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Creating stronger awareness of traditional academic and "by design" scholarship.
Investigating 'Doctorateness' in Belgium, Sweden and Norway

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Over the years, research in the ADA fields (Architecture, Design and Arts) has become more and more mature, with this research producing field-specific scholarly knowledge, both in the traditional context of dialogue with disciplinary knowledge and in the context of "research by design". The issue of higher standards of scholarship has been addressed in organised research education, where they have been taught, debated and negotiated. One of the key aspects of mastering this scholarship is the strengthening of the creative abilities of the doctoral students; another is training in research craft. Both these aspects are assessed by adjudication committees for the purpose of evaluating the final product of the doctoral work, most often in the form of a thesis. These committees investigate whether a thesis has achieved a satisfactory level of "doctorateness".

There has been much discussion of the concept of "doctorateness" in recent years, both in the traditional academic disciplines and in the creative fields, and there is still much debate about how to define this concept in the contemporary situation (Denicolo & Park 2010; Stock 2011; Philips, Stock, & Vincs 2009). This short article is a brief report generated out of the midst of an ongoing project, which we hope will contribute to how "doctorateness" could be defined in our own field of architecture, design and arts.

As early as in 1997, the UK Council for Graduate Education brought out a report on the quality of doctoral work in the creative and performing fields, in which it defines its standards of "doctorateness" as follows: "The essence of 'doctorateness' is about an informed peer consensus on mastery of the subject; mastery of analytical breadth (where methods, techniques, contexts and data are concerned) and mastery of depth (the contribution itself, judged to be competent and original and of high quality)" (Frayling et al. 1997, 11).

Eight years later, the European Ministers adopted the Framework for Qualifications from the so-called "Dublin descriptors" (EHEA 2005). In the third cycle of higher education, the doctoral studies, these qualities or competences were defined as: a systematic understanding of a field of study, including mastery of the skills and methods of research; the ability to conceive and pursue a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; a contribution through original research; capacity of critical analysis and evaluation; and an ability to communicate with peers, with the larger scholarly community and with society in general.

While the first set of criteria addresses in a more pronounced way the final product of the doctoral work, the second concerns strengthening the doctoral competences to be

achieved during the process of doctoral studies. Combining these two sets of criteria of doctoral standards is how we tentatively interpret the concept of "doctorateness". Historically speaking, the doctor's degree was a licence to teach in a university as a faculty member. This has of course changed, and today it is more about certain abilities and capacities in relation to research, as well as the position in a certain community. The doctoral degree proclaims that the recipient "is worthy of being listened to *as an equal* by the appropriate university faculty", and to be a 'doctor' means "to be an authority, in full command of the subject right up to the boundaries of current knowledge, and able to extend them"(Phillips & Pugh 2005, 20–21). Someone with a doctorate is recognised as an authority by the faculty and by other academics and scholars outside the university, and doctoral education is today about becoming a professional researcher in your field and acquiring what can be called research competence. This mostly concerns the learning of skills, rather than of certain knowledge. "You have to be able to carve out a researchable topic, to master the techniques required and put them to appropriate use, and to cogently communicate your findings. So there are craft skills involved in becoming a full professional, which, like any skills, have to be learned by doing the task in practice situations under supervision." (Phillips & Pugh 2005, 20–22)

The first time we introduced studying and evaluating doctoral theses as an assignment in research education at the Sint-Lucas School of Architecture in Brussels was in 2008, as a module of the independent research education unit we set up on the theme of "Scholarly craft and criticism" (Dunin-Woyseth & Nilsson 2010, 75–76). In 2011, together with a group of international doctoral candidates, we embarked on a more thorough investigation of the "doctorateness" of several recent Scandinavian practice-related doctoral theses in architecture and design. This investigation itself was the beginning of a new research project.

This research project is empirically based on the series of doctoral courses which we offered to groups of architects and designers in Belgium, Norway and Sweden in the years 2008-2011 (Dunin-Woyseth & Nilsson 2009; Dunin-Woyseth & Nilsson 2010; Dunin-Woyseth & Nilsson 2011a; Dunin-Woyseth & Nilsson 2011b). These courses were an attempt to train the doctoral students in the art of scholarly assessment as a mode of developing research competences and, thus, to prepare these students to be creative and competent in producing the final product of their doctoral studies – a thesis. The courses were built around the study and evaluation of already accepted doctoral theses in the design fields, which served as empirical material for our research project. The doctoral students were requested to work in groups of two or groups of three. This "peer learning" was intended to train the students in the ability to communicate, argue and give scholarly criticism, as well as to get them more acquainted with the different perspectives from which they as doctoral candidates approach the ADA field. The PhD students were guided in this work by a set of criteria defined by us as teachers. With regard to these guidelines, which include our interpretation of how the competences are embedded in the final product of doctoral

work, the students were requested to discuss and evaluate the following: the research problem of the thesis; the knowledge status in the field; *the "research design"* of the doctoral project (the relations between the object of study, the theoretical frameworks used, the traditional or the "by design" approach to the research); the description and *self-evaluation of the "route mapping"*, i.e. the research method applied and the arguments for the chosen approach; *the scholarly craftsmanship* materialised in the thesis; *the communicability* of the thesis; *the importance of the project* to the building of knowledge in the field, and whether it has brought about new original knowledge; *the potential for further development* of the results of the thesis; and *the value of the thesis outside* the scholarly and designer community.

At the end of each assessment seminar we asked the PhD students to assess the value of this type of research training. We also asked them how they interpret the concept of "doctorateness" after having analysed and discussed the thesis they were assigned to evaluate during the seminar. The conclusions drawn by four different groups, each working on one of three different theses, can serve to elucidate the aims of the project.

A group of doctoral students from the Ardhi University in Dar-es-Salam who studied a traditional thesis (Syversen 2007) wrote: "The assignment on the doctoral thesis review was useful in self-reflection on our own research projects in addition to imparting knowledge on how we can assess other scholarly works". Their
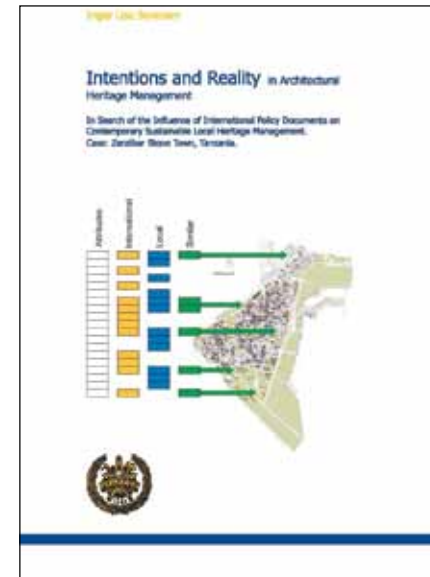

Fig1- Doctoral thesis: 'Intentions and Reality in Architectural Heritage Management', by Inger Lise Syversen, 2007.

understanding of the concept of "doctorateness" emphasised its dependence on the academic context of where a thesis was written: "'Doctorateness' is a demanding scholarly endeavour that largely relies on the prevailing traditions in a specific university / institution". (1)

A Swedish architect, working part time in practice and part time doing an industrial PhD, who studied a thesis based on "research by design" (von Busch 2008) reported that his study of the thesis had been problematic for him. He browsed through it many times, though not in a sequential way, and then discussed its contents and form with his co-partner in the assignment. He was not sure whether he had understood the thesis as it was intended to be understood by the author, but in spite of that he found his study of the thesis to be interesting and fruitful. The PhD student highly appreciated the assignment, and he thought that his course colleagues did too. He also found it of value that the course participants had had the opportunity to learn about more than one thesis during the seminar, in which all the theses studied were presented and discussed. He felt a kind of uncertainty with regard to the concept of "doctorateness". He believes that the "degree of doctorateness" can be measured
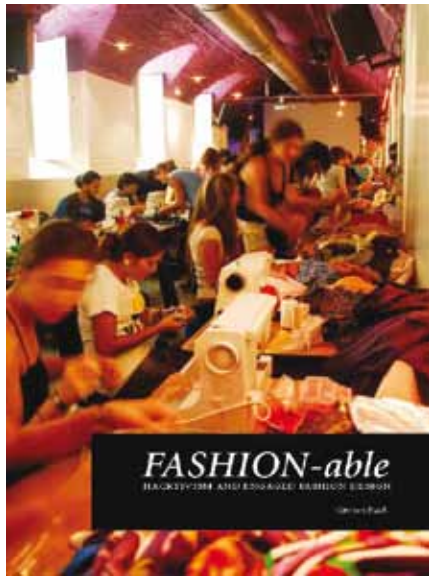
by the degree of the author's awareness of what research generally deals with in an academic and cultural context and how the author understands the specificity of his own field of research in relation to other fields. He believes that the course has highly improved this awareness in the participants. (2)

A group of doctoral students at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) studied an early example of a thesis that is close to being research-by-design (Redström 2001). They comment that, in retrospect, it is possible to argue that the epistemological position of the author might be viewed as in a by-design or performative paradigm, but that there is an uneasy connection between practical experimental design and theory in the thesis. Even though the thesis often claims that its theories, arguments and design philosophy are based upon the outcomes and the processes of the practical experimentation in designing and building the artefacts, there is little evidence in the thesis itself as to how the practical work influenced and formed the theory. "The artefacts then act more as illustrations, as starting points for discussions by the authors and for the presentation of ideas, rather than as experimental design efforts that in themselves seek to explore, investigate and probe
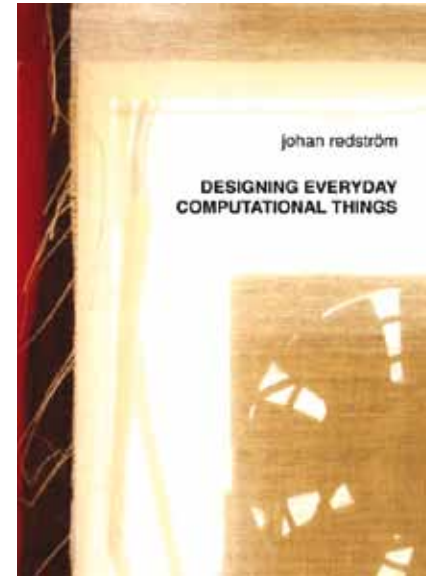

Fig2-Caption: Doctoral thesis 'FASHION-able: Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design', by Otto von Busch, 2008.

Fig 3: Caption: Doctoral thesis 'Designing Everyday Computational Things', by Johan Redström, 2001

certain topics." In their reflections on "doctorateness", they emphasise the importance: (a) of having knowledge of the research landscape; (b) of understanding traditions of research structures, cultures and languages; (c) of having the ability to communicate across disciplinary and professional borders; and (d) of being able to demonstrate criticality, rigour and appropriateness of the structure of the presentation. (3)

Another group at AHO, which also studied the thesis by Otto von Busch (von Busch 2008), highlighted "doctorateness" as something that distinguishes or makes the link between research and the professional practice of the research field. "To us, the analytical breadth is crucial in deciphering the essence of doctorateness as it is this that separates the practice from the research." They argue that even though we as individuals may only work with one method, the understanding of the breadth of methodology and our positioning within this mesh of theories is critical in order for us to properly be a master of our own craft of research. And: "In the future we may be confronted with work that may demand a different methodological approach." (4)

During the seminars, we as teachers put emphasis on the research design of the doctoral theses written in a traditional academic manner, and on how these theses differed from doctoral theses based on research by design. We found it important that especially those PhD students who set out to approach design research in new ways have to be aware of what the traditional approaches are. We regard this awareness as being necessary for building generic and field-specific research competences among the doctoral students. This awareness is also essential for being able to communicate their research and new knowledge to others within the field of architecture and design, as well as to those in other fields, and only by doing so will they succeed in gaining recognition for the field-specific knowledge and approaches that they have developed.

Our research project is designed to proceed in several stages. The first stage was the analysis of the assessment assignments carried out by the doctoral students at various universities and schools of architecture in three different countries – in Belgium, Sweden and Norway. All of them examined the same set of doctoral theses, and it is this first stage we are briefly reporting on in this paper. The research project will now continue into the next stage, which will be to analyse the assessments written by the adjudication committees for the same doctoral theses at the universities where they were defended. While the first group of informants are novices in research practice, the second group are experts in the practice of assessing research at the doctoral level. The third stage of the project will be dedicated to comparing the different results of the assessments made by these different groups of assessors. In our studies we have adopted the approach that is called 'integrative research review' (Cooper 1984). This approach is a form of scientific inquiry similar to the primary research process.

This research project is to a large degree based on sensitive information (especially in the case of the experts' assessments, which can be studied only with the permission

of all parties involved). For this reason, throughout the entire project, the authors are following the ethical rules of conduct as formulated in several European guidelines, (for instance, the Code of Good Practice in Academic Research, European University Institute 2011).

Already at this stage, we can see that the importance of having an awareness of the knowledge landscape through which one as a professional researcher has to navigate cannot be over-emphasised. This awareness is crucial for "doctorateness". It is essential for being able to position oneself and to extend the knowledge in one's field. And what is equally essential is the increasingly important ability to communicate and to get into dialogue with peers, professionals and other knowledge producers, both in one's own discipline and in others. We presume that one result of this project will be a more operative definition of "doctorateness", which will be used both as a pedagogical tool in research education in the design fields and in dialogues between the research professionals and the practice professionals, who will increasingly come to be the same people.

Notes
1. The PhD students Joel Msami, Sarah Phoya and Daniel Mbisso studied the doctoral thesis "Intentions and Reality in Architectural Heritage Management" (2007) by Inger Lise Syversen in October 2011.
2. Architect Nils Björling and architect Stefan Lundin, both doctoral students at Chalmers Architecture, studied together a doctoral thesis by Otto von Busch: "FASHION-able: Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design" (2008), in October 2011.
3. The doctoral students Anthony Rowe and Jørn Knutsen at AHO, the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, studied the doctoral thesis by Johan Redström: "Designing Everyday Computational Things"(2001) in December 2011.
4. Nicole Martin and Lothar Diem, doctoral students at AHO, studied the doctoral thesis by Otto von Busch: "FASHION-able: Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design" (2008) in December 2011.

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