Criteria for ‘Doctorateness’ in the Creative Fields: A Focus on Swiss Architecture

Oya Atalay Franck

The thoughts about ‘doctorateness’ in the creative fields that are put forward in this essay take architectural design as their discursive setting. However, they may also apply to other disciplines in the creative fields that deal with the design of concrete objects. The essay focuses on Switzerland with its particular architectural and educational conditions, but, again, the observations could well be valid elsewhere as well.

The core competence of the architect – to design – forms the conceptual framework for the proposal here for two different types of doctoral programs in architecture. One of them is an extrapolation of design education at Masters level, with the doctorate leading to highly advanced expertise in dealing with complex architectural design tasks, resulting in the creation of a kind of ‘super-master’ designer; the other establishes the qualifications for an ‘expert theorist’ in architectural design. Both of these types of doctoral work are strongly oriented towards the creation of design knowledge that has a ‘practice-oriented’ focus, in the sense of providing knowledge about designing as and objectively appraisable form of added value within architecture.

Keywords: Architecture; Research on Design; Research by Design; Doctorateness; Swiss architecture; Swiss architectural education; practice-oriented research

Introduction

The following thoughts on ‘doctorateness’ in the creative fields take architecture as their discursive setting, although the ideas put forward may also apply to other disciplines in the creative fields that deal with the design of concrete objects, such as industrial and landscape design (but probably less so for other disciplines such as arts and media). The thoughts proposed are also strongly informed by the specific conditions of architecture in Switzerland – the understanding of architecture and professional practice, the role of the architect in the building process and the characteristics of architectural education – which in many ways differ considerably from those abroad.

Doctoral programs in Swiss Schools of Architecture

For quite a few years now, schools of architecture at universities in several countries have started to offer doctoral degrees in architectural design, while continuing to offer ‘classical’ PhDs as well. Not so however in Switzerland: of the three Swiss universities with architectural education in their curricula – the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETHZ), the École Polytechnique Fédérale Lausanne (EPFL) and the Università della Svizzera Italiana Mendrisio (USI) – only the school in Lausanne currently offers an explicitly design-based doctoral degree, in its ‘Complex Design’ program. Here it may be worth pointing out that there may be some confusion arising from the distinction between PhD and doctoral degrees in architectural design, because in English the term ‘PhD’ does not denote doctorates in philosophy only, but all types of doctorates from such diverse fields as engineering, the formal and the natural sciences. In German-speaking countries, however, these doctorates are all specifically designed; examples include Dr. theol. (Doctor of Theology), Dr. iur. (Doctor of Law), Dr. sc. (Doctor of Science) and Dr. oec. (Doctor of Economics). In this context, a Doctor of Architecture or in Architectural Design does not seem entirely far-fetched.
Due to its federal political system and its consensus-based approach to problem solving, many things developed elsewhere take a while to settle in Swiss society. This is also true in academia. The tertiary-level educational landscape in Switzerland was shaken up quite forcefully by the Bologna process. The adoption of the Anglo-Saxon model led to a re-thinking of professionalism and a restructuring of academic requirements. The Qualifications Framework of the Swiss Higher Education Area, dating from 20th September 2011, describes and defines the levels and qualifications in higher education in Switzerland on the basis of generic descriptors, admissions criteria, ECTS credits, and academic levels. Now with two different professional degrees – a Bachelors and a Masters – the discussions at the Swiss universities and in the professional organizations about the relative merits of these degrees – and the qualifications they represent – are still going on.

Prior to the Bologna reform, there were basically two tracks leading to a professional degree in architecture in Switzerland. There was the academic track requiring A-Levels or equivalent qualifications and leading to a university-based school of architecture (almost exclusively at the Federal Polytechnic schools in Zurich and Lausanne) and there was the non-academic track consisting of a four-year apprenticeship in the dual education system and a four-year education at a tertiary-level technical school. Interestingly, some well-known Swiss architects who have pursued this second, non-academic track include Theo Hotz, Peter Zumthor and Gion A. Caminada.

The degrees awarded were in both cases called 'diplomas in architecture'. The titles of university and technical-school graduates differed only in the suffix, which indicated the type of school attended – either 'ETH' or 'EPFL' for the university graduates, or else 'HTL' for technical-school graduates from the Higher Technical Learning Institutes (Höhere Technische Lehranstalt). Here it must be taken into account that the professional title of the architect was not, and still is not, protected in Switzerland; in fact, anybody can call themselves an architect and practice as such. The school suffix is therefore of importance in distinguishing architects with a particular qualification from those without. Behind the three-character suffix, however, a completely different understanding of professional qualification was subsumed and a clear hierarchy existed. The university-trained architect was particularly skilled in designing, with a strong theoretical knowledge and capable of handling complex tasks. The practitioner-architect on the other hand was equipped with a good understanding of the more down-to-earth, practice-oriented aspects of building.

In the process of adapting the Bologna reform to Switzerland, the Higher Technical Learning Institutes were turned into Universities of Applied Sciences, giving them a more elevated status within the educational system. Access to these schools is still granted primarily based on a vocational education in the dual education system. However, with the structures of the architectural schools both at the three older universities and at the new Universities of Applied Science now being basically identical, and also with a high degree of permeability between the two systems, there is considerable anxiety amongst the older universities in Switzerland that the various stakeholders might no longer recognize the 'superiority' of their education. There is one field, however, where the three older universities still hold a monopoly in Switzerland: i.e. doctoral education. Until now, the consensus of education specialists and politicians alike has been that the universities of applied science cannot provide the necessary environment for doctoral studies because their focus is primarily on teaching, and thus research has only played a relatively minor role in those institutions. But this situation is about to change too, as can be seen for example at the Zurich University of the Arts (Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, or ZHdK), which has recently opened joint-doctorate programs with the Universities of Oldenburg, Germany, and Linz, Austria. Until now, however, for formal and other reasons, doctoral degrees from this new joint program have only been awarded by the foreign universities and not by ZHdK itself.

**The changing role of the architect in Switzerland**

Swiss architecture is internationally renowned for its adherence to the principles of modernity, for its sense of understatement, for the way in which design and construction are fused into one, for the thoughtful use of materials, and for the high quality of execution at every scale. A general idea of the importance of craft – in design, in construction, in execution – permeates the best projects. In fact, in terms of the traditional dichotomy between the architect as an artist and as ‘Baumeister’ (master-builder), the overwhelming majority of Swiss architects at the forefront of the profession would still identify themselves with the latter. Andrea Deplazes, architect and professor at ETH Zurich, speaks for many of his colleagues when he postulates the idea that designing and constructing are inseparable: ‘For me, designing and constructing is the same thing. I like the idea that form is the result of construction; and material, well, that’s something finite. Nevertheless,
confining myself to this formula would be a mechanistic reduction because the shape of the form, deliberate or not, bears – beyond its material or constructional component – information, an intent.’ [1, p.19]

However, please note that there is a distinct problem when translating these ideas of architectural designing from German to English, for the meaning of the English verb ‘to design’ does not correspond fully to the German ‘entwerfen’ (as in the phrase ‘Entwerfen und Konstruieren’ used by Deplazes in the German original). The word ‘design’ has the same root as the German ‘zeichnen’ and French ‘dessiner’ – i.e. to draw. The meaning of the German word ‘entwerfen’, however, is not tied to the act of drawing at all; it is rather ‘to give a form/a shape to something’. The duality of ‘Entwerfen und Konstruieren’ is therefore that of giving something simultaneously a shape and a structure.

In any event, according to the understanding of the Swiss architectural profession as being essentially rooted in the values of practice, the design educators at its universities, too, are mostly chosen for being successful practitioners, not for being successful academics or researchers. It is quite obvious that in such a professional setting there is no real urge for a design degree demonstrating academic excellence, such as a doctorate. In fact, a doctorate in architecture is not a requirement – nor a boost – for either a professional or an academic career as a designer. Quite the contrary: an architect-designer with a doctoral degree is regarded at best as an oddity. At worst, a doctoral degree may be interpreted as a sign of either a lack of interest in the core activity of an architect – to design and construct – or a lack of talent! It shouldn’t come as a surprise, then, that certain professors at the Department of Architecture at ETH Zurich complain about creating ‘too many doctoral students’ for which there is no need in the job market.

This may explain why in Swiss professional circles the support for a doctorate degree ‘in architectural design’ – in other words, a ‘Doctor of Architecture’ – has not really arisen. Indeed, before tackling the main questions regarding the criteria for doctorateness in the field of architectural design, these should perhaps be the first questions answered: what is a doctorate in architectural design, and what is it good for?

**What is a Doctorate – and what is a Doctorate in Architectural Design?**

A doctorate is an academic ‘post-professional’ degree – i.e. it is awarded for the successful completion of an education that goes beyond the requirements for a full professional degree (usually a Masters degree). It distinguishes its bearer (the ‘Doctor’) as having reached a level of expertise beyond basic (Bachelors) or even advanced (Masters) professional and academic requirements.

Doctoral studies consist in most cases of coursework and of a research project of some kind carried out independently by the student. These doctoral studies usually result in a ‘document’ commonly referred to as a ‘doctoral thesis’ or sometimes as a ‘dissertation’. The requirements for being admitted to a doctoral programme and for graduating as a doctor vary from country to country. There is, however, a ‘common understanding’ regarding the qualifications of a doctoral candidate, which are generally as follows:

– the possession of advanced knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and the research field as a whole, and of the methods associated with this field;
– the capability of critical analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
– the ability to carry out research in a methodical and systematic way, thus contributing to the progress of knowledge in the field;
– the capability of communicating the ideas and research findings to the scientific community and others [2–4].

A key component of doctoral studies is advanced independent research. In many countries, there is a considerable ‘bias’ when we use the term ‘research’, because there is a widespread understanding that ‘research’ is a scientific endeavour. However, not all disciplines taught at universities consider themselves as part of science, especially not the so-called ‘creative’ disciplines. Nonetheless, clearly there is research being conducted in the creative disciplines, too. In fact, most architects and artists would also consider the process of designing as a research endeavour.

In many areas of science, the concepts of doctoral studies are not far removed from those of studies at Masters level. In both instances, the requirements comprise a process of coursework as well as a research project. The distinction between the two types of academic education is therefore not categorical but is more related to the methodological, conceptual, and intellectual depth of coursework and research that is undertaken. A doctoral thesis is in many cases like a Masters thesis, but at a clearly higher level of expertise and innovation regarding ideas and knowledge.
This is generally not the case in architecture – at least not in Switzerland. Today’s doctorates in architecture at Swiss universities are, for the most part, studies belonging not to the core activities of architecture – design and construction – but to ‘side-branches’ such as the history of art and architecture, urbanism, materials sciences, sociology, theory and philosophy, or information technology.

This absence, in architecture, of a doctoral education and degree ‘in line’ with the curricular sequence leading from Bachelors to Masters would be striking if it were not for the fact that there is so far no clear need for such a degree. Indeed, what would be the benefits of having a doctoral program as a continuation of the Bachelors-Masters sequence? What would a ‘Doctor of Architecture’ be other than a highly educated ‘theoretical’ architect who lacks professional experience and knowledge? Who might employ an architect who has acquired ‘advanced design skills’ but quite possibly does not have the portfolio of practice work to prove it?

In order to gain acceptance in the professional market in Switzerland, and to secure employability for its graduates, any kind of doctoral program ‘of architecture’ or ‘in architectural design’ would have to make a meaningful addition to the spectrum of architectural education, and to its range of degrees and qualifications. The hierarchy of these degrees can be visualized like this diagram (Fig. 1):

![Circle of academic degree holders by level and by scope and complexity of research involved](Image: Oya Atalay Franck).

As the illustration shows, a doctorate in architectural design of this type would further broaden and deepen the educational spectrum provided by the Bachelors and Masters programs, being factual as well as processual. Based on this trivial but fundamental concept of different levels of expertise, there are two types of doctoral studies that I can think of which have the potential for a relevant contribution to the portfolio of doctorate degrees of universities – even in reluctant Switzerland:

- Doctoral programs in architectural design that form ‘super-masters’ – i.e. extremely qualified, highly experienced and creative designers who are equipped with an extensive critical/theoretical framework, and who can tackle the most complex building endeavors in systematic, structured ways. Such a ‘super-master’ designer might be, for example, particularly skilled in dealing with so-called ‘wicked problems’ – i.e. problems that are manifold, difficult to define and highly complex to solve [5].

or

- Doctoral programs in architectural design that shape ‘intellectual specialists’ – i.e. architectural theoreticians/critics who can lead an intellectual discourse on topics important for architecture today, and who may find jobs as teachers in academia, as journalists, as experts in public administrations, or as ‘critics in residence’ in large design firms. In such a program, current design problems could serve as ‘case studies’ for the development of ideas and concepts. Such a specialization should therefore not be confused with a doctorate in art history, dealing purely with historical phenomena.
What should be the criteria for a Doctorate in Architectural Design?

Having concluded that there is both an argument for having a doctorate in architectural design, and professional potential for the holders of such a degree (though probably a limited potential), it is time to tackle the core question regarding the criteria for 'doctorateness in architecture', and of how to provide adequate modes for their assessment.

In science, the notion of 'doctorateness' is closely tied to the research work conducted in the course of studies and to its qualitative requirements. It is obvious that doctorateness in the creative fields, too, must have a strong association to the particular kind of research being carried out in these fields, which may – or may not – be similar to the research done in other fields. Therefore, when reflecting upon the issue of 'doctorateness in architectural design' one must first reflect upon the kind of research associated with the core business of architecture, i.e. designing and constructing. One way to approach this might be by looking at the ways in which doctoral work in the natural or the social sciences or engineering builds upon the work done at Masters level. The difference between Masters and doctoral programs that can be observed in these disciplines (the 'vector', so to say) might then be added to the requirements for a Masters degree in architectural design, resulting in establishing the requirements for a doctoral degree in architectural design. Doctorateness in architectural design would thus be formulated in 'extrapolation' of the requirements for a Masters degree. This implies, however, that a doctorate in architectural design is 'structurally similar' to a Masters degree.

A more open and – to my eyes – an altogether more interesting approach would be to look at the way that research is done in architectural practice and then deduce the requirements for doctoral-level research from these observations. In fact, many architects claim to perform research when designing a building. However, there is a fundamental difference if the research is executed in an ad-hoc and unstructured manner or in a systematic, thorough and more 'scientific' manner.

Also relevant for the discussion is the distinction between research 'on design' – that is research done about designing or for the purpose of designing – and research 'by design' – that is research carried out by means of designing. In research 'on design', the focus may be on all kinds of aspects related to a specific design problem. It may for example be programmatic or morphological, typological or historiographic. This kind of research is 'auxiliary' to the primary task of designing (Fig. 2). Research 'by design', however, has as its objective not the design of a building but an issue investigated by means of designing – and somehow related to it (Fig. 3). This distinction is relevant because, in my opinion, a designed object cannot be

![Design-Triggered Research Process](image)

**Figure 2**: Design process supported by 'auxiliary research': $P_d$ denotes a design problem, $S_d$ a design solution; with knowledge transfer from the auxiliary to the primary process (Image: Oya Atalay Franck).
considered as the ‘main outcome’ of research. Research must always lead to knowledge – it is knowledge that is the principal outcome of academic research. A design may be the carrier – or, as Nigel Cross puts it – the ‘source’ of knowledge [6, p.47]. A design is either the object to be studied – if it is in research ‘on design’ – or the means by which knowledge is gained – if it is in research ‘by design’. Research produces all kinds of knowledge, but in order for this knowledge to be acceptable at doctoral level in academia it must generally have specific attributes: it must be distinct and clear (i.e. resistant to different interpretations), communicable (i.e. describable in words or illustrations), and repeatable (i.e. others repeating this research must come to the same findings). However, buildings as the results of architectural design processes are by themselves none of the three: they are highly susceptible to personal interpretation; their qualities are notoriously hard to communicate in words; and the results would differ even if the same designer were to approach the same problem a second time, never mind if it were to be tackled by other designers.

**Research ‘on design’ and ‘by design’: Two illustrative examples**

I will now discuss two examples that illustrate how both research ‘on design’ and ‘by design’ can be directly linked to the act of architectural designing. Neither of these examples is the outcome of doctoral work, but both show which direction such doctoral work could take. One is a recent publication by the Federation of Swiss Architects (Bund Schweizer Architekten, or BSA) on research regarding a specific building type known as ‘hunks’ or ‘clusters’, which are dense urban developments intended for mixed use [7]; the other is the design by Staufer & Hasler Architects for the Federal Administrative Court in St. Gallen [8]. The selection of these illustrative examples is discretionary, of course; however, each of the two represents a particularly interesting – and important – aspect of the involvement of research within the design process.

**Buildings as ‘hunks’: A form of typological research**

On the occasion of its 100-year anniversary in 2008, the Federation of Swiss Architects, for the first time in its history, issued a grant for the promotion of design-related research activities by young architects living in Switzerland. Since then it has sponsored two more research projects with such a stipend, and a call for proposals for a fourth has now been published. These grants are meant to support research into questions of urban, architectural and constructive design; purely historiographic topics or research into materials or technology are not eligible. The criteria for selection are originality and the critical relevance of the topic for designing [9].
Of course, it is not unusual for larger architectural firms to publish findings from their work related to planning and design in various magazines and reports. A publication stemming directly from a research grant – a stipend expressly devoted to architectural designing, and with a particular focus on current developments – by an organization outside the academic realm was, however, entirely new to Switzerland at that time. In their research projects into ‘hunks’, published in 2014, the two authors (Lisa Euler and Tanja Reimer) investigated a building type which, according to them, is not entirely new, pointing to various historical precedents especially from the early-twentieth century such as the Chile-House in Hamburg by Fritz Höger, the Ca’brutta in Milan by Giovanni Muzio, and the Casa Economica ICP S. Ippolito II in Rome by Innocenzo Sabatini [10]. However, in their opinion, the ‘hunk’ type of building has gained considerable significance in inner-city settings in Switzerland and elsewhere over the past 30-50 years: large, compact urban blocks of mixed use that, because of their size, are hardly ever built by single investor/owners, but rather by consortia. The territories they are developed in typically belong to the inner periphery of the cities, areas freed from former industrial or infrastructural use. The blocks are characterized by mixed, sometimes even highly fragmented ownership, a comparatively large size, an often amorphous or ‘accidental’ shape, usually excellent connections to public transportation, and the potential for them to be high-density, high-profit development investments.

The functional program of the ‘hunk’ is invariably hybrid, typically encompassing shopping facilities, offices and housing. The attractiveness to investors of these projects depends particularly on the ability of winning an important, high-profile, key tenant or anchor store that will in turn attract other stores, services and residential users. The buildings are typically of medium-rise in height; in Switzerland this means usually not more than 25 metres high (buildings higher than that are considered to be ‘high-rise’ and require increased safety levels regarding earthquake and fire resistance, making them less economical to construct). The ‘hunk’ buildings usually occupy the entire site, with their facades following the building lines; they are clearly distinguishable as singular objects even though they are often not actually free-standing solitary volumes (Figs. 4–5).

As mentioned before, such research into design typologies is not unusual. In fact, such an analysis and categorization of buildings for the purposes of establishing a typological taxonomy is relatively common. However, the authors of the study point out three specific goals of their research. The first is to differentiate buildings according to their functional and morphological nature, thereby enhancing the typological library of architecture in general – which is, after all, the quintessential idea of research, in terms of furthering humankind’s knowledge of the world. Secondly, the research project serves as a ‘primer’ or

Figure 4: BDE Architects, Archhöfe, Winterthur, 2013 (Image: Lisa Euler and Tanja Reimer).
as a ‘manual’ for architects by providing specific knowledge about the principles and rules that govern ‘hunk’ buildings – ranging from the early phases of investment and project development through to their realization. Through processual and economic, morphological and typological analysis, the authors developed criteria and assessment tools which are also meant to guide the design process in a manner beneficial to creating ‘good architecture’. Their third goal is that the research should benefit from these first two aims, and overcome the increasing fragmentation of responsibility by re-establishing a more holistic view about the design of such buildings by uniting the programmatic aspects with architectural, structural and urban analyses.

This also explains why a research project like this is of such interest for the Federation of Swiss Architects, because it investigates – and helps to understand – the phenomena of current professional practice. Such understanding, or such ‘knowledge’, is of particular use when the traditional role of the architect (with the Federation acting as its safeguard) is being threatened by economical and social developments. The fact that the BSA sponsors such research also shows a growing awareness of its benefit to professional practice.

The Swiss Federal Administrative Court: A complex building task
In a referendum in 2000, the Swiss electorate voted for a reform of the federal judiciary. The main goal was to improve legal protection and to relieve the Federal Supreme Court of some of its workload through the establishment of two additional, specialized federal courts, one being the Federal Penal Court and the other the Federal Administrative Court. The latter deals with appeals against decisions made by federal authorities, and furthermore it examines cantonal decisions and issues judgments in individual litigation proceedings. The seat of the Federal Administrative Court was decided to be in St. Gallen in eastern Switzerland.

For the design of the building, a competition was held [11–12]. The winning entry was by the architectural firm of Staufer & Hasler from Frauenfeld [8]. The resulting building was inaugurated in 2012 (Fig. 6). Its
spatial program is quite straightforward, in that there are some shared spaces – a lobby, a few courtrooms, cafeteria, library, archives, and such like – and also a large number of individual and group offices for the judges, their clerks, and the general secretariat. The court building has three distinct parts: a low pedestal-like volume, an elongated extension to this ‘pedestal’ defining a terrace, and a cubic tower. The tower contains the offices of the five divisions of the Federal Administrative Court, the so-called ‘pools’, each being assigned two floors. The pedestal beneath the office cube provides room for the general secretariat, and the extension to the pedestal contains the courtrooms and other shared facilities.

Between 1997 and 2001, while working at the Zurich School of Applied Sciences, Astrid Staufer and other colleagues had developed the concept of ‘Synchrones Entwerfen’, or ‘synchronous design’ [10, p.18]. This concept abolishes the traditional model of designing in different ‘stages’ – i.e. starting on the largest scale, with the highest degree of abstraction, and working continuously towards a more and more precise and detailed design, from site analysis to massing studies to constructive solutions – in favour of simultaneous thinking at all relevant scales and parallel exploration of different aspects and levels. While teaching at both of the ETH schools in Zurich and Lausanne, the architects added to this method the dimension of ‘textual work’ whereby certain aspects of the design were addressed not only from an architectural, but also from a linguistic point of view, and as such they referred to the process as ‘simultaneous projection’ [10, p.19–20].

Through the application of this method, the process of designing the Federal Administrative Court building in St. Gallen led to (potentially shareable) knowledge gained both ‘on design’ and ‘by design’. The kinds of knowledge gained ‘on design’ may be seen to include:

– typological knowledge regarding the design of courthouses in general, and especially in Switzerland with its particular judiciary system;

**Figure 6**: Staufer & Hasler Architects, Swiss Federal Administrative Court, St Gallen, 2012 (Image: Staufer & Hasler; photograph: Roland Bernath).
knowledge regarding the urban specificities of the site, in terms of its location at the edges of
neighbourhoods of various density, and at the transition from the flat bottom of the valley to the
hillside above;
– knowledge regarding the construction process, in regard to the ways in which the load-bearing
outer columns are connected to the floor slabs, or the articulation of the four corners;
– knowledge regarding architectural elements and their production, such as the patterned terrazzo
floors and the tinted stucco walls.

The kinds of knowledge gained ‘by design’, on the other hand, may include:

– methodological knowledge regarding the further development of the ‘synchronous
design’/’simultaneous projection’ method of design method;
– conceptual knowledge regarding the adequate representation of justice and the expression of the
dignity of the judiciary – and of other public functions – in architectural form.

The architects for the Swiss Federal Administrative Court see the latter as the key aspect of the task of
designing this specific building, in that it should reflect the ‘dignity of the court’. As Astrid Staufer puts it:
‘That is the far-reaching social, philosophical and cultural question. If you ever begin to reflect [on this], it
offers endless raw material with which you can busy yourself as an architect.’ [10, p.19–20]

**Conclusion: Prerequisites and assessment of ‘Doctorateness’ in Architectural Design**

As mentioned above, neither of the two examples cited here can be considered as ‘doctoral work’. Firstly,
neither has been submitted, in conformity with rules and regulations, as a doctorate proposal in a program
at a university. But this represents ‘only’ the formal aspect. More important is that neither example shows
all of the characteristics and requirements of doctoral research to the required extent. Nonetheless, both
can be seen as having the potential for fully-fledged doctoral work, containing the necessary elements ‘in
nucleo’: i.e. a number of topics worthy of doctoral examination, with considerable relevance to the academic
and professional debate; a critical stance; and a systematic and coherent analytical and synthetic method of
investigation.

The examples also show that knowledge gained ‘on design’ is more easily identifiable than knowledge
 gained ‘by design’ – just as ‘researching for the purpose of design’ is much more common than ‘designing
for the purpose of research’. But there is also a limit to what can be learned factually both about and
through a design. This has to do with the inherent subjectivity of both the design process and the product
that results: the former in terms of its creation by the designer, the latter in its perception and use by the
public. Every building is as individual as its designer. Some important aspects of a design will always be
inaccessible to explicit knowing, being limited to other ways of perception and interpretation because
they belong to the world of emotions and feelings, of the senses, and thus not readily accessible to logic
and reasoning.

When we look at these two illustrative examples, we can ask what might constitute the core of a doc-
torate in architectural design in these projects? Reading the publication about ‘hunks’, it is obvious that
it contains all the typical ingredients for a doctoral proposal and could well serve as an applied exposé
of the subject. It is by no means a finished thesis, though, because both the analysis and the critical
reflection on the findings do not reach the breadth and depth expected of doctoral work – after all, it
was not meant to.

A design project such as the Swiss Federal Administrative Court, on the other hand, is never an individual
effort, but always the work of many. To my knowledge, there are no ‘team degrees’ as yet awarded in architec-
tural programs. This means that all doctoral work must be attributable to a single person. It is also not possible
to award a doctorate degree after the fact, after the building is finished, and based on the material produced
in connection with the design process. Otherwise, the standard formal and processual criteria for doctoral
research – such as the admission to the program and the approval of a study plan or the assignment of advisor
and co-advisor, and the fulfillment of other requirements such as coursework and the proof of independent
and original research – could not be met. Such a degree for work that has been done beforehand could only
be on the basis of *honoris causa*, as a mark of esteem, just like winning an architectural design award.

A project like the new Federal Administrative Court represents a complex, multi-layered body of work,
which is more than evident from the range of its ideas and concepts, its tectonics of space and construction,
its contribution to the genealogy of this particular building type and program, its materialization, and in
the way that its design process evolved. ‘Doctorateness’ as a concept is instead tightly linked to the object
with which it is to be proven: i.e. the doctoral thesis or dissertation [13, p.8]. The criteria for doctorateness
in architectural design depend on the nature of the ‘doctoral thesis’ itself. But whatever the thesis primarily consists of – a report on empirical research, a philosophical reflection, a concrete architectural design project – a key aspect of ‘doctorateness’ will always be that the doctoral candidate demonstrates that he or she belongs to a professional élite and has excelled through doctoral work in specific, describable ways.

Of course, the ‘pièce de résistance’, when discussing for what kind of doctoral work and on what ‘grounds of doctorateness’ a doctoral degree in architectural design could be awarded, is whether or not the doctoral work has produced ‘new and shareable knowledge’ and whether or not it is ‘innovative’ – these, after all, are the key components of doctoral work in all disciplines.

To pick up again on the two professional tracks for a Doctor in Architectural Design as described above, if we think of a doctoral program in architectural design as a ‘super-masters’, having at its centre a complex design project, then it is mainly the quality of the design work – and of the auxiliary research that supports and feeds the design – which has to be judged by the doctoral jury. The jury’s assessment will also be based on the ways in which the requirements of the program are fulfilled and whether the design succeeds in making a bold, new, artistic statement. If, on the other hand, a doctorate in architectural design were based on the intellectual-critical treatment of an ‘ideological’ aspect relevant to architectural design – with the design project merely as the vehicle for shaping the ideas and concepts brought forward in the doctorate thesis – the jurors must not look primarily at the design itself, but rather at how these ideas are exposed through texts or images or other means of communication. This involves scrutiny of the intellectual depth and rigour of the argument being made, how it is rooted in the context of the history of ideas leading up to today, and whether the thoughts proposed constitute an innovative form of ‘new and shareable knowledge’. Here the results could, and should, be measured quite like those of a doctorate in philosophy.

What are, then, the overarching ‘brackets’ holding together as truly doctoral work such cases as might be worked up from the two illustrative examples? As Nigel Cross points out, there are fundamental criteria which count for any and all research work, whether it is designerly or not, in that all research work has to be purposive, inquisitive, informed, methodical, and communicable [6, p.48]. These criteria – in my opinion – are indeed valid for all doctoral work in architecture, too, whether these are ‘classical’ PhDs or ‘new’ doctorates in architectural design.

What should not be forgotten is that any kind of academic degree – whether Bachelors, Masters or Doctorate – is the result of a contract fulfilled. The graduates having committed to their side of the deal by paying their tuition fees, attending courses and producing ‘by their own hands’ a product (the thesis), the school of architecture then conforms to its side of the contract by bestowing the degree upon the candidates. Furthermore, such a degree is not only an affirmation of a specific quality of its holder, but also of the school assigning it. For the relationship is reciprocal: by awarding the degree, the school of architecture transfers some of its prestige and renown onto the degree holders – and through their research work, the degree holders give proof of the quality of the education of the school they attended. The consequent adherence to clear and convincing criteria governing ‘doctorateness’ is in this sense a key element in securing the quality of the educational system.

Competing Interests
The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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