ETHICS AND DESIGN RESEARCH AT SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A PROLEGOMENON

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Abstract

South African Universities demand of their lecturers, amongst other things, a burgeoning research track record. Such research is inevitably subject to the requirements of research and included in these requirements is that the research is carried out within the bounds of acceptable research ethical practice. Therefore, any research that emanates from Design programmes has to meet the mandate of such research ethical practice.

This paper sets out to explore what such a mandate might entail. It does not interrogate the ethics of design practice in general practice– there is an extant body of work in this domain -- but concentrates on how this necessity of research ethics might impact on the type and practice of research that is generated in Design programmes at tertiary institutions. In this regard it concentrates on Practice Based Research as this approach might apply to Design, because the basic tenets of Practice Based Research imply that it is in the specific design-making process that new knowledge might be generated. In essence there is research about a design, and there is research in and through design. The former might be seen as design critique, and this in not the focus of this exploration, whereas the latter will become the central area of investigation.

All research projects undertaken at South African universities require ethical consideration and clearance. (In the United States, for example, these projects are reviewed by Institutional Review Boards or IRBs). Based on the personal experience of the author (who serves on such an ethics committee) this paper will explore the major decision-making approaches to ethics in research in general and their epistemological underpinnings. In essence the paper will interrogate the basic principles of Non-Maleficence, Beneficence, Scientific/Scholarly validity and Human Rights. It will then lay these theoretical constructs out against the underpinning concerns of participant (and environmental) vulnerability, invasiveness, risk/benefit ratios and Informed Consent as these apply to research in the design arena.

It is acknowledged as a basic principle that Design as a practice is innately emergent in nature, and predominantly inductive in approach. This places great tensions on the control over ethical issues that might arise in the design research process (as regularly witnessed in the development of a research proposal, for example, for research design projects at tertiary institutions.) It is hoped that this paper, as a prolegomenon, might open these tensions out for debate and a possible development of a code of research ethical conduct in Design departments at tertiary institutions.

Key Words: *ethics, research, design, responsibility, participant, proposal*

Introduction

South African Universities demand of their lecturers, amongst other things, a burgeoning research track record. Such research is inevitably subject to the standard practices and procedures of research and included in these requirements is that the research is carried out within the bounds of acceptable research ethical practice. Therefore, any research that emanates from Design programmes has to meet the mandate of such research ethical practice.

A working definition of design might be the following:

> Design is the innovative conceptualisation of the optimal and aesthetic use of given and/or developing materials to solve problems in society, reshape society and/or improve society. This conceptualisation is presented in the form of an innovative, conceptualised blueprint with detailed instructions for manufacture .

> . . Design is not replication, not manufacture, and not for mere use . . . Design is innovative, criteria driven, fit for purpose (utilizing) the optimal use of materials. (Design) push(es) the aesthetic, material and conceptual limits (and by) experimentation . . . moving from the known to the unknown and testing it. . . (Design is) progressive, the opposite of replication, the step after the mastery of manufacture.[1]

The key concerns for this paper (which deals with the ethics of research) are captured in the following extract from above definition: "the optimal and aesthetic use of given and/or developing materials to solve problems in society, reshape society and/or improve society." As soon as an aspect of research engages with society, the research needs to engage with ethical considerations. However, the rest of the definition captures what might go into large sections of the justification of the decisions made in the design, bringing to a certain extent the design and product in line with the demands of research.

Any working definition of research would include the following engagements. The research should generate 'new knowledge' (which could include new insights, processes and technologies – perhaps clustered around the concept of 'epistemological gain'); the research process should be undertaken in a systematic way; the research needs to provide evidence for the findings captured in the 'new knowledge;' such evidence should be collected and 'manipulated' in a way that is acceptable to the research community; and to a large extent the research sets out to solve a delineated problem. Controversially, perhaps, is also the notion that the results of the research should be transferable, or 'generalisable.' It is to accommodate this 'demand' that one might attempt to avoid the seemingly universalising yet particularising notion of 'new knowledge' and supplant it with the concept of 'epistemological gain.' One could argue, given this reconceptualising, that the purpose of research is to get a 'better understanding of life' rather than simply a 'better product.'

The generating of 'new knowledge/epistemological gain' can (and usually does) follow an inductive process in design research. In other words the 'new knowledge' flows from, or, more cogently, 'emerges from' the exploratory and discovery process in the design making. Indeed, in most cases this is the trajectory of research for design, as shall be argued below. Alternatively the 'new knowledge' can be deductive in its approach, in that the extant theories are either tested against emerging data, or extant theories are used to explain and order emerging data. (In the definition on design, offered above, this latter concept would engage with the aesthetic, material and technological justification of the design, as captured in the research report). In both cases the notion of 'emergence' (either of theory or of data) is critical and makes the research process potentially risky, hazardous and unpredictable. It is the type of data that emerges, and the way that it is collected to provide the 'body of evidence' (that substantiates findings) that is the main focus of ethical consideration in research.

There is much debate as to whether the design product itself (as a representation of a final product that has been developed following a concerted and systematic process of innovation) can be seen as the equivalent of the research report. (Examples of this debate can be found in the articles contained in Barrett & Bolt 2009; Macleod & Holridge 2006; Gray & Malins 2004). The South African Department of Higher Education and Training currently has a working group interrogating how this might be assessed, so that design and art outputs from tertiary institutions might be incentivised in the same way that classical research article-type outputs are (namely through financial subsidy awards). However, at least in the formal qualification system of Masters and Doctoral degrees such a situation does at present not exist in South Africa. For these degrees a written research report has to be submitted for assessment. The origins of the research process and product, however, find their first submissions for scrutiny in the research proposal. Therefore, in as much as the research proposal is a cardinal part of the research process because this provides the justification for the research as well as the plan of action (the methods to be used and the design of the process to be undertaken) so the process needs to be ethically acceptable. This needs to be captured in the research protocol or proposal. In other words, the trajectory that the research is to follow in the gathering of data for the development of new knowledge needs to follow not only sound and acceptable research methodological strategies, but these strategies need also to conform to and take into consideration the ethical aspects during the process and along the way of the trajectory. Speculatively it is also argued (and expanded upon below) that the design itself needs to demonstrate engagement with ethical considerations.

[1] My thanks are extended to the working committee on the Focus Area of Computer Aided Design in the Faculty of Arts, Tshwane University of Technology for this definition.

Exclusions from the argument

Before turning to ethical matters, I wish to exclude from the discussion certain aspects that might fall under the broad category of 'ethics.' These exclusions are either governed by law, or are part of an institution's own way of doing things. It must, however, be remembered that these will also be taken into consideration in the adjudication of the ethical issues in research and therefore might be considered indirectly in this paper. The exclusions are the following:

- Plagiarism: Most universities have policies in place to deal with plagiarism and it is generally accepted that the use of another person's intellectual property for personal gain is not within the bounds of acceptable research. Indeed, it is outside the bounds of the law.

- Intellectual property: The matter of the protection of intellectual property is contained in the various Acts of Parliament that lay the foundation for the control of Copyright, Design (both aesthetic and function), Patents, and Trademarks. However, the matter of the protection of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) will not be addressed in this paper. Although there is an Act of parliament that engages with IKS it is a contentious and problematic area that often does not receive the necessary engagement by researchers.

- Also not included in this paper is the engagement with the implications (for tertiary institutional employees) of the Act on intellectual property generated at publicly funded institutions. This might be considered to fall under the rubric of 'institutional ethics,' as it is a matter between the institution (as representative of the country and therefore the tax payer) and the employee (in this case, the researcher/lecturer).

- A further exclusion is the reference to the adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) where the law either requires the SOP or it is part of an institution's own set of SOPs. Although at first it would appear that SOPs are more relevant to the Natural Sciences, it can be argued that in the design process either the design has to take into account such matters as the handling of waste products for example, or the actual testing of the design will generate waste products – there are (or should be), for example, SOPs for the handling of waste from dye processes as these are potentially hazardous to the environment. As will become clear below, one of the areas of ethical consideration is how the researcher interacts with and protects the environment. Furthermore, where the design engages with building codes, for example, these are taken as a given in the ethical matters.

Finally, what is also not included in this paper is engagement with what might be called "institutional ethics." This branch deals with the running of an institution in an ethically acceptable way and, although it might impact on acceptable ethical behaviour in research[2], it is not the primary concern here.

It must be stressed that any assessment of a research proposal will take these matters into consideration. The point, however, that the article wishes to make here is that the matters mentioned are all governed by law or by regulation. Research Ethics, on the other hand, deals with matters that are not regulated in such strict way, but are cardinal in the morality of research practice, so to speak.

A working definition of Ethics for research

De Vos et al (2005: 57) provides one with a working definition of ethics for research:
Ethics is a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or a group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students.

[2] An example of this is when a university sets up a Research Ethics Committee (REC) under the aegis of a Business Unit, and provides the Business Unit with an 'override power' over decisions made by the REC. In this case the threat of conflict of interest is potentially intense because the tension between ethical research and the possibility that this might provide obstacles to commercial gain for the university (the so-called "third stream activity") is ever present. RECs should be completely independent of such potential pressure.

From this a number of matters can be foregrounded. Firstly, ethics implies a 'set of behavioural expectations' – this speaks directly to the research methods and design of the research process. Secondly, the 'most correct conduct' (or behaviours) in this process is governed (or at least guided) by a set of moral principles that is generally accepted by the community. A large section of what will follow in this paper will engage with these moral (philosophical) principles as they apply to research in general, and, speculatively, to design research. These philosophical principles play out in practical principles (Wassenaar 2006: 69-73). Thirdly, the definition outlines many of the types of participants (over and above the researcher) who might be involved in the research project that is to be undertaken.

Although the origins of the application of ethics to research lie predominantly in the field of the natural sciences, the move to the social sciences tracked the changes from quantitative research methods to qualitative research methods, and also tracked the challenges made to colonialism. (Colonialism might be seen as a massive, oppressive and exploitative research project). In terms of the natural sciences the start of engaging with the ethics of research might be traced to (amongst other places) the horrific discoveries of research conducted on humans that were undertaken in the Nazi concentration camps.[3] This led to the Nuremburg Code, which was followed by Helsinki Declaration and Belmont Report from the United States. More were to follow. However, predominantly, the research undertaken on and with humans fell into the biomedical science domain and employed quantitative research methods. As the social sciences (such as anthropology, sociology and psychology) theorised that the world was not stable, but interpretable, the move toward qualitative research methods proceeded. This placed the human subject not simply as an object from which data could be gathered, or on which matter could be tested, but now as an active individual and participant in the project at hand. This notion, that the participant is both the subject of and the target for potential design engagements is critical. Furthermore, this positioned the researcher as an interpretative agent, undercutting the sense of objectivity of the researcher. Arguably this move also paralleled (but was not necessarily causally connected or even connected by correlation) to the move towards decolonisation and the recognition and entrenchment of the notions of Human Rights[4]. For the sake of the argument it is perhaps better to refer to Individual Human Rights, as, by and large, this concept forms the basis of research ethical considerations in South Africa.

Research ethical principles

Research ethics draws on four philosophical principles. These are (1) Autonomy and the respect for the dignity of persons; (2) Nonmaleficence; (3) Beneficence and (4) Justice (Wassenaar, 2006: 67-68). To this might be added the notion of 'scientific' validity. The first principle locates the dignity and autonomy of the participants as an inalienable right. In all research, therefore, the permission to enter into the space of the participants, to treat them with respect, and to preserve their autonomy is foregrounded. This principle forms the philosophical background to the notion of 'informed consent' and speaks to the right to anonymity and confidentiality for the participant. The matter of 'informed consent' will be taken up again later in this article.

Nonmaleficence (colloquially captured as the notion of 'do no harm') seeks to make sure that no harm comes to the participants as a result of the research. The potential for such harm should be considered both during and after the completion of the research activities. There are two critical concerns that are at play here. The first of these is that research has potential for 'invasiveness.' By this is meant that to gather information or to test matters, the researcher has to enter the space of another. Such an entrance ranges from the simple act of communication, through the provision of information that might be harmful in the public domain, includes the dangers of emotional or psychological invasiveness, and moves onto the more physical invasiveness that might go with drug testing and the like. The second concern works with this first one, and postulates the notion of the 'vulnerability' of the research participant. These two concerns are considered after the next principle.

[3] Although the Nazi experience is the most widely recognised, the Americans have also been involved massive unethical research projects. I would venture to suggest that most research generating nations have abused participants prior to the attention given to research.

[4] Other approaches include Virtue Ethics as espoused by Artistotle, Utilitarianism, as emanating from thinkers such as John Stuart Mills and Jeremy Bentham, universal values, from the work of Kant, and, lately, a strong emphasis on care ethics from feminism, and the concerns from post-modernism. For a useful trajectory through these approaches, see Rachels (2007) that deals with ethics in general, but is often used to engage with research ethics.

The Beneficence principle ('do good') engages with the ways in which participants might benefit from being part of the research (and indeed the ways the research might benefit society).

It is important to note that all research that requires ethical consideration is invasive in some form or another, and therefore these three principles are to be engaged with and balanced according to an ethical consideration of so-called 'risk-benefit' ratios. This implies that the risks to the participants need to be balanced against the benefits to the participants, which further implies (drawing on the 'autonomy' principle) that the participants should be suitably informed so that they can make a decision to participate (given the clear understanding of the risks and benefits). This cardinal matter, namely that the potential participants are given sufficient information so that they might independently consider the risk/benefit proposition and then come to a decision, is a cornerstone of research using human participants.

The final principle is encapsulated by the concept of Justice. As Wassenaar notes (2006: 68) "Justice in research is a complex philosophical principle, and in general it requires that researchers treat research participants with fairness and equity during all stages of research." These stages include recruitment, the intervention and its aftermath, and engage also with matters such as incentivisation, benefit, the lack of deception, and the community benefiting from the results of the research.

Philosophical principles to practical principles

To achieve these *philosophical* principles generally eight *practical* principles are used in the ethics considerations of research. In developing these Wassenaar (2006) draws on the work of Emmanuel et al (2004).[5] These practical principles include

(1) *social and scientific value* (that is to say, the research that is to be undertaken needs to be able to demonstrate how the results with benefit the community and the discipline);
(2) *scientific validity* (where the research follows acceptable research procedures and therefore the results are valid and reliable);
(3) *independent ethics review* (in that the entire process is overseen and approved as being acceptable, by an independent body);
(4) *Community and stakeholder engagement or Collaborative partnership* – in this sense the participants are fully engaged, and have granted permission to be fully engaged with the research;
(5) *fair subject selection* (where not only is the science of selection fair but the recruitment of the participants is also fair and non-coercive, for example);
(6) *informed consent* (in that all potential participants have been adequately informed so that they can make a fairly judged decision to consent to take part in the research or not);
(7) *favourable risk/benefit ratio*, in that the information provided to potential participants clearly indicates the risk to benefit ratio of their involvement in the research (and furthermore that the risk/benefit is favourable and fair); and
(8) *respect for participants* – this speaks to the practices of honesty, integrity and forthrightness on the part of the researcher towards the participants.

Participants

Given the above principles, and recalling the definition of design, it is perhaps useful to create a conceptualisation of who the participants in design research might be. Speculatively it might be argued that there are in fact two tiers of participants. On the first tier one would discover the interface among the 'client' (the person or organisation that commissions the design because they themselves do not have the necessary expertise to do the design themselves, for example), the 'consultant' (or designer in this case) and the 'contractor' (who would be the one implementing the design blueprint). Arguably, of course, the consultant and the contractor might be the same, but what is clear form this first tier are the ethical imperatives towards the client.

[5] Wassenaar's comment on this work is significant: "this paper presents a novel framework for conceptualising and operationalising ethical issues in research. It sets out eights General principles, and articulates several benchmarks for each. The framework matches the sequences of designing and implementing a research proposal and is more 'user friendly' to researchers than most ethical guidelines and philosophical principles" (2006: 79). See also Emmanuel et al (2000).

The second tier can be conceptualised around the participants who will provide the range of information that might be required to provide the optimal design for the situation. These participants might be users of products, spaces or processes, for example, or they might be clients themselves, who are determining market engagement or the pursuit of market edge. (Tangentially, there is a real ethical dilemma if the client's demands for the design require the potential acceptance of a client's own unethical behaviour – subliminal marketing, for example, or forms of deception. From a research point of view for tertiary institutions these are areas that highly contentious and contested).

The Role of the Research Ethics Committee

The rest of this article is structured in a particular way. The author serves on a Research Ethics Committee or REC (the international trend is to call these committees 'Institutional Review Boards' or 'IRBs') of a particular tertiary institution in South Africa, namely the Tshwane University of Technology. As such the article will be structured around the deliberations that might take place once a particular proposal (emanating from a particular design department or discipline) to do research is submitted for review and approval. It is important to note at the outset the central role that the research proposal plays in the process, as the ethics demands in research proposals in design are notoriously difficult to formulate, given the emergent nature of design as a process in and of itself, as well as the inductive process of design (and qualitative research in general). (This is one of the reasons for the generation of this article).

The role of the REC is to deliberate on the potential research to see whether in the first instance the research is scientifically sound. It is generally accepted that bad research science is ethically bad. (The word 'science' is used here to denote rigor, fairness, scholarship, a systematic approach and other hallmarks of accepted research process and not to point toward the 'traditional' view of 'science' as embedded in the 'Natural Sciences,' for example. It is perhaps more helpful to replace 'science' with 'scholarship,' but this replacement is not widely used in the literature, and therefore the notion of 'science' will be maintained). For this scrutiny the research proposal is central, as the proposal will justify the research, and will lay out the purpose and trajectory of the research, the places where data is to be gathered, the methods that will be employed to manipulate and interpret the data, and the process of the design.

The second deliberation is to whether the research impacts on the key areas of potential concern to the participants in the research, and how this impact is being managed. For this engagement the proposal needs to correlate with supporting documentation such as information leaflets and letters of consent, letters seeking permission to access participants, and the like. The third deliberation concerns itself with protecting the best interests of the university and what the university stands for and practises. In this sense the economic, the ethical and the reputational aspects are considered. Here the scrutiny is around matters such as intellectual property, the possibility of Serious Adverse Events occurring, and the like. However, the second deliberation overrides the concerns of the university – in essence the REC performs the task of the watchdog over research to protect the participants.[6] *Fundamentally the role of the REC is to act as a type of in loco parentis for the participants.*

The first particularly ethical consideration that the REC gives to the proposal is to whether the research that is to be undertaken engages with one or more of the three main categories of research participation namely humans, animals and the environment. In cases of the environment, by and large these will be covered by the SOPs and the law, but they need to be acknowledged in the proposal. In terms of design the most obvious example of the environmental concerns rests with Architecture, but any process that engages with or leads to waste material needs to be considered. Matters that concern the use of animals in research are normally forwarded to a specialist Animal Ethics committee.[7] More and more a fourth dimension is being added, one that is of particular importance to

[6] Most RECs at universities, for example, are constituted in such a way that they are independent of any potential interference into their deliberations by the rest of the research community, and they fiercely defend that independence.

[7] This researcher has indeed come across research with animals in a design setting – a student wished to design a range of jewellery accessories for pets, and so the testing of the products on the pets (including ear-piercing) needed to be approved. In Architecture, the design of animal enclosures might fall into this category, as an example, and it is feasible that similar considerations might occur in Interior Design.

design, and that is the impact on the cultural, and more specifically the notion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems or IKS. In this last case, although the predominant engagement in IKS is around biodiversity and the use of indigenous materials, the concern has spread to cultural practices. Although it can be argued that this falls within the domain of the human, it can also be argued that with reference to the human one is obviously dealing with the individual, whereas with the cultural one is dealing with a community – this warrants a separate category of consideration. Given these four categories, one observes that the most prominent one, and the one that will form the basis of the rest of the consideration, is the category that engages with the human.

Research ethics and human participants

This article now returns to the definition on design raised above, namely that design is: "the optimal and aesthetic use of given and/or developing materials to solve problems in society, reshape society and/or improve society." From a design perspective Fineli (2001) reformulates these concerns around the notions of designer as human being, designer embedded in culture, designer embedded in discipline and designer embedded in culture/society. Within these fourfold concerns, he posits the notion of the designer as a 'responsible person' (Ibid, 13)[8]. The nature of such responsibility is of course open to interpretation and can (and should) be addressed through moral and ethical philosophies. (The same can be said of the nature of the 'responsible person' serving in the RECs). Nevertheless, it is clear that the designer has a responsibility to engage with the "optimal use of given and/or developing materials" which would speak to the engagement with the environment, for example. The responsible designer also needs to determine (and perhaps justify) the aesthetic impact of the design on the society, culture and the environment.

From a research point of view, the engagement with the "problems in society," the "reshaping of society" and the "improvement of society" demand responsible approaches in gauging such problems, making decisions that will reshape and improve such society. Fineli (2001: 12, brackets in the original) speaks of the "necessary upstream (problematique) and downstream (impact) complexification of the design project." Here the two areas of ethical (responsible) consideration are foregrounded. In terms of the upstream, the responsible design research needs to engage with such data gathering processes (interviews, briefs, focus groups, other designs in similar situations, for example) that are to be done following standard ethical and research practices (many of which are contained in classic qualitative research methods guidelines). From a downstream point of view, the research needs to determine methods of assessing and enhancing the impact that the design might have, and to make decisions on this impact in a responsible way. Put another way, it is useful to conceive of the design process in two phases and each phase has specific ethical considerations. In phase one data is gathered that will inform the design process. Here the ethics of data gathering are at play, and this might correlate with Finelli's 'problematique.' In phase two, after the data has been gathered and manipulated to make conclusions, these conclusions are then used to make the design. In this phase, therefore, the ethics of design are at play. Firstly, the design should meet all the legal, regulatory and other criteria. However, very importantly, the design should meet the demands of the participants as far as possible, as it is they that have provided the information that assisted in informing the design. This speaks to the impact factor in the research/design.

Applying the eight ethics principles to design research

It is now useful to draw on the Wassenaar/Emmanuel eight principles to consider how these notions of 'problematising' and 'impact' might work.

Social and scientific value: The cornerstone of this principle lies in the notion of 'value.' As such, ethically, the researcher/designer would need to gather information from the particular society in an ethical manner, and use that information ethically. In this regard the researcher/designer would engage responsibly with the problematising process in the efficacy of the design intervention, and would need to determine responsibly the potential impact on the particular community for whom and about which the design is being undertaken. (It might also be considered that the 'value' would need

[8] Fineli (2001: 13) notes that such parameters of responsibility should be embedded in design education programmes and should engage with the various ethical matters encapsulated in theories around Virtue Ethics, Feminist Ethics, postmodern ethics, human rights ethics, Utilitarianism and the like. He calls this the development of "individualistic ethics."

to lie not only in the impact of the design, but also in the contribution to new knowledge and insight that the project might need to generate.)

Scientific validity: This aspect engages with responsible research and would require fair justification (problematising) and a clear indication or demonstration of comprehensive planning for determining potential negative impact (which speaks to the risk/benefit ratios as outlined below). It might also here be argued that the validity of the design would be determined by the way that the design contributed to the discipline. Although this seems not to be an 'obvious' ethical consideration, it speaks to the notion that 'bad research is ethically bad' which might in turn be 'translated' as 'bad design is ethically bad,' particularly in tertiary institutions. It is acknowledged that this is a contentious proposition.

Independent ethics review would refer to the responsible evaluation and confirmation of the research and the design process, taking into consideration the principles of non-maleficience, beneficence, justice and the like, both in the problematising data gathering process, and in terms of the impact assessment. It is perhaps this point in the article that is most important. The title of this article notes that this is a 'prolegomenon' – an introduction or start to the debate – and the plea made covertly in the article is that this debate be carried forward, perhaps even culminating in time in a 'code of ethics' for designers at tertiary institutions. An 'independent review board' might be the start of such a process.

Community and stakeholder engagement or collaborative partnership. This principle speaks to the responsible interfaces amongst the client, the designer and the community. The engagement is both in terms of the data gathering prior to design, and the assessing of impact (directly or indirectly) of the design on the stakeholder community and partnership. The principles of non-malficence and beneficence, coupled to the risk/benefit ratios speak to these deliberations, and would include the engagement with potential physical, emotional, psychological, economic and the like invasiveness. Furthermore, the findings of the research need to be shared in some way. Naturally, the design itself is shared, but should other findings come to the fore, such findings might need to be communicated to the stakeholders.

Fair subject selection. Although this matter is fundamentally a traditional research design concern, it does resonate in design research as well. Predominantly, in terms of responsibility, this would interrogate the potential problems of exploitation both in terms of data collection and in terms of the potential vulnerability of those who will bear the brunt of the impact of the design. It can, however, be argued that the commissioning of a design excludes the 'fair subject selection' concern because the purpose of the design is set by the commission, and the 'users' of the design are in fact embedded in the commission as well. Nevertheless, it is beholden upon the researcher designer to consider matters such as exploitation that such a commission might bring about.

Informed consent. The key here is that all those involved in the research (one might again read these as client, designer and community) need to be adequately informed so that they can make an 'informed decision' to take part in the research or not to. Respondents need sufficient information to provide consent. A case, for example, can be made that a respondent might unwittingly provide information that would undermine a company's market edge. In this case the researcher needs to inform the respondent that this might occur and that the researcher has taken certain precautions to exclude at best or limit, at worst, such potential risk. To do otherwise is to court deception. Finally, in this section, it must be noted that respondents should have the 'capacity' to make the decision. Minors, for example, are prohibited by law from providing research information, as are those in mental institutions.

Favourable risk/benefit ratio implies that there is a responsible consideration of the risks involved and the benefits that might accrue, as well as the risks and benefits that have been discovered in assessing the impact. In this domain it is important to note that the client, who does not have the same level of design expertise, needs to be adequately informed of the risk/benefit ratios. The risk/benefit ratio should be contained in the Informed Consent process.

Respect for participants. The notion of respect and the notion of responsibility are intertwined, inevitably.

Given the above the REC will apply its mind using the practical principles to the design research proposal. It must be emphasised that, except in matters of the law, the REC member needs to act responsibly toward the proposed research, engaging with the principles and basing them on the philosophical principles.[9]

Conclusion

The occurrence of Tertiary Education research endeavours in the design disciplines is burgeoning, and the need for guidelines for the ethics part of research needs to be considered. It is a new field and requires much engagement. It is hoped that this article has served as an 'opening gambit' to these deliberations. It has been accepted that the general field of research ethics, particularly at tertiary institutions has already developed extensively, particularly in the natural sciences and medicine. In the fields of the Social Sciences much work has been done. In the domains of the arts and design the engagement with ethics is still in its infancy.

As such, this article acknowledges two matters, in conclusion. Firstly, it acknowledges that there is a fear that the practices and principles that have been accepted in other domains might be 'imposed' on a field such as art and design that has other practices, requirements and demands. This fear is real, in the author's opinion, and therefore the sooner the debate is started and domain specific guidelines generated the better it will be for the domain. There are legal moves afoot that will make ethical clearances mandatory.

Secondly, this article has generated general guidelines developed from the Social Sciences and the concept of Human Rights. Nevertheless, the application of these to art and design is speculative in nature in the article. This speculation is acknowledged, but that is the nature of a prolegomenon – it is simply meant to be 'coherently provocative.' One trusts that others will take up the debate as well.

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[9] In research that needs to engage with children, the medical field and aspects of natural science type research, there are guidelines that are also used. In the Social Sciences the Human Sciences Research Council's Code of Research Conduct is used where appropriate.

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Short Biography

Allan Munro is a Research Professor in the Faculty of the Arts, Tshwane University of Technology. He has a PhD in theatre from the Ohio State University. He has published papers across the Arts spectrum and delivered papers at conferences both nationally and internationally. He has supervised Masters and Doctoral candidates in such fields as Music, Graphic Design, Photography, Fashion, Film and Theatre. His current interests are in Practice-Led research and their methods in the arts. He has lectured on Research Methods in the Arts at a number of universities, and is completing a book on this, and on creative writing for theatre. He has written a number of plays that have been produced both nationally and internationally. He serves on his University's Central Ethics Committee.