



Studio based research in architecture: the legacy and new horizons offered by digital technology

Jules Moloney

University of Auckland, NZ
<j.moloney@auckland.ac.nz>

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The position of architecture as a discipline straddling the arts and sciences is reflected in the range of research undertaken at post doctoral level. In general architectural doctorates have been "legitimised" by pursuing either scientific or art historical methods of enquiry with studio based research the exception rather than the norm. This is surprising given the dominance of the studio design project in undergraduate degrees. Some educators argue that even at this level the design project is a form of research that contributes to the disciplines knowledge base (Necdet 1992). Further evidence for acceptance of undergraduate design as a form of research is the publication and subsequent dialogue on student work by leading academics and teachers.

The design project in the context of professional practice is also championed as a form of research with arguments for "critical practice" eloquently presented by Peter Eisenman (1988) and Diane Agrest (1991) These two are examples of the symbiotic relationship between academia and leading architectural practitioners. Both started as prominent theorist / teachers who, having tested and refined their ideas in the academic design studio, have gone on to produce buildings that operate as "texts" that extend the knowledge base of architecture. Symbiosis between university and practitioners operates across the disciplines but is exceptionally prevalent in architecture. One could argue that the undergraduate design studio has been the "ideas hothouse" that has extended the knowledge base and field of enquiry for twentieth century architecture. Thus it would seem an anomaly that doctorates in architecture that utilise studio based design as the vehicle of inquiry are under represented.

This paper clarifies the status of studio based doctorates in architecture via an international survey. Course requirements are compared and successful abstracts are examined for common threads. A studio research agenda that has the potential to break the traditional divide between scientific and humanities based approaches is proposed. This builds on earlier work by the author on the development of digital procedures – generative modelling, immersive editing and computer aided construction – which may transform the practice of architecture. (Moloney, 1998). Rather than extend this argument by written thesis the framework for a series of studio projects is outlined. These proposals are discussed in relation to the requirements of the doctorate in fine arts offered by the University of Auckland.