

BEFORE METHODOLOGY: IN CASE OF VISUAL ART-BASED RESEARCH IN STUDYING COMICS ART

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Abstract:

One of the cultures that emerged since late nineteenth century is comics. The amusement of comics seems to invite more people – young or adult – to be immersed into the world of comics. Studying visual art is an intriguing task, especially if taking underrated subject matter from a popular visual culture media such as comics. Articulating the expression of contemporary comics is not a lucid task. The understanding of the art of comics can help public awareness to go beyond the initial appreciation of drawings and stories it contains. This paper gives a conceptual overview on a way of studying comics, its task is to propose on how to manage pacing in research by using art-based research methodology. We discuss first on the paradigm for art and design research ontology and epistemology before methodology. Along with the study steps on collecting data by using content analysis qualitatively, followed by generate a visual semiotics analysis for seeking into its visual representation the drawing in itself, then finally offering an alternate method on phenomenology of reading the pictorial as lived-experiences. . It is important yet meaningful to understand how comics invite its readers into its world which researcher should involve and take part as a reader by experience the reading moments as first-person perspective pre-reflectively.

Keywords: Comics, Art-based, Artistic, Phenomenology, Lived-Experience

1.0 Introduction

The reason why we are studying visual images, Ball and Smith (1992) simply argued because it is everywhere and we are used to reading them all the time (as cited in Holm, 2008, p. 325). Visual images have exhausted much of our physical and emotional energy on the act of seeing (Berger, 1998) and it inevitably plays a central role in the culture of the twenty first century (Sturken & Cartwright 2004). Maria Sturken & Lisa Cartwright in *Practice of Looking* (2018) noted that culture is something fluid and interactive, yet visual culture 'made between individuals and the artifacts, images, technologies, and texts created by themselves and others' (p.7). 'The domains of visual arts practice,' as Graeme Sullivan identified in *Art Practice as Research* (2010) are, 'found in the work of the artist and art writer, in the study of the artwork, and in the critique of visual culture' (p. 70). The extensions of the visual arts into interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary methodological is quite novelty. Patricia Leavy in *Method Meets Art* (2020) acknowledged that comic-based research, "What distinguishes comics from other art forms is how they are experienced: both sequentially and simultaneously. In other words, they are read sequentially and experienced all at once." (p. 255).

1.1 Research Paradigm and Methodology

As for comics which 'are arguably younger than literature, certainly older than moving pictures,' its studies, 'have received less critical attention' for quite a long time (Berninger, Ecke, & Haberkorn, 2010, p.1). Its impact to contemporary popular culture is huge but only lately, as a popular culture, comics gradually succeed to influence other storytelling medium (Talon, 2004), as well as the eagerness to study comics at large make it notable as an emerging art and literature medium (Harvey, 1996; Hatfield, 2005). Comics mostly attracted attention from scholars working in different discipline; the study of comics

has been slow to emerge in its own right. John A. Lent (2010) founder of *International Journal of Comic Art* said that one of the reasons distracted the merits of studying comics is because it is 'a relatively new field of inquiry that the theoretical base or handy framework, a set of approaches and techniques did not exist yet' (Lent, *Studies in Comics Journal*, 2010, p. 11).

Comics discourse usually lack conceptual and methodological clarity, inhibits this field to develop a body of knowledge that can be discussed, debated, contested or confirmed and which could eventually lead to increased its knowledge from time to time. This research plan is to render comic as an art form which is perceive comics as 'comics art', therefore it will be necessarily to take account of the art-based research philosophical assumption alongside with its research methods and methodology. The usual assumption bear in mind attempts research as a form of knowing and explaining. Indeed, Shaun McNiff (2006) suggested that a research task could be preoccupied objectives such as the need to experience, to inspire, or to build a profession collectively. Recently, research as a knowledge creation has increasingly interested in and attention to the creative arts field (McNiff, 2006, p.11; Leavy, 2020, p.2). Joseph A. Maxwell (2013) asserted that underpinning any research, there are some at least implicit philosophical assumptions about the view of the nature of the world (ontology) and the way to understand it (epistemology); and by making them explicit, carefully considering them Gary Potter (2000) believed that will be of practical benefit (p.3). Van Manen in '*Researching Lived Experience*' (2015) noted that a research method in the field of human sciences is 'only a way of investigating certain of questions...the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such' (p.1).

COMICS STUDIES AS ART-BASED RESEARCH		
CONTENT ANALYSIS	SEMIOTICS	PHENOMENOLOGY
DISCOVERY	SELECTION	EXPLICATION
DESCRIPTION CATEGORIZING CLASSIFICATION	ANALYSING	UNDERSTANDING
VISUAL TAXONOMY	MEANINGS	DESCRIBING LIVED-EXPERIENCE

Table 1.1 Steps on Research Methods for Comics Studies as an Artistic Research

Carole Gray and Julian Malins (2004) stated amongst the important concepts for artists or designers alike which engaged in research are 'reflective practitioner', which induced the concept of 'reflective practice' and 'reflection in action' were being presented by Donald Schön (1983) in his book '*The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*'. According to Schön, Gray and Malins (2004) ascertain that much of the activity of artist or designer as a personal knowledge is not usually articulated, and sometimes indescribable, and it relies on the principle of learning by doing. Artist or designer alike attempts to unite research and practice in a retrospective reflection – 'reflection-on-action' – as a critical research skill and part of the generic research processes of review, evaluation and analysis. The other one is 'reflection-in-action' which is described as 'an activity that involves thinking about what we are doing and reshaping action while we are doing it' (p.22).

The view of philosophical assumptions known as worldview or 'paradigm', is a significant thought disseminates by Thomas Kuhn (1922 – 1966) a prominent of the twentieth century science's historian, is of our ideas about reality and how we going to gain knowledge out of it (Maxwell, 2013, p. 36). Egon Guba (1990) in *The Paradigm Dialog* imposed that a researcher 'must understand the basic ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of each, and be able to engage them in dialogue' (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 252). There are many paradigm, which is nothing more or less than a conceptual framework (Garratt, 2005), used in guiding research inquiry. Guba (1990) indicates among the competing paradigms are positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism.

Elliot W. Eisner, educational theorist coined the *art-based research* term around 1980s in *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002), in which he identify few objections to the traditional conventional research methods. One of the beliefs and assumptions that he rejected is that research is only the result of scientific inquiry. He repudiated by saying:

“...research is considered a species of science. In the more current view, science is one, and only one, species of research. Research need not be scientific to count as research. Research can be arts-based as well as science-based. Arts-based research begins with the recognition that the arts as well as the sciences can help us understand the world in which we live....Arts-based research is a way to ensure that science-based research alone does not monopolize...” (p. 213).

Science is one of the essential phenomena of the modern age, once said by Martin Heidegger in *The Age of the World Picture* (1938) where he emphasizes that at this age ‘the essence of science is research (p. 118), which constitutes the metaphysical ground of research’ (p. 127). Heidegger further critics that ‘when we reflect on the modern age, we are questioning concerning the modern world picture’ (p. 128). By the ‘world picture’ Heidegger neither mean it a copy of something nor some collective imitation of things in the concrete world. He further stated that it ‘does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture’ which means ‘the matter stands before us exactly as it stands with it for us’ (p. 129). The expression of ‘world picture’ goes along with a popular expression (amalgam) by Confucius (551 – 479 BC) that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’, which Patricia Leavy (2020) attained that:

“Visual imagery does not represent a window onto the world, but rather a created perspective....visual art inherently opens up multiple meanings that are determined not only by the artist but also the viewer and the context of viewing” (236).

The research paradigms help to distinguish the inquiry in science, social science, and the arts. The field of natural sciences is generated by the scientific mind, through the research process, abstraction, and objectification. Therefore, everything has been regard as if concrete tangible existence (reification) which made this region separated from man's inner world of appreciation, and becoming mechanics material areas. Where research should acquire knowledge about *das Sein* (what is) and not about *das sollen* (what should exist), it just copy the knowledge from social facts. Natural processes investigated to find a causal link that was considered necessary according to the formulation of deductive-nomological, which a phenomena that repeatedly experienced then it results in a covering law theory. If arts studies using this approach James F. Walker (2004) assured that the artist would perform an instrumental rationality that is controlling and manipulating (experimental) the art object. It treated art as ‘an impersonal representation of the world as described by an objectivist science’ (Matthews, 2006, p. 137), which end up in a deductive premise proposition as the literal meaning. James F. Walker (2004) in *The Reckless and the Artless: Practical Research and Digital Painting* has criticized carrying out facilely the scientific method into art research for the sake of validity matter of things as:

“...the absurdity of the 'objective' criteria of art school research speak, the absurdity of using the models of the physical or social sciences when framing research in visual art; the models should come from the humanities, where 'objective truth' is somewhat hedged around with questions of viewpoint and interpretation. It was as if visual art suffered from an inferiority complex, and had to wear a different set of clothes to look respectable...”

According to Tom Barone (2008) there are two purposes of arts-based research: (1) enhanced understanding through communication of subjective realities or personal truths that can occur only through works of art, and (2) a shift away from the traditional objectivist epistemology identified with most social science research (p. 29-30). Indeed, inquiry in aesthetic research as stated by Liora Bresler and Margaret Macintyre Latta (2008) is ‘becomes a movement of thinking, a medium in which meaning is not applied or imposed but rather manifested and could never be fully anticipated’ (p. 14).

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Researcher should notice that the study of art is neither parallel nor it can be analogous to the scientific study of nature. Renée Green (2010) offering a definition for artistic research that can be contemplated and further probed developed by Sha Xin Wei who described how art research differs from other form of research:

“...It is more akin to the humanities in its attention to the particular rather than the systemic, but it creates knowledge via aesthetic as well as critical inquiry, and engages material and embodied experience as well as concepts. Like other modes of research, art research generates portable knowledge: it generates insights, how-to's, why's that can be shared by more than one individual; what is learned in the context of one art project can be applied in a different one. Like research in other domains, art research has its own archive, but whereas historians use textual archives, and anthropologists use materials gathered in fieldwork, art research's “body of literature” is the body of prior works and the critical commentaries surrounding them. Like other research, art research is open-ended, we cannot declare in advance what is the “deliverable”: if we already know the answer, then we would not need to do the research...” (as cited in Green, 2010, p.18).

Human lives by providing a means to understand the meaning of life. Interpreting is a humanly characteristic. Studying the arts does not mean to explain the nature of art, because art is not a kind of knowledge whereupon to find the law of causation as natural scientific per se. Gray and Malins (2004) based on Guba's analysis of paradigms suggested that artistically or designly paradigm of inquiry is illustrated as the role of ‘practitioner is the researcher’ whereupon the ‘subjectivity, involvement, reflexivity is acknowledge; Knowledge is negotiated – inter-subjective, context bound, and is a result of personal construction’ (p.21). Researcher as artist means ‘researcher's artistry as if ‘researcher as instrument’ (Brodsky, A.E., 2008, as cited in Given, L.M, p. 766) is also predominant; it includes the conceptual artistry and creative and aesthetics sensibilities, not just technical skills or externally sanctioned title of “artist” (Knowles, J.G. & Cole, A.L., 2008, p. 34). Gray and Malins (2004) further characterize it:

“..., it is clear that researchers have been characteristically eclectic, diverse and creative in the methodologies they have adopted. When necessary, they have drawn on positivist experimental methodologies, constructivist interpretation and reflection, and invented hybrid methodologies involving a synthesis of many diverse research methods and techniques. So a characteristic of ‘artistic’ methodology is a pluralist approach using a multi-method technique...” (p.21).

Even though, the term ‘art’ was found later in the more advance human civilization such as Greek, and however people realize that the ‘art’ were lived among humanity since the modern man standing with two feet walk around the earth; it need continuous efforts to put on debates about what kind of research is the ‘artistic’ research. Ever since the term ‘science’ already contingent with scientific proven validity, it seems there is no chance for another meaning of ‘research’ if it not scientific in order to be called a ‘science’.

Nonetheless, research is about communication; as simple as a man desire of and necessity to articulate, to deliver or to convey some of his/her thoughts or ideas about something to the others. Concerning obscurity in art research – wherefore the use of the arts in research is not for art's sake (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 34) – upon two apparently disparate modalities, the *visible* (image) and the *writable* (text), Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield (2009) in *Theory as Art Practice: Notes for Discipline*, intriguingly put forward that ‘visual art is not simply visual – there is always something written in the work’, which he further expressed:

“It is a space, an interval, in the work of visual art which is given by how the work itself writes and writes of itself – this would be art writing. Not simply something *sayable* about that art in the form of its place or role in and for history or its meaning for aesthetics or value for criticism – although neither is it simply detached from the discourses of history of art or philosophy of art or art criticism – rather, it is something *writerly*, what Jean-Luc Nancy calls “a certain *writability* or *scriptuality*”, which makes possible what we see, within what is seen, something

which makes the art itself possible as something *seeable*. Art writing what it wants to say itself – this is what the researcher can draw out from the visible.”

Art-based research is a form of qualitative research defined by the presence of aesthetics qualities which quite different from traditional forms of research that are associated with the social sciences (Barone, 2008, p. 29). But it need to differ that art research is not the art practice as such as ShaXin Wei (as cited in Green, 2010, p.18) argued that ‘not every artist shares her or his working knowledge with her or his peers, nor need she or he do so’. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2003) made similitude as if qualitative research is like a *bricolage*, and the researcher is a *bricoleur* or maker of guilt uses aesthetics and material tools of his or her craft. They emphasized that ‘interpretive practice involves aesthetics of representation that goes beyond the pragmatic or the practical issues’ (p.6). Accordingly, Holm (2008) in agreement with Denzin (1989) argued that ‘the researcher’s theoretical framework will influence the analyses and the ‘aesthetic choices will influence how an image is read’ (p.331). In qualitative inquiry-as-bricolage, Martyn Hammersley (2008) noted that ‘materials are juxtaposed in open-ended ways designed to provoke readers rather than to convey some closed message’. Indeed, previously accentuated by Uwe Flick (1998) that:

“Qualitative research is inherently multi-method....the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to obtain an in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon being investigate.....triangulation does not has to be a tool of validation, but alternatively it can be a strategy to add rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to the inquiry processed” (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 8).

It seeks alternative methods for evaluating the research in spite of the study communicate or ‘says’ something base on how the researcher conceptualize reality and images of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 15 – 18). From the 1960s through the 1970s, as indicated by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrum (1998):

“...a family of qualitative research approaches concerned with reality-constituting interpretive practice....although the approaches bear a resemblance, their difference are not mere variations on a single enterprise. Clearly, they are all indebted to the phenomenological tradition, but the analytic paths taken from the basic tenets diverge into a rich variety of constructionist, ethnomethodological, conversation-analytic and interpretive strains” (Denzin& Lincoln, 1998, p.137 – 138).

Furthermore, Umberto Eco (1994) uttered that ‘the logic of interpretation is the Peircean logic of abduction’ (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004, p. 37). Leading semiotician and pragmatics philosopher, C. S. Pierce (1839-1914) put abduction to denote the only truly knowledge-extending means of inferencing that distinct from deduction and induction (cited in Reichertz, 2004, p. 159). Pierce divided logical reasoning into three certainty level: (1) deduction proves that something must be, it is the reasoning of mathematics, (2) induction shows that something actually is operative which must be validated empirically with tests and experiments, (3) abduction merely suggests that something maybe it only offer hypotheses (Aliseda, A., 2006), p. 56). Abduction is the slightest recurring mode of reasoning in conjunction with deduction and induction, abduction inference is in fact reasoning toward meaning and used to make logical inferences about the world. Abduction is an alternative to those other two modes of reasoning, whereas deductive inferences are certain (as far as their premises are true) and inductive inferences are probable, abductive inferences are merely plausible.

Thus, approaches in this comics study researcher drawn upon abductive interpretative strategy, following the reasoning made by Jennifer Mason (2002) that theory, data generation and analyses are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process such as moving back and forth between data, experience and broader concepts (pp.180-181). Nevertheless, abduction proffers significant promising mode of reasoning for creative art research. Indeed, Nigel Cross (2006), a leading figure in design research, in ‘*Designerly Way of Knowing*’ offered what was pointed out by March (1976) that in creative field such as art and design, need to employ abductive reasoning strategy. This means that when we reason to meaning, we are expanding the horizon of persuasive explanations. Abduction as

an interpretivist research strategy was also called as 'logic of discovery' by Russell Hanson and characterized as 'reasoning to the best explanation' by Gilbert Harman. Gary Shank (2008) has argued for six modes of abductive inferences that all researchers use, which the types of inferences lead to hunches, omens, clues, metaphors, patterns, and explanations. One of the characteristics of qualitative approaches indicated by Klaus Krippendorff (2004) that:

"Avowedly qualitative scholars tend to find themselves in a hermeneutic circle, using known literature to contextualize their reading of given texts, rearticulating the meanings of those texts in view of the assumed contexts, and allowing research questions and answers to rise together in the course of their involvement with the given texts" (p.87).

Leavy (2020) in *Method Meets Art* introduced the emergent of a new methodological genre called '*art-based research practices*' which she defined as, "They seek to bridge and not divide both the artist-self and researcher-self with the researcher and audience and researcher and teacher. Researchers working with these new tools are merging their interests while creating knowledge based on resonance and understanding" (p. 3). Hannula, Suoranta and Vadené in *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices* (2005) urged 'for carefully argued for criteria, principles and guidelines that are situated in both qualitative research and artistic practices'. In agreement with Eisner, Leavy (2020) then purported 'the emergence of art-based advances critical conversations about the nature of social-scientific practice and expands the borders of our methods arsenal.' (p. 12).

'Its attitude', said Hannula et al. (2005), 'is to open and to include, not to exclude or to build barrier between mediums of expression and methods of knowledge production' (p. 9). Sale & Betti (2004) said that 'art is a reflection of the culture in which it is made' as Leavy (2009) noted that 'art is produced within socio-historical contexts'. She believed that 'we may see an increase in art-based research practices for their compatibility with studies of globalization', and explained further that:

"There is an institutional context to the production of art, as well as market forces, which together create the value system in which art is legitimized, judged, consumed, and traded. Moreover, philosophical perspectives on art, cultural norm and values, as well as pragmatic concerns also affect the production and consumption of art. Globalization, a multidirectional exchange of cultural artefacts, capital, and technology, also influences artistic production" (p. 254-255).

Contrary, as many people believed, according to B. Croce and R. Collingwood, that art begins from the expression of visual forms that is full of meaning. Art requires a way that revealed to the world that art is realization of the person's thinking and then he began to design what he wanted to express. Without making design, art may not be able to form an appearance on the earth. Without any form of disclosure, the arts will continue to dwell only in the bosom of one's mind and horizons. We need to realize that art formed, and design make it happened. In agreement with opinion expressed by John Heskett in little book *Design: A Very Short Introduction* there is:

"An initial problem in delving into the origins of the human capacity to design is the difficulty in determining exactly where and when human beings first began to change their environment to a significant degree..." (p.8).

The etymology of words that we recognize as 'Art' is derived from Latin: *Ars*, which means 'skill' - technical capabilities, '*techné*'. While design was derived from Latin: *Designare* - *designo* (Italian). It was said that in the beginning of Renaissance, the design is the picture - drawing, which is considered by an art theorist Giorgio Vasari as the basis of all visual arts (Walker, 1989, p.23). The current situation makes design is more recognizable as the goods or products. Joseph J. Kockelmans (1986) in *Heidegger on Art and Art Works*, explained the views of the real meaning of 'art'. The following quotation elucidates that:

"In addition to the concepts of matter and form Plato also uses the term *techné* to speak about art...for the Greeks *techné* is to be understood from *phusis* which is the concept that properly counters it. *Phusis* is the first Greek name for the beings themselves and for the beings taken as a whole... Originally, the word did not have the connotation of making something or producing something... *Techné* therefore

often just meant human knowledge.... The word *techné* did not mean the making or the producing as such; it meant then, too, the knowledge which guides man in so doing" (p. 6).

Exploring the world of comics verisimilitude the excitement of experience reading the drawings and captivate by the story. Comics, be it in the form of a strips panel in newspaper or magazine, or as a single book, or drawn in any other possible medium or graphitize on any surface as an artefact, the comics itself is inseparable art and design products. This study is a pre-research for meaning through the reading comics activities, or a re-reading the lived-experience into-the-world of comics.

Perspective of methodological triangulation uses here intertwines visual content analysis with visual semiotics and applied phenomenology of perception to gain a holistic view of the comics-world in reading experience. Far from using a theoretical model that imposes an external logic of a phenomenon, the phenomenological approach seeks to find internal logic of the subject (Grey, 2004, p.21). Katy Macleod and Lin Holdrige (2004) highlighted the use of theories in art and design studies are 'generally perceived as tools for analytical reasoning' and 'instrumental to the construction of an appropriate methodology. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber stated that if an interpretative approach is employed in a research, its epistemology assumes multiple subjective realities as well as Crabtree and Miller (1999) noted that interpretivist in particular:

"...trace their roots back to phenomenology (Schutz, 1967) and hermeneutics (Heidegger, 1927, 1962). This tradition also recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity. Pluralism, not relativism, is stressed, with focus on the circular dynamic tension of subject and object" (as cited in Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 18).

By following Feyerabend's philosophy of science viewpoint, Hannula, Suoranta and Vadené (2005) believed that artistic research encapsulated as a researching attitude, which the researcher seeks as openly as possible a relationship to the object of the research (p. 48-49). Regarding the process of experiencing a phenomenon and its interpretation Hannula, Suoranta and Vadené(2005) explained further that:

"...the continuum of experience has to be approached in a way that thoroughly hermeneutical...not only questions of validity for the interpretation, but also for recognising that interpretation is not final, that experience has no end or ground and that, therefore, constant criticism is the only way to go forward. The hermeneutic circle starts from the given interpretation of the phenomenon to be investigated" (p. 44).

1.3 Qualitative Analysis of the Visual

Feyerabend (1999) elucidated that 'writing has become a very pleasureable activity, almost like composing a work of art...writing simultaneously thinking and doing both observing the world and creating it' (as cited in Hannula, Suoranta and Vadené, 2005, p. 39-40). Dronsfield (2009) remind us that 'visual art is not simply visual – there is always something written in the work, something textual, in what is seen, whether or not 'words' are present in the form of legible signs.' Moreover, he emphasized there is: "...something writerly, what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "a certain writability or scripturality", which makes possible what we see, within what is seen, something which makes the art itself possible as something seeable..."

Klaus Krippendorff (2009) said that 'content analysis utilizes text – writings, images and all kind of symbolic matter – as data to answer various social research question' (p.205). Within popular culture studies, qualitative content analyses have been common for exploring films, magazines, and television (Holm, 2008, p. 329). It is probably one of the most commonly technique used by scholars in dealing with any kind of texts range from the studies of media, communication and cultural studies (Berger, 2000, p.173) to information and library science (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2003). Moreover, Charles R. Wright (1986) as cited in Berger (2000, p.173) offered definition of content analysis as 'a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories, which may involved quantitative, or qualitative analysis, or both'. Clearly, beside the general use of content analysis in quantitative approaches, it also

supports qualitative studies. Yet, researcher should bear in mind that the quantitative aspect distinguishes this method from other more qualitative techniques, which is essentially counting things (Davies & Mosdell, 2006, p.98). Although, broadly speaking it does not have to consist exclusively written texts, any item such as photographs, videotape, musical, pictorial, plastic or any other visual item can be treated using content analysis. Simply says content analysis referred to W. Lawrence Newman (2003) is:

“...a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text. The *content* refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any messages that can be communicated. The *text* is anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication....Researchers have used content analysis to study visual “text,” such as photographs, paintings, statues, buildings, clothing, and videos and films” (p. 310).

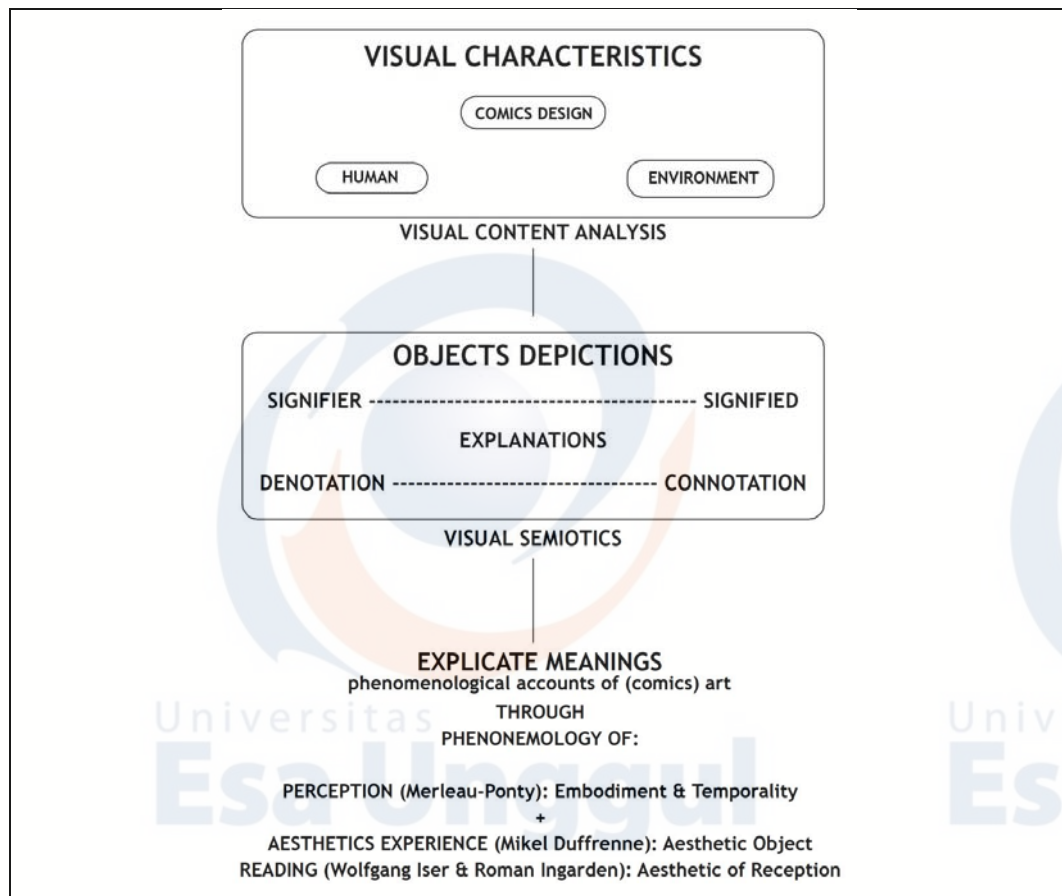


Figure 1.1 The flow of studying the visual of comic art by appropriating the Art-based research methodology

Indeed, Krippendorf (2009) imposed that ‘reading is fundamentally qualitative process’ and ‘recognizing meanings is the reason that the researchers engage in content analysis’ (pp. 20-22). Therefore, content analysis as a systematic attempt to examine some form of image communication “goes beyond merely counting or extracting objective content from texts to examine meaning, themes and patterns that maybe manifest or latent in a particular text” (Zhang & Wildemuth). Bell as cited in Holm (2008) explained that it is not a theory-based process and does not tell much about meanings, it is better to establish variables with distinguishable values rather than just categories for classification (p. 328-329). Krippendorff (2009) argued that ‘the feature that distinguishes content analysis from other techniques of inquiry is that it provides inference by abduction’ (p.205). Therefore, Holm (2008) suggested for exploring the messages intended to be perceived from the

pictures, a content analysis needs to be combined with a qualitative semiotic analysis (p. 329).

1.4 From Qualitative to Research into Drawings

Human has been telling stories from the first time they started the journey walking around the world, even before they developed any recognizable language to any modern life's. Everything we do or say and in everything we visualize through gesture or our clothes, we are narrating story about ourselves. The cave painting is propounded paragon. In *Towards A Critical Discourse in Drawing Research*, Steve Garner (2008) appraised that although relatively youth the discipline of drawing research exist more vibrant today and the discourse is informed by an increasingly broad range of influence within wider context of art history, drawing practice, history, philosophy, and aesthetics but, it still wrestle with the relationship between drawing and research. He hoped that drawing research is making knowledge by those who develop their own preferred strategy, through drawing, talking, reading, writing or any combination of its. He stated that:

“Given our uniquely visual domain and our predominantly visual culture the various methods and procedures we devise for drawing research can make an important contribution to the arts and the sciences. Drawing research hasn't come of age yet, but it is maturing” (p.25).

Visual content analysis tends 'to see the content meaning preside in the totality of impression, the Gestalt, and to analyze it accordingly not in the atomistic combination of measureable units' (Berelson, 1952, p.126-127). Content analysis depends upon its categories, as consequences the formulation and the definition of appropriate categories take on central importance (p.147). The categories into which coding were made, vary according to the nature of the research and the particularities of the data. It involves the interaction of two processes: specification of the content characteristics (basic content elements) being examined and application of explicit rules for identifying and recording these characteristics (Berg, 2004).

The visual content analysis provides a system by which qualitative information may be translated into quantifiable measurement. According to Flick (1998) suggestion:

“...Mayring differentiates the units as the following: the “coding unit” defines what is “the smallest element of material which may be analysed, the minimal part of the text which may fall under a category”; the “contextual unit” defines what is the largest element in the text, which may fall under a category; the “analytic unit” defines which passages “are analysed one after the other”.(p.313)

In the study of comics art, the quantitative numbers simply denote the presence of a specific sign which is defined objectively and limited to the manifest content of the appearance. Once the comic arts have been coded according to the objective content categories, they can be compared against each other in an effort to discover trends and style patterns. The use of content analysis in this study are first, identifying the table of contents from each magazines then make a comparison to each other. Second, identifying the characteristics of each every type of comics in magazines and presenting it in taxonomy tables. According to Danesi (2007) we may called it as the study of 'visual texts', in which it became the centre of attention after the publication of two books which have a major influence on the study of arts in general (p.111). 'Visual Thinking' (1969) by Rudolf Arnheim and 'Way of Seeing' (1972) by John Berger have brought to the realization that visual representation play a role in the way people understanding the worlds they dwelt. Danesi (2007) suggested that:

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, textually speaking. All visual texts area constructed and interpreted in this way – anything that can be perceived visually can be represented iconically by a combinantion of points, lines, and shapes....are the basic visual signifiers that we use to assemble visual texts. Other visual signifiers include value, color, and texture....(p. 112)”

Krippendorff (2004) point out that content analysis is chosen as the investigation method because we are recognizing meaning (p.21-22) and the feature that distinguishes it from other techniques of inquiry is that it provides inferences by abduction (p.179). In

accordance with Peircean semiotics, Eco said allegedly that the logic of interpretation is the logic of abduction (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004, p.17)

1.5 Visual Semiotics of Comics

This research step pursues a visual analysis of comics art via semiotics theory and intertwine correspondingly with psychology of art, art theory, aesthetics and other related philosophy of art. It focuses on the visual-based research by carefully examine the drawings and visual design characteristics. This research into drawing method and models derived from Charles Sanders Peirce which is develop by William Morris that constructed within the triadic models of semiotics theories, and insight from Göran Sonnesson's 'pictorial semiotics'. Generally, the semiotics theoretical approach here is deliberately come from the visual communication design studies or generally known as graphic design.

Despitefully with insights absorbed from media studies, cultural studies and critical theory to enrich the discussion. Although it is merely not a systematically theoretical in true sense, yet it provides useful thought as a stepping-stone to enrich the discourse of visual-verbal interplay in comics. The visual presentation based upon the design of several comics book training and instructions such as produced by acknowledge practitioner as Will Eisner, Scott McCloud, and series from publisher such as Marvel or DC comics, The Society for the Study of Manga Techniques, and locally publish book such as *Melukis Kartun Cara Gayour*. It is also drawn upon insight from the observation to the comics bookshops, comics events and involvement with some individuals around there, discussion in mailing list through internet connection to gain about the perception and reflection onto the practices of local comics scene.

The '*Understanding Comics: Invisible Art*' (1993) by Scott McCloud, often being mentioned as one of seminal books wrote by practicing comic artist that distribute worldwide and prompted the debates on theorizing comics practice. Formerly, Will Eisner had given an influential expression called 'sequential art' in his practical theories books titled: '*Comics and Sequential Art*' (1985) and '*Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*' (1996) that help to elevate the significance of comics as a distinctive art form which he popularize as 'graphic novel'. Magnussen and Christiansen (2000) affirmed that *Understanding Comics* is composed without any presupposition to a 'specific perceptual or semiotics theories', it is heavily influenced by the Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, which McCloud 'built on a general view on meaning production' (p. 8). Magnussen (2000, p. 193) suggest the uses of the semiotics of Peirce's theory of sign as the theoretical framework for the understanding of comics. 'The theory of visual communication presented in *Understanding Comics* arguably rivals the best of contemporary semiotics', which Alan D. Manning (1998) further stated that, 'McCloud recreates and elaborates on Peirce's trichotomy of icons, adopts a simpler terminology, and cleverly applies this theoretical schema to the specific problem of cartoons and comics in relation to other art form'.

The visual semiotics and iconology are exceptionally useful for examine the representational (denotative) and symbolic (connotative) meanings of an artwork. Tony Sachirato & Jen Webb (2004) in '*Reading the Visual*' construes that 'a group of sign is *text* – a collection of sign which are organized in particular way to make meaning' (p.8). The analytical tool of visual culture is semiotics; it is an approach and research methodology to investigate comics as a sign. Comics as an artwork was arrange deliberately by the artist who choose and place sophisticatedly the elements of art as the signs for viewer to choose how they see and arrange by themselves to produce a satisfying effect (Schirato & Webb, 2004, p.8). We fascinate in semiotics so as to cultivate the intricacy in deciphering or interpreting the comics artform as visual signs.

Barbara Postema (2013) in 'Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments' discuss shortly about Barthesian denotation and connotation. She make assertion although in 'Rhetoric of Image' Barthes take denotation and connotation to further discuss images but it does not fit into the meaning at pictorial drawing image such in comics. Barthes contends that the linguistics message is the clearest message related to explaining the meaning of the image itself. The analysis of photograph images and the textual caption accompanying an advertisement in Barthes 'does not cover at all the various levels of signification at work in drawn cartoon, and certainly not in the sequential images of comics'. Yet, Barbara assumed that Barthes would be in agreement to say that 'any function of the

image – symbolic, narrative or otherwise – is anchored by the representationality of the image, even in images that have been highly simplified or abstracted' (p.8).

1.6 Pictorial Representation

Postema (2013) notes that 'visual representation has always made us of the "staggered system of signification' (p.8). In viewing every visual or pictorial representation there is some denotative degree which are what we literary see, and some other suspect a connotative degree which are the interpretive insinuation of what we see. In cognitive psychology, there are two type of representation, one is the external representation and the other one is internal representation or mental representation. External representations include painting, photographs, written descriptions, clocks, maps, scale models, sculptures, diagrams, and so on. Some of these representations bear some physical resemblance to the object or event they represent. The graphic images representations are called analogue representations, the other types such linguistics representations do not resemble the represented objects are called symbolic representations. Thus, letter and words are arbiter symbols that bear no physical relation to the phonemes or items they represent, because they symbolize rather than mimic the thing they stand for. Otherwise, there could be 'onomatopoeia', which means the process of forming a word based on the sound's mimic of what the word pronounced. A representation is a sign, symbol or token which 'represents' something in it absence.

Pearson & Warburton (2005) expressed that 'representation theory makes assumption that when people and objects are represented it is incorrect to assume that their portrayal is naturalistic and is merely reflecting the reality of lived world' (p.164). Berger (1999) in 'Signs in Contemporary Culture: an Introduction to Semiotics' stated that:

"Comics can be analyzed much the same way other artistic and literary creations are – in terms of the symbolic significance of their heroes and heroines and villains, their narrative structure, the artwork and language, the values and attitudes reflected, the psychodynamics of their characters, and so on....In the case of comics, the images are graphics and usually accompanied by language so that we are actually presented with a formidable and complex aesthetic problem in trying to interpret and explicate comics" (p.83).

According to Groensteen, a comics semiologist, the basis of comics is not just interaction between words and images but the comics itself is a system of interactions between visual elements. The key to comics, Groensteen argues, is the simultaneous co-presence of images arranged sequentially. OuBaPo, a Franco-Belgian community of comics studies draw attention to the circumstance Groensteen showed that 'text is no more integral to comics than dialogue is to cinema'. Simply to say, pictorial representation put the subject presented through the visual artform whereupon the reader (spectator) is reminded of the factual objects.

1.7 Lived-Reading Experience

It is important here to mention what Iain D. Thomson in 'Deconstructing the Hero' (in McLaughlin, 2005, p.104) talked about the experience of the uncanny by retroactive defamiliarization in a re-reading process that:

"...we realize that the first reading was not a "reading" properly so-called, since (we now realize) we had not yet understood the text on that first reading, although we assumed, of course, that we did understand it, and so we learn (or at least are encouraged to learn) to become more reflective about the course that we have been following with unreflective self-assurance" (p.104).

A lived-reading experience is something fundamental about reading itself that a comics is to be reread in order to be read, that the works of comics art is 'resonant enough, meaningful enough – to continue to generate new readings, even those revolutionary re-readings which radically reorient our original sense of the work' (Thomson, 2005, p.104). Indeed, if we agreed with Wolfgang Iser (1972) observation that 'a second reading often produces a different impression from the first which tend to appear in a new light and seem to be at time enriched' (pp.193-194)

1.8 Embodiment in the Drawings

By embodiment, it does not mean simply physical reality, but rather, the way that physical and social phenomena unfold in time and space as a part of the world in which we are situated as we lived it. The idea of embodiment is at the centre of phenomenology, it rejects the Cartesian separation between mind and body on which most traditional philosophical approaches are based. Phenomenology asks to explore our experiences as embodied actors interacting within the 'world', participating in it and acting through it, in the absorbed and unreflective manner of casual experience. Embodiment in drawings means presuppositionless while reading the visual of comics artform and the immersion of the reader as spectator into the world presented by the work of art of the comics. It is in the actual embodied of visual experiencing the world of comics, which emerged from the virtual reality – the coming together of the comics artform as text and imagination.

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