THE THEORY DEGREE, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, IN THE STUDIO ART

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Abstract
This paper is an attempt at defining what is a theory and how it works in fine arts. The argument of the PhD in fine arts has drawn out battle lines among the professors of fine arts on whether or not theory or research degree (PhD) is necessary in the training and development of an artist and art curriculum. Who is an artist in the first place, and who is a theorist? Do their practices (the artist) propel theory or not? Is it true that art practice kept its distance from theory while informing itself or is it a dweller in the theory itself and manifest in the physicality of aesthetic imageries in object/subject dichotomy? These questions would underpin and construct the focus of this reading.

Keywords: Ph.D., fine art, theories, practice, argument

Introduction
The main history of the fine art programme started in the U.K when most of the Polytechnics were converted into Universities and subsequently the argument arose on whether or not fine arts and other discipline's have the capacity to conduct research in the university environment (Sullivan 2005). The paper delivered by Christopher Frayling, rector of the Royal College of Arts in 1993, graduated to become the focus of various discussions of research today in fine arts. One of the early attempts to identify research genres in art and design was by Frayling. He categorised art and design related research into three broad genres based on the focus and method of the research task. In his scheme, “research into art and design” stands for traditional theoretical research in which art and design become the subject of inquiry, a phenomenon to be studied from the outside; “research through art and design” involves creative production as a research method; “research for art and design” is the practical kind of exploration where the end product is an artefact which embodies the formative thoughts that led to its making. Since then, this argument has grown and has been adopted by so many Universities around the world today. The original intention of the degree is to help clarify on the process and method of the development of an artworks and theorising on them; and show the possibility of its process as a method of research inherent in the creation of art objects with philosophical and psychological logic like that of Langer (1969) and Arnheim (1997).

However, some scholars have identified strongly with the development and have provided a path to the understanding of the process of epistemology and research in fine arts. Scholars like Sullivan, Bolt, Cater and host of them had agreed that PhD is necessary but differ on how this programme can be conducted. Scholars like Elkin (2006) differed in calling the product of investigation in the visual arts “a research” or rather associating it to epistemology. He holds that it should be called artistic production and its process should differ from that of social science and other humanities (Elkin, 2006, Egonwa 2012). Even when the argument of PhD in the fine arts is gradually finding its bearing and the dust of the arguments is settling; some scholars in this part of the world are starting the argument afresh so as to find a solution to the peculiar Nigerian situation.

The arguments and the Nigerian context
There are about three different parties in the Nigerian context arguing for and against the PhD in the fine arts. There is a need to identify and contextualise each of the contributors to this argument. The first party argues that the
fine artist or rather art practitioners should not bother with theory and the artist has no business theorising hence he/she spends all the time trying to create a piece of art. This party went on to suggest that the artist should not bother in the articulation of the position of their creation as that’s the job of the humanist and the important degree for the lecturer in this field should be limited to an MFA or MA in fine arts (Jegede, 2010, Ugiomoh, 2012). Another party argues that there should be a PhD in the studio rather it process of research should follow the thinking of Read in Frayling 1993 where it is stated that ‘research is for the art.’ In this process the art object becomes the object of investigation but not how and what it was created but what it constitutes to the society (Kalilu, 2013). The third party argues that there can be a research through the art using the artefact as a point of epistemology itself. This position is held by Jari (2009) and Buhari (2010). This party has a strong persuasive argument that the art making is the process of theorising like articulating one thought in a textual manner. Conversely creating from the thinking to image making is a process of intellectual ability (Arnheim, 1997). This fact is supported by Sullivan (2009).

The last party to the argument holds the position that Art itself is a theory - from the point of conception to the stage of finishing. The theorisation is the same with creating of the artwork. One is the thinking process and the other is the manifestation of such mental creativity on canvas or wood, plaster or even metal. These arguments had continued to assume a dimension that urge the writing of this paper, to make clear what this degree is all about. The higher manifestation of Art practice is the same with theory. Art practice deals with self reflexive which of course is the same process of constructing a grounded theory.

**What is a theory and how does it relate to fine arts**

Theory according to the positivists means a space. Theory does not exhaust painting; statement of relationships between abstract painting does not exhaust painting. Painting concepts that cover a wide range of empirical produces theory and kernels that can transform observations. The positivists view their; it can draw stalks out of it and translate them theoretical concepts as variables and construct into its own language. While painting produces operations of their concepts for hypothesis testing through accurate, replicable empirical measurement. These definitions exert considerable influence for two reasons 1) they reach across fields and 2) authors of research textbooks wide adopt and promulgate them. In this view, the objective of a theory is explanation and predicature. To Positivist according to (Charmaz 2012), theory aims for parsimony, generality and simultaneously reduces empirical objects and events to that which can be subsumed by the concepts. Meanwhile, Silverman (2011) “argues that theories are arranging sets of concepts to define and explain some phenomena.” Likewise, an alternative definition of theory emphasizes understanding of observed phenomena rather than explanation. Visual arts as an object are interpretive; which in itself embodies a theory. The very proponents of this definition are of the view that theoretical understanding gained from the theory rests on the theorists’ interpretation of the studied phenomena (Sullivan, 2009).

The idea that painting itself is a theory is challenging to the pedestrian observer to understand. The polit of academic has refused to recognise the eyes and images as an effective means of research (Silverman, 2011). This often narrows the understanding of images and the constructive effectiveness of painting as a formation of theory and research method. Silverman (2011) continues that “theory is an arranged set of concepts to explain a given phenomena”. Painting employs the arrangement of space, lines, texture, colours and forms to explain visual phenomena that words cannot bring to bear. Painting as a theory calls for the imaginative understanding of the elements of design on the surface of canvas.

In order to interpret an understanding of the viewers such as space line texture of brush and the subjective use of colours, the process of doing so becomes a theory that would reconstruct of the context of texture, line and

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133
theory, theory casts light on painting in a backward projection. Therefore, theory and painting need each other to perform well.

Sometimes, theory seeps anticipates approximation of what would become a future painting, an instigation that will be retroactively revealed. The touch in painting changes the thought and goes elsewhere; the thought alters and returns to the touch. Painting and theory illuminate each other asymmetrically when adjacently placed, but their temporalities differ. This type of (artwork?) assumes emergent, multiple realities. The interpretative theory is fully compatible with the understanding of the elements of narration in the surface of painting, the application of texture by the brush of the artist, his/her use of space, line, imageries and the body of colour he/she brings to bear on the canvas.

With this insight on what theory is, it may be asked, is it right to think that art practice and its scholarship should be left out of the theory or research degree? It is difficult to agree with the first party that argues that artist should be left out of theory as the humanist would theorise for them. In this context the practice-based degree is at the centre of getting the artist to understand the two ways of creation which is the mental strength which a theory and the physical aspect of it which result into the creation of the artwork. The second party argues that art practice should be seen as an art production not a research and the word epistemology should be left out of the degree. Then, of course in that case, it should not be called a PhD or anything doctorates because a PhD or doctorate of any kind infers a mastery of theory of a given area of academic discipline and from the inception the argument whether art can be located in the sphere of knowledge or not is an old argument as far as the school of mimesis of Plato. I had argued elsewhere, that understanding of knowledge is relative and depends on what one is looking for, for example a process of creating aesthetic imageries is knowledge in the field of aesthetics. Let’s carefully examine the process of research in the Visual Arts so as to understand how art creates knowledge. The current argument had showed that art is a symbolic knowledge which can contest with any aspect of knowledge; scholars like Langer and Arnheim had cleared that in their writings.

**Visual arts as a process of research**

According to Smith and Dean (2010), practice-led and practice-based research are most times used interchangeably, but most of the time means the research is based on studio practice. However, Practice-led originally means locating problem in the practice that can lead to research and the original knowledge outcome can be presented textually without the support of creative practice. On the other hand, Practice-based research is in the centre of constant exploration in the studio that eventually produces new knowledge and understanding. This idea emerged from the Australian Research Council which started in 1970s and subsequently was adapted in the British Research for Humanities in 1980s (M.Makela, N. Nimkulrat.D.P. Dash and F.S. Nsenga 2011). These two names are used interchangeably to mean creative art inquiry through the studio mostly by the U.K universities. This research method most of the time, is called “Art based research or creative art research process.” The name embraces the wider concept of all the arts: from the Performing Arts, to Dance, to the Visual Arts. Artistic research as well as those researchers from other European country apart from the U.K would call it. Whatever one calls it whether practice-led or practice based research it is the same thing in meaning these days. It is about the self-reflective and self-critical processes of a person taking part in the creation of meaning within contemporary art. In such a fashion the resultant art work that it communicates where it is coming from, where it stands at this precise moment, and where it wants to go (Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén, 2005).

Another expectation from an artist-researcher is captured in the idea of “creative discovery” (M. Fleishman, cited in Farber & Mäkelä, 2010). This idea underlines the importance of the two-fold process of making and reflecting, and the potential of this process to reveal the maker’s insights, knowledge, or understanding the body.
of this research method is composed of three basic techniques from the conventional research method, which are qualitative, performative inquiry and the Action Research Inquiry and then third dimension is the creative process of Practice based method that allows the researcher to use studio tools as a research method. There are various researchers from various universities around the world that employed this method in their research.

The true nature of the theory degree in fine arts is to use the basic element of design to evaluate the process of knowledge and research in creative arts. The idea is not to argue whether the art practice embodied knowledge but it is to see the possibility of whether or not the process of art making and the process of research could share similar pattern. According to Bakhtin in Meban (2004), holds that art as a form of conversation, Grant Kester proposes contemporary viewing practices that engage the social collective within a framework of a dialogical aesthetic. This means that art practice its self construes theoretical dialogical using the principle of design as its point of contact (Sullivan, 2009).

The writers’ position
The very idea of PhD in Fine Arts is to re-create a scholarly attitude of most artists in the academia, in imitating “Leonardo Da Vinci” an example of simple academic ability to combine skill with theorisation and create a balance between the two. The artist/scholar in the university is a clear image of “Da Vince” in the modern sense because he has the ability to take a simple common element and turn it into force and conduct investigation of new order of phenomena in visual arts. This process may be what this paper would want us to consider as a thrust of the artists/scholar position that the MFA could not enshrined on its students. This programme (PhD in Fine Arts) holds new hope to enrich the artist/scholar in practice and theory as one entity in the scholarship of Fine Arts in the academia. This is because he/she shoulders the responsibility to educate new generation of artists, scholars and of course teachers that would keep the art culture moving in a modern direction. He/she is not just an artist but a philosopher and art maker, something one would refer to as an artist/philosopher. Let us think back to philosophers that had explained that Art is the process of revealing the concealed to unconcealment. Scholars like Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Susanne Katherine Langer(1895-1985), have argued strongly that art itself is embodied philosophy; their positions argues and captures what may be referred to as ‘true’ in art, especially painting like the mind would have in a mental exercise.

Hegel in Daley (2012) observes that fine arts is not real art until it is free and only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with Religion and Philosophy and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance Divine Nature. In trying to explain this fate, Heidegger holds that Van Gogh’s painting of the peasant shoe of the female farmer or perhaps his painting titled the ‘potatoes eater’ construe universal truth that philosophy and religion seek to interpret. Van Gogh’s painting brings us face to face with the farmer’s world which is deeply attuned to the struggling with, and farming. The women till the earth daily, caring for, struggling with, and ultimately depending on the earth to nurture and bring forth the harvest. Heidegger suggests that no one is more immediately attuned to the struggle between the earth and the world and the experienced farmer, long intimate with the ‘uncomplaining fear as to the certainty of bread’ as well as ‘wordless joy of having once more withstood want.’ A simple painting of Van Gogh has captured the truth of life and brings to bear on our daily for struggle for survival. In the same vein Piet Mondrian drew on Kantian theory of ‘originality’ which asserts that the work of fine arts according to Bernstein (1992) should be groundless, without determined antecedents. Its brings free production, a production that cannot be explained or accounted for in terms of its antecedences, either historical or psychological, which should be constitutive of the work and manifest in its appearing of freedom. The way which freedom appears as originality becomes manifest in two modes: destructively and constructively. In order on their setting of new
and standards for Judgement, this is another way of revealing their status. This theory informed the creation of Mondrian’s paintings, he removes all influence of society and all trace of human factor was replaced with a mechanical hardedge; in anticipation of the emerging technological age of the twenty first century societies.

Aniakor (2005) reflects that Mondrian brought to bear constructive effect as a method of art which process of destruction and construction paved way for dynamic equilibrium. It throws light to constructive event, which destroys in order to create a new. Such forms lack basis for reference or antecedent. In this light Odutokun (in Danjuma, 2010) insists that his paintings are product of accident and design. He holds that accident creates a design and a design is recreated by the same accident in cyclical order. He continues that life itself is a product of this event. This brings us back to the Kantian theory of destructive and constructive as a truth nature of art.

In the same vein the PhD thesis of the author is on “transforming shadow into an aesthetic element” that would constructs the essence in contemporary painting some of the examples of that painting propelling a philosophical and research position in the context of qualitative analyse. Shadow in this context is not a reference to natural occurrences of shadow but a pure form that is a deprivation from an original source. Langer (1967), points out, is intrinsically rhythmic, a notions that is central also to the pragmatist aesthetics of Dewey. In virtual object that is the work of art, and human perception itself, this dialectical structure is the main source of its unity. This unity gives the artwork a kind of substantive character, a kind of basic presence, giving it the appearance of a ‘being,’ which can be called aesthetics.

The word ‘aesthetic,’ in the context of this research is the metaphysical presence in any given object that the researcher in a sensuous perception found a new forms come forth from an ordinary object in nature that construes truth in painting. If fine arts is the revealers of concealed truth, then, I want to think that fine arts is far away from craft practice rather it is a manifestation of visual thinking (Arnheim 1997). This means that the third party that argues that the artefact is in itself is knowledge is a position that holds a true position about art and in that event, art especially painting has the capacity to generate knowledge and sustain research in the academic sense of it.

Conclusion
Having understood the various arguments from the various quarters this paper has come to the conclusion that the essence of a PhD in fine arts is to theorise the art practice to an extent the artist in the academic could realise that his/her scholarship does not in any way differ from works of scholars from literature, philosophy and sociology in the same university. This to a large extent shows that what Langer had continuously insisted on as ‘living form’ is in order. However, it is the thinking here that a PhD is not compulsory for non academic artist rather the MFA or a B.A. Hon or even a HND is sufficient for any studio person that is outside the academic to practice and rise to any level he/she wishes to. However, the peculiar problem that the Nigerian academics face is the ongoing compulsory requirement of the acquisition of a PhD in the universities because the university administrator had said so, not necessarily because it is relevant to the system; because they would want to keep their jobs. The university should re-conceive that a PhD as an academic degree for those who wish to reach the zenith of their academic practice through research and theorisation, this is not to say that such artist would theorise through practice. A PhD is a theory degree in the context that it deals with philosophical, and sociological matters and how these elements influence the creation of artwork. In every respect it is a theory in its interpretation, in this sense the artwork constitutes philosophical hermeneutics. The understanding of the multiple voice of an artwork is key to theoretical development of meaning making of any given artwork or practice; therefore, PhD in Fine Arts seems inescapable to the development of Art practice for teachers in the tertiary education.

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