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Editorial

The art of assessment – focusing research assessment from different perspectives

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Over the past decades, the production of knowledge has become ever more recognised as being of central importance for our current society. The knowledge society therefore invests a lot in education and research, as can be noted from the relentless expansion of universities, both in number and in size, after 1970 and a similar evolution of large corporations with R&D departments and dedicated government scientific research institutions (Murphy 2013). In 1999 the Bologna Declaration was signed, and this was the start of major reformations in the European higher education institutions. In line with the increased demand for knowledge production, the Bologna process also brought about that areas that previously were not primarily driven by research, notably creative fields like architecture and the arts, now have to articulate how they produce knowledge and have to invest in developing genuine research communities.

The inclusion of the creative fields and their research culture in academia has a particular relevance in the dynamics of the Bologna process – a process that originated in a wish to strengthen openness, mobility, curiosity and creativity, inspired by medieval and Renaissance European culture (De Graeve 2010). Peter De Graeve points out the fundamental importance of architecture and the arts in this context and the central contributions made by Renaissance artists to the development of knowledge and scholarship. The same applies in the present-day situation. Current development in academia is obviously strongly connected with an economy driven by technology; but De Graeve argues that only if architecture and the arts are given – and take – a central place in the academic world will it be possible to attain the objectives of increased innovation, creativity and knowledge development.

Establishing a place in the academic world arguably involves to an important degree the development of research. This also implies the firm establishment of the doctoral level. In the Bologna-Berlin Communiqué of 2003 it was therefore stated that the ministers consider it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process (BolognaProcess 2003, 7). It comes as no surprise, then, that research in creative fields has since been in

dynamic and increased development. When using the term “creative fields” in this book, we have in mind the fields of architecture, design, music and fine arts (cf. Frayling et al. 1997). Research in these practice- and arts-based fields has become increasingly mature in the past decade, yielding in various ways both field-specific knowledge and contributions to academic development in a broader perspective. This has happened thanks both to a well-developed but more traditional dialogue with established academic disciplines and to experimental and new forms and modes of practice- and arts-based research.

The development of research in creative, practice-based fields generates various questions and issues on the matter of what constitutes doctoral proficiency in these fields (or how this can be attained). Biggs and Büchler mention the emergence of a new incipient community of ‘practitioner-researchers’ (Biggs and Büchler 2011, 98). These practitioner-researchers are individuals who have experience and values as practitioners but who produce research in an academic context. Biggs and Büchler argue that there should be a distinct research model that is faithfully associated with the specific values of this new community of practitioner-researchers. One central question in this context is, then, how PhD students are to develop, master and manage their own creative capacity while being trained in the craft of research.

In parallel with the emergence of numerous different forms of doctoral programmes and degrees (with varying agendas and stakeholders with differing emphases and disparate historical and academic contexts, such as profession-based and artistic), a major discussion of the notion of “doctorateness” and how it should be defined in the contemporary situation has developed (Denicolo and Park 2010; Philips, Stock, and Vincs 2009; Stock 2011). Several voices have coined the term “doctorateness” while referring to the assessment of the production of doctoral research and the research competence of research students (e.g. Denicolo and Park 2010; Trafford and Leshem 2009). Important to notice in this respect is that “doctorateness” requires a high-quality assessment practice that is transparent and arguably one that is relevant to the specificity of creative fields. In the oft-cited report *Practice-based Doctorates in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design*, about quality in doctoral theses in the creative and artistic spheres, issued by the UK Council for Graduate Education in 1997, “doctorateness” is defined 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). Artistic ability and research skills are assessed by examining boards and committees charged with evaluating the end products of doctoral studies, usually in the form of theses. These bodies investigate whether each thesis meets a sufficiently high standard for the candidate to be awarded the doctoral title. In other words, they judge

whether the end product shows that the candidate has attained a sufficient degree of “doctorateness”.

In architecture and the arts the concept of doctorateness, however, has not yet attained a clearly articulated operational definition, linked to field-specific criteria and modes of assessment, that are academic-wide agreed upon. When developing their research environments in an academic context the creative fields have focused mainly on the production of doctoral theses. The discussion of doctoral research has been principally oriented to the modes of production and the output. The assessment of quality has been *practiced* by way of supervising, mentoring and evaluation of the dissertation but much less *discussed*. This has also been noticed by Biggs and Karlsson in the closing section of *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (2011), announcing that the next step in artistic research would be the problematic of evaluation and assessment. They assert that artistic research should understand its own value and the nature of its potential contribution to academia, so that existing evaluation systems can be adapted accordingly. What is required, in their opinion, is not to develop a special evaluation system for art but to ensure that the criteria for assessment are connected to the values and purposes of research in this field rather than rigidifying in obsolete forms or notions of where its value and significant contributions may lie (Biggs and Karlsson 2011, 405). They concluded that without serious stance in this regard, there is no possibility to establish serious research. The problem of assessment, however, is inextricably linked to the ongoing debate on the nature of the doctorate in creative fields. Every discussion on evaluation is necessarily anchored in a discussion on the nature of doctorates. The aim of this book therefore is to offer perspectives on *qualifying* doctoral research. Qualifying is a process in which identifying the characteristics (nature) and the quality (evaluation) are intertwined. At this stage of the maturity of research in creative fields, a better balance is needed between its production and the ongoing debate on its quality and how to assess this. The contributions in the book aim to give insight into pending qualification issues regarding research in architecture and the arts. With this we wish to feed the *discourse* on qualifying research in creative fields based on *qualifying practices* that have been developed in these fields of practitioners-researchers.

At the inception of the book we set up a special academic event as an alternative to the traditional blind peer review. Architecture and the arts being young academic fields, we consider the concepts of mutual learning in knowledge production as described in the knowledge-building discourse (Scardamalia and Bereiter 2010) to be very instrumental. This event was organized as an intense one day symposium during which the contributing authors presented the first draft of their chapter to the other authors and to expert panels of each university (Chalmers University of Technology, Telemark University College and the University of Agder) that had read the text beforehand and prepared questions and comments. That way

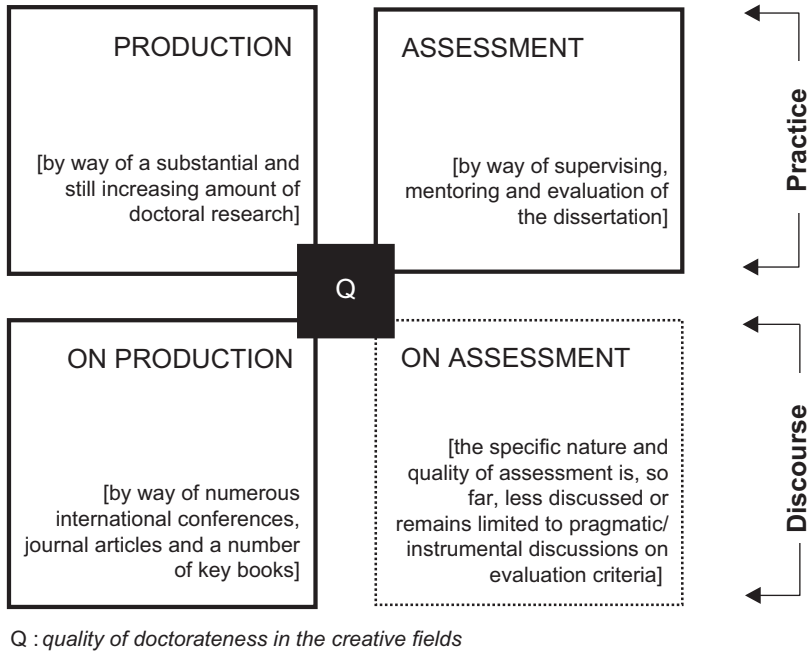


Fig. 0.1 Focus of the book

Courtesy of H. Dunin-Woyseth, N. Janssens, F. Nilsson

we established an extended scientific committee consisting of both authors and invited experts who engaged in a collective review and collective book production process. This helped articulate the relation among the different chapters and to sharpen the overall theme. Contributing authors and reviewers together with the editorial team discussed a number of recurrent and unresolved themes or issues that could be detected. One of these was the place of the doctorate in the educational system. Since the Bologna-Berlin Communiqué of 2003 it is supposedly the third cycle of education, which would arguably require a specific curriculum. The question then was raised whether the doctorate could be considered a kind of “supermaster”, a yet further specialization or mastering – leading to the acquisition of even more knowledge and skills. Yet, it was said, doctorateness involves not merely a quantitative difference, it is about attaining a qualitative difference. This qualitative difference arguably is situated in the first and second levels (BA and MA), being mainly oriented to learning and exploiting the knowledge we already have, while the third level, doctoral research, is about producing new knowledge and acquiring and developing the techniques necessary to do so. In that sense the third level might not be well described as a kind of super MA. That the doctorate level implies a change of track from learning

and applying knowledge to developing knowledge is also illustrated by the example of some (British) university regulations that make it possible to do a PhD after completing the BA. However, in contradistinction to such a clear-cut change of track, we notice that most universities advocate a so-called research-based teaching in which everybody, from year one, starts to learn research skills. First, second and third levels (BA, MA and PhD) can then be considered a continuous educational curriculum in which a qualitative change in the sophistication and the amount of originality in handling and developing knowledge is expected by the time one gets to the PhD.

The third level, however, is very different from the first and second levels in terms of its financial base and its orientation to the professional world. While BA and MA are predominantly funded by state funding (with varying heights of tuition fees depending on the country) and lead to a diploma oriented to a professional career, the PhD is established on research funding and until fairly recently was almost exclusively oriented to an academic career. This however has started to change. In Sweden, for instance, about 20 percent of the doctorate degrees that stays or goes back to academia. This means that 80 percent of the people with a doctoral degree leave academia. Especially in practice-based fields it is not yet clear what doctorateness adds to the educational trajectory of a practitioner, since the professional world has not clearly asked for this kind of specialisation in research. In architecture, however, there seems to be a growing demand for research expertise but also for research dissemination in the professional offices (see e.g. Hensel and Nilsson 2016). The current discourses on Mode 2 knowledge production and transdisciplinarity point out a changed relationship between research and society (Doucet and Janssens 2011; Dunin-Woyseth 2009; Gibbons et al. 1994; Thompson Klein et al. 2001), and this affects demands on the doctorate education, how it is formed, how it interacts through the process with society. The amount of so-called industrial doctorates is increasing also in practice-based fields. Large architectural firms contribute to the funding of a PhD student, working at the same time in the office. The company paying with external funding might then lead to a much richer interaction with society and also result in a type of dissemination in which people themselves go out into industry rather than their publications, which is a whole different idea, and take on the issue of dissemination of research results.

The relationship of academic and professional values and how they (dis)connect has been a topic of debate for a while now. But now the general trend of research, in all areas, not in the creative fields, is to pull professional and academic values much more closely together. This is a consequence of the increasing use of research in professional, non-academic practices and transdisciplinary context in which present-day problems have to be investigated and solved. Given this evolving shift in the broad knowledge landscape, we might need to develop a different understanding of what is a scholar and what competence s/he needs to acquire. We might want to think of the

“adaptable” scholar, who can go into future problematising, having both research competence and the competence that is needed in practice, able to establish a direct contact between academy and practice. Such a profile also raises the question of the quality and nature of a (changing) learning environment. Doctorateness comes into being by what is achieved through a sort of shared community understanding around values and issues to address and methods to use while using certain languages and rewards attached to it. The question then becomes how to facilitate the highest-quality learning experiences and situations and which is the relation between individual and collective learning processes.

Another point raised during the peer-review event was the recurring discussion about the format of the thesis for doctoral work in the creative fields. The tension often debated is the relation between the written document and the artistic or design work. Some PhD programmes advocate that the artistic work itself can be the thesis; others insist on a written document accompanying the artistic work. The written part then is often considered a reflection on the creative work made and/or a contextualization of the work in the broader field, but there is also another position which states that the act of writing is a key component for the creative project – in other words, writing does not have to be confined to the explanatory but can be equally part of the exploratory and the investigative. The re-deliberations on the position on writing and text already involves a considerable reconceptualization of the format of a doctoral thesis. However, the stretch of the format continues when the pressure rises for adapting the standard to forms that are more suitable for specific artistic practices. Examples of such a stretch of the traditional PhD format are, for instance, a pair of acrobats applying for one PhD; a film collective of three people applying for one position and insisting that they’re taken as three; music orchestras and so on. Since there are reasonable arguments for these “out of the normal” requests, the pressure on the traditional (individual) format is rising and might soon lead to change. This means that we’ll have to rethink the format of the PhD itself such that it supports the type of knowledge production that is at stake in creative fields. Although the idea of a shared, collective PhD or a zero-word PhD is apparently shocking. In the peer review discussion of experts it was said that providing the community understands what that is, and it is considered to be a meaningful thing within a community, then we begin the process of actually consciously developing, validating and authorising it. In 1997 it was already reported in the UK Council for Graduate Education publication “Practice-based doctorates in the creative and performing arts and design” that for the music doctorates it is enough with “accompanying commentary of 3.000–5.000 words” and in the particular case of a DPhil in composition at University of York, it said that “Compositions may be submitted. May have accompanying notes, but not required” (Frayling et al. 1997).

The issues raised during the peer-review symposium of experts strengthened our conviction that production of doctoral work and assessment are

intertwined and closely dependent on each other. What became clear during the discussion was that although the main topic of the book is the issue of research assessment and evaluation, what was talked about the most was the nature of the doctorates. The problem of assessment remains inextricably linked to the ongoing debate on the nature of the doctorate in creative fields. We can only evaluate whether something has been successfully done or not in relation to some kind of agreed objective or purpose. What qualifies as doctorateness in creative fields has to relate to what ultimately are the objectives of practice-based research that is being developed and how these objectives are best met.

This book wants to contribute to this ongoing debate on issues of qualifying doctorateness and focuses this issue from different perspectives. The aim is to create a broader arena for discussion on doctorateness by establishing a framework for its application to creative fields. The book builds upon contributions that (1) offer general frameworks for further conceptualising doctorateness in the fields in question; (2) describe and discuss various experiences, cases and concerns in the production and assessment of doctoral research reporting from currently developing doctoral programmes; and (3) ask the question about how the ongoing, profound changes in academia are going to influence the concept of quality in both doctoral process and product.

The three groups of contributions are organized in three sections. Section 1 is about framing the concept of doctorateness. This is done by three contributions. The first one, written by Michael Biggs, addresses the societal context and specialist communities in which doctorates are evaluated. This chapter considers the possibility of an “institutional theory of artistic research”. It proposes four distinct quadrants in which one might look for evidence for such a theory, which needs to have the capacity to accommodate the diverse positions on artistic research in the literature. The quadrants are named “explicit”, “implicit”, “generic” and “specific” and form a Boolean square with which one may also consider the contested term “doctorateness” in any field.

The second chapter reflects upon the conceptual frameworks surrounding the concept of doctorateness and how it could be considered in the field of architecture, design and arts. The authors Halina Dunin-Woyseth and Fredrik Nilsson build upon their experiences from doctoral programmes in several countries, and in this chapter they use a study of the development of assessment practice at one institution during 10 years as the base for reflections on how the assessment frameworks have changed and can be elaborated further. The practice of assessment of doctorateness can be seen to have developed to include more of the field-specific character of the discipline and professional practice and has started to engage the emerging communities of “practitioner-researcher” with their multiple competences and backgrounds. The chapter elaborates on the conceptual frameworks for assessment of research in the creative fields by using, for example, Elliot

Eisner's model of connoisseurship and criticism and current discussions on different approaches and models for evaluation of transdisciplinary research.

In the third and last chapter of Section 1 Anne Solberg discusses the formal frameworks of regulations that surround the establishment of the third cycle of education in the creative fields, for instance, EU Bologna. The focus of this chapter is on the challenges facing doctorateness in architecture, design and the arts, with respect to the criteria of doctorateness in the Dublin Descriptors' third cycle, and the definition of research that is upheld in the descriptors. Questions regarding the obligatory nature and the scope of opportunities within formal frameworks of these international norms are discussed, and the consequent impact on national standards of doctorateness is exposed by a Norwegian case study.

In Section 2 expert witnesses provide insight into the various experiences, concerns and visions they have regarding doctorateness in their respective university departments (architecture, arts/design, music). The section opens with experiences from the Swiss context, and in the first chapter Oya Atalay Franck illustrates a situation in the country in which there is still a debate on the relevance of doctoral research in architecture. She dwells on what direction such doctoral studies should take in the future and suggests that one scenario could provide for two parallel kinds of studies, one to be called a "Super Master", resulting in advanced expertise in designing complex buildings, and another one, based on theoretical underpinnings of the design, that is, its principles, concepts and methods, offering new insights into designing and building processes. The quality to be required from such work, that is, its doctorateness, should correspond with the general cross-disciplinary standards of advanced academic work as well as with the specific requirements of architectural design and of research into the art of building.

From the Swiss experience, the next chapter in Section 2 moves the perspective to the Anglo-Saxon context. Murray Fraser describes the development of doctoral studies at the Bartlett School of Architecture and at the University of Westminster. With their relatively long history of PhD studies in the UK in mind, the author concentrates on addressing criteria for the assessment of PhDs by design. He argues that it is essential to retain a sense of openness and experimentation in architectural design research. He finds it as crucial that "doctorateness" be perceived through two criteria sets: first, what are the kinds of new knowledge being created as doctoral scholarship or "doctorateness" and, second, what kinds of methodological approaches have been, or ought to be, used to do so?

In the third chapter Colin Fudge and Adriana Partal report from development of the doctoral studies at the RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. They explain the origins and background to the RMIT model for design practice research and note that the model in operation today across three continents has developed considerably over the last thirty years with the foundational ideas remaining at the core of the model. They further discuss the model and the assessment component of the doctoral process

with external and international jury members. Qualitative comments formulated by these jury members are included in the text, providing further insights on the assessment process and the value of the model. The authors conclude this chapter with their own reflections on the model and doctoral assessment, ideas on a wider research agenda on the development of design practice research, translation to other disciplines, applications in the wider policy and practice world and the notion and purpose of the contemporary university.

In the next chapter the perspective shifts from architecture to the field of music. Popular music performance is a new field for doctoral studies in Norway. A new doctoral programme in the field created by orally transferred musical traditions such as rock, pop, reggae, folk songs, jazz, world music and the like was established at the University of Agder in Kristiansand in 2008. Tor Dybo presents in his text this programme, where a particular emphasis is placed on knowledge areas characterized by intuitive and tacit knowledge among, for example, musicians, sound engineers and producers in recording studios and on stage. A serious challenge has been to develop theoretical and methodological approaches to this research field and, not least, to develop appropriate criteria for evaluating doctoral theses, addressing both academic and artistic-creative processes and their results. This duality and complementarity are reflected in the final products of these doctoral studies, as they consist of a practical, performative part and a traditional thesis.

Karen Burland, Michael Spencer and Luke Windsor from the University of Leeds then consider in their chapter practice-based research degrees (RDs) in music composition and performance in order to establish the characteristics of musical “doctorateness”. Semi-structured interviews with supervisors and students at the University of Leeds were analysed thematically using interpretative phenomenological analysis and four key themes emerged: personal characteristics; defining practice, establish process; relationships with supervisors; and assessment, contexts and commonality. The data suggest that the shape and progress of the research is underpinned by three interrelating factors: practice–self-reflection–identity, in conjunction with positive working relationships with supervisors. Compared to their traditional counterparts, practice-based doctoral programmes in music are a relatively recent development in the UK. Their emergence is noted to the early 1980s, and they must satisfy both academic demands and those relating to professional practice. They must focus on both product and process and at the same time consider professional or personal identity – ensuring their voice is heard clearly. The authors therefore highlight the need for greater discussion and greater recognition of practice as research.

We end this section with a Belgian perspective provided by Liesbeth Huybrechts and Marijn Van de Weijer, who explore the meaning of “doctorateness” in PhD trajectories in art and design that engage with public issues, public spaces and/or act as resources that “publics” can debate and

contribute to in their own ways. They reflect on the challenges of defining doctorateness in art and design disciplines when doing research that constructs publics around the complex situations of contemporary society. In the chapter they present two Flemish PhD projects that deal with everyday issues, respectively employment and housing, and centre on constructing publics on spatial aspects of these broad societal concerns. This leads to a proposition of ways for nurturing a more nuanced debate on the richness and diversity of doctorateness in art and design that actively engage with societal issues and publics. They conclude by outlining specific requirements for PhD candidates in this field and point out that these can nurture a more nuanced debate on the richness and diversity of ways in which doctorateness in art and design can be understood and put into practice.

This second section of the book reports from experiences that illustrate the complex landscape of doctoral research in different countries and in various traditions. The context of the various countries and different creative and performing fields are of importance for demonstrating a growing awareness of significance of relevant assessment of doctoral scholarship as an indissoluble part of the process of producing new, relevant doctoral knowledge and insight of high quality.

Following this, Section 3 then offers more future-oriented perspectives on knowledge-building processes that can offer specific conceptualisations of doctorateness in the creative fields. Nel Janssens and Gerard de Zeeuw, in their chapter, argue that practice-based research cannot be positioned in the (still dominant) paradigm of observational research. Instead, they propose methods for “non-observational research” as a suitable paradigm for the making disciplines. They discuss this type of research as a proper extension of observational research. Non-observational research takes individual values and preferences as its resources. In this light, they introduce the notions of “instructions” as outcome and argue that in practice-based fields the development of instructions is about the improved recognition of structures and artifacts to extend the interactive performance of experiences. In addition, they address the base for evaluation and doctorateness this type of research generates.

Rolf Hughes, in his chapter “When will it thunder?”, argues that doctorateness should be treated as an open-textured concept (not unlike “art” or “artistic research”). It addresses the challenges for those developing learning resources for doctoral candidates in artistic research. How might we prepare our students for futures we are currently incapable of imagining? How is a practice changed by investigation into that practice? Research exposes the implicit assumptions that underpin habits, making the artist’s own sensibility a legitimate area of inquiry. The relation between a standardised curriculum and resources tailored to the individual learning needs of each doctoral candidate accordingly becomes a central question.

In the last chapter of Section 3, Catharina Dyrssen discusses the artistic precision and judgment in relation to doctoral research. Judgement usually implies selection, an understanding embedded in Western traditions of

knowledge, law or taste, and this is reinforced by contemporary funding and career machineries. Dyrssen, however, explores judgement as precise, contextual and performative action with compositional logics and perspectives mainly from architecture and music. This stresses judgement as actions of spatial-compositional modelling that continuously enrich knowledge and avoid reductive indicators of standard evaluation. She further argues that artistic research and education, now maturing, rapidly diversify and merge into various practices in dynamic interactions between research fields, critically questioning romantic views on “artistic processes” as well as traditional logics of cause and effect, academic procedures and criteria.

Our intention with this book is to offer different perspectives on the issue of how to develop relevant and fruitful research assessment practices and criteria in the practice-based and “creative” fields of architecture and the arts. The three sections propose ways of framing this issue and its development conceptually, show the need for awareness of the specific context and tradition programmes develop in as well different phases and levels of their maturity and give proposals for various trajectories and potentials for the future. We hope that readers will get inspiration from the contributions in similar ways as we have got when working with this project and its contributors and that this book will trigger further discussions that will contribute to what a more operational definition of “doctorateness” entails. Our hope is that this can serve as a means of strengthening dialogues between professional researchers and professional practitioners – who, more and more, will come to be the same people, being researchers and practitioners in the new community of “practitioner-researchers”. These dialogues and discussions will need to be maintained and continued.

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