Bo Lindberg, »The Academic Lecture. A Genre In Between«

ABSTRACT

This article provides some observations on the production and function of academic lecture notes in the early modern period at the universities of Uppsala and Lund in the 17th century. Books being relatively scarce, students acquired most of their knowledge by listening to lectures or by reading notes taken during the lectures. Compared to dissertations, i.e. the printed texts defended in a disputation, the lecture notes were usually better accounts of knowledge, but their contents may deviate substantially from what the lecturer originally said due to the modifications and distortions caused by those who took the notes or those who copied them. Further, the mode of lecturing – dictation versus a freer extemporizing delivery – affected the form of the manuscripts as well. A pair of manuscripts from the teaching of Samuel Pufendorf in the early 1670s are here used to illustrate the difficulty to determine the authenticity of extant manuscripts and how they originated.

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THE ACADEMIC LECTURE

A Genre In Between

Dissertations and Lectures

Early modern academic culture in northwest Europe produced two kinds of text in particular: printed dissertations and manuscripts written in connection with academic teaching. The dissertations – i.e. the theses defended in disputations – are attractive sources for research in intellectual history, being easily available and readable. Manuscripts from teaching are not that accessible – they are stored deep in libraries, not always easy to read, often incomplete and difficult to attribute to an author in the usual sense of the word. But they are interesting, sometimes more interesting than the dissertation. This article will deal with handwritten products of academic teaching at the universities of Uppsala and Lund in 17th century Sweden.

The awkward concept of manuscript from teaching covers two sorts of texts: the lecture manuscript written by the professor and the lecture notes taken by someone in the audience and often reproduced and circulated afterwards. Most extant manuscripts are of the latter type, and so are the examples discussed in this article. Both types, however, can be arranged under the basically oral genre of the academic lecture.

The academic lecture is a supporting pillar of university teaching. It has been so since the Middle Ages and it still is. Before the printing press, lectures were practically the single source of knowledge of students. Very few of them possessed handwritten books. The advent of printing made books available, but they were still rare and comparably expensive. In 17th century Sweden, not the most affluent country of Europe, the average student probably had just a few volumes: a Latin grammar, an edition of some Roman author, and a compendium of theology. Such a book could be bought for a daler or so; less elementary books were more expensive. If the cost of living in Uppsala in the second part of the century was about 4 dalers per week, a substantial book like Pufendorf’s *De jure naturae et gentium* fetched a price of 10 dalers. Nor were there many textbooks produced by professors at the Swedish universities; there does not seem to have been a market stable enough for this.

This is to say that students, well into the 18th century, were heavily dependent on the lectures of professors and of notes taken during lectures which were circulated and copied. Gradually, books became more frequent, but lecture notes...
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seem to have been important throughout the 19th century. In fact, they are still important, and increasingly so, since modern students often prefer to have the course content recounted in lectures instead of acquiring it by laborious reading, and modern technology facilitates the distribution of lecture notes.

In view of this, it is striking how little attention the lecture attracted as a mode of communication. There was no room for it in the handbooks of classical rhetoric, since it did not fit into any of the three rhetorical genera, the deliberative, the judicial, and the demonstrative. There was more discussion of the disputation, i.e. the public defence of a thesis or dissertation, which was the most typical and conspicuous scholarly performance in the university tradition; de arte disputandi, »how to discuss a thesis«, was a rather frequent topic in academic self-reflection. Very little was said about the lecture. It does not seem to have been identified as a genre in its own right until the beginning of the 18th century, when denominations like oratio scholastica and stylus scholasticus turn up.

Still, lecturing was an important scholarly activity that has left to posterity an important genre. Remember that Aristotle’s philosophy has been brought to us in the form of lectures, and several other important philosophical works were not originally written by the author but delivered orally to an audience; Saussure and Wittgenstein are examples. Early modern lecture notes preserved in Swedish libraries normally did not present original ideas, but compared to printed academic texts they did communicate the standard knowledge of the time in a plain mode that was comparably unaffected by rhetoric and social paraphernalia. Printed dissertations were marked by the demonstrative and representative character of early modern society. They were rhetorical, since they were to a large extent formal exercises with an epideictic content. Often they were written by students, who mostly produced texts less mature than those of the professors. Add to this that dissertations were often a kind of social investment, where the respondent humbly addressed sponsors and future employers and was himself celebrated by colleagues and friends. The actual text of the dissertation was surrounded by social peritexts which often obscured the scholarly achievement.

In comparison, lecture notes have a more purely scholarly appearance: no peritexts, not much rhetoric, quite often a substantial content, and sometimes presenting topics and opinions on the outskirts of what was allowed. There may be references to current issues and events, which was normally avoided in dissertations, or advice on women and sex by a professor lecturing on ethics, or comments incompatible with royal absolutism by a professor teaching natural law. Clearly, lectures were no revolutionary genre, but they left some room for the unexpected and the unconventional and sometimes
opened the door to the realities that surrounded the academic sphere. This confirms the general impression that handwritten texts are often more interesting than printed ones, especially in the early modern period when the public sphere had not yet come into existence.

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**FLOATING MATERIAL**

Being interesting sources, lecture notes on the other hand are a kind of floating material with uncertain origin. Since they usually do not originate from the lecturer, one cannot be sure they represent exactly what was said. Often they are second-hand copies made by someone who did not attend the lecture, which may remove them further from the original. Add to this that the lectures of one professor were sometimes reused by his successor or someone else, who added some remarks and excluded others. All this makes the academic lecture a genre in between, vacillating between print and orality and transmitting texts without clear origin. To the modern scholar this may appear a weakness, but it reflects the intertextual and literally traditional character of early modern scholarly culture.

If early modern lectures were neglected by contemporary academic self-reflection, they have not fared much better in modern scholarship. Lately, a focus has been placed on the change in academic culture that occurred around 1800, when books became so easily available that lectures supplying basic academic learning did not seem necessary any longer, which in turn contributed to the rise of the research university and the Humboldtian ideal.7 Not much has been done, however, about the lectures in the Renaissance and late Renaissance.8 Lectures seem to have been similar all over Europe.9 At many universities, at least those in Germany and Scandinavia, there was a difference between public lectures, which the professors were obliged to deliver, and private lectures, the so-called collegia. Students were usually admitted to the latter by payment only, and the audience was smaller. The collegia constituted an important source of income for academic teachers, although in several cases poor students were admitted without charge.10 Obviously, professors preferred the collegia, and perhaps the students too; in the late 1600s, the rector of Uppsala University regularly reminded the professors at the beginning of the semester of their duty to deliver their public lectures, which some of them obviously were reluctant to do.11

In delivering lectures, dictation was common, i.e. the professor read his text slowly, paragraph by paragraph, word by word, giving the audience the opportunity to take down his words verbatim, or at least accurately enough to make it possible to reconstruct a continuous text in full sentences afterwards. In its most elementary form, consisting in the mere reading of an existing text, it could be left to a student to act as
a stand-in for the professor, as is actually reported from the University of Jena.12

The method was questioned, however. Dictation was difficult to follow, and tedious. At Uppsala, the regulations of the university, issued in 1626, expressed apprehensions about the method by stipulating that dictating long commentaries should be avoided, and, if practiced at all, there should be a focus on the argument of the whole book and the disposition of its chapters, in order to facilitate memorization by the audience.13 The instruction seems to have had some effect. Johannes Schefferus (1621–1679), a German immigrant and leading professor in the 1650s, 60s, and 70s, referred to it when, in an edition of a collection of his academic lectures, he pointed out that the published lectures differed from those he had actually delivered. For in Uppsala, in contrast to other universities, it was forbidden to dictate »ad calamum«, i.e. for the pen, because most students did not manage to keep up and jumped to next note before they had finished the former, thus having little use for their scarce notes.14 On the other hand, the same Schefferus announced in the lecture catalogue for 1665 that he would get ready with his ongoing work on natural law – »Breviarium«, or as it later was called, »Sciagraphia juris naturae« – and dictate it publicum in calamum.15 Obviously, this was an exception to his usual practice, since these lectures consisted of his own work that he published in this way by reading it verbatim – it was designed to become a textbook, but never appeared.16 Normally, his lectures consisted of comments on existing books, mainly Roman authors, where he may have practiced the less strict method he professed.

There are quite a lot of lecture notes from the 17th century in Swedish libraries, as I suppose there are elsewhere – I have made no comparisons. Almost all of them are in Latin, many of them carefully written, and well ordered. How did they come into being? It is not easy to trace the production process. The extant manuscripts are mostly the results of the efforts of advanced students, sometimes future academics who may have used their annotations during their own teaching activities. Quite often the manuscript tells when and by whom the lectures were given, sometimes also by whom the notes were taken. The aforementioned Sciagraphia juris naturae of Schefferus exists in at least fifteen different manuscripts, none of them by Schefferus’ own hand and several of them written after his death.17 Although never printed, the Sciagraphia, with additions and omissions, functioned as a basic account for much of the teaching of natural law in Uppsala until the beginning of the 18th century.

This, however, does not answer the question of how the texts were actually produced. Schefferus, as we have seen, pointed to the problem of dictation, and it is not likely that anyone could
render a dictated lecture in such orderly shape and handwriting as the manuscripts mostly present. I have found the expression *currente calamo excerptae*, i.e. excerpted off hand, on a manuscript, whereby the scribe admits that he has not reproduced the lecture verbatim but restricted himself to observations he found important – or maybe only intelligible. Perhaps many lecture manuscripts were of this kind, although it is not indicated as in this case. However, many accounts of delivered lectures look more complete. I do not dare to explain categorically how they came about. Stenography was introduced in Sweden in the 1660s, and in 1690 there appeared an introduction to the art. On its title page, it pointed out lectures and collegia at the university as one suitable use of the invention, among others. However, I have no information about anyone having used stenography in the early modern era. It may be possible that two or three of the audience practiced a form of teamwork by concentrating on various elements of the lecture and bringing them together afterwards; the method is occasionally mentioned in late sources from the 19th and 20th centuries. I find it more likely that a scribe somehow got access to the professor’s text and copied it in peace and quiet. If the lecturer did not expect or intend his lectures to be published, he could just as easily let someone make a proper handwritten version of them; the idea of intellectual property was not fully articulated in the early modern era, and the lectures could be regarded as a kind of common scholarly subject.

Who used the manuscripts? If the assumption that books were rare and expensive is correct, one might expect the number of extant lecture manuscripts to be much bigger than it is. Perhaps they were numerous, but only those of acceptable quality were preserved. Here is another lacuna in our knowledge: when, why and by whom were lecture manuscripts collected and bound into the volumes where we now find them? By contemporaries or by later librarians? The history of the preservation of these sources is unknown. There seem to have been individuals who were interested in or even specialized in collecting and copying manuscripts.

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PUFENDORF LECTURES

To go into more detail, I will discuss two manuscripts emanating from the lectures of the famous Samuel Pufendorf in the early 1670s. Pufendorf (1632–1694) was a professor at the new University of Lund from 1668 to 1676, and published his main works on natural law there, the *De jure naturae et gentium libri octo* in 1672 and the *De officio hominis et civis*, the short version of his doctrine, the following year. Pufendorf lectured on his own books, which was fairly uncommon; normally professors commented on books by other authors, especially those of antiquity. Pufendorf started commenting on his own
books as soon as they were published, or perhaps even earlier. The lectures are of interest, since no other remnants of Pufendorf’s teaching are known and since they show how he presented his doctrine to a contemporary audience of students. But I omit the contents from my account here, focusing instead on the manuscripts themselves.

Manuscripts from both lectures are extant; those on *De jure* are short, running 18 pages in 4:o only. They derive from a private collegium in September 1672, «from the mouth of the author» and comprise «excerpted observations» (observationes ... excerptae) on the first of the eight books of the *De jure* and the beginning of the second. Why the notes stop there is unclear; perhaps the whole lecture series was interrupted, or the student gave up. The notes refer to selected paragraphs in the book. There is no introduction, nor are there any generalized remarks on the idea of the whole work, as one might expect from someone who is introducing a brand new book to an audience. Quite a few comments concern issues where Pufendorf had been criticized by his opponents, mostly orthodox Lutheran theologians. Others seem haphazardly chosen. The wording «observationes excerptae» might suggest that it was the listener who chose the observations he took down out of a larger number of comments given by Pufendorf; in that case, the value of the manuscript as a witness of how Pufendorf chose to present his book would be weakened.

The other manuscript on *De officio hominis et civis* runs to 105 pages in 4:o and follows the book all the way through, although thinning out markedly towards the end. The series started on February 11, 1673 and ended on May 15, 1674. Eleven separate lecture days are indicated in the manuscript, but there must have been more; after December 3, 1673, when Pufendorf had reached chapter 3 of book two, there are no more dates given. This time there is an introduction, where Pufendorf explains why the moral philosophy of Aristotle is antiquated and has to be replaced by something else, i.e. natural law according to Pufendorf. Then follow the observations on different paragraphs, covering the majority of the chapters of the *De officio*. The observations usually depart from some words quoted from the text, which are explained or elaborated on. The quotations, which are underlined, indicate that the audience, or at least some of them, had a copy of the book with them, something that was probably not the case with those who listened to Pufendorf commenting on the massive, and expensive, *De jure*. The notes from the lectures on *De officio* are not only more exhaustive, they are also somewhat better structured, lacking the – not very frequent – anacoluthons in the *De jure* notes. The possibility that the listener to the *De officio* lectures should have made a choice of his own among the comments given is here excluded; obviously, he has followed Pufendorf’s account closely.
There is a problem here, however: Pufendorf’s dedication of the book to Count Gustaf Otto Stenbock, the Chancellor of the university, is dated February 10, 1673. The first lecture took place the day after, on February 11. We can hardly expect the printer in Lund to have produced the book in one day. Did Pufendorf only introduce the book in his first lecture, waiting with the comments on particular passages to the next time on March 6, when the De officio may have appeared? Probably not; there are already comments on particular passages in the first lecture; moreover, he did not send a copy of De officio to his colleague Schefferus in Uppsala until November, which indicates that the book appeared rather late during the year of 1673. A solution to this problem may be that the text and the dedication were not printed at the same time. The dedication is paginated with small letters, together with Pufendorf’s preface to the book, whereas the pagination of the main text has block letters. That the book was not complete when the lectures started is corroborated by the fact that Pufendorf does not comment on the preface of the De officio in the lectures; he goes directly to the main text. In the preface, he developed his opinion on the relationship between natural law and moral theology, a delicate topic. That he omitted comments on it may be due to the controversial nature of the topic, but can be explained equally well if we assume that the dedication and the preface were added later. The explanation would be even more convincing had copies existed of the De officio that do not have the dedication and the preface. I have not come across such a copy. Maybe the De officio was not yet bound when the lectures started, which would mean that the audience, or some of them, had printed sheets of the text available.

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**WHO WROTE THE MANUSCRIPTS?**

There remains to be said something of the origin of the manuscripts of the Pufendorf lectures. They are by the same hand, and preserved in the same volume in the Royal Library in Stockholm. The formula *ex ore ipsius auctoris* on one of them, together with the fact that the first person is used – I, I respond, we – might lead one to assume that the manuscripts are by Pufendorf himself. However, strong reasons dissuade against that exciting conclusion, above all that the handwriting is not that of Pufendorf. Instead, the scribe appears to be Jacob Troilius, a vicar in the diocese of Västerås some 100 kilometres from Stockholm. Troilius was an enthusiastic collector who brought together several volumes of manuscripts from various fields; if he did not get hold of original texts, he copied them. He might have had scholarly or pedagogical reasons for copying the Pufendorf lectures, but may also have done it just because of Pufendorf’s reputation.

It is most uncertain, however, that Troilius attended Pufen-
dorff’s lectures. Born in 1657, he was a boy of 15 when Pufendorf lectured on *De jure*, and although people had to mature quickly in those days in order to have time to achieve something, I doubt that a mid-teenager was skilled enough in Latin to take notes and make the abbreviations used in the manuscripts. Additionally, there is no evidence that Troilius was ever in Lund. Therefore, the manuscripts were probably written when he was older and had established his habit of collecting manuscripts.

If so, someone else who attended the Pufendorf lectures in the early 1670s must have taken the notes. Whether he also added the references to later writings by Pufendorf that are quite frequent in the manuscript, or whether they were put in by Troilius, is uncertain; there may also be yet another mediator between the original manuscript and Troilius.

One possible actor in the process may have been Jesper Svedberg, a future bishop and leading clergyman in Sweden. Born in 1653 and a few years older than Troilius, Svedberg studied in Lund between 1669 and 1674, read and listened to Pufendorf and, according to his autobiography, admired him for his non-scholastic, practical teaching of moral philosophy. Svedberg went to Uppsala in 1674, where he may have connected with Troilius. But this is just one possibility to pursue.

The same holds true for most of the topics I have touched upon in this paper. The academic lecture of the early modern era is, to a large extent, a terra incognita. To understand it better, meticulous studies of several manuscripts and manuscript genealogies are required, so that patterns and general characteristics can be pointed out. Questions should be asked about the method of lecturing in various disciplines – lectures in the sciences must have differed substantially from those in the humanities; about material circumstances like time, heating, and light; about the number of listeners; about fees; about languages – Latin vs the vernacular; and about the contents of lectures. That would be part of a better understanding not only of the lecture phenomenon but also of the scholarly and pedagogic practice in the semi-oral culture of early modern universities in general.

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ENDNOTES

1 Annerstedt, Claes, *Upsala universitets historia* vol II:2 (Uppsala 1909), 157sqq. For a recent discussion, stressing the variety of prices due to paper quality, binding and other factors, see Wingård, Rikard, *Att sluta från början. Tidigmodern läsning och folkbokens receptionsestetik* (Bokenäset 2011), 103–113.

2 Annerstedt op. cit. 108 for 17th century. For 19th century, see Frängsmyr, Carl, *Uppsala universitet 1852–1916* vol 2:1 (Uppsala 2010), 289 sqq, also Johansson, Kurt, »Den akad-
emiska föreläsningen, Språkets speglingar (Skåneförlaget, Lund 2000), 81–87.

3 Annerstedt op. cit. 158. For conditions in Germany, see Clark, William, Academic charisma and the origins of the research university (Chicago UP 2006), 86 sq.

4 Marty, Hans-Peter, Philosophische Dissertationen deutscher Universitäten 1660–1750 (München 1982) has listed a number of dissertations on that topic (662). Some dissertations on the same topic were published at Swedish universities.

5 The entry Vorlesung in Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik, Bd 9 (Niemeyer: Tübingen 2009) column 1195 sqq.


7 Clark, Academic charisma.


10 Annerstedt op. cit., 119 sqq.


12 Geschichte der Universität Jena 1548/58 (Jena 1958), 76.

13 Statutes of the University of Uppsala 1626 on lectures (Annerstedt op.cit., bihang (appendix) 2, 276); »sed, si dictandum erit, argumentum cuiusque scripti cum dispositione, et partibus, ut et singulorum capitum oeconomic brevemque sensum tradent, memorias auditorum consulentes.« The new statutes of 1655 did not repeat this instruction, but Schefferus apparently had the older statutes in mind.

14 Schefferus, Lectionum academicarum liber (Hamburg & Amsterdam 1675), Preface to the reader: »Neque enim nobis ea recepta est consuetudo, quam scimus obtinere alibi ut in calamum dicitemus nostris auditoribus notanda, prohibent ipsae leges nostrae Academiae laborem taediosum juxta atque utilem paucissimis cum plerique ante finem ejus vocentur ad alia, nec ex paucis annotatis fructum possint consequi speratum.«

15 Catalogus praelectionum ... Academiae Upsaliensis 1666: »... Iuris naturae breviarium, studebit absolvere, ac publicum in calamum dictare«. Two years later he announces that »he will publish« (publicabit) the breviarium he has written.
Note the word »publicabit« – one could publish orally as well as in print.

16 Printing was started but never completed; a few pages are extant.

17 Grape, Anders, »Om Schefferi Sciagraphia iuris naturae«, Nordisk tidskrift för bok- och biblioteksväsen 1921.


20 Observationes super librum de IN & G Pufendorfii ex ip-sius auctoris ore in collegio privato Londini Scanorum Ao 1672 Mens. Septembris excerptae. (Ms Royal Library, Stockholm B 399.)

21 Observationes in libellum Sam. Pufendorfii de officio hominis et civis ex Publicis lectionibus ipsius auctoris Ao 1673 d. 17. Febr. (Ms Royal Library, Stockholm B 399.)

22 Considering the price of books, it was not self-evident that students had a copy of the book that was to be commented on. It is clear that it was desirable, as is shown by an Uppsala professor in 1661 who had decided to read Isocrates since his own edition of Paleophatus – a Greek writer on mythology – had not been printed in time; but Isocrates was available. (Annerstedt op. cit. II:2, 114.) Pufendorf’s De jure was much more expensive. There is of course a social aspect to this question. A picture of a lecture from 17th century Germany shows the social hierarchy in the lecture room. Only the students in the first rows close to the professor possess books, while those further back seem to be lacking both books and writing materials. (Williams op.cit. 86 sq.)

23 Letter from Pufendorf to Schefferus Nov. 23, 1673 (ms Uppsala university library G 360c).

24 That it could be Pufendorf’s hand has been convincingly excluded by Detlef Döring, the editor of Pufendorf’s correspondence (personal communication).

25 The name Troilius appears nowhere in the manuscripts. He is tentatively pointed out as the scribe by Grape op. cit. 219. I have compared the Pufendorf lectures with manuscripts written by Troilius and kept in the library of Västerås (in particular the manuscripts mentioned in footnote 17 above) and found that Grape’s attribution is probably correct. Abbreviations are similar, numbers are similar, and so is the handwriting in general. But I am not absolutely sure.