectivist worldview. It is a disposition characterised by detachment from the world of things, he characterises it as a “distant lofty gaze” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 22). This fixed ocularcentric detachment, explains the incapacity of the scholastic disposition for any real self-reflection or self-critique. The hermetically sealed *camera obscura* represents a “point of view on which no point of view can be taken” (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 22). This is a significant point because it explains the blindness, as outlined earlier, of the scholastic disposition in terms of its failure to esteem the epistemic worth of other ways of knowing. The “scholastic view” is, as Bourdieu recognises, particularly blind to the epistemic worth and value of making, that is of practice as production, these ways of knowing rest as it were along with Heidegger’s “irrational,” within its blind spot.

Bourdieu also calls the scholastic disposition by the name “*skholè*,” a state that represents, as he explains, “the scholastic situation (of which the academic world represents the institutionalized form)” (Bourdieu, 2000, p 13). *Skholè* is posited as a quintessentially bracketed state, “liberated” by definition “from practical occupations and preoccupations” but by the same token isolated and unable to fully recognise itself or its internal logic. As Bourdieu explains:

There is nothing that “pure” thought finds it harder to think than *skholè*, the first and most determinant of all the social conditions of possibility of “pure” thought, and also the scholastic disposition which inclines its possessors to suspend the demands of the situation, the constraints of economic and social necessity, and the urgencies it imposes or the ends it proposes. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 12)

## 9. Conclusion

There is little doubt that the “scholastic disposition” still permeates the academic milieu and this cannot fail to have a bearing on the development of the disciplines of fine art and design as they become more integrated within the university. In this context Bourdieu reminds us of Oakeshott’s criticism of “the rationalist tendency to devalue practical traditions in favour of explicit theories” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 82). This article has highlighted a number of issues regarding the existential stance represented by concepts like contemplation, theory, and method. This short list is indeed an honoured one in our academic cultures and justifiably so, and certainly in terms of academic villainy these are most definitely not the usual suspects. All the more reason to heed the concerns of Dewey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Bourdieu: their thought in this regard urges us to question the valorisation of the kind of knowing represented by these pillars of academic life in order to seek a parity of esteem between reflecting and making that would grant epistemic value to both of these fundamentally different ways of knowing.

It has been suggested that the disciplines of art and design are somehow in an adolescent phase of development (Mottram, 2009, p. 24), and that we cannot afford to ignore the collegiate anxieties, concerns, requirements, and interests of older more established fields. This is no doubt the case, however neither must we ignore the reality that the university is, as are all human institutions, a site of power-play where each discipline or *field*, in a Bourdieuan sense, is subject to both external pressures and internal forces both positive and negative. As Bourdieu explains, every academic field has, and essentially must have, a “degree of autonomy” if it is to thrive or even survive. However as he explains this autonomy is “not a given but a historical conquest endlessly having to be undertaken anew” (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 47).

And so we come full circle to the issue of a renewed autonomisation of the disciplines of art and design under a new disciplinary dispensation. As that process continues to unfold we would do well to recognise that a mature discipline, just like a mature person, body, or institution, must hold fast to central aspects of its knowledge and traditions, while embracing such change as serves its purposes and maintains its autonomy. A healthy autonomous field according to Bourdieu is one in which:

the system of forces that are constitutive of the structure of the field (tension) is relatively independent of the forces exerted on the field (pressure). It has, as it were, the “freedom” it needs to develop its own necessity, its own logic, its own *nomos*. (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 47)

It is this equilibrium that is at stake at this moment with regard to, for example, our framing of the PhD in the fields of art and design, whereby the need for the equilibrium referred to by Bourdieu becomes paramount. It must moreover be the kind of equilibrium that encompasses both reflecting and making in terms of a parity of esteem. If we lose this equilibrium, that loss will alter our disciplines at all levels--and not only at PhD level--so the stakes are indeed high.

Gadamer lamented that in the case of the humanities in general, in the late nineteenth century, they had effectively lost the freedom to decide their *nomos*: that is their principles and practices, and in this way their “claim to know something *true* came to be measured by a standard foreign to [them] . . . the methodical thinking of modern science” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 21). Gadamer here presents a cautionary tale. We do well to remember that making is an integral and essential part of the logic, necessity, and *nomos* of art and design.

Such a rallying call may appear defensive, however it is important to remember Bourdieu’s analysis to the dynamics of disciplinary fields, specifically his suggestion that in order to be a full and effective participant in the broader arena of the university each field must attain and hold a structural position of strength. From such a secure position, which can only be achieved through the autonomy that Bourdieu advocates, the disciplines of art and design can play a more significant part in the development of the kind of university that accommodates making as well as reflecting. This represents an enormous opportunity for the university.

With regard to the evolution of “the practice-based PhD,” Candlin points out that “whether or not it includes theoretical elements” it is bound to differ greatly from equivalent “conventional” terminal degrees in more established fields (Candlin, 2000, p. 11). She suggests, moreover, that rather than problematising this situation and responding to it by “making art practice as scholarly as possible” we might see it in more positive terms as “an opportunity to re-think academic norms” (Candlin, 2000, p. 11). And this view is echoed by Elkins who suggests that the PhD degrees in art and design present a real opportunity for a “university-wide debate about the unity or fragmentation of the contemporary university,” because, as he explains:

Universities have not been set up to think about the confluence of making and studying, understanding and knowledge, practice-led research and research-led practice, writing and seeing. Studio art practice could be the place to carry those discussions forward. (Elkins. 2009, pp 121-122)

In light of this, the lesson Bourdieu dispenses is crucial: structurally sound, autonomous fields have more to offer the university as a whole than fields or disciplines that are limited in their freedom to develop their particular *nomos*.

## References

- Adorno T. W., & Horkheimer, M. (1997). *Dialectic of enlightenment*. London and New York: Verso.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (2003). *Practical reason*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (2004). *Science of science and reflexivity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

- Candlin, F. (2000). Practice-based doctorates and questions of academic legitimacy. *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 19(1), 96-101. Retrieved October 8, 2011, from <http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/737/>
- Dewey, J. (1930). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan. (First published in 1916.)
- Elkins, J. (2009). On beyond research and new knowledge. In J. Elkins (Ed.), *Artists with PhDs: On the new doctoral degree in studio art* (pp. 111-133). Washington, DC: New Academia.
- Feenberg, A. (2005). *Heidegger and Marcuse: The catastrophe and redemption of history*. New York and Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Frayling, C., Stead, V., Archer, B., Cook, N., Powell, J., Scrivener, S., et al. (1997). *Practice-based doctorates in the creative and performing arts and design*. Warwick, UK: UK Council for Graduate Education.
- Gadamer, H. G. (2004). *Truth and method* (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). London and New York: Compendium.
- Gallagher, S. (2009). Philosophical antecedents to situated cognition. In P. Robbins & M. Aydede (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of situated cognition* (pp. 35-53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldstein, C. (1996). *Teaching art: Academies and schools from Vasari to Albers*. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Grondin, J. (2003). *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A biography* (J. Weinsheimer, Trans.). New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell. (Original in the German: *Sein und Zeit*, 1927).
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology and other essays* (W. Lovitt, Trans. & Ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1992). *Parmenides* (A. Schuwer & R. Rojcewicz, Trans.). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1993a). The origin of the work of art. In D. F. Krell (Trans. & Ed.), *Basic writings: Martin Heidegger* (pp. 143-212). London: Routledge.
- Heidegger, M. (1993b). Modern science, metaphysics, and mathematics. In D. F. Krell (Trans. & Ed.), *Basic writings: Martin Heidegger* (pp. 267-305). London: Routledge.

- Janaway, C. (1996). *Images of excellence: Plato's critique of the arts*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Jay, M. (1994). *Downcast eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.
- McGuirk, T. (in press). The 'rift-design' conundrum: Drawing as form-giving and knowing. *ACCESS: Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural & Policy Studies*, 30(1).
- Miner, R. C. (1998). Verum-factum and practical wisdom in the early writings of Giambattista Vico. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59(1), 53-73.
- Mottram, J. (2009). Researching research in art and design. In J. Elkins (Ed.), *Artists with PhDs: On the new doctoral degree in studio art* (pp. 3-30). Washington, DC: New Academia.
- Safranski, R. (1998). *Martin Heidegger: Between good and evil* (E. Osers, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Steiner, G. (1987). *Martin Heidegger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, M. (2009). Four theses attempting to revise the terms of a debate. In J. Elkins (Ed.), *Artists with PhDs: On the new doctoral degree in studio art* (pp. 57-70). Washington, DC: New Academia.
- Woodfield, R. (2004). The UK fine art PhD and research in art & design. In A. W. Balkema & H. Slager (Eds.), *Lier & Boog: Series of Philosophy of Art and Art Theory* (Vol. 18, pp. 103-108). Amsterdam: Rodopi. Retrieved October 8, 2011, from <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/rodopi/leb/2004/00000018/00000001>

Received 21 May 2011

Accepted 23 September 2011

---

[Copyright © 2011 Journal of Research Practice and the author](#)