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Manifesto for the Humanities

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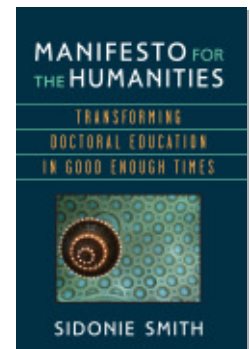
Published by University of Michigan Press

Smith, Ann.

Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in Good Enough Times.

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015.

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Breathing Life into the Dissertation

What is fast becoming the “new normal” in the everyday life of academic humanists will require people to be intellectually nimble; conversant in digital media, networks, archives, and identities; energized by collaboration; flexible in their modes of address; imaginative in their pedagogical practice; and adept at telling the story about what they do. The challenge is to reorganize doctoral education to meet the imperatives and the opportunities of the 21st-century academy.

I’m going to start at the end, with the big kahuna, and work from there. Since 2010, I have been arguing that expanding the forms of the dissertation must be a cornerstone for responding to these conditions—precisely because it is the hardest nut to crack on the way to transforming the humanities doctorate. Both the SSHRC white paper and MLA task force report recognized this need for more flexibility in definition, form, and project of the dissertation.¹

For me, the argument for embracing more flexible dissertation options proceeds from recognition that, in these good-enough times, it’s imperative to affirm the *intellectual mission* of the PhD as a project and redefine its paths of achievement. The current model is no longer adequate to the state of higher education, the state of the disciplines, and the nature of future jobs in the profession. The quality, extension, and liveliness of scholarly conversations across humanities fields in the next decades depend on this redefinition as well as the vitality of the liberal arts in an academy pressured to pursue an instrumentalist vision of higher education. If doctoral study is to launch the careers of future academic humanists and contribute to a robust humanities, then more flexible road maps through the degree, and a more flexible set of models for its capstone, are required.

In earlier initiatives, cited in the previous section, what remained an unquestioned given in responses to the problem of the humanities doctorate was the dissertation monograph. The summary finding of the Mellon project

reported in the October 12, 2009, *Chronicle of Higher Education* makes recommendations on the relationship of funding to attrition in humanities doctoral programs; it says nothing about rethinking the dissertation itself. No “thinking outside the box” with regard to the dissertation took place at meetings of English department faculty and students sponsored by the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, in which I participated as chair of the English department at Michigan. And the seven-year project undertaken by the Council of Graduate Studies, and funded by the Ford Foundation and Pfizer, nowhere raises central issues about the dissertation as a genre of scholarly production in its recent, fourth monograph out of the project, entitled *Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Policies and Practices to Promote Student Success*.²

There are reasons for the continuing investment in the dissertation monograph. It is the presumed measure of “promise” in most humanities fields, a demonstration that doctoral students can accomplish the arduous work of imagining, researching, digesting, organizing, and arguing in fluid prose important interventions in their fields. Here is the discourse that constellates around the proto-monograph as dissertation. It is performative, a sustained set of acts through which certain habits of mind are practiced and internalized, the pleasures of solitary inquiry, for instance. Encouraging these habits, faculty prepare the next generation of scholars for the extended intellectual inquiry requisite to producing an important first book and entering, enlivening, and influencing scholarly conversations. It is a ticket to a career in the academy. It leads to the tenure book. Without it, the probability of tenure for the individual diminishes and the institution of tenure itself becomes vulnerable to attack. No wonder it is difficult to unthink the proto-monograph as signature to the humanities doctorate. Skeptics, and there are and will be many, will thus decry what they perceive to be an assault on standards in humanities education with the introduction of options to the dissertation monograph. They will declare it reckless to launch candidates on the troubled job market without the security of a traditional dissertation.

Let’s disentangle some of the assumptions behind the investment in the proto-monograph dissertation. The assumption is that in the humanities the terms *originality*, *expertise*, *mastery*, and *substantive contribution* are associated exclusively with the book as codex. The assumption is that writing a proto-monograph is the only form of preparation for writing a long-form book. The assumption is that a monograph dissertation needs only a modest amount of revision to become a book. The assumption is that the monograph dissertation is the only predictor of future success as a humanities scholar. The assumption is that all this is understood by doctoral students and doesn’t require articulating. I am challenging these assumptions, as have many colleagues, dating back to 1995 and David Damrosch’s *We Scholars*; or, as histori-

ans of higher education have observed, dating far back to a 1903 piece written by William James and entitled “The PhD Octopus.”³

I would argue that insistence on only the traditional form of the dissertation as capstone will disadvantage doctoral students and adversely affect the quality of doctoral education in the humanities. Make no mistake. The hold of the traditional concept of the book as the sole criterion for tenure and promotion in humanities disciplines is loosening as I write. In the spirit of Recommendation 19 of the 2006 MLA “Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion,” it is beyond time to rethink the fetishization of the dissertation monograph as the culmination of doctoral education in the humanities.⁴ The current dissertation monograph remains inflexibly wedded to the traditional book culture format; and the habits of inquiry and production it reinforces may not train doctoral students in the many scholarly skills and the new kinds of dispositions necessary to navigate the emergent environment of scholarly communication, which I explored in Part II. Reaffirming that there is only one way of doing the dissertation—and that is as a proto-monograph—trains and constrains students in a one-model-fits-all version of doctoral education that is no longer adequate to the times. The need is great to ask questions anew, to energize inquiry into the implications of current practices. What is it to be “a scholar” and to be “scholarly” now?

A Short History

Of course, the concept of the dissertation has itself changed over time, as well as the conventions of producing it. Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang has observed of the early modern dissertation in scientific fields that it involved “the collaboration of two actors: the supervisor, who prepared the textual thesis, and the degree candidate who performed an oral defense. Neither of them had exclusive rights to, or claimed exclusive authorship of the thesis.”⁵ In German practice (for which the historical archive is most robust), the student defended the disputation written by the supervisor; paid for the disputation to be written down; and, if successful, paid for its printing and the free copies submitted to the university.⁶ This arrangement of collaborative production through a differentiated hierarchy of authority had two effects: it furthered the supervisor’s reputation and intellectual authority and trained the new generation of scholars in the skills of disputation. In such an environment of knowledge reproduction, Barbara Crossouard notes, “University education developed appropriate performances that reflected ‘given’ arguments. . . . It was therefore about internalizing and reproducing authoritative forms of expression and conduct in rehearsals of established canons of knowledge.”⁷ This arrangement of practice derives from the medieval and early modern knowledge

economy in which “truth” was already there to be found in Holy Scripture and in classical philosophy.

By the 18th century, an alternative model of the dissertation had emerged with the rise of the experimental method in the sciences, the inductive method for finding a truth that hadn’t already been established. The new model dissertation, presenting the results of original experimental work in the field of the advisor’s expertise, took shape in the labs of the medical scientist Albrecht von Haller at Göttingen, Germany. Haller introduced experimental labor as a key component of the dissertation, labor that eventuated in what Chang describes as “solitary or exclusive authorship . . . made possible by the supervisor’s relinquishment of his share” of the credit; and this exclusive authorship, observes Chang, “was used to reward the students’ experimental work and monetary investment.”⁸ This model of research became institutionalized in German universities by the beginning of the 19th century; and toward the end of the century it was the model adopted in the United States when Johns Hopkins established the first graduate programs in advanced study.

In the late 19th and early decades of the 20th century in the United States, the printing/publication of the dissertation, an original work by an independent scholar, remained a compulsory requirement for graduation, as it had been in earlier centuries.⁹ Completion of the doctoral degree, what Cassuto references as the “researcher-in-training” degree,¹⁰ thus ensured the publication of an “unvetted” monograph by a university press or publication office.¹¹ This publishing practice, Gary A. Olson and Julie Drew note in their brief history of the doctoral dissertation, “was premised on the notion that the dissertation is in fact a scholar’s first full-length scholarly book,” as it had been and continues to be in Europe.¹² With publication, the successful graduate could expect to find a position in a college or university through access to the director’s professional network.

The number of doctorates increased substantially by the 1930s, and university presses no longer commandeered the resources to publish all dissertations produced. To fill the vacuum, University Microfilms launched in 1938, ensuring the preservation and cataloging of every dissertation produced in North America. This shift in responsibility from university presses to UMI eventuated in a change of role for university presses; according to Olson and Drew, presses focused on publishing books by seasoned scholars, thereby enhancing academic press profiles in the publishing world. This shift marked as well changes in the doctoral dissertation. “Rather than the first major project that a scholar completes as a ‘professional,’” they observe,

it became the last major project a scholar completes as a “student.” This perception seems to have resulted in changes in the actual form of the dissertation, so much so that the dissertation became a different genre from

the scholarly monograph. As an academic exercise, the dissertation became primarily the instrument by which students demonstrated to their professors that they had a thorough grasp of research in the field.¹³

The humanities dissertation turned into proto-monograph.

The 1970s brought shifts in the relationship of dissertation to first job, first monograph, and tenure. These changes came with the consolidation of practices of peer review at presses and journals. Phil Pochoda elaborates several factors affecting the shifting ethos and practice of academic publishing with the introduction of peer review of manuscripts:

While the scholarly disciplines had previously weighed in formally but erratically post-publication on the merits of monographs through reviews in prestigious professional journals, and informally in many other ways, by building in the review hurdle or authorization within the publishing process itself, it [sic] attempted to ensure that every published monograph, all published content, attained at least a minimal professional level.¹⁴

This shift was one of professionalization—from unvetted processes of publishing work by those from the press's institution to vetted review processes at all levels of acquisition, editing, and production.¹⁵ The first book, peer reviewed and published by an academic press, would now be the gold standard for earning tenure; and the dissertation as proto-monograph would now be the predictor of success in that arduous realization of promise.

The 2006 MLA report on criteria for tenure and promotion delineated several contributing factors related to heightened expectations for successful tenure.¹⁶ The 1970s was a buyer's market for untenured faculty in literatures and languages and other humanities fields. That's when the annual conventions of professional organizations, such as the MLA, became marketplaces in which multiple candidates competed for scarce positions, displayed their wares and their promise. The quality of the dissertation monograph, its sophistication, boldness, and demonstrable scholarliness became the major filter for distinguishing candidates in the new search process, now itself a vetting process. During this decade as well, the demographics of humanities doctoral students changed as more and more white women and men and women of color completed doctoral studies, diversifying the pool of potential candidates and testing the terms of candidate assessment. No longer could a newly minted PhD assume that he would find a job through the old-boys network. Additionally, the democratization of departmental governance eroded the formerly authoritarian power of the chair acting unilaterally and without accountability.¹⁷ In the words of the task force *Report*:

The new emphasis on publication and other criteria for tenure was an expression, then, not only of the higher demands created by a buyers' market but also of the search for safeguards against the possible arbitrariness or bias of chairs and of department factions unsympathetic to the new demographics of the profession and to new developments in literary study.¹⁸

The shift to less personally based and autocratically guided hiring practices benefited many graduates entering their first jobs in the 1970s and 1980s. It did me.

These are changes that promised to serve the project of diversifying the profession by gender and race, and by intellectual and theoretical projects. Completion of the degree and its pedigree, publication of first articles, contracts for first books: these criteria were not only about the "fit" of a person for a department; they were demonstrable. But the expectation of measurable achievement could be, and indeed was, ratcheted up. In this intellectual economy, the entire edifice of evaluation for tenure and promotion depended upon the stability of academic presses and their economic models for finding and circulating scholarly work.

Critiques of the system tended to focus on the intensification of specialization and the calcification of the apparatus and the discourse of the dissertation. Olson and Drew, for instance, decried the fate of the proto-monograph:

It became overburdened with exhaustive reviews of the scholarly literature, intended less to establish the context for a discussion (as a good scholarly monograph would do succinctly) than to demonstrate knowledge and competence. It also became bogged down in a superfluity of discursive footnotes, and even the language changed to the defensive, obfuscatory, stilted prose now referred to as dissertationese.¹⁹

Appropriate obeisance to scholarly conventions; acknowledgment of others' work; citations as recognition of intellectual property; careful, nuanced analyses; performance of disciplinary practice. Yes, all that. But also the navel gazing of intimate circles of interlocutors; the repetition of close readings without much difference; the easy recourse to insider's language; the freight of lethargic prose. I am purposefully overstating the case here—in part to counter the assumption of the proto-monograph dissertation as almost a book.

Fifteen years ago, Olson and Drew called for the "rehabilitation" of the dissertation from its capture in "dissertationese." Theirs was a call to make the dissertation more truly like a monograph. Then came the 21st century. In the 2000s, the crisis in scholarly publishing and the proliferation of digital af-

fordances for new modes of scholarly communication unsettled the environment of publication and the relationship of dissertation as proto-monograph to first book and potential tenure. Presses under severe budget constraints eliminated series and contracted their fields of focus. Chairs and deans worried about the likelihood of probationary faculty getting contracts for first books as presses saw print runs dwindle. University press editors protested the way that tenure committees ceded responsibility for the assessment of scholarly work to anonymous readers whose reports were not written as tenure documents.

As the troubles in academic publishing intensified, colleagues, questioning the monograph dissertation as the culmination of doctoral study, issued calls for change in the publishing system and its impact on faculty careers, often invoking Lindsay Waters's pithy phrase "the tyranny of the monograph."²⁰ In 2006, Leslie Monkman wrote:

The tyranny of the dissertation as larval monograph remains the key source of "the tyranny of the monograph" (the phrase is Lindsay Waters's, currently Executive Editor for the Humanities of Harvard University Press). In complex mutations, that tyranny emerges in the appointment, tenure, and promotion decisions determining not only our own careers but also our decisions on the careers of others, and it drives the current valuation of teaching, research, and service.²¹

That same year, the *MLA Report* cautioned about the fetishization of "the book" for tenure and recommended greater flexibility in the criteria committees, departments, and deans apply in making tenure decisions: "The profession as a whole should develop a more capacious conception of scholarship by rethinking the dominance of the monograph, promoting the scholarly essay, establishing multiple pathways to tenure, and using scholarly portfolios."²² Reminding readers that "the monograph as the gold standard for tenure dossiers is a relatively recent development," the *Report* argued that "rigorous quality standards for scholarship are not tied directly to monograph production."²³

In 2010, as noted earlier, I dedicated two *MLA Newsletter* columns to making the case for an expanded repertoire of forms for the dissertation. Then in late 2013 and early 2014 the SSHRC white paper and the *Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature* both called for more flexibility in the form the dissertation can take. Additionally, over the last half decade the appearance of dissertations in multimedia formats and new authoring platforms, even in comics form, has begun to register the diverse repertoire of models for innovative dissertations.

Making the Case

Here are five interlocking arguments for expanding the repertoire of models for the humanities dissertation. These arguments speak to the changing ecology of humanistic scholarship and teaching in the 21st century, reprising traces of earlier discussions.

1. The digital revolution requires doctoral programs to prepare students for new knowledge ecologies, new resource economies, new research practices and methodologies, and new modes of scholarly communication. Doctoral students need to know about the state of scholarly publishing, the shifts in scholarly practices, the new kinds of relationships scholars will have toward their work, and the opportunities and challenges of an open-access ethos. Students will increasingly use and create digital archives and innovate digital modes of scholarly presentation and communication in the next decade. They will have access to new funding opportunities, made available through foundations and the NEH, and through corporations such as Google. They will participate in open peer-to-peer review. Some will develop the persona of the scholarly blogger. Others may get involved in the work of new e-journals. Yet the current dissertation monograph remains inflexibly wedded to the traditional book culture format; and the habits of inquiry and production its conventional demands reinforce may not train doctoral students in methodologies enabled by, and skills necessary to navigate, this emergent environment.

2. The singular and solitary model of the scholarly career in the humanities, a model inaugurated in graduate school in the student's struggle to write a proto-monograph, can no longer be the only model of the humanist's life. Future faculty in humanities disciplines will require flexible and improvisational habits of mind and collaborative skills to bring their scholarship to fruition. Scholarly inquiry will move forward through the mobilization of scholarly networks, networks that include not only scholar-peers but graduate and undergraduate students.

Remaining wedded to the dissertation monograph as an isolated venture will limit students' preparation for this increasingly collaborative scholarly world. Opening opportunities for diverse models of the dissertation and diverse ensembles of scholarly inquiry will signal the importance of preparation for new cultures of collegiality, what Damrosch, in *We Scholars*, terms "intellectual sociability":

When people acculturate themselves to academic life by enhancing their tolerance for solitary work and diminishing their intellectual sociability, they reduce their ability to address problems that require collaborative solutions, or even that require close attention to the perspectives offered by

approaches or disciplines other than one's own. The structuring of graduate education quietly but pervasively discourages such close attention, fostering instead a culture in which people work alone or within the perspectives and expectations of a small group of like-minded peers.²⁴

Recognizing and playing to different scholarly dispositions, learning trajectories, intellectual passions, and expertise, a 21st-century doctoral education encourages students to engage their peers as co-inquirers rather than competitors; to engage their faculty advisors and mentors as partners; and to engage an ensemble of colleagues whose expertise animates their imagination, sense of opportunity, and purpose.

3. The primary message currently conveyed is one about final product, the proto-monograph. There's a long history to that message, as Cassuto observes: "Early practices laid the ground for the researcher bias that endures today—with teachers barely allowed on the island and then only because their tuition supports researchers. And most important, teaching is explicitly disrespected as a constituent part of the research enterprise."²⁵ The message is not one about preparing for a career as a scholar-teacher in the next decades. The time and stress involved in completing the dissertation monograph now absorb the psychic, affective, and intellectual energies of doctoral students, often overwhelming what attention they might want to direct toward preparation for and intellectual inquiry into the future of learning.

Doctoral students will be shortchanged if they do not graduate as skilled teachers, excited to be in the classroom and adept at engaging classes of various sizes, of diverse student literacies, and diverse demographics; and familiar with and innovative in digital teaching environments. They will benefit from knowledge of new modes and methods of organizing classroom dynamics, activities, and relationships. They will benefit from knowledge of hybrid course formats, and from some familiarity with trends in online teaching and open educational resource development and adaptation. They will benefit from articulating an elegant story of the relationship between their teaching and their scholarship. They will benefit from having written, and perhaps even published, an article analyzing pedagogical practice, or from having created innovative open educational resources. And all these benefits will position them to tell the story of their future plans in the classroom in letters of application and in interviews. For as various commentators note, not all graduates will go on to elite research institutions; and even those institutions have recalibrated the balance between attention to the quality of teaching and the quality of research in their personnel decisions.

4. With so much riding on the production of the proto-monograph, doctoral students invest years in developing a careful scholarly voice. That voice

is one that takes care, demonstrates due diligence, catches brilliance, digs for persistence, rehearses discursive knowledge, and aims for scholarly credibility. Yes, the honing of a scholarly voice is part of graduate education in the humanities. But so much is invested in one form of scholarly voice that aspiring humanists do not experiment with speaking through multiple voices to multiple audiences. Future faculty will want to communicate their work in different modes and write for different audiences.

They will write for specialists in their fields, of course, but there are other audiences to address: academics outside the humanities, collaborators from multiple disciplines, public policy professionals, nonacademic advocates for the humanities, donors, the savvy crowd, and a range of what Virginia Woolf termed “common readers.” These are the people who attend events sponsored by state humanities councils, who read broadly, who support cultural institutions. These are people in communities with whom public scholarship engages. These are people who exist in publics that are radically reconfiguring as online and offline, communally located and born digital.

The era of overspecialization and the insider’s language and rhetorical mode is on the wane. As access to knowledge and knowledge production, to archives and databases, expands, those with facility in a repertoire of voices will be able to imagine, inspire, and organize colleagues, undergraduate and graduate students, and nonacademics to contribute to the intellectual enterprise of humanities scholarship, at once traditional in the best sense and engaged with publics. In 2009, Bulbul Tiwari, whose born-digital dissertation on performances of the Mahabharata received an honorable mention in the Emerging Scholars Prize awarded by the University of Michigan’s Institute for the Humanities, talked of reaching new audiences through new modes of scholarly communication and of “creating new kinds of readers.”²⁶

Let me bring in William Germano’s reflection on academic writing here. In 2013, Germano, dean and professor at the Cooper Union and former editor of Columbia University Press and publishing director at Routledge, announced the “Age of the Reader,” opining that “the conditions of scholarly writing depend in new ways on the reader as arbiter and recipient.”²⁷ In “Do We Dare Write for Readers?” he wrote pithily of academic monographs as “snow globes”: “Academe has been in the snow-globe business for years. The problem here is not the specificity of research but the intention of the finished product. Inward-looking, careful to a fault, our monographs have been content to speak to other monographs rather than to real, human readers.”²⁸ Germano called for the shift from the snow-globe, the isolated, small, careful world of modest consequence, to the monograph as “machine,” a thing that “waits to be deployed” and thus has “consequence.” Thinking of the monograph as machine, for Germano, puts the emphasis on acts of doing, moving,

and inviting active reading. He termed this “writing as activism”: “The book-as-machine requires that the scholarly writer imagine a problem or concern that will engage the reader, making the investment of reading time worthwhile.”²⁹ In other words, the scholarly voice in the academic monograph can take more risks, display more zing, and open up to broader readerships.

To be sure, facility in shifting from a scholarly mode of voice to a voice directed to people outside one’s discipline and beyond is hard-earned skill. Public intellectuals hone their distinctive voice over years. And faculty who imagine themselves writing a “crossover” book know only too well how daunting and frustrating that project can be. But there are ways in which that transition can become more conceivable, more energizing, and more successful. What I am suggesting here is that to the extent that doctoral students begin early to experiment with aspects of code-switching, they will be well served for opportunities to address multiple publics as well as scholarly interlocutors as they move through their careers.

5. The model of success narrowly focused on one outcome—completion of the long-form proto-monograph and then a tenure-track position at an R1 institution—has run its course. It is exhausted; it is exhausting; it is no longer tenable in terms of student interests and prospects. As Megan Pincus Kajitani and Rebecca A. Bryant advised in 2010, the “one model” of success instilled in students has to be displaced by an ethos of flexible success.³⁰ Or, as Grafton and Grossman write in “No More Plan B,” it is time to reorient doctoral education away from a professional ethos that projects the message that “the life of scholarship [is] somehow exempt from impure motives and bitter competition” and that those who move into jobs outside the academy are understood to be leaving the virtuous life.³¹ It is past time to reimagine success away from its equation with isolated research and long-form publication only, away from the replicative model that equates brilliance and “bestness” with entry into a tenure-track position at an R1 university and a long career in the academy. Projecting a one-size-fits-all model of success and expecting a one-model-fits-all form of the dissertation will not serve well the interests of humanities doctoral students who benefit from preparation for diverse professional environments and diverse career trajectories.

Doctoral students will enter many different kinds of institutions. Yes, a number of graduates will take up positions in R1 universities; they are collectively one of the largest sectors employing humanities doctorates. But many (about a third) will find academic teaching positions in regional universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges. And the latter, as noted earlier, educate around 44% of undergraduates across the United States. Others will pursue and find academic positions in libraries, institutes, administrative offices, student services, development, and outreach. Some will move to the

nonprofit world of the humanities workforce; some to the world of government and public policy. Practically, graduate students need to optimize the range of opportunities they can pursue by recognizing the transferability of skills they already have and finding opportunities to gain skills they do not already command. If, as Alexandra Rausing argues, the new Alexandria of the future is an expanded network of knowledge producers inside and outside the academy, if the production of knowledge is an effect of the cloud and the crowd as well as professionally trained researchers and scholars, then preparing doctoral students for the larger humanities workforce will enhance opportunities for collaboration among intellectuals and researchers within and without the academy.

These are my five good reasons.

Multiple Forms

So let's design a dissertation of expansive possibilities, of which the monograph form will be one among several options. Some students will pursue the traditional dissertation; but they will also recognize that there are other options and thus other kinds of preparation important for their future careers. Some will opt for alternative models if that option is available to them, and they will surprise advisors and graduate directors with their conceptualization of this capstone to their studies.

What are these alternatives?

The most common alternative to the long-form dissertation is the "suite" of three or four essays, a concept of the dissertation advanced 20 years ago by Damrosch.³² A suite might involve a theme and its variations; or a set of distinct essays, probing different topics, using different methods, elaborating different theoretical frameworks and approaches. The emphasis here would be on honing skills in the short-form essay (of 25–35 pages), precisely structured, persuasively argued, elegantly written, at once lean in purpose, compelling in the story it tells, and provocative in the intervention it proposes. Students might be expected to submit the essays to different kinds of journals, a project in researching the world of scholarly communication in the short form.³³ Philosophy often requires this form of the dissertation, with this expectation of publication. "Form" in this context has two aspects: form as discourse and form as material vehicle. The essay ensemble might be conceptualized in such a way as to ask the student to experiment with different scholarly voices and discursive contexts; or to experiment with a variety of material forms, such as scholarly print, public print, born-digital essay.³⁴

The suite of essays constitutes one form of an ensemble dissertation. And there are other projects that could be combined into an ensemble disserta-

tion involving multiple components. Here are several possibilities: Preparing a teaching portfolio, including an extended essay on pedagogy and a design for sequenced courses geared to different levels, class sizes, and audiences. Writing a metacritical essay on the intersection of scholarship and teaching in the classroom. Pursuing a project of “public scholarship,” of “making knowledge ‘about, for, and with’ diverse publics and communities,” as sketched by Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman in “Scholarship in Public.”³⁵ Addressing issues of the humanities and public policy. This latter possibility would involve learning how to translate in acts that, in the eloquent words of Kathleen Woodward, “embrace our knowledge and [do] not dilute it; translate it, yes, but not water it down completely.”³⁶ An ensemble dissertation might combine a scholarly essay of original research of 80 pages; a metacritical essay on teaching in the field; an essay on theorizing digital curation; and an essay on the experience of community-based scholarship; all of which would evidence flexibility in communicating scholarship in different voices, media, and venues. Or, given the affordances of new platforms for scholarly communication, the dissertation project might involve an edition of some text or corpus of texts with multiple components to it. The expectation of research “scope” of a capstone project would derive from the depth of thought, sophistication of methods, and intellectual ambition arrayed across multiple modes and media assembled in the ensemble dissertation.

For students in language and comparative literature units, a dissertation project might include a translation of a formerly untranslated scholarly or literary work or a new kind of translation of an already-translated work. The translation could be accompanied by a robust introduction that situates the work historically, or generically, or theoretically, or geographically, and an essay critically engaging theories of translation as a practice. As a colleague of mine recently observed, only a small amount of the world’s literatures is available in English translations with introductions and commentary. How much the public, students, and colleagues would benefit from broader access to the world’s heritage!

Then there are the new opportunities for born-digital dissertations. This mode of dissertation involves conceptualizing, mapping, composing, displaying, and offering metacommentary on a digitally envired scholarly project, often of significant value to other scholars, teachers, and students. As Kathleen Woodward suggests, such projects might be conceived under multiple rubrics, one of which would be “curation”³⁷; others might be ideation, multiple pathway argumentation, visual mapping, multimodal syncopation, interactive reading, and tool building. Here is McPherson’s bookishness of another kind.

There are a growing number of examples out there. For his doctorate at

Teachers College of Columbia University, Nick Sousanis composed a dissertation in comics form that is about the centrality of visual thinking to teaching and learning.³⁸ This is the long-form dissertation in new media of presentation. Or there is the project Amanda Visconti is completing at the University of Maryland's Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities. *Infinite Ulysses* is "a participatory digital edition of James Joyce's difficult but rewarding novel *Ulysses*." An ambitious project, *Infinite Ulysses*, Visconti tells visitors to her website, "takes a unique non-monograph form, consisting of the *Infinite Ulysses* participatory digital edition (plus a code repository and documentation on using my code to create your own participatory digital edition); user testing, site analytics and analysis; and regular research blogging culminating in a scholarly article final draft."³⁹ Other innovative, hybrid dissertation projects were highlighted at a session entitled "Transforming the Dissertation: Models, Questions, Next Steps," organized by Cathy Davidson at the 2015 HASTAC conference at Michigan State University, and available for viewing on the HASTAC 2015 website.⁴⁰ They are also supported in the work and events sponsored by the Futures Initiative at the CUNY Graduate Center, under the leadership of Cathy Davidson and Katina Rogers.⁴¹ As graduate students pursue more and more born-digital, multimedia, and hybrid modes of the dissertation, departments and graduate schools will be pressed to develop adequate policies and mechanisms for filing and preserving these innovative forms.⁴²

A radically reimagined doctoral dissertation might involve a multiyear collaboration of doctoral students and faculty in a large project. Todd Presner at UCLA and Andrea Abernethy Lunsford at Stanford talk persuasively about large-scale collaborative research projects and even collaborative dissertations.⁴³ The idea here is that admitted students enter into a long-term project as a cohort, gaining experience in collaboration, benefiting from the expertise of the collective, working with multiple faculty, and elaborating for themselves as they go what kinds of scholarly communication make sense at what stages of the research. Such projects might eventuate in a traditionally published or born-digital initiative, such as a scholarly edition, or publishable essays for all students involved or a book-length set of essays, or all together.

And there are other possibilities imaginable, such as documentary film or the creative dissertation of mixed modes. The SSHRC white paper presents two possible models, as it calls for "a diversified, outward-looking program of study" that "will afford doctoral candidates a much fuller sense of the implications of their own work and of their field generally, and will help them establish a more vigorous and usefully active network of colleagues beyond the formal academy."⁴⁴ The models are the Workshop PhD and the PhD in the Applied Humanities. The Workshop model eschews the rigidity of the coursework, exams, dissertation triad in favor of a four- to five-year apprenticeship

in “an interdisciplinary research workshop led by a small group of faculty who have agreed to take a leadership role in the workshop for five years.”⁴⁵ During the apprenticeship students would undertake four linked projects building expertise in a field; one involving collaboration; one negotiating the complexities of interdisciplinary practice; one directed to a nonacademic constituency; and all culminating in a singly produced/authored “masterpiece.” The PhD in the Applied Humanities would involve coursework in policy and management studies and specialist field courses; put students in an internship; and require them to “integrate management/policy with humanities research on their chosen subject.”⁴⁶

However the dissertation is configured, whether as the long-form proto-monograph or some alternative ensemble of modes, projects, and vehicles, the prospectus stage of the doctoral study will take on a more dynamic, rather than formulaic, dimension. No longer a formality to get through, with a nod to the recognition that the proto-monograph will be very different in the end so the prospectus doesn’t much matter, the prospectus in a time of choice could become the occasion to think about the content of the project and the vehicle together. As a graduate fellow at the Institute for the Humanities here at Michigan recently observed to me, “How beneficial it would have been to think through why I was writing a monograph for the form of my own dissertation—what specific skills I wanted to gain from writing a monograph, the rationale behind presenting my work in monograph form, etc. If doctoral students, with their advisers, were invited to think about and then make a case for the form they wanted their dissertation to take, I think this could be quite helpful.”⁴⁷

There is so much to be gained by expanding the repertoire of possible kinds of dissertation. I am convinced that the availability of more flexibility in programs, projects, and pathways through the doctorate will attract more diverse cohorts of students. I am convinced that humanities departments and doctoral programs will gain in creativity, cross-fertilization of ideas and practices, energized learning communities, and more satisfied students. With Damrosch, I am convinced that, with an ensemble dissertation project, students will expand their critical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives and their collaborative sociability as they work with multiple mentors instead of “the single parental figure.”⁴⁸ I am convinced that the dissertations produced will be of higher quality than many of the proto-monographs delivered to faculty after long years of forcing five chapters to their less-than-compelling conclusion. I am convinced that doctoral programs will become more innovative, inclusive, and vibrant.