

Master Thesis Media design

Spring semester (S2) + Fall Semester (S3)

FRAMING

The Masters Thesis is a research project carried out in anticipation of the diploma project. It provides the opportunity to conduct an investigation to consolidate your perspective, deepen your knowledge, which is essential to the construction of your thinking and feed the practical project you will work on afterwards. Overall, it aims at establishing one's position in the discipline of design.

The dissertation is conducted under the direction of a tutor who regularly discusses the student's work at each stage of completion. Neither a simple literature review nor a strictly theoretical dissertation, it is a writing assignment grounded in an investigation as well as a personal reflection. The dissertation should therefore identify a knowledge gap in the literature and bring an additional perspective to an area or topic, and feed into the upcoming project.

From a design research standpoint, the Media Design master's thesis corresponds to a "research on/for design" approach: it is the preliminary stage of creation, which serves to establish a perimeter, and to prefigure the possible paths for the practical project, whether it concerns the design of an interactive experience, a product, a service or an object. For this, you will conduct an investigation, generally about a context or a phenomenon, an object or a social practice. This is, for example, what Gabriel Abergel (2021) did in his dissertation about the various roles of automation technologies among Orthodox Jews on Shabbat. Or with Salome Kahn (2023) who explored how people personify everyday objects. It is also possible to investigate a context in order to understand the issues at stake, as Ilhana Besic did in her investigation of the studios involved in Extended Reality production. But it can also be a question of investigating a specific artefact, as in Andreia Rodrigues' dissertation (2023) on the ways of promoting a Portuguese heritage object, the azulejos. Or, about the evolution of video game controllers carried out in the work of Nicolas Nova and Laurent Bolli (2013) by means of genealogical diagrams, in order to understand the logic and opportunities of design.

Design research : three perspectives

Recherche on design, which consists in studying the discipline, the objects and the practice of design. Takes design as an object of study: history of design, sociology of design, etc.

Recherche for design, that aims at investigating a situation, an object or a practice prior to changing it with an artifact or service

Recherche through design, in which knowledge, ideas and questions emerge from the design practice itself. Also called "practice-based research".

METHODOLOGY

Practically, this investigation is based on the approaches of field research coming from ethnography, using interview techniques, direct observation, or analysis of objects etc. But it can also be innovative in its method – for example by designing an object that help your inquiry, as is the case of the "cultural probes" (kits given to survey participants to enable them to document their daily lives, see Gaver et al. 1999) or web-scraping tools used in the field of Digital Humanities or Computational Social Sciences.

This field investigation will produce data that you will have to analyse and discuss in order to write down your thesis. The dissertation then takes the form of a description of the field material you produced, and of the ways in which this inquiry makes it possible to (1) describe a situation and its stakes, (2) discuss opportunities for design: possibly problems and needs, but also opportunities, new questions, even original theoretical concepts, or more broadly the social, cultural and political implications of the phenomenon you considered.

Presenting your field research obviously involves writing a text, but you should also use your design skills in order to enrich your manuscript with data visualization, diagrams, observational sketches (Curious Rituals project, 2012) and illustrated vignettes (Dr. Smartphone by Nicolas Nova & Anaïs Bloch, 2020), cartographies, objects rendering observations (Multi-Touch Gestures, Gabriele Meldaikyte, RCA, 2013). While the dissertation generally corresponds to a printed document, it is also possible to explore digital and on-line formats (podcast, interactive narrative, website with interactive features, etc.). Similarly, writing a textual dissertation can also take singular forms (narrative with a more or less important visual component, visual essay, commented lexicon, etc.). The important thing here is to reconcile content and form by taking this memoir as a creative object in its own right.

The conclusion of the dissertation should offer a synthesis of the work, but also present three ideas for practical projects to be carried out in the second semester. These intentions should be discussed in the light of the survey carried out and the observations and findings presented in the dissertation.

Length of the manuscript and submission date: the dissertation provides for a manuscript not exceeding, in principle, between 45'000 and 65'500 characters. However, an exception may be considered with the authorization of the tutor. It may be written in French or English. Particular care must be taken with the final formatting, iconography, and reference citation standards.

It must be submitted to the jury during the last week of November (date to be specified). The day of the defence of the dissertation is generally mid-February.

PROCESS

The dissertation is supported by :

- a seminar in the second semester that provides conceptual and methodological support for the choice of subject and approach to the investigation.
- Intermediate stages of presentation in the third semester. In the form of an oral presentation to the supervisory team and all the students, these sessions are a place for exchange and enrichment for the realization of the thesis.

In order to allow this collaboration with the team, the dissertation work is based on the sharing of documents in a directory tree on your GitHub, to be updated at different stages. This tree reflects the trajectory of the dissertation project, as a prerequisite to the practical project:

INSPIRATION: illustrations of projects, bibliographic references (academic and other texts) or any notes that inspire you

METHOD: lexicon in the form of a network + interview guide, observation guide, criteria for case studies

DATA: notes, drawings, audio or video recordings

OUTPUT: semester 2: presentation of field research material, semester 3: written chapters of the dissertation

TUTORING

The tutor helps the student to choose the subject and define the objectives, advises on readings and on methodological choices, and makes remarks on the manuscript and its formatting in order to improve it.

ADMIN

See timeline for calendar.

The distribution of grades about the dissertation is as follows: 2/3 at the dissertation rendering, and 1/3 at the oral defense.

USE OF AI SYSTEMS

When writing a dissertation, just like when creating a project, it's essential to find your own voice, to reason and to understand in depth the work of others and their ideas. This is just as true for texts as it is for practical art and design projects. While some of today's tools can handle certain tasks, that doesn't mean they should be used in every phase of a project. In the same way as spellcheckers and other syntax analysers, automatic translators can help us with our writing; and generative AI can help us to explore and formulate our thoughts. But when it comes to finding sources, these tools are irrelevant, and require other, more appropriate software. As for writing as it is with a text generator, this is not recommended, as it will result in a text that is full of repetitions and at best imprecise, at worst erroneous. It can, however, provide you with a basis on which to build.

You can use AI tools to :

- Generate ideas or starting points for your thoughts. The prompt you use should be based on your research question and its keywords, not on a generic query.
- Obtain structure suggestions for your texts or research.
- Find ways of formulating your ideas with variations that you can then use yourself.
- Translate or reformulate certain passages for better understanding.
- Correct the spelling, grammar and syntax of your texts.
- Use tools designed for this purpose (Retrieval Augmented Generation) to search for sources (Perplexity.ai, consensus.app) rather than generic systems (ChatGPT or Claude).

When using AI systems :

- Clearly state in a final colophon which tools you have used how you have used these tools in your work (AI systems but also word processing, page layout software, spell and syntax checker, bibliography manager, translator, bibliographic search engine, etc.).
- Always check the statements provided by the AI, as they may contain errors, biases or incorrect information. This applies even to rewordings.

Do not use these AI tools to:

- Write all or entire passages of your work. Your personal reasoning must remain at the heart of what you produce, and it is highly likely that the content produced will be of poor quality or full of errors.
- Copy and paste generated text without reworking or checking it.
- Search for sources (or use Augmented Generation Retrieval AI tools) and definitions (use seminal articles, specialist dictionaries or encyclopaedias).

CITATION FORMATS

Bibliographical references should be placed in the body of the text, with the author's name and date of publication in brackets. Full references are placed at the end of the text in a section called 'Bibliography', in which authors are listed in alphabetical order. If there are several contributions by the same author, they are listed chronologically, starting with the oldest.

The rules of presentation vary, depending on the country, institution or publisher. At the HES-SO, we follow the ISO 690 standard (digital in French or English). Here is the model.

Books

KINROSS, Robin. *Unjustified texts : perspectives on typography*. London : Hyphen Press, 2002.

BROOMBERG, Adam, CHANARIN, Olivier. *Fig*. Brighton : Photoworks ; Göttingen : Steidl, 2007.

ADAJANIA, Nancy et al. *Vitamin 3-D : new perspectives in sculpture an installation*. London : Phaidon, 2009.

Book chapters

CASTLE, Alison (ed.). *The Stanley Kubrick archives*, Köln : Taschen, 2008. P. 398.

MIDAL, Alexandra. Quelle utopie pour le design ? In : *Design : introduction à l'histoire d'une discipline*. Paris : Pocket, 2009. P. 69–78. (Agora).

Articles

GAUTHIER, Michel. Néo-conceptuels : la redistribution des rôles = Around and beyond Neo-Conceptualism. In : *Art Press*, avril 2009, no 355, p. 52–59.

DVD, Audio CD

BEKA, Ila, LEMOINE, Louise. *Koolhaas houselife* [DVD-vidéo]. Roma : BêkaFilms, 2008.

LES WAMPAS. *Never Trust a guy who after having been a punk, is now playing electro* [CD-audio]. Paris : Atmosphériques, 2003.

Website

KOTTKE, Jason. A Murmuration of Starlink [online]. <https://kottke.org/15/01/a-murmuration-of-starlings> (accessed on 3.10.2024).

NEW YORK TIMES. *ArtsBeat : the culture at large* [online]. <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/> (accessed on 14.01.2023).