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### POLARITIES LIMITS AND THRESHOLDS



#### How to apply social sciences to design research.

Ana Belen Rojo Ojados

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# HOW TO APPLY SOCIAL SCIENCES TO DESIGN RESEARCH. A CASE STUDY BEYOND THE MASTER CLASS.

## ABSTRACT

This article introduces the members involved in design teaching in a research proposal whose main objective is to present, from the disciplines of anthropology, philosophy, sociology, art history and cultural studies, teaching experiences related to the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the impact that classical social disciplines (sociology, ethnography, consumption and trend) are having in the final degree projects produced in higher design studies. The analysis of these methodologies, from the social sciences, starts from this research to advance a “stage of the question” that can also be present in the final degree works of other studies related to the arts and design in general.

## INTRODUCTION

Actually, schools and design education, like other educational institutions, must adapt to the new and changing paradigms that impact the real world (understood as the professional and work environment after the educational stage). With this in mind, the educational community, specifically those involved in teaching, must consider various questions related to enhancing theoretical, humanistic, and intellectual discourse in design education. These questions may include identifying the existing boundaries between the academic and professional stages or exploring the intangible frontiers between technical culture and intellectual culture in the practice of design. This article addresses a specific topic related to how art and design schools introduce their research subjects—students who will become future design professionals—to knowledge and research resources related to social, humanistic, and cultural studies. Another point to be discussed in this dissertation is the tacit or explicit values, criteria, and mechanisms deployed in art education.

According to the thematic axis of this text and in relation to the arguments previously presented, more than limits, what exists are barriers that have been constructed between students, teachers, and institutions. These barriers have taken shape through

different approaches and ways of doing, thinking, teaching, and researching, which have highlighted differences in design didactic strategies over the last few decades. Researchers like Lorusso<sup>1</sup> argue that in the academic field, considerable effort has been devoted to investigating the connections between educational institutions (referred to as “design schools” hereafter) and the real-world work environment.

Furthermore, researchers have examined the similarities and differences in student aspirations across different generations, as well as the role played by cultural capital in shaping emerging professional models (Adams, 2003; Tums, 2003; Atman, 2003).

Knowing the interests of students to outline an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for teaching specialties is one of the main objectives of this project. There are proposals similar to the one presented here, recently carried out in the field of higher artistic education in design and that are part of the transfer network provided not only by the schools themselves but also by organizations such as the “Confederación de Escuelas de Artes Plásticas y Diseño”<sup>2</sup>. In May 2024, this research project was disseminated within the framework of the “IX Jornadas para Docentes 2024” (Valencia, Spain) and it was found that it is a topic that interests many teachers in this specialty and especially those in the social and history areas. We must not only rely on literature and sources but also on the real needs of professionals who dedicate themselves to design teaching.

The humanistic investigation of design, beyond classical methodologies such as historiographic reviews, bibliographies, catalogs, or reviews, has been constrained by the technical dominance inherent in design disciplines. Therefore, research proposals like the one presented in this article are crucial in an increasingly digitized, technical society where critical thinking is virtually marginalized (Tatulyan, 2021). Regarding this idea, Lorusso is quite explicit: “I discuss how a broadly humanistic turn in design, which transforms the designer into an intellectual of techniques rather than a technical intellectual, is less a spontaneous evolution of the field than the logical outcome of design’s unstable position within the technical domain”.

The unstable position of design, as highlighted by Lorusso, emphasizes the need for a humanistic and creative approach to address the challenges inherent in the academic design field<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, other contemporary authors validate that expanding the didactic context of design contributes to the necessity of providing students with broader and more reflective approaches. These approaches must unequivocally be related to the social sciences and supported by methodologies that have proven most effective in recent decades, such as anthropology applied to sustainable design (Augé, 2000). These have been complemented by design theorists who have integrated social methodologies into the more technical realm of design. For example, Michael Leube defends, in his latest work<sup>4</sup> «By revising classical design approaches, such as those related to desire generation

<sup>1</sup> Silvio Lorusso has challenged the traditional boundaries between culture and design, demonstrating their inseparability and the crucial role their interaction plays in understanding contemporary society. His work invites reflection on how design influences our everyday life and how culture manifests through it. Read more in his personal site <https://silviolorusso.com/work/what-design-cant-do/>

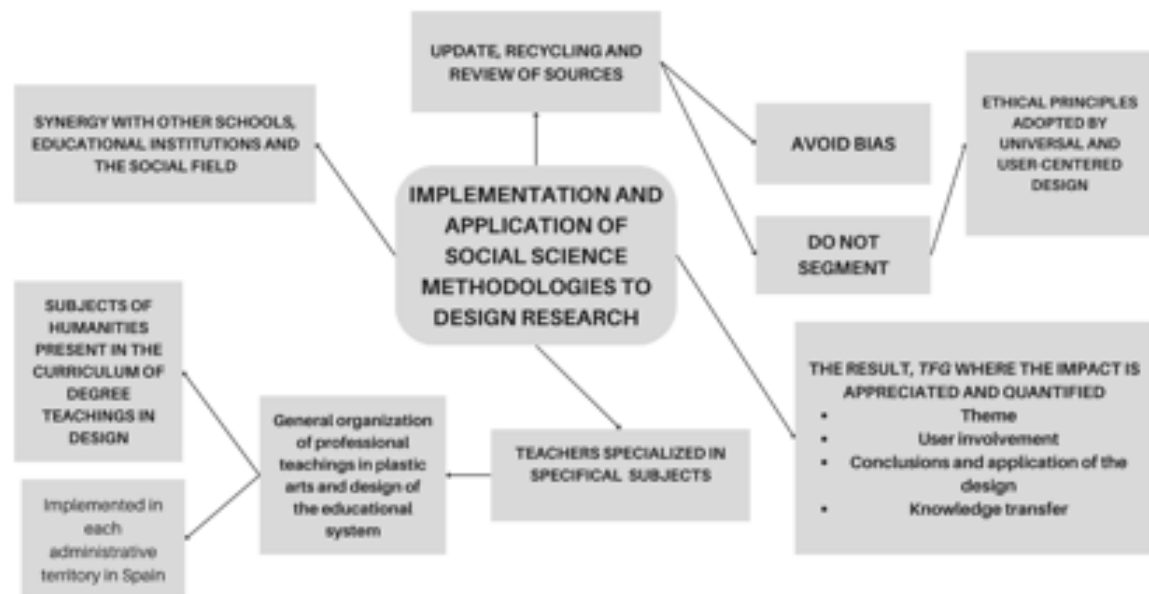
<sup>2</sup> The programme is available at <http://www.escuelasdearte.es/news/2024valencia/home.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Id. Lorusso, S. (2024). *What Design Can't Do: Essays on Design and Disillusion*. Set Margins' Publications.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Leube, in his latest work *The Future Designer: Anthropology Meets Innovation in Search of Sustainable Design*, provides practical examples, methods, and tools for implementing sustainable approaches in the practical work of experienced designers. By showcasing cutting-edge innovations for pro-social and humanitarian design, Leube argues that if we change the objective of design from creating desire to creating value, we can solve many of the most pressing social problems, from citizen cooperation to sustainable cities.

and value creation, we can address numerous urgent and emerging social challenges. These challenges span from citizen collaboration to urban sustainability».

The research discussed in this article, like any qualitative research project, must also take into account how the data offers us, at a quantitative level, information that must be represented graphically, if we want the transfer of knowledge to be effective, providing students, teachers and other design agents with a theoretical but also practical corpus.



Self-made graph that summarizes the state of the issue.

## 2. UNDERMINING INSTITUTIONS FROM WITHIN

Since the student revolutions of '68, educational institutions have been undermined from within by student collectives themselves. The context provided by mass media means that information managed by students (and the educational community) is no longer solely produced within classrooms or departments. Internet and social media portray information in an aestheticized and spectacularized manner, and often, it is manipulated<sup>5</sup>. A substantial amount of information is related to the concerns that design students have, such as inclusion, sustainability, identity, or consumption.

The research project referenced here conducts a rigorous analysis supported by methodologies aimed at highlighting how the social issues chosen by students over the years yield multiple perspectives in the resulting research, fostering innovation and critical thinking. From these final degree projects, both qualitative and quantitative data can be obtained regarding how they have prepared students for a professional career where the social, anthropological, and cultural focus will increasingly be defined by the actual impact of design on the overall user experience. The importance of applying a social approach in any discipline affected by contemporary developments is emphasized<sup>6</sup>, and subject to the vicissitudes of advanced capitalism (Jameson, 2017), this approach directly influences

<sup>5</sup> Laranjo, F. Modes of Criticism: Design and Democracy. Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Recent theories on capitalism, such as those proposed by Bell, Fisher, and Jameson, explore a new social formation that questions its nature and no longer adheres to the principles of classical capitalism. These theories challenge the traditional emphasis on industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle. Instead, they engage with the complexities of contemporary capitalism, considering factors like globalization, technological advancements, and shifts in economic power dynamics.

the results of research like this, making it more evident that high-quality, up-to-date, and impactful social, anthropological, and cultural investigation is essential in the design and artistic creation process. The scheme below helps visualize the key elements involved in this research process.



This graphic scheme presents the transfer of knowledge to students in the field of social sciences applied to design, it is organized into three main blocks:

1. Main Question about how the transfer occurs.
2. Transfer Process which includes methods, techniques and practical applications.
3. Teachers Responsibilities highlighting the need for continuous updating, critical review and maintaining a critical spirit in design research.

There is an evident paradigm shift in design education, which educators in this field must embrace. This change necessitates a fundamental reevaluation of how design is taught (Findeli, 2001). Academic programs must adapt to address not only technical skills but also the ethical, cultural, and philosophical implications of design, working with, applying, and disseminating them. Furthermore, the research results generated by students upon completing their studies should reflect the assimilation of this knowledge associated with academic practice (Frayling, 1993) and its practical application in future design endeavors.

Design researchers are faced with a research approach that must consider an object/subject-oriented perspective from a scientific standpoint, which includes holism. When the decision to adopt such an approach is carefully considered, the research results can align with the new design practices demanded by the market and embraced by the individuals (in this case, students) conducting the research<sup>7</sup>. Classical historiography (for lack of a better term), led by Frayling, has paved the way for a widespread revision of the theoretical frameworks present in design research. This revision begins with criticism regarding how designers or researchers who are also educators have focused on studying creation and manual work, rather than utilizing scientific methodologies that encompass systematic hypotheses, thought structures, or ordered procedures to create meaning.

All of these categories that we intend to analyze (sustainability, inclusion, consumption, culture, etc.) are already integrated into the curricular systems, that is, in the subjects that are part of the humanities or design culture departments (nomenclature that may vary depending on the subject). schools but they are included in the educational laws that are the framework in Spain. Subjects such as "Design Culture", "Design and Society" or "Design as an agent for social change" offer students theoretical knowledge (theoretical such as those that appear in this article) but also the skills to implement these concepts

<sup>7</sup> Panchenko, M. What Is Holistic Design? The Future of UX or a Buzzword? Recuperado de <https://www.eleken.co/blog-posts/what-is-holistic-design>



into reality. practice. Concepts such as capital, economy and politics are explained as conditions to which the design is exposed.

The political component has been latent in design research, but it became particularly pronounced with the emergence of the pandemic and the spread of fake news, resulting in a kind of “superstorm” that Noemi Biasetton analyzes effectively in her latest work<sup>8</sup> offering a practical model to frame the relationships between design and politics, Noemi Biasetton proposes three distinct approaches: design with politics, design about politics, and design for politics. She encourages design researchers to recognize that combining design and politics does not necessarily imply activism, but rather responds to the need for new tools in addressing emerging challenges and urgencies.

Encouraging reflective thinking among students and design researchers must challenge the traditionally materialistic conception of education, which often views it as mere preparation for the labor market, tailored to market needs.

### 3. NEW FRAMEWORKS FOR DESIGN RESEARCH

Frayling described how the image of the designer has evolved. From being considered a thoughtful individual dedicated to honest practical experimentation, to becoming a style advocate, and transitioning into the role of a manager who seeks to recycle images, signs, and styles to align with the latest trends. Given this landscape, the function of the designer-researcher (whether student or faculty, as is the case in this text) must constantly renew itself and incorporate knowledge, tools, techniques, and methodologies beyond traditional lectures or independent student work.

One of the key points of this research framework renewal is to observe how topics from the social sciences (history, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, gender, etc.) have progressively integrated into Bachelor's theses (TFG) and Master's theses (TFM), according to the official curriculum<sup>9</sup> at present, all these works confirm how future design professionals are receptive to the social paradigms with which they interact, both practically and theoretically. This is evident in the mandatory research load that students must undertake for academic consolidation, as well as in the radical, and often violent changes observed in consumption, communication, trend models, and politics. (Lynam, 2024).

As Karen Heald proposes in one of her recent studies, ‘practice-based research is also an integral part of art and design.’ All these areas have been the subject of ongoing discussion and debate. One of the current challenges is to create models that facilitate and enable research development and advancement within art and design. (Heald, 2015). Practice-based research<sup>10</sup> it has been hegemonic in the artistic sphere, it is not sufficient

<sup>8</sup> Biasetton, N. Superstorm. Design and politics in the age of information. Eindhoven, Onomatopée, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> The regulations governing Bachelor's Degree Final Projects (TFG in Spanish acronym) in the field of design at Spanish university schools are established by various legal provisions. In Spain, these regulations are governed by Real Decreto 822/2021. According to regulations, each university may have its own internal guidelines for Bachelor's Theses (TFG) in the field of design.

<sup>10</sup> The debate surrounding practice-oriented and evidence-based research has also generated considerable discussion regarding consensus on what is appropriate for academic development and evaluation purposes. Additionally, the field requires fair and consistent evaluation methods across different types of practice. Currently, research in these areas is being assessed, indicators are compared and evaluated, and proposals are made for incorporating indicators and developing and utilizing research models for further investigation and development. (Heald, 2015).

or, at times, appears incapable of effectively, honestly, and academically incorporating all aspects, indicators, or knowledge related to social and cultural studies.

Social sciences such as sociology contribute several suitable methodologies to research in design and art. In the initial stages, the analysis of diverse databases is essential. In the case at hand, these databases<sup>11</sup> (officials of educational institutions to analyze) like research memories, produced within a significant determined temporality, constitute the research memory.

Simultaneously, this memory is defined by the regulations or guidelines for Bachelor's theses (TFG) developed by educational institutions, as previously pointed out. These data must be subjected to a series of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. First, to organize this information, it should be sorted by calls, categorized by specialties (graphic design, product design, interior design, and fashion), and later organized based on the weight of data related to theoretical perspectives such as social, ethical, and cultural factors.



The following graph<sup>12</sup> visually illustrates how this categorical approach can be.

Conduct primary research<sup>13</sup> combined with an analysis of written material (Visocky, 2021), can offer a diverse series of recurring social categories that can be termed 'main categories.' Within these, secondary and tertiary categories can be inserted, which can be conceptualized as 'relational categories.' By organizing the data obtained from this initial analysis, a relevant presence of concepts related to the fields of cultural, social, anthropological, consumer, and ethnographic studies can be confirmed.

The dissemination of research is considered important for the spread and

<sup>11</sup> Data are consistently obtained from official sources, repositories, and both physical and digitized archives maintained by higher education institutions in the field of design.

<sup>12</sup> The graph below is my own creation and is part of the presentation that was made of this research at the last IX Conference for Teachers conference, which took place in Valencia in May 2024. Rojo, A. B., & Vidal, F. (2023). ¿Para qué sirven las humanidades y las ciencias sociales en los estudios de diseño? Propuesta de investigación. ResearchGate. URL [researchgate.net/publication/380752812\\_Para\\_que\\_sirven\\_las\\_humanidades\\_y\\_las\\_ciencias\\_sociales\\_en\\_los\\_estudios\\_de\\_diseño\\_Propuesta\\_de\\_investigación](https://researchgate.net/publication/380752812_Para_que_sirven_las_humanidades_y_las_ciencias_sociales_en_los_estudios_de_diseño_Propuesta_de_investigación)

<sup>13</sup> Visocky, J., & O'Grady, J. (2021). Manual de investigación para diseñadores. Blume. pp. 42-43.

transfer of knowledge generated by these educational institutions<sup>14</sup>. The information generated by these research endeavors not only becomes valuable databases for design research but also serves as a valuable resource for consultation and fieldwork for the entire educational community (students, teachers, or researchers in design). This is particularly significant because it can extend understanding beyond the definitions of classical research inherent to the sciences and academic disciplines (Owen, 1998).

In addition to serving as a relevant asset for qualitative and ethnographic research, this information can be presented and disseminated through networks and media, transforming primary data into highly interesting processed information. This can be done in parallel or as a complementary approach to performative analyses<sup>15</sup>, visual, ethnographic, etc., aspects that can enhance the outcomes of future research (Blauvelt, 2007). But the result, at present, will depend on how we work with the data that we now have, specifically, with all the Final Degree Projects (also TFG in Spain) that have been carried out in a period of time long enough to measure the gradual impact, the possible trends and thematic biases that may have occurred.

To facilitate the management and organization of the primary sources, which are the students' works, it is decided to enter the raw data in a table arranged in several columns where the inputs can be entered. Reducing it to a series of main social categories, which will help us classify this data. An example is shown below:

PROMOCIÓN	MODA	Non alumnos	CATEGORIA	CORE 2	CORE 3	CORE 4	PRODUCTE
2016-2017	Estereotipos*		Estereotipos	Colectiu específic	Inclusió		
	WDF: We don't fit*		Identitat	Inter cultures	Crits Design	Genèric	
	La coberta*		Colectiu específic	Inclusió	Crits Design		
	Humans Sandals*		Inter cultures	Crits Design	Emergent design		
2020 A 2021	Awake		Inter cultures	Eco	Emergent design	Inter cultures	O.A.M.E.D
	Olivo Studio		Crits Design	Cultura	Emergent design	consum	First Step In Art
	Utopia		Eco	Eco	Emergent design		Cotxi, la màgia del descans
	Dress Kneal not animals		Inter cultures	Crits Design	Consum		dvok SADDLE
	Awareness		Emotions	Consum	Cultura		Wings
	Alternative		Crits Design	Eco	Consum		
	Si		Genèric	Identitat	Cultura	Consum	
	Bridgers		Genèric	Identitat	Consum	Emotions	
	Ciao Bari		Inter cultures	Identitat	Cultura		
	Hygiene		Salut	Inter cultures	Eco		
	Up Sick		Salut	Inclusió			
	Nuit		Inferior	Inclusió	Consum	Crits Design	
2021 a 2022	CYBER TREE clothing collection		Consum	Concept design	Crits Design	Colectiu específic	Inhalador d'asma
	Beyond Wounds		Salut	Identitat	Genèric	Colectiu específic	Cupra Taconorde concept car
	Namés un Troc		Emotions	Consum	Cultura		
2022 a 2023	Gloria Airways, Inclusive flights		Genèric	Consum	Salut	Colectiu específic	Argonometes modulars
	Artesania híbrida		Cultura	Consum	Crits Design	Eco	L'Altus i la ciutat sensorial
	KAGIRILLO		Cultura	Identitat	Comunitat		Bossa War

Screenshot showing methodology in the initial phase of approaching the data

#### 4. CATEGORIZING THE DATA

The main categories that can help design researchers delimit the areas of study can be quantitatively analyzed by conducting a documentary analysis of completed works. For instance, in the case presented here, the focus is on undergraduate final projects.

<sup>14</sup> To make this approach in search of primary data, various university and higher education design school websites have been consulted, such as ESDAPC. Data can be accessed there <http://www.esdapc.cat>.

<sup>15</sup> Referring to Andrew Blauvelt, these qualitative data related to contextual and experiential design are indicative of the application of ethnography in design research. Retrieved from <https://designobserver.com/article.php?id=5467>



While there is no specific fixed number of categories that can be considered ideal (as it depends on the needs of each research study), it is advisable that if the resulting number of categories in an initial classification is too high, researchers proceed to further reduce this initial categorization into broader thematic groups.

In the initial stages of research, it may be favorable to broaden the number of main areas to avoid unwanted biases from research results. And also, to accommodate the categories that may arise from the analytical work of the databases of the center with which interdisciplinary work is carried out, as is the case with the previously treated political sphere.

One of the objectives of research of this nature may be to establish parallels and synergies by quantifying common categories between art and design, such as gender, identity, sustainability, culture, or concept design/art.

As an example, the realms related to sustainability can include those of 'environment' and 'development'<sup>16</sup>, grouping them under the category 'eco.' This methodological organization of categories can be useful for research, as one of its objectives should be the creation of repositories for consultation, work, and research that are valuable to the artistic and design community. It also addresses the need for knowledge dissemination, outreach, and transfer. Additionally, most of the categories selected during the initial data exploration can be transformed into visual parameters, which may even lead to new investigations with a more aesthetic and artistic focus<sup>17</sup>.

In fact, part of the data analyzed during all phases of the research can be transformed into multimedia, audiovisual work, etc. And this may be a point of synergy that should be considered as an axis of collaboration and interdisciplinary work in design research.

Data, the more varied, the better, since we cannot separate research from the context in which it develops. (Sanjuán, 2019). The debate regarding the emergence of AI in the purely academic context (specifically within theoretical and cultural domains) of design is not yet widespread. However, it is more prominent in the theorization and artistic production sphere (across various disciplines, but particularly in multimedia, image, and sound), resulting in a significant body of work and critical reflection<sup>18</sup>.

## 5. CONSEQUENCES IN DESIGN RESEARCH

The consideration of all human aspects, accepting the long-term consequences of design, emerges as a consistent theme in the majority of the analyzed research. This is likely related to increased awareness among students and also due to a noticeable presence of theorization and research on sustainability in design, such as the principles of Hannover. (McDonough, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Despite the fact that development and environmental areas can also intersect with consumption or economy, they contribute to the production of significant human capital.(Pont, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Forensic Architectures is an organization made up of architects, artists, filmmakers, journalists, scientists and lawyers. Its main objective is to investigate violence perpetrated by the state and large corporations, especially when it affects architecture and the built environment. To carry out their work, they create expert reports, models, animations, video analysis and maps, and disseminate them both in general media and in courts, truth commissions and civil courts. A whole series of quantitative data that are transformed into artistic pieces to publicize social problems that currently affect us. It can be consulted at <https://forensic-architecture.org/>

<sup>18</sup> A good example is found in the amount of reflection around new technologies and artistic production that we find in institutions such as the CCCB. More info <https://www.cccb.org/ca/exposicions/fitxa/ia-inteligencia-artificial/240941>

The intensification of the need to enhance multidisciplinary research in design underscores the importance of studying, understanding, and comprehending how these social and cultural concepts are integrated into the creation and transfer of knowledge. It can be argued that investing in research is an optimistic proposition, as schools should serve as spaces for liberation that foster critical thinking—the essential backbone of ‘design thinking’. Art and design schools are a special case because, more than in other places, they encourage students to transform their own cultural background, especially the most personal aspects (passions, hobbies, readings, ethical and political ideas, etc.), into practical work. According to Bordieu, a design practice can be understood as the activity through which culture becomes beneficial, and cultural consumers become cultural producers.” (Bordieu, 1979).

## 6. DOING RESEARCH IN A COMPLEX CULTURAL CONTEXT

Providing an example that clarifies what is argued next, historically, the design profession has excluded women (Lupton, 2021), minorities, and oppressed groups, especially in recent decades<sup>19</sup>. The design profession has become one where workers self-devalue and operate within precarious conditions (Zafra, 2018). Design work, fully embedded in cultural industries, is sustained by part-time professional collaborators, enthusiastic interns, and diverse individuals who normalize new forms of professional precarity in the digital era.

But when the cultural system itself sustains or promotes this precariousness, how reliable are the data it provides? How should design researchers manage all these complex data?

If, as discussed in other sections of this text, cultural capital encapsulates the aspects currently under investigation in design, and given that design is in crisis, we are dealing with data, facts, and information chains that must be managed critically. This necessitates ongoing review and constant updating of the knowledge generated and received, as well as the sources and data handled at all initial stages of research. The profession of design has become intellectualized, thanks to the incorporation of ‘social research,’ giving rise to generations of ‘organically intellectual’ designers, as noted by Lupton (from a Gramscian perspective): ‘These organic intellectuals could merge physical and mental work, constructing ‘new models of thought’ based on actions of making and creating. Their skills would be both technical and theoretical. The affinity with the ‘designer prototype’ conceived and promoted by art and design schools is evident: it refers to an intellectual who takes a stance, critiques, and learns, designing themselves and transforming their work into original content that they will also use to express their own personality.

The educational community, particularly the community of professors, must understand what intellectual work entails and how it should be integrated with practical work. Perhaps one of the differences that needs to be examined lies in recognizing the challenge of distinguishing between the technical and the intellectual<sup>20</sup>. One of the ‘resolved’

<sup>19</sup> We can say that the crisis exposed by Ken Garland’s 1960 manifesto is revalidated and fed by the new crises brought about by millenarianism. See the 2000 edition of the First Things First Manifesto hosted on the Adbusters.org website. Recovered from <https://www.adbusters.org>

<sup>20</sup> One of these differences, for authors like Lorusso, may lie in the generalized perception of the professional roles of design, which may not take into account the roles that the design student acquires, among which is that of researcher, data analyst, data manager. sources, etc.

differences in the practical and academic exercise of teaching applied design has been moving away from a singular focus and opting for a multidisciplinary vision and strategy.

## 7. BECOMING DUAL DESIGNERS

Quoting Irwin, through this multidisciplinary approach, complex problems posed by society, their interconnections, and interdependencies can be visualized and mapped (Irwin, 2018). The systemic issues presented by the society for which design is undertaken (a continuously changing structure that requires design strategies in transition) call for new academic approaches to assist future designers in identifying key areas within a complex (and problematic) system for strategically locating design actions.

Frayling's concept regarding the dual nature of design research<sup>21</sup>, does nothing more than reinterpret Bourdieu's 'double culture' in relation to the cultural boundaries faced by a student who not only investigates design (cultural capital) but also becomes a professional synthesizing these two cultures (Angeschi, 2020). Given this perspective, if the current cultural context is so complex and confronts the previously mentioned 'perfect storm,' how can we explain the intellectual, 'monocultural' inclination of contemporary design? Not having managed to establish itself authoritatively in the technical sphere, the designer, as criticized by Lorusso, attempts to occupy the humanistic sphere.

This is a sensible decision, as schools can thereby confer a formally autonomous role, which involves the exercise of critical thinking and consciousness production<sup>22</sup>. Previously we explained the need for teachers who are experts in these topics, sensitive to the fast-social changes that are occurring, increasingly faster, and which the student must condense in their final project. On many occasions, as can be seen in the final reports of these works (or their summaries), there is a kind of "resignation" to introducing these social issues because they "touch", they are necessary to approve the project and it is for this is why another of the objectives that permeate this proposal is to quantify the real impact that these categories have on both the students and their final work.

But how is this achieved? Organizing the raw data, the qualitative results that build the first hypotheses evidently only allow us to scratch the surface. This is why techniques specific to ethnography, such as interviews, must be applied. Directly question the students in the research process, when they are faced with devising their project. Only in this way can we know, first-hand (through directed surveys, obviously) the concerns, the real social concerns that are behind the idea. There is no doubt that the school environment (sponsored by the teachers, their direct involvement and mastery in these topics), the need to orient the design to the social and the universal make up a relevant part of the presence of these inputs in social work.

In the face of such a paradigm, could design not be considered a reflective activity in which, by configuring the environment, we also reconfigure ourselves? Answering affirmatively would undoubtedly validate the need to enhance reflective

<sup>21</sup> Frayling (1994) links the use of the first term ('research') with a common investigation, inquiry or investigation, the second ('Research') is associated with academic professionalization, the legitimation of the domain and the practices around the development of products and innovation.

<sup>22</sup> Lorusso, S. What Design Can't Do: Essays on Design and Disillusion. Set Margins' Publications. pp. 257.

practices related to the environment. An environment that is inherently social, in constant crisis, and subject to questioning from its foundations.

The design researcher must be acutely aware that the things they design have an impact on the designer themselves. Art and design schools primarily become laboratories for self-design, and only secondarily serve as contexts where objects are created. This conception, resulting from nourishing design research with tools and methods from the social sciences, does not clash with the 'classic' implementation of design as a project of self-awareness (self-design - the designer) that directly intervenes in spheres such as human capital or identity policies (the context in which the designer designs).

"The versatile, multifunctional, and multidisciplinary aspects are key features of (post)modernity, representing both a range of opportunities and a series of 'curses' for design professionals who operate in non-traditional environments (purely intellectual contexts). Overall, and by way of conclusion, the traditional figure of the designer has (self-)perceived themselves more as a technician than as an intellectual. However, what kind of future designers do we, as design educators, wish to cultivate in today's schools? Is it the one who does not reflect or aspire to engage in intellectual or research work, or the one who does?

Research proposals like this one, sponsored by teachers who are interested in educating their students in the challenges of the future (a future that oscillates between utopia and dystopia) are nourished by real projects that have been coming out of higher schools for a few years. of design, not only from our country, but from art and design schools around the world.

The schools ensure their dissemination and transfer by sharing these final degree works on social networks, interactive channels, conferences, presentations and specialized festivals. I strongly invite the community of readers, teachers and researchers to access the virtual spaces of schools like ours (ESDAPC<sup>23</sup>) to learn first-hand how our students are sensitive to social paradigms, know their problems and implement the design to achieve a better world.

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23 <https://www.esdapc.cat/en/students/final-degree-projects/>



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