

Open Source Thesis Guide at the GSD

An interview with Michael Hooper on the topic of thesis and preparing to do thesis.

Sushi meets Architecture with Yufeng Zheng's thesis, Fall 2016.

On the disputation of thesis with Kant.

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Spring 2016



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Courses:

Analytic Methods of Urban Planning: Quantitative /Fall 2015 (M1)

Preparation for Independent Thesis Proposal for MUP, MAUD, or MLAUD /Fall 2015

Past Courses:

Urbanization and International Development [GSD 5319]

Advanced Workshop in Participatory Urban Planning and Design [GSD 5468] [Taught in conjunction with the Harvard Kennedy School's DPI 682, Solving Problems Using Technology]

Public Participation in Planning and Development: Theory and Practice [GSD 5335]

Thesis Preparation Seminar: Theory and Methods for Graduate Research [GSD 9204]

Analytic Methods: Quantitative [GSD 5215]

First Semester Core Urban Planning Studio [GSD 1121]

Social Agency Lab Research Seminar

What do you understand to be a thesis and its purpose?

I think your question is a good one and it's the one that provides the starting point for the UPD thesis prep seminar. It's important to note that within the GSD, and certainly within UPD, the definition of what constitutes a thesis is more expansive than in some other academic contexts. In UPD, this is particularly the case, since we have both urban design and urban planning students working in the thesis track together. So the truth of the matter is that our theses, in the department and in the school, are considerably different, and more diverse, than those in many other parts of the university. If you go to, let's say, anthropology, many theses look the same, they feel the same, even though they do focus on different sites and different subjects. But methodologically they feel relatively similar. And that is also true in many other fields, ranging from economics to sociology. These more standard theses are more uniform in methodology, length and presentation style than theses at the GSD. This is primarily because we have no canonical method. This could be considered a real weakness of our fields – and probably most economists or anthropologists would be troubled by our lack of a common methodology – but in fact it is incredibly helpful because it forces us to ask: with so many differences across our theses what is actually the common thread in our research efforts?

If you look at urban planning theses, they are incredibly diverse. These include projects that range from something that feels exactly like an “architecture” thesis to something that feels exactly like a history thesis, to everything in between, including theses as films, plays, you name it. And yet, I think there is something very common across these theses, and this commonality touches on something that has been common to theses for that last 500 years. In our thesis prep seminar, we read this great article that traces the history of the thesis. What's interesting is that the thesis hasn't changed much

since its first development: it's an argument, a defensible argument that is public. In short, it's a contribution to public knowledge. This is very different than a studio course or a class where you produce something for a faculty member according to some specification that they set out on a specific topic. It's also not for a private or limited audience, in the way most course and studio work is. This means the topic has to be decided by you. You make an argument around a question or problem in the world. That argument could be a design argument or it could be another type of argument. And, as others have done for the last half millennium, you then have to substantiate those claims through a series of choices which you justify. And, importantly, the thesis is public – it doesn't just go on your hard drive, it doesn't just get submitted to a faculty member – you make a contribution to the body of ‘what is known.’ That means you also have to establish ‘what is known,’ and say “this is what is known about my topic, and this is how I have contributed beyond that.” So, the common threads of the thesis over time are that it's public, it's defensible, it involves arguments or claims that are substantiated, it involves choices that are justified, and it answers questions that respond to some abstract or real problem. I think that's relatively common across most theses and this is where we start the UPD thesis prep seminar. This identification of common threads in theses – not only between current students, but also from centuries of thesis students – is really useful because otherwise, people can feel they have very little in common and are just working on their own private, personal assignment. One student might say “Ok, I'm working on urban landscapes in China” while another would say “I'm working on art installations in Rio de Janeiro” and they might think they have nothing in common. But, in fact, these two students have a lot to say to each other because they are engaged in the task of producing a thesis, which while they are diverse, also have these historically shared elements. They are making justifiable choices in forming an argument that relates to some problem in the world – they might be going about this in different ways, but their intellectual task in adding to the store of public knowledge and expanding the frontier of knowledge on their respective topics involves similar intellectual logic at the broadest level.

How do people begin if they come to thesis prep without a topic?

We talk about this as a kind of ‘dance’ – that you can't really get an advisor until you know what you're doing, but you can't know what you're doing totally until you have an advisor. There is an inherent tension there. So we help students articulate what their broad issue is – because most theses start with an issue or problem – and then start to work through how to nail that down into a tractable question. Part of this involves finding an



Ultimately, no one really wants to know what your arguments or claims are—and this is true whether your argument is a design or something else—until you open a series of important “doors” about why your thesis question is important in the first place. Once you open this question door, then you can open the second door, which is: what’s the frontier of knowledge?

advisor who is supportive and has knowledge that you want to tap. But part of it also involves advancing your own thinking by finding out where the relevant frontier of knowledge lies.

What are the steps to producing a 'good' thesis?

I think a useful metaphor in this regard looks at a thesis as a way of “opening doors.” We talk about this a great deal in the UPD thesis prep course. Ultimately, no one really wants to know what your arguments or claims are—and this is true whether your argument is a design or something else—until you open a series of important “doors” about why your thesis question is important in the first place. Once you open this question door, then you can open the second door, which is: what’s the frontier of knowledge? Because every thesis has some sort of frontier of knowledge related to it. What has been done? And how am I going to make a contribution beyond that? Now your audience can begin to say “You have an important topic on hand and it sounds like you know what has been done and that you’re going to make a contribution beyond this threshold. This sounds interesting and like a contribution.” And then people are likely to ask: “but how are you going to make that contribution?” And then you, as the thesis student, can respond by saying: “...well this is my methodology.” If you skip any of those doors, which we often do in design theses, people often end up baffled and your thesis ends up seeming like a personal rumination that is of little relevance to other people. In effect, people will be relatively uninterested in your arguments, whether rooted in design or some other mode of scholarship, until you establish what your methodology for making claims is, and in turn they need to know what the frontier of knowledge is before they can appreciate whether your work will make a contribution to it, and most importantly, this all hinges on what your question is and what the abstract or real problems are that are at its heart. So, I think a ‘good’ thesis can be many things, but at least in the UPD department, we try to drive home that a ‘good’ thesis is one that takes the listener and reader through these doors and builds an argument in such a way that, by the time you come to your argument, which is maybe a design, or maybe another mode of argumentation, people have been fully brought on board in terms of why this is important and why they should listen to you. Personally, I think that is a ‘good’ thesis, but this definition still leaves an incredible range of options open for how you might actually go about doing this, methodologically, etc.

You mentioned that this becomes public. What is done with these theses after people graduate? Or what is your viewpoint on what should be happening? How is this knowledge shared?

The thesis is public in many senses. And, it’s public in a way that other work at the GSD typically is not. For theses there is ostensibly the idea that a random person can come in and that they can ask you a question where there is a burden of proof on you to justify your argument to them. So, the thesis is public in that it is defended publicly. But, also, the kinds of justifications you bring to bear in making your arguments have to be credible through some external source of knowledge, in that some person could come in, and they would still have to find your arguments credible, even if they haven’t been fully inculcated in the culture of the GSD – and even if they’re not even a Designer, or Architect, or Urban Planner. So with a thesis, there is the idea that there is a burden on you to make arguments that are credible beyond the walls of this building and even beyond the university. This convention is at least 500 years old and has evolved from the public “disputation” that was the form that most theses took. People still view theses as these public events, so you will find people saying, “Hang on, I’m really interested in that. It’s a thesis review; I must go to that and ask a question.” So there’s a deep norm there that goes all the way back to the beginning of the thesis – that the argumentation at the heart of the thesis is public. In fact, the earliest theses, which predated print, were just verbal arguments, and those were open. People were able to come dispute the claims you were making. In most thesis programs around the world, still to this day, this is still somehow at their core – it’s public in the sense that anybody should be able to dispute the claims you make. As a result, the argument you make must be able to withstand the disputation of these potential disputants. Which is quite different than other kinds of work we do at the university. No member of the public is likely to come into your seminar class and say, “Sorry is that your term paper? I need to read that. I dispute your claims!” But in a thesis, the wider public can come and say “I dispute this, or at least I have questions about this.” And instead of going, “Can someone call security?” there is a burden on the thesis producer to say, “Ok, thank you for your comment. Here’s how I respond.” Finally, the thesis is also public in the sense that it goes in the library. Anybody in the world can look at them, particularly now that they are digitized.

With this ‘disputation,’ is there a misalignment with how some of the departments conduct their thesis program? This is actually the first time I’m hearing about this, and I’m coming from Architecture – and now I’m also within Urban Planning. With Architecture, Landscape Architecture, etc. is there something missing there?

I don’t think so. I think the way reviews are advertised – thesis reviews – they’re very public. There’s a list, and I’m not saying that someone from the public is always in every thesis review, but I can assure you that if a member

of the public went to a thesis review, because of those very powerful norms, it would not feel strange. And that person could ask questions, and the student's thesis coordinator would likely encourage the students to really defend their claims against those questions. I'm sure that across the departments there is a strong idea that the thesis is a "public document" and that the contribution is public and open to scrutiny in a way that few studio reports or final papers ever are.

On sharing the thesis – I don't know if it's a department or program by program basis – but there are a lot of students who express the willingness and desire to cross boundaries,

"We talk about this as a kind of 'dance' – that you can't really get an advisor until you know what you're doing, but you can't know what you're doing totally until you have an advisor."

or to cross-fertilize. This may also depend on a student's individual will to go out and find the potentiality, or could be more of an informal process that happens on the trays. I was wondering if you could comment on this process – how the thesis program may allow or encourage it, or if informal, what that means for theses development.

I think interdisciplinarity is very important. We were just talking about this the other day with the thesis prep students, and they are really eager for that. One of the aspects about the UPD thesis track is that it is already quite interdisciplinary, in that you have urban design and urban planning students together in the program, and it always becomes a little bit murky who is who. Once you start to align yourself with ideas and arguments rather than with your degree program, what you find is that an urban design student might be working on Indonesia and so is an urban planning student. So they have more in common in some ways – at least in this one dimension – than two students working in urban design, but on radically different sites, at different scales, and relying on different methods. One of the things we're trying to do in UPD is to say "Look, here you all are in these different degree programs, and you're working on a thesis. That's great. Now let's start to think a little bit more specifically at how you're going about posing questions and establishing arguments. Some of you are doing interviews in your theses. Three of those are leading to designs. Two of those are historically oriented. So there are differences and similarities. Where there are similarities, let's say in terms of doing interviews – might you be able to share similar experiences, or how to fill out an IRB submission, or simply stories of hard knocks and successes?" Or you might observe, eight students in the cohort are drawing on historical design precedents. Very interesting. Some of those are planners, some of those are designers. What do you have to share methodologically there? Looking at these

topical and methodological overlaps between students is often more useful than saying, "Well we are all in the MAUD degree, and you are all in a MUP degree." This kind of interdisciplinarity is again important because, as mentioned earlier, we don't have a canonical research method that is a standard method that connects our questions to our claims regarding that question. So we inevitably have to draw on other fields' methods. Theses also tend to be interdisciplinary because usually when you're at the forefront of a field, you're bleeding over into other fields. Most interesting work starts to get interdisciplinary. Thinking about what you're doing, and why you're doing it, rather than focusing on which degree program you're in is probably very healthy.

Well this is very helpful, thank you. Perhaps there is a closing statement we could give the students?

My pleasure. I think the thesis process is very exciting, partially because what constitutes a thesis at the GSD is so diverse. In many departments or schools you'd be much more constrained, with a necessary focus on the core method of the respective field, whether that is an ethnography or an econometric analysis. In our fields, we have more freedom in deciding how to go about our research, but this also puts a bigger burden on us to justify why we are doing our theses in the way we are. I think that's actually really healthy to do, and actually very intellectually honest. It's not about a methodology in particular that our field has normatively decided is appropriate. That would be actually quite unscientific. In principle, science is supposed to work in such a way that you have a question and you choose a methodology that's most appropriate to answer the question at hand. I actually think theses at the GSD generally do that, or at least in UPD we strive to have students develop these kinds of robust justifications for the choices they make in their research. Perhaps it seems odd to say that the design school is a relatively scientific place when it comes to research, but I think we are, or should be, in that we ask questions then ask what methodology we can deploy to answer this question the best. In contrast, most disciplines, even ones that claim to be very scientific, are often very unscientific and they deploy a much more standard set of approaches that their field deems to have merit. I think our approach is actually quite intellectually robust, but it does (or should) also put a huge burden on students, because you have to say, "There's no natural way to answer the question." I have to look at the question and say, "How do I best try to resolve this problem?" And that often means learning new methodologies. But that's also what makes thesis work so intellectually satisfying and so much fun.



When Architecture Meets Japanese Culinary Art

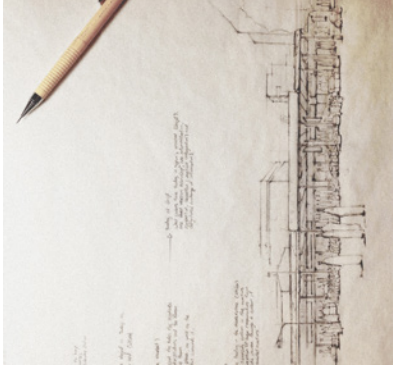
Yufeng Zheng, advised by Jorge Silvetti

“Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”

—Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *French Gourmet*¹

By articulating one's rhythm between space and food, this thesis seeks to reconstruct consumer attitude and sincerity toward cultural cuisine. The industrialization of food provides opportunities for our diverse world to sample and taste extraordinary cuisines from the comfort of home. However, as these regional methods and culinary traditions become commodified, consumers are often divorced from the delectable and enticing knowledge ingrained within these intangible heritages.

As cultures are stirred together by technology and globalization, the identity of traditional ceremonial and theatrical foods is being challenged. The essence of cuisine cannot be defined by ingredients and manner of cooking alone; it needs to be justified through cultural characteristics and



practice of making.

Using Sushi as a “main ingredient,” this thesis proposes two culinary interventions to preserve, enhance, and transmit attributes of cultural practice and performative aspects of Japanese culinary art. The first intervention is situated within a culturally submersed site where a “simple” way of life is gradually being consumed by globalization. The second intervention is located in a globalized society where domestic foods of foreign cultures are being celebrated as exotic cuisines. How can architecture shape our intimacy with cuisines? How can our experience of cuisine reshape our perception towards culture and consumption?

1 Kennedy, Mary Frances, Fisher (San Francisco: North Point Press, 2986).

Yufeng Zheng is an M. Arch I AP student who recently wrapped up the last semester with his thesis that seeks to uncover the threshold of tradition and commodification within an aesthetics of an Architecture of and for Japanese Culinary Art. Doing most of his design work by hand – something done very little these days – resulted in a refined and meticulously well-crafted drawings and models that seemed to speak to the kind craft that is central to Japanese Culinary Art. As far as accomplishing all of this research and production work, Yufeng says that

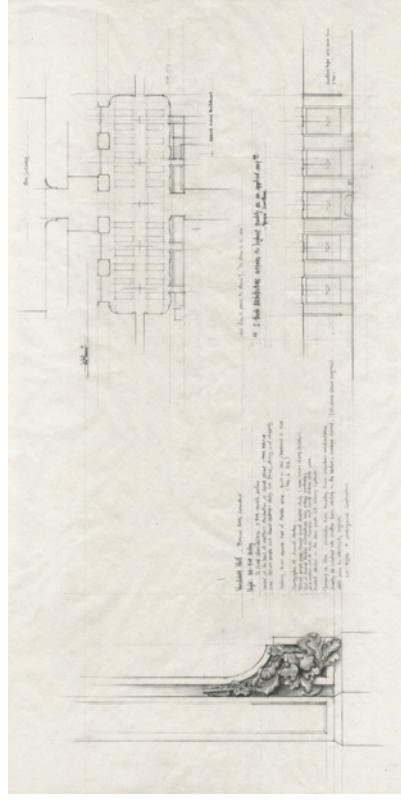
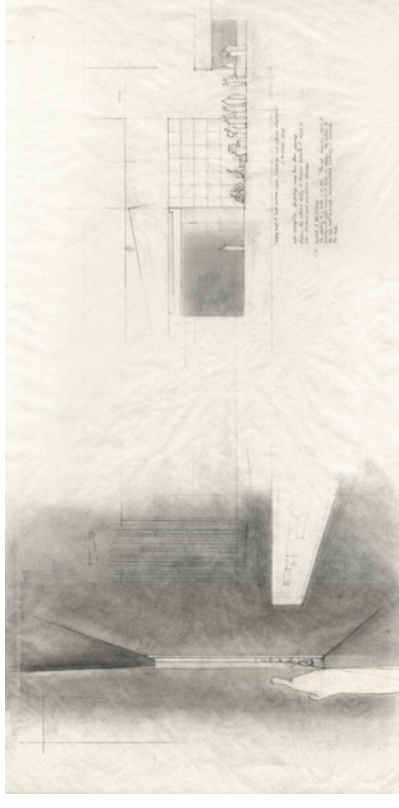
I have often been told to ‘produce only what is necessary’. I think the same advice should be applied to thesis research. During my thesis semester, I would find myself flipping through more books than necessary. It is so easy to get caught up on new discoveries and readings, especially when you are interested in the topic.

If you're wondering how the topic of Japanese Culinary Art and the making of Sushi came about in an Architecture thesis, it's not such a straightforward proposal to execution. There's merit to jumping into the task and defining your goal as you work through questions, a methodology is more likely to develop in the course of your research.

I just picked a topic of personal interest and went with it. In the beginning, I didn't know if the topic would manifest itself into a thesis or not. My first thesis topic was on “methodology of design: analog and digital.” Over the course of thesis prep, I realized that this topic did not align with what I had in mind for a design thesis. Although my first topic did not find itself into my final thesis, all the research I conducted over the prep thesis semester definitely influenced my final design approach and execution.

Throughout his ‘thesis semester,’ Yufeng made it into a fun endeavor – even making a trip to Japan for more “thesis research.” While reflecting on his experience, we asked him to share a bit of advice for those who are just beginning to think about their thesis.

Pick a topic that is of personal interest and have fun. I think thesis is a project where students have the freedom to explore and discover their own design interests. After thesis prep, you will find yourself becoming a little expert in your topic. Sometimes you might feel like you are obliged to show all of your research during presentations, or produce diagrams for every discovery... It is ok not to present everything. “Less is more...” And plus, presentations usually go by faster than you expect.



Kant's disputation of 1770: the dissertation and the communication of knowledge in early modern Europe

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Originally published in *Endeavour* Vol.31 No.2

Kant's disputation of 1770 at his inauguration as the metaphysics professor at Königsberg is a good example of the nature of the early modern dissertation and its use as a means of communicating knowledge. The public disputation played an important part in the teaching, examination, publication and ceremonial life of the medieval university. Originally prepared as a text for the public disputation, the dissertation communicated the teachings of individual scholars and institutions and was used by eminent early modern scholars to introduce their ideas and findings. Kant's use of his 1770 disputation also reveals the different channels of communication, both private and public, that paid close attention to knowledge published in dissertations.

Kant in the chair

On 21 August 1770, Immanuel Kant held a disputation at the University of Königsberg as part of the inauguration of his professorship in logic and metaphysics. His *dissertatio*, or thesis, *De Mundi Sensibilis atque Intelligibilis Formis et Principiis* (On the Forms and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World), marked the beginning of his critical philosophy (Figure 1). Perhaps odd to the modern reader, the author Kant did not defend the dissertation himself. Rather, he appointed his student Marcus Herz to play the role of defendant, or traditionally known as respondent, and three others to serve as the opponents, while he chose to preside over the disputation as the *praeses* or chair. On the day of the disputation, Kant sent the king of his country, Frederick the Great of Prussia, a copy of his dissertation with a note of dedication. Although the dated note was brief, the page next to the title page of the printed dissertation was a very formal dedication to Friedrich, 'the most august, serene, and powerful prince and lord' (*augustissimo, serenissimo atque potentissimo principi ac domino*), to whom the new philosophy professor offered 'the first fruits of his office' (*muneris primitias*). Within weeks of the disputation, he sent copies of

this dissertation to prominent intellectual figures in Germany, including physicist Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728–1777), mathematician Johann Georg Sulzer (1720–1779) and philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786). And it did not take him long to receive feedback. Herz, the respondent, visited Mendelssohn in Berlin in September and wrote a letter to Kant describing the reaction to his dissertation. Lambert wrote Kant a letter in mid-October, and Sulzer did so in early December, both also discussing the dissertation. The communication between Kant and his colleagues on this dissertation continued for several years [1].

This is a prime example of the way that eminent thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used the practice of dissertation to communicate their ideas to a wider audience. A closer inspection of Kant's deployment of his dissertation also reveals how the early modern dissertation gave rise to its modern offspring, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis.

The Oral Debate

The dissertation began as an important ceremony in university life, a key tool for teaching, examining and publishing ideas. It was, in general, synonymous with disputation, a highly formalized oral debate following principles of dialectical logic and played out between four different parties. The respondent, who defended a given position or thesis, was the focus of attention. The opponents, usually two or more, tried to fault the respondent by demonstrating problems in the thesis or in the respondent's argument. The respondent and the opponents took the lower podium in the auditorium when they spoke. The upper podium was reserved for the *praeses*, usually a professor. The public disputation was, by definition, open to an audience, the fourth role, consisting of the faculty and students of the university, and noblemen, doctors, magistrates and clergy from the university town and afar.

The public disputation usually took place with pomp and grandeur on important feast days or holidays in an auditorium on campus or a great cathedral in town. The most celebrated form was probably the *quodlibetal* disputation, in which a professor, acting as the respondent, accepted any challenges on any issue from anyone in the audience. It was, of course, an audacious way of demonstrating his learning as well as the intellectual standing of his institution. Consequently, the public disputation was an important part of the ceremonial life of the university [2].

Critical Exchange

Since the Middle Ages, the lecture and the disputation had been the two major pedagogical tools of the university. In the lecture, the professor directed his class to read a canonical text and offered his commentary.

The class then used regularly held public disputations to conduct a close and collective examination of the questions raised. This nature of critical exchange made the disputation a great form of examination, exposing a student's understanding of his professor's teaching, his impromptu reasoning and his delivery. The most important form of examination for students was, not surprisingly, their degree examination, known as inaugural disputation. If a degree candidate successfully defended the given question or thesis in the disputation, his graduation ceremony, known as promotio, followed later the same day or the next day (Figure 2). Because this ceremony was an occasion on which the corporation of doctors celebrated the inception of new members, the disputation for it was called inaugural. It was the text prepared for the inaugural disputation that evolved into today's doctoral dissertation [3].

One of the most important functions of disputation was the publication or making public of new ideas. This oral publication worked in several ways. In the Middle Ages, a public disputation usually consisted of two sessions: the professor let his students assume the roles of both respondent and opponents on a question (quaestio in Latin) of his choice, before making his position public by reviewing the arguments

and delivering a determination (determinatio). This was also given orally, although some professors wrote down their determinations afterward or had them transcribed. Alternatively, the professor might arrange a series of themed questions that communicated an overarching message. Thomas Aquinas, for example, disputed questions on several central themes, including 124 questions on truth, 101 on evil, 21 on amina and 36 on virtues among others [4]. Finally, a scholar could simply take his views to the podium and try to defeat opponents, real or hypothetical, in a debate. In 1486, for example, the great humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, then aged only 23, proposed a public disputation in Rome early the following year, in which he defended the 900 theses that made up his philosophical system. He invited the Pope, the College of Cardinals, and all philosophers and theologians in Italy, even offering to pay any challengers their travelling expenses [5]. As it turned out, however, the Pope banned the proposed disputation. Three decades later, Martin Luther likewise wanted to present his case to the entire Christian world, including the Pope, so he proposed a public disputation on the Church's practice on indulgences by, at least as the legend goes, posting his famous 95 theses on the door of the Schloßkirche in Wittenberg [6].

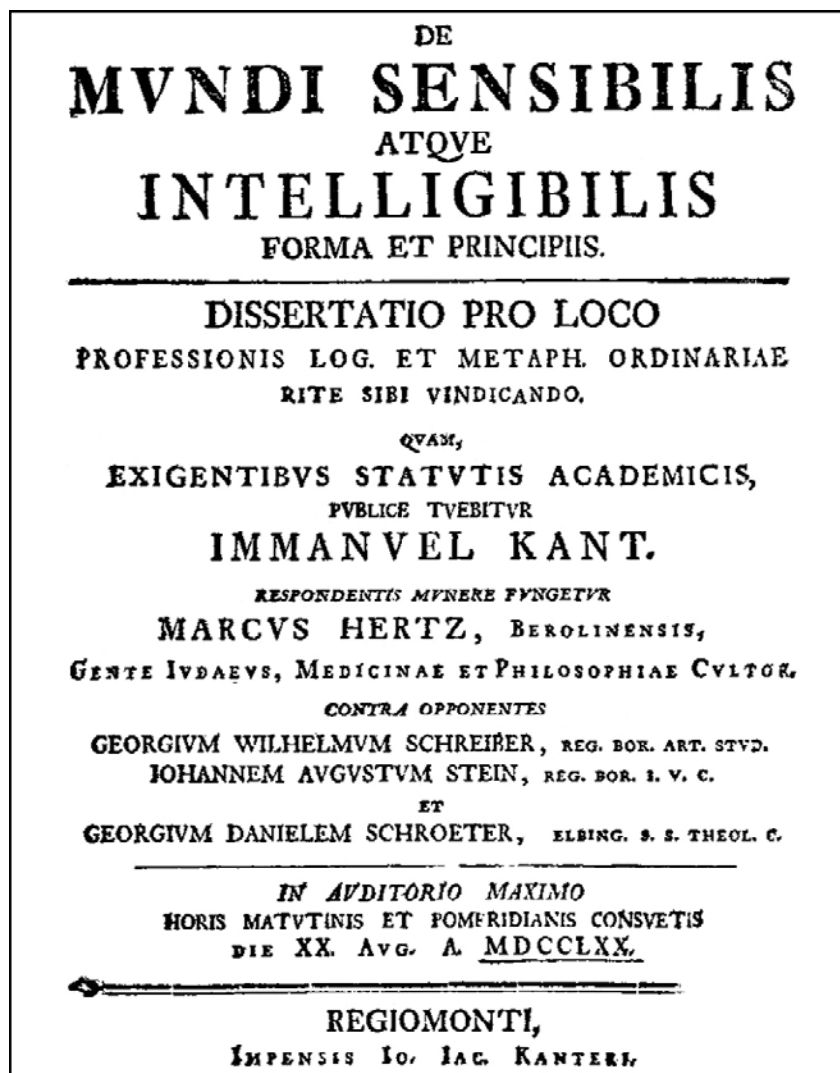
The Power of Print

Although these modes of oral publication continued long after the appearance of print, disputants were also quick to exploit the power of this new medium. Pico published his theses in print, months ahead of the proposed disputation so that they could reach his potential opponents and audience. And the Reformation seems to have induced the first large-scale printing of disputations, with protestant reformers and their opponents using print to advance their interpretations of Christianity. Luther, for example, printed and circulated his 95 theses widely, as he did dozens of other disputations.

There is a subtle but important difference between the written forms of Aquinas' disputed questions and Pico's (or Luther's) theses. Although both were products of the disputation, Aquinas wrote his determinations after the oral debate, whereas Pico wrote his theses before the debate. Today's doctoral dissertation, written before its oral defence, therefore bears a greater resemblance to Pico's thesis.

It took a long time for the textual dissertation to become standardized in earlymodernEurope. The earliest forms were simply circulars that announced the disputants, the question, date and place of the disputation (Figure 3). As the disputation turned from a short, yes-or-no question to a collection of theses (as for Pico and Luther), the print component of disputation got more substantial. Printed theses, however, remained a

(Below) Figure 1. Title page of Immanuel Kant's 1770 dissertatio, or thesis, De Mundi Sensibilis atque Intelligibilis. Courtesy of Immanuel Kant Information Online.



rarity until the late seventeenth century when printing a dissertation for inaugural disputation became common in places such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Scotland. By this time, the textual body had evolved into an integral, coherent thesis like Kant's that consisted of an overarching argument, supported by elaboration, demonstration and provision of evidence.

In Central and Northern Europe, the dissertation was most commonly printed on quarto paper, and its title page usually indicated the discipline of the dissertation (theological, juridical, medical or philosophical, for instance), the subject matter (*De anima*, for example), the occasion (*pro gradu*, *pro licentiate* or, in Kant's case, *pro loco*), the date of the public disputation, the name of the praeses, enlarged on the top, and the name of the respondent down below. The printer's information was often given at the bottom of the title page. Depending on the requirement of individual universities, the name of the disputant's university or even the name of his rector might be featured. The length could range from a dozen to over a hundred pages. More important, just as the formalized academic debate was known as a disputation or dissertation, so these terms were also applied interchangeably to the written thesis.

What did the textual dissertation communicate?

At one level, the dissertation was a tool for teaching and so communicated what was taught by a professor or an institution. We know, for example, that Copernican astronomy was defended in two disputations chaired by Michael Maestlin, Kepler's professor, at Heidelberg in 1582 [7]. When early modern academics began to deliberate on the nature and virtue of chemistry, they also examined it through disputation. Thomas Erastus, an opponent of alchemy, and Andreas Libavius and Daniel Sennert, proponents of chemistry, all published their positions in dissertations [8]. This does not mean, however, that dissertations simply followed intellectual trends of their age. In fact, authors at the forefront of learning used dissertations to advance new ideas

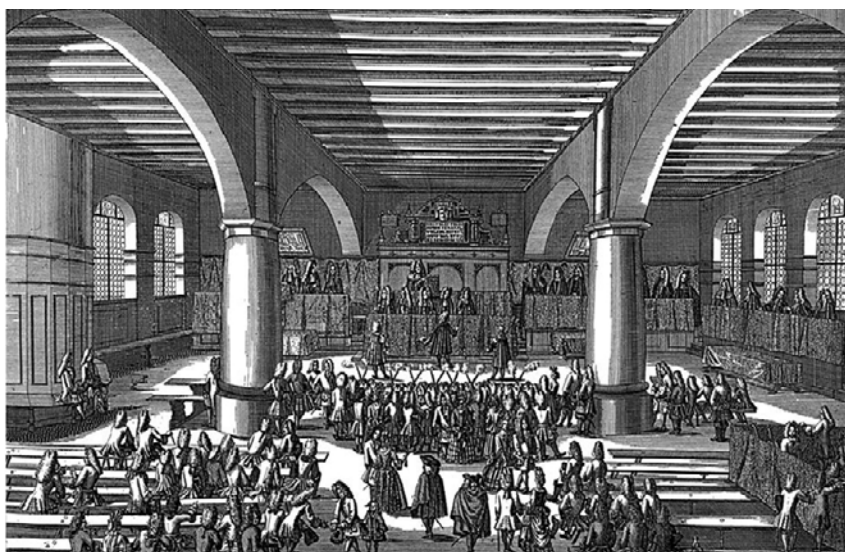
or findings. Leibniz's inaugural disputation on the principle of the individual was the basis for his famous monadology. The great botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) also published many of his important findings with dissertations, collecting them together in his *Amoenitates academicae* (*Academic Delights*) [9].

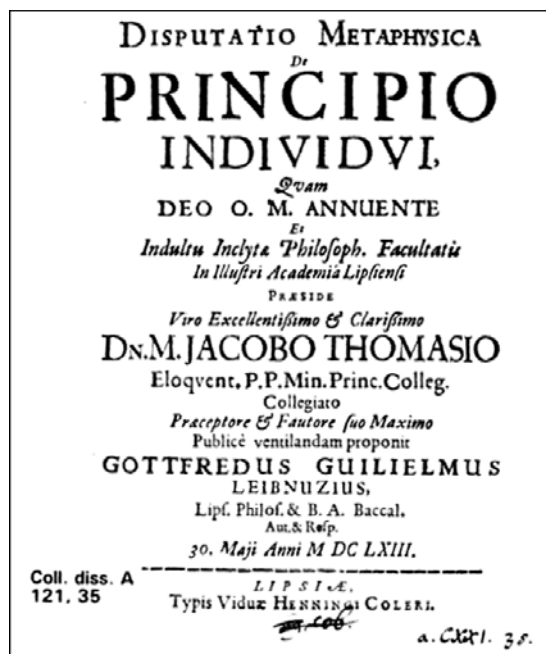
Kant's 1770 dissertation, which opened the period of his critical philosophy, reveals several aspects of disputation that have since gone out of favour. First, there were many different forms of dissertation. While today's doctoral thesis is often the only kind in practice, the purpose of Kant's dissertation *pro loco* (for a place in the faculty) was to grant him a professorship. There was also the dissertation *pro receptione* – the predecessor of today's habilitation thesis in German academia – which was required of anyone wishing to teach as an unsalaried lecturer (or *privatdozent* in German) [10]. Also printed were the theses for exercise disputations, which were held to help students prepare for their inaugural disputations.

Second, Kant followed the medieval tradition of distinguishing between the author and the defendant. Today, it is taken for granted that degree candidates write their doctoral theses and defend them *viva voce* (in their living voice). Throughout the eighteenth century, however, the inaugural dissertation in Germany and Sweden was normally written by the professorial praese. This was typical of early modern inaugural dissertation, which had evolved from the medieval practice of questions posed by a professor being answered by his students. Although what was presented to the audience had changed from a question to an essay-like thesis, the early modern professor inherited the responsibility for preparing the thesis. The degree candidate's task remained to show to an open community his understanding of the assigned question or thesis by sustaining it in face of objections. The praeses and the respondent essentially shared the credit for the dissertation: each sent out copies of it as gifts, and contemporary bibliographers were happy to attribute it to both the praeses and respondent.

Third, Kant's dissertation also illustrates the different social and intellectual uses to which the early modern dissertation could be put. The author of a dissertation sent it to their family, friends, colleagues and patrons, either as a personal gift or to invite intellectual discussion. The copy that Kant dedicated to Frederick the Great might have worked more as a gift of social or political nature. By contrast, the copies for Lambert, Sulzer and Mendelssohn were invitations for intellectual discussions, and indeed the recipients replied shortly with their comments. Fourth, the discussions that Kant's dissertation generated shed light on the importance of the dissertation for the communication of knowledge in the early modern period. The great numbers of authors in Central and Northern Europe who communicated their teachings and findings with dissertations is testimony to the importance of this medium. Scholars discussed dissertations in private, most notably in their correspondence. There were also public outlets for

(Below) Figure 2. A graduation ceremony, *promotio*. Five candidates, standing on the lower podium, were promoted to their doctoral degrees, while the praeses took the upper podium, as in a disputation. The grandiose space, a big crowd of guests, well-dressed ladies, and cheer-leaders all indicate the ceremonial nature of the promotion. Reproduced from Johann Georg Puschner's *Amoenitates Altdorfiae*. Courtesy of Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen.





dissertations, including their publication as individual books. Popular dissertations were often published twice, three times, or even more, sometimes decades apart [11], revealing the public interest in this mode of communication. Scientific journals and literary magazines, such as *Acta Eruditorum*, *Göttingische Philosophische Bibliothek*, *Journal des Savants* and *Mercure de France*, gave dissertations another public platform [12]. In Germany, especially, there were repeated efforts to publish dissertation abstracts that digested the latest dissertations published in European universities. Even in face of this growing value of the textual thesis, the importance of the oral disputation for knowledge communication cannot be ignored. For example, there were plenty of heretical ideas that received a public airing thanks to disputation. Spinozism, for example, often identified with atheism, was seen as a dangerous doctrine by every religious authority across Europe. Consequently, as Jonathan Israel shows, theologians and philosophers in Germany and the Baltic countries often organized disputations to debunk it [13]. Ironically, since the disputation gave both proponents and opponents an opportunity to elaborate their positions, the disputations against Spinozism gave assigned spokespersons the chance to put up a robust defence. The oral disputation was therefore a means to get controversial ideas heard in a generally repressive ancien régime.

Today's dissertation

The dissertation we are familiar with today is the product of several relatively long-term intellectual and cultural changes in early modern Europe that caused the disintegration of the disputation as an institution that

incorporated teaching, examination, publication and academic ceremony. The disputation suffered severe criticisms by Renaissance humanists and received revived criticisms by Enlightenment savants like Voltaire [14]. Having fallen out of favour, many kinds of disputation were unable to stage a comeback and died out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The doctoral dissertation and defence has survived largely due to its ceremonial importance for the candidate and the university. As the responsibility of writing the dissertation gradually shifted from professor to student, the textual work was able to take on its current role of serving as a specimen of the candidate's qualification for a doctoral degree. With a new world order in which we the moderns won the battle against the ancients to make novelty a welcome intellectual value, the originality of a dissertation became increasingly important, and with the Romantic emphasis on the creative nature of the author, it finally became a necessary virtue of the mature scholar. Developments in Germany during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were particularly important for the emergence of the modern dissertation. At this time, the universities in France and England were no longer prominent sites of knowledge production, whereas in Germany the university was at the centre of intellectual and cultural life. Furthermore, as Germany emerged as a scientific and intellectual superpower in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its model of research university along with its degree requirements spread across Europe and eventually over the world. Kant's stature helped elevate the intellectual and social standing of philosophy, shaped the model of the research university with its emphasis on pure knowledge and thereby contributed to the arrival of the modern PhD degree [15].

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- 2 For an updated bibliography of medieval disputation, see Weijers O. (2002) *La 'Disputatio' dans les faculté's des arts au Moyen Âge*, Brepols. For the medieval quodlibetal disputation, see Glorieux, P. (1925) *La littérature quodlibétique de 1260 à 1320*, *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*. On the early modern disputation, Horn E. (1893) *Die Disputationen und Promotionen an den deutschen Universitäten*, vornehmlich seit dem 16. Jahrhundert, Harrassowitz, is a classic. For recent references, see, for example, Marti, H. (1994) *Disputation and dissertation*. In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* (Vol. 2) (Ueding, G., ed.), pp. 866–884, Niemeyer; Chang, K.-M. (2004) *From oral disputation to written text: the transformation of the dissertation in early modern Europe*, *History of Universities* 19, pp. 129–187 and Clark, W. (2006) *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*, especially pp. 68–92, University of Chicago Press
- 3 On the ceremony of graduation, see, for instance Frijhoff, W. (1996) *Graduation and Careers in Universities in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Ridder-Symoens, H., ed.), Cambridge University Press
- 4 Of course Aquinas was still able to introduce his teachings in the determination sessions for these disputations. So in fact in the serial quaestio disputations, he could use the first and second forms in combination to publish his thought. On

Dear GSD,

We're happy to announce the Thesis Almanac for Spring 2016. The Almanac consists of two portions. The first an interview with a professor, a current student, and an article of interest. The second is a compilation of all thesis abstracts presented at the GSD last year (14-15) for all departments. Given how difficult it is to actually find information on the theses at the GSD we hope this would be a useful resource for people who want to know what's been done, or want some context on how to approach their theses. The almanac is here to give a taste of thesis, a bit of info, and a year's worth of history to look at.

This edition features an interview with Michael Hooper, a paper on Immanuel Kant's thesis, an interview with Fall semester thesis student Yufeng Zheng. Look out for coming issues which feature Leire Ascensio, Grace La, and Diane Davis!

If you'd like to get involved email Justin Kollar or Ali Karimi.
jkollar@gsd.harvard.edu, akarimi@gsd.harvard.edu

Sincerely,

Thesis Almanac Team

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- the medieval quaestio disputation, see Lawn, B. (1993) *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic Quaestio Disputata: With Special Emphasis on Its Use in the Teaching of Medicine and Science*, E.J. Brill. For a survey of Aquina's quaestiones, see Mandonnet, O.P. (1918) *Chronologie des questions disputées de saint d'Aquin*, *Revue Thomiste*, nouvelle série 23, 266-287 and 341-371
- 5 Hankins, J. (1998) *Pico della Mirandola*, Giovanni. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Craig, E., ed.), Routledge Retrieved February 21, 2007, from (<http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/C031SECT1>)
- 6 The foreword of Luther's 95 theses reads: 'Out of love for the truth and from desire to elucidate it, what are written below [the 95 theses] will be disputed in Wittenberg under the praeses of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, and Ordinary Professor at that very place (my emphasis).' The Latin original is: 'Amore et studio elucidande veritatis hec subscripta disputabuntur Wittenberge, Presidente R. P. Martino Lutther, Artium et S. Theologie Magistro eiusdemque ibidem lectore Ordinario', in Luther, M. (1883) *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 1), 233, Hermann Boehlau
- 7 Methuen, C. (1996) *Maestlin's teaching of Copernicus: the evidence of his university textbook and disputations*. *Isis* 87, pp. 230-247
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- 9 Leibniz, W. (1663) *Disputatio Metaphysica De Principio Individui*, Jakob Thomasius (praeses), Hennig Köhler; Linnaeus, C. (1749-69), *Amoenitates academicae seu dissertationes variae physicae, medicae, botanicae antehac seorsum editae*, C. Haak
- 10 Kant in the Classroom: Materials to Aid the Study of Kant's Lectures, <http://users.manchester.edu/Facstaff/SSNaragon/Kant/Professors/profsIntro.htm>, retrieved on March 26, 2007. It appears in some other universities the dissertation for gaining the teaching privilege was named the dissertation pro loco
- 11 For instance, For example, Stahl, G.E. (1708) *Dissertatio Medica auguralis De Consilio Medico* . . . , Henckel, was reprinted by the same publisher in 1721; Stahl (1706) *Dissertatio medica inauguralis De scorbuti et venereae luis diversis signis et medicinis* . . . , Henckelius, reprinted in 1715; Stahl (1702) *Disputatio medica, pathologico-practica de malignitatis, praecipuae febrilis, indole*, Henckel, reprinted in 1707 and 1723, both by the same publisher. It must be noted that dissertations were published and circulated differently from books and periodicals. More research has to be done on this subject
- 12 For example, the first volume (1683) of *Acta Eruditorum* reviewed the collections of Olaus Borrichius's public disputations held at the University of Copenhagen, p. 281. The 1749 volume of the *Göttingische Philosophische Bibliothek*, a scholarly magazine, reported that on 12 March an *Abhandlung* was defended under the chairmanship of Johann David Michaelis, a great philologist, on ancient Jerusalem, and another thesis defended by Johann Peter Fischer under the praeses of the editor of that magazine, Christian Ernst von Windheim, extraordinary professor of philosophy at Göttingen at the time. The July 1699 issue of the *Mercure Galant*, predecessor of the very popular *Mercure de France*, reported a *viva voce* theological disputation at the Sorbonne in which l'Abbe' de Louvoir sustained his thesis in a 'very lively manner' (d'une maniere tres vive). The *Mercure de France* in 1753 reported the publication of a collection of *medicae quaestiones* defended in the previous two centuries at the medical faculty of Paris
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