

Dr **GAVIN MELLES** is Head of Interior and Industrial Design at Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia. He researches and supervises in the areas of design education, product design, and research methods.

Professional Doctorates in Design?

Rhetoric and Reality

PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES EMERGED IN THE 1990S IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND AUSTRALIA AS A RESPONSE TO A RANGE OF INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES IN MASS HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE POSTGRADUATE LEVEL. GLOBALLY ALTERNATIVE DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES INCLUDING (CREATIVE) PROJECT WORK HAVE DEVELOPED WHICH PURPORT TO ADDRESS PROFESSIONAL AND PRACTICE VALUES IN CREATIVE ARTS AND INDUSTRIES, INCLUDING DESIGN, MORE ADEQUATELY THAN THE TRADITIONAL PHD. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE QUESTIONABLE 'PROFESSIONAL' STATUS OF DESIGN AS SUCH, SHOULD INSTITUTIONS ENCOURAGE SUCH COURSES? IN THE ABSENCE OF A REAL 'PROFESSIONAL' CONTEXT SUCH AS THAT OF MANAGEMENT, NURSING AND TEACHING, FOR EXAMPLE, THE DEGREES PROPOSED HAVE ATTEMPTED TO COMBINE THE STUDIO LOGIC OF PROJECT WORK AND THE PRACTICE-BASED DISCOURSE OF THE CREATIVE VISUAL ARTS WITH DUBIOUS PROFESSIONALISM. TAKING EXAMPLES FROM THREE COUNTRIES—AUSTRALIA, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES—THIS PAPER IDENTIFIES AND THEN QUESTIONS THE DISCOURSE OF PROFESSIONALISM EMPLOYED TO DESCRIBE ALTERNATIVE DOCTORATES OF DESIGN AND THE VISUAL ARTS, SUGGESTING THAT THE PHD CONTAINS SUFFICIENT 'SPACE' TO ACCOMMODATE CURRENT DESIGN RESEARCH NEEDS.

Design Research and Doctorates

The recent development of doctoral programmes other than the traditional text-based PhD in design has produced alternative degree formats. For example, any close examination of doctoral programmes in the fields of architecture and design reveals a penchant for variation rather than homogeneity. Moore (1998), for instance, examined twenty-three

doctorates in architecture programmes in the United States finding diversity in curriculum and submission formats, which he suggested provided greater options for student choice and selection. Radu (2006), more recently, has proposed that architecture should define the nature and content of doctorates of architecture and design according to the practical, pedagogical and other aims of the field rather than duplicating the characteristics and structure of other fields.

In design and the visual arts, new practice-based and professionally oriented degrees have appeared: the PhD (Studio), Practice-based PhDs and Professional Doctorates, including Doctors of Design. In addition to a range of other institutional agendas, these degrees have been developed as 'creative' alternatives to the conventional PhD and often refer to their 'professional' focus. Rust (2002), however, suggests that on closer examination many doctoral degree distinctions in design, e.g. practice-based, professional, traditional, do not translate into substantive curriculum differences. Thus, the question that design and the visual arts must answer is whether these alternative programmes are necessary or a significant and valued contribution to the fields.

Professional Doctorates and PhDs

The professional doctorate emerged in fields such as nursing, teaching and business to focus on the profession, the workplace and the university, concerns that are not addressed in the typical PhD (Lee, Green & Brennan, 2000). In the current second generation of professional doctorates, "the realities of the workplace, the knowledge and the improvement of the profession and the rigour of the university are being brought together in new relationships" (Maxwell 2003, p. 290). Such professional doctorates, aim to produce "professionals with formal research skills, along with specific understandings and dispositions, undertaking advanced research in the specific context of their workplaces" (Lee, Green & Brennan, p. 119).

The proliferation of professional doctorates globally as competition for the PhD has given way to some considered reflection on the purported differences between the two models (e.g. Hodell, Street & Laing 2002). Neumann (2005), for example, found many similarities between the two kinds of programmes, "the major difference between them lies in the target population and selection criteria for students. Financial differentiation through the charging of fees, at least in some disciplines and in some institutions, is another contrasting feature" (2005, p. 184). In

addition, Neuman's study confirmed the tenuous link in most professional doctorate programmes between the university and the workplace, also noting that most students preferred the professional doctorate because of its "easier framework and shorter thesis" (p. 186). Neumann concludes that, "the capacity to pay rather than the underlying purpose and structure of the degree will become the prime differentiating feature between professional doctorates and the PhD" (p. 186).

With specific respect to the PhD, Bourner, Bowden & Laing (2001) note that distinguishing the PhD from professional doctorates is difficult as neither format is homogenous and there is variation across and within institutions. Meanwhile, Allen, Smyth and Wahlstrom (2002) point to a move among institutions in Canada to expand the PhD curriculum to cover the territory of professional doctorates. In addition to the stigma attached to the professional versus the traditional PhD, they note that some PhDs already accommodate professional practice and creative work.

The Design Argument

Some doctorates in design and the visual arts are distinguished as having a professional focus in comparison to the conventional PhD, e.g. the Doctor of Design, Doctor of Visual Arts and PhD (Studio) models. However, it is not clear how the term professional is really relevant and comparable to that applied to other fields. Unlike professions such as nursing, teaching, management, etc., the pretensions of professional doctorates in art and design to be addressing workplace (practitioner) issues are questionable. As Laing and Brabazon (2007) point out in relation to the 'professional' character of creative arts doctorates, "a space for professional doctorates in creative arts—rather than practice-based work—raises a serious epistemological issue: what 'profession' is actually being discussed, labeled and described in and through this qualification? While the 'outcomes' or 'results' are often challenging to existing concepts of artistic creativity and cultural production, they

do not often have any immediate practical application in the way required by professional doctoral theses" (2007, p. 256). Indeed, the designation 'professional' is also debatable, given the lack of professional status of design disciplines (Chung & Whitfield 1999).

The inclusion of project work (designed artefacts, studio work, etc.) in the practice-based doctorates seems in some cases to be a de facto demonstration of the 'professional' character of the doctorate in design curriculum descriptions. Although Pedgely and Wormald (2007) call it a 'misnomer', the term practice-based research is widely used to refer to research programmes in art and design. Dallow (2003) describes practice-based research as located in the research in a specific problem (and resolution). Practice-based doctorates of art and design challenge students, as they require practitioners to reorient their practice to academic constraints (Hockey 2000; 2003; Hockey & Allen-Collinson 2000). Prentice (2000) suggests practice-based research in art and design represents an opportunity "to develop new models that replace the equally limiting and worn stereotypes of the lone researcher in the arts and humanities, and the scientist as a member of a directed project team" (2000, p. 532).

In addition to exemplifying 'creativity', some academics view the incorporation of project work in design doctorates as a particularly appropriate reflection of the field's real world concerns (Dallow 2003; Hughes 2006; Younes 2006). This incorporation of project work plays out in the text and rhetorical form of the doctoral submission leading to 'hybrid genres' unlike existing doctoral formats (Hughes 2006, p. 296). In the context of new doctoral formats, practice and professionalism are alluded to in design programmes in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom but the professionalism and practice—sometimes realised by project work—varies considerably.

The inclusion of substantial coursework in professional and practice-based doctorates and the reduced text requirements have made these, in some cases, the degree of

choice for fee-paying international and other students. In the absence of clear professional relevance of such degrees (e.g. Laing & Brabazon 2005), this economic characteristic has become significant. Thus, Neumann claims that "capacity to pay rather than the underlying purpose and structure of the degree" is the major differentiating factor between professional and traditional doctorates. Focusing on Australia and Design, Love (2003) notes the financial agenda for universities "a university innovation by which universities are able to gain additional funding by attracting a different cohort of students to that targeted by more traditional doctoral education (PhD)".

Australasia (Australia and New Zealand)

In Australasia, it is the newer universities and those recently converted from technology institutes to universities which have been most prolific in developing both professional doctorates and practice-based doctorates employing 'professional' rhetoric. Note the juxtaposition of practice and profession in the curriculum statement (abbreviated in the table below)

Griffith University Doctor of Visual Arts (Design)

This is a professional development programme with an integrated programme of independent research and coursework. It is designed for graduates seeking to extend their studio research and practice, and make original conceptual advancements within their chosen discipline. Graduates of the programme will possess the necessary expertise to provide leadership in their respective fields through the quality of their professional practice, research skills and the ability to articulate a theoretical position within a visual arts discourse. Graduates will possess the necessary expertise to provide leadership in their respective fields in the quality of professional practice, research skills, and the ability to articulate a theoretical position within a visual arts discourse. Thesis is 8-20,000 words plus project component.

Queensland University of Technology Doctor of Creative Industries (includes Fashion, Lighting, Multimedia, Sound and Web Designers)

The course comprises two components—coursework and professional projects. Coursework is undertaken at the beginning of the candidature and provides the essential conceptual tools candidates need for doctoral-level analysis and reflection on their professional practice and related contextual factors. Candidates will design, implement and evaluate three professional projects during the period of their candidature. The scale, scope and focus of these projects will be determined in consultation with mentors.

Auckland University of Technology (NZ): Doctor of Design (DDes)

The recently approved AUT DDes shows an institution keen to provide a degree for recruits from other design-related areas into an 'interdisciplinary' programme.

The Doctor of Design is an interdisciplinary professional doctoral degree designed to instil advanced research and practice in Design and Business Innovations. Critical Research Methods and Analysis; Design Thinking; Brand and Business Strategies; and Design Theory, Culture and Contexts are some of the key focus of the DDes to prepare graduates with integrated insights and approaches for creating value and competitiveness in product, system and service innovations.

The DDes programme is suited to "experienced professionals in business, marketing and the creative industries". The Doctor of Design has a first year of coursework (four 30-point compulsory papers) followed by two years for the Thesis. One of the coursework units is preparation for the doctoral proposal. Candidates may use work-based projects as research topics for their thesis. Entry criteria include the applicant having "at least five years' experience in design practice or in a comparable and related area". As

the programme has just been established no details are supplied of current candidates.

Swinburne University (AUS) Doctor of Design (Professional Doctorate)

The Swinburne DDes is offered alongside the PhD and Masters (Research) programme. Barron, Anderson and Jackson (2005) describe its genesis and its role as a catalyst for the continuing development of project-based research and designing as a scholarship. The authors acknowledge that "The DDes, while called a professional doctorate, could better be described as a practice-based doctorate and, as discussed later, is focused on a particular type of practice—the generation of knowledge through product" (2005, 66). The embodying and representation of knowledge in the (designed) outcome is a somewhat contested area in current debates around design research.

The programme requires a project outcome and reduces text requirements accordingly. Judging by existing submissions publicly available through the Australian Digital Thesis (ADT) archives the text component ranges between 20,000 – 30,000 words. The programme recruits students into a one-semester research induction programme at the end of which students have hopefully developed a research proposal and can be assigned to a relevant supervision team. The research induction programme provides an overview of research methods, topics in design and research skills training. Aimed at practicing designers, there have now been a number of submissions and continued enrolments.

North America

In North America, which has the longest history of awarding doctorates in design disciplines, beginning with the Illinois Institute of Technology, the inclusion of creative work and professional emphases into professional or

practice-base doctorates remains a peripheral enterprise. Notwithstanding, at least three institutions—the University of Baltimore (Doctor of Communication Design), Washington State Spokane (Doctor of Design) and Harvard University (Doctor of Design and PhD)—have explicitly differentiated an alternative ‘professional’ doctoral format from the conventional PhD curriculum.

University of Baltimore (US) Doctorate in Communications Design (DCD)

This is clearly offered as a professional entry qualification for student from disciplines other than design. The DCD is identified as a “first professional degree” requiring a minimum of 48 hours of coursework beyond the Master’s degree. Students specialise in one of four areas: user research, interaction design, government and public-sector applications and educational applications. Students are also required to submit a major project showing ‘a high degree of competence’ in one digital technology. No prior background in design is required and the degree would be completed over four years (12 credits per year by 4). Two examples of [completed] student work (with some links to web-based resources are offered. Three examples are noted below.

The relationship between the text and project is described in the following terms: “The project must be a significant, useful and executable work of application that demonstrates ability to apply professional skills of design and expression, to analyse a problem, to define an audience, and to integrate content, medium, and market [...] each project must include a well-developed, reflective written discussion which will include an audience and market analysis and a business or implementation plan, along with a rationale for the approach taken and a discussion of possible alternatives”. Thus, the Baltimore DCD is a discipline-specific degree for advanced professional development, emphasising market and business analysis. It attempts to recruit and train non-designers and includes compulsory project work.

Washington State University (United States): Doctor of Design

Washington State University offers a similar ‘professional’ characterisation while emphasising the equivalence of DDes with the PhD and other ‘professional’ aspects of their programme, “the DDes focuses on applied research and emphasizes the advance of knowledge in the design disciplines. It is intended for persons who are well versed and professionally advanced in the design profession and who seek to make original contributions to their fields”.

It is also claimed that “the DDes addresses a demonstrated void in design education by specifically bridging education, research, and practice within a philosophical and pedagogical framework of interdisciplinary inquiry and critical synthesis. The DDes educates students so that they will become more valuable to academic, business, and government organizations that require greater artistic, scientific and investigative skills”. Interdisciplinarity for WSU addresses relationships between Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Interior Design and other related disciplines.

The Doctor of Design (DDes) programme is intended to advance both the ‘art’ and ‘science’ of design. There is no contemplation of project work as part of the submitted outcome although a series of journal articles is a possibility. The DDes offers three areas of concentration: 1) History, Theory and Criticism 2) Physical Design and 3) People and Place. These concentrations fulfil specific needs in the design disciplines while at the same time building upon faculty expertise at Washington State University. Candidates must possess a Master’s degree to enter the programme and may come from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds. Current students of the programme (and their projects) are listed on the site but these have no distinctive characterisation that would distinguish them from a PhD programme.

Although the programme claims that “potential students come from a professional orientation rather than a research

orientation”, this would imply that their previous Masters degrees did not address research and/or that they had spent some substantial time in industry prior to returning to study. The Foundation Courses will be required of all students and composed of nineteen semester hours of graded coursework. In relation to the dissertation the notion of profession again occurs, “This scholarly account must advance the body of knowledge, and the art and science, of the declared disciplines. Toward this end, the student must clearly establish the implications of the dissertation on the endeavour of design as a professional practice”.

Harvard University GSD: Doctor of Design (DDes)

Harvard’s Graduate School of Design focuses on the broad built environment disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture and urban design rather than those design disciplines of smaller spatial and material scope, such as industrial or product design. Both the PhD and DDes programmes involve coursework while the DDes involves a greater body of coursework. Harvard candidates often describe the DDes as “a doctoral programme that focuses on applied research and emphasizes the advancement of knowledge within the disciplines of design and related fields. The DDes is intended for persons who wish to enhance a higher teaching and as also to pursue advanced professional careers”. In both the Harvard and WSU cases interdisciplinarity is referred to and developed through the coursework component and multiple disciplines addressed in the relevant school of faculty.

The site [accessed August 10, 2008] lists a mixed international and North American background cohort of twenty-seven current DDes students all with extensive teaching and practice backgrounds (including often Masters degrees from the United States); the alumni page lists 102 graduates. The brief descriptions of student projects include topics that would elsewhere be found in conventional PhD programmes. One distinctive feature is the extent to which projects recruit a range of disciplinary

sources, e.g. healthcare, religion, etc. into projects about urban, landscape and built environment projects, among others. Thus, in some respects the programme appears to recruit highly visible, experienced architects into projects exploring a wide range of design fields in a diverse range of human and built environments, who then may return to (advanced) practice.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom and to some extent in Australia the designation of choice for art and design degrees incorporating project work is the ‘practice-based’ doctorate although the term studio research is also used. In 1997 the UK Council for Graduate Education examined practice-based doctorates in the creative and performing arts (UKCGE, 1997), canvassing a wide range of views and aiming for some consensus. The report suggested a consensus on the need for a written thesis (between 30-40,000 words) and a creative work of equal weight and significance to the text, while the advancement of knowledge is achieved partly by practice. A reduction in word length merely on the basis of the inclusion of coursework subjects was not viewed as an acceptable pretext for the equivalence of a practice-based with traditional PhD.

In the United Kingdom, Candlin (2000) suggests some of the current variation in submission formats that currently exist in practice-based doctorates: “The length of the thesis also varies substantially, from a minimum of 10,000 words at Brighton University to a maximum of 80,000 words at the University of Hertfordshire. In some institutions the written component can take the form of an exhibition catalogue supporting the work, while in others it is more akin to a conventional doctoral thesis with students receiving supervision from the philosophy or art history departments” (2000, p. 97). Candlin finds fault in the UKGCE report in that images cannot stand alone as representations of research work but must be contextualised with text. This she argues reinforces the theory-practice divide that continues to

inform institutional responses to practice-based research. This variation is both flexible and responsive to creativity while also raising questions about the comparative value of project work.

Northumbria University (United Kingdom): Design Practice (Doctorate)

Practice-based doctorates in design disciplines are common in the United Kingdom as alternative submission formats to the PhD. That is many institutions (Royal College of Arts (RCA), Goldsmiths London University, etc.) offer a practice-based or studio option for the PhD incorporating project work and reduced text requirements. Northumbria's recently introduced Doctor of Professional Practice (DPP) takes a different approach.

The DPP is clearly offered as an advanced professional practice programme with a portfolio assessment and support document (15, 000 words). This on-line distance-learning course is run over 3 years (P/T 5 years) and has a taught first year shared with the Design Masters course, covering subjects such as Research Principles, Creative Thinking and Intellectual Property. The third semester focuses on research bridging modules including Project Management and Systems Thinking. The recruitment profile notes a focus on candidates in 'design-related professions', a profile similar to the AUT (New Zealand) and the University of Baltimore (United States) models.

This course is for those practitioners with more than two years experience in a design-related profession, who want the opportunity to develop higher level thinking skills while continuing to practice, with a view to enhancing their personal career and professional entrepreneurship. This Professional Doctorate will enable the development of role and career opportunities in, and towards, upper management, both commercial and academic, including: Strategic Planning, Global Project Community Management, New Knowledge Development and Resourcing, Market

innovation. At doctoral level, assessment involves a publishable portfolio, with a support document (not normally to exceed 15,000 words), to be orally defended at the viva. The portfolio and support document enables practitioners to demonstrate their ability to engage successfully in advanced scholarship, extend the forefront of the discipline and produce work of a publishable quality. No alumni profiles were available as the course has only recently been accredited.

Discussion

Despite some continuing support for the notion of practitioner doctorates (Lester 2004), there is increasing scepticism in many applied fields, (e.g. Ellis 2005) about whether the rhetoric and practice of professionalism in such degrees warrants their continued existence in competition with the PhD. The development of doctorates of design that more adequately respond to practice and profession has been a global phenomenon. The place of project work in such doctorates varies, as does the sense(s) of profession purportedly addressed.

A move in some institutions (Baltimore, Auckland University and Northumbria University) to recruit candidates from design-related or non-design professions has emerged as a particular direction for such programmes. In these and some other cases (e.g. Swinburne University), the incorporation of project work is seen to be an intrinsic part of the creative and profession-oriented direction of the programme and, as mentioned above, has become a common studio or project-based option in PhDs in the United Kingdom (and Australia). In other institutions (e.g. Harvard University, Washington State University) the professionally oriented doctorates of design rely on a more rhetorical link with industry as they do not incorporate project work and emphasise comparability with the PhD in principle and practice. They may recruit seasoned design professionals and academics into interdisciplinary programmes and projects with broad scope and resources demands (e.g. Harvard University).

The professionalism and disciplinary status of design remains an incomplete project. The somewhat tenuous link between the profession, practice and industry in some doctorates of design suggests a rhetorical ploy of doubtful practical significance, a phenomenon already noted in the extant copious literature on professional doctorates in other fields. While the practice orientation of a degree seems less contentious, as Pedgley and Wormald (2007) have shown, it also may be a somewhat empty term and the same may also be true of allusions to design professions. Perhaps design fields and institutions should clarify their curriculum and mission statements before further doctoral differentiation becomes confusing.

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