

The Crisis in the Humanities

The Crisis in the Humanities:

Transdisciplinary Solutions

Edited by

Žarko Cvejić, Andrija Filipović
and Ana Petrov

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INTRODUCTION

ŽARKO CVEJIĆ, ANDRIJA FILIPOVIĆ
AND ANA PETROV

In April 2015, the Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade, Serbia, hosted a major international conference to address the long-standing crisis in the humanities and reflect together on possible ways of transcending it. The conference saw presentations by some 50 scholars working in the humanities and related fields, both young, still in the early stages of their academic careers, and senior, more established thinkers from across Europe. The latter included Miško Šuvaković and Rastko Močnik, both from the Faculty of Media and Communications, as well as Marina Gržinić and Aleš Erjavec from the Institute of Philosophy in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The keynote speakers were Marina Gržinić and Lev Kreft (Department of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana) and the closing remarks were given by Terry Smith, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. In addition to Serbia, Australia, Slovenia, and the United States, the conference also gathered participants from Austria, Great Britain, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Israel, Norway, and Romania.

This book is a result of that conference, comprising a selection of essays about the crisis in the humanities and possible ways out of it by most of the scholars mentioned above, as well as a selection of the most provocative papers presented at the conference by younger and less established thinkers. The resulting collection of essays will interest all students of the humanities, especially those interested in its ongoing crisis, not only from Southeast Europe, but globally.

Since the early 1960s, there has been a heated debate about the alleged crisis in the humanities. The emergence of cultural studies opened not only new perspectives, but also posed many new problems. The so-called “long crisis in the humanities” has revolved, on the one hand, around the theoretical issue of the “crisis of the subject” and, on the other hand, the practical issue of the position of the humanities as a field of research in the

academia. This book examines the position of the humanities in contemporary society and challenges the ways the issues that form the foci of our disciplines have been addressed in recent theoretical discourses. Our intention was to reflect on the status of the disciplines in the humanities and probe the links between history, culture, media, and art.

The crucial question addressed here is the following: are the humanities really in crisis and, if yes, what are the features, causes, and possible outcomes of that crisis? The book discusses the characteristics and relevance of certain alternative contemporary transdisciplinary approaches that cut across traditional disciplines, such as, for example, neo- and post-Marxism, and their potential contributions to various theoretical paradigms of the 21st century.

Furthermore, since many have argued that we live at a time when the humanities have been reduced to a passive historical segment of the academia, treated as playthings for closed academic circles, we want to point out possible ways of opening the closed “high art” circles of the academia and reflecting critically on the perspectives of engaged art and scholarship. We want to examine the relevance of art practices in contemporary society, to define engaged art and establish its consequences.

Finally, some of the papers address the issues of producing individualities, collectivities, identities, and positions in the consumerist age and the position(s) of art in transdisciplinary transformations. Seeking to encourage contemporary theoretical approaches, we want to discuss the potentials of contemporary research of the audience’s body, the artist’s body, and the public sphere body in the context of new materialist studies, text/discourse studies, and other theoretical approaches in the humanities.

In line with the issues discussed above, the book is divided in three parts: 1) general discussions of the (purported) crisis in the humanities as a whole, as well as in individual disciplines; 2) more specific discussions of individual issues related to the crisis; and 3) discussions of the respective positions of the artist and the audience in contemporary art and media.

Part I begins with **Rachel Aumiller**’s critique of the privileging of seriousness in modern scholarship and particularly in the humanities, on account of its purported neutrality and objectivity, the resulting foreclosing of all other emotions and insights, and the potentially subversive and enriching potential of laughter, as discussed in Karl Marx’s dichotomy of laughter and seriousness. Then, **Žarko Cvejić** discusses the (still ongoing) crisis that swept (positivist) musicology in the 1980s, following the general breakdown of positivism in the 1970s, and transdisciplinarity as a possible way out. **Nikola Dedić** pursues a critique of the philosophy of the

event, whereby the event defines radically new, different ways of existence in the world; in other words, the event is the overcoming, transcendence of the ordinary and the everyday; referring to Stanley Cavell's thesis that negating the ordinary and the everyday leads only to a kind of "private language", Dedić argues that the basis of any social transformation is not to negate but rather, through the process of self-knowledge, to rediscover the ordinary and the everyday. According to **Aleš Erjavec**, the notion of aesthetics has undergone enormous transformations over the course of its development—the advent of postmodernism has changed not only the place and role of literature and the novel in culture(s), but also that of the fine and visual arts. With the advent of postmodernism, aesthetics discovered contemporary art, while we are witnessing the passage from literary to visual culture in the global culturescape. Departing from her latest book, *Necropolitics, Racialization, and Global Capitalism*, co-authored with Šefik Tatlić, **Marina Gržinić** reworks the main notions of what and how to think capitalism, politics, exploitation, aesthetics, and racialisation. In his essay, **Lev Kreft** shows that Marxist aesthetics has shared the same contradictions with philosophical aesthetics, including its entrapment in modernist philosophy of art; to change the perspective, he proposes to begin from Marx's critique of political economy, treating it as his only existing aesthetics. In her contribution, **Bojana Matejić** analyses the relationship and contradictions between humanist and anti-humanist aesthetics by way of comparing two theoretical paradigms: Herbert Marcuse's humanist approach and the anti-humanism of Jacques Rancière. **Maja Stanković** discusses the contextual nature of contemporary art, which could be observed as a crisis in art (as well as an indicator of the crisis in the humanities) or, alternatively, in terms of the emancipation of context, as one of the key features of contemporary art. **Vladimir Stevanović**'s article discusses the conceptual, thematic, and methodological possibilities of the aesthetics of architecture, in line with contemporary, discursively, and culturally oriented aesthetics. Stevanović discusses the historical relationship between aesthetics and aesthetic problematisations in architecture theory. **Miško Šuvaković** points to the problem of constructing and performing a new transdisciplinary school of the humanities and theory of art in the context of the ongoing global and local crisis, i.e., of the biopolitical disciplining of forms of life in the "gray zones of everyday life". Finally, **Mirjana Veselinović Hofman** argues that musicology has exceeded the scope of the study of music solely focusing on analytical and/or positivistic descriptions of musical phenomena because in the postmodern condition, musicology has

managed to fully articulate its genuine nature, revealing it by means of a contextual consideration of its factual findings, while the concept of transdisciplinarity may be critical in terms of preserving the interdisciplinary profile of musicology as a discipline.

Part II begins with **Marija Maglov**'s essay, which deals with the potentials of Wolfgang Welsch's concept of transculturality in re-examining discourses on the musical avant-garde and its survival in postmodernity and contemporaneity. **Aleksa Milanović**'s essay is an attempt to point out the mechanisms of engendering social phobias regarding different, non-normative bodily forms, as well as the possibilities and abilities of the body to resist social oppression and overcome the limitations imposed on it by the dominant discourse. **Sanela Nikolić** looks at the *Tel Quel* group and argues that overcoming the traditional humanities, as a model of *reading and representing reality* in the capitalist social order, also required it to overcome rationalism, logocentrism, and existentialism in the philosophical and literary sense, the critique of structuralism in the scientific and theoretical sense, and, finally, to develop *semanalysis* as a general philosophical and scientific theory, as a universal epistemological model capable of including all those areas of human experience that were repressed in the traditional humanities. Still in the domain of literary theory, in her contribution **Dubravka Đurić** discusses the (de)merits of Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti's theorisations of world literature and their critical reception by other literary theorists. **Ana Petrov** addresses the consequences and implications of popular music concerts in the post-Yugoslav space, arguing that concerts have historically served various collectivities as a means of coping with a problematic (historical, musical, emotional) past. In her contribution, **Lada Stevanović** poses the following question: are there some tabooed topics that are in and outside of the academia at the same time? To problematise the issue, she reflects on her research of laughter and gender in ancient Greek funerary rites.

Opening the final part of the book, **Andrija Filipović**'s essay deals with the possibility of (re)imagining the subject(s) and political communities they make at the intersections of artistic practices such as video art and experimental film and the concepts of sexuality, the body, etc. Moving to the commercial side of film, **Oleg Jeknić** discusses the possibilities of using commercial movie recommender systems in scholarly research in the field of film aesthetics, arguing that data about viewers' aesthetic preferences could be used to construct personalised narratives. Moving from film to sound, **Biljana Leković** problematises sound art as a simultaneously trans-musical and trans-visual practice, or a

trans-art connecting music and the visual arts, as well as the competences of current musicology as the study of music to engage with it. **Dragana Stojanović** examines complex relations between the artist and the audience in the presence of an artificial body, exploring the fascination with automata, specifically in performance acts that induce a special type of crisis of all subjects involved. Moving from automata to holograms, **Aneta Stojnić** argues that the fast-developing phenomenon of holograms (as) performers offers us an opportunity to look at the changes that digital technologies have brought to the contemporary understanding of the body, as well as to examine how new subjectivities are created in the relation *between* apparatus and substance. Stojnić looks at the extreme example of the hologram as a new kind of performer that redefines the notion of “life” in live performance. Finally, from her dual position of a scholar and practitioner of bio art, **Polona Tratnik** draws our attention to bio art produced in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, arguing that modern scholarship has tended to misrepresent bio art as an exclusively “First World” phenomenon, neglecting all bio art from other cultures and regions of the world, along with its geopolitical and contextual specificities.

PART I

GENERAL DISCUSSIONS: THE CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES

CENSORING EMOTIONAL DISCOURSE: MARX ON SERIOUSNESS AND LAUGHTER

RACHEL AUMILLER

An age in which you are permitted to feel what you wish and to say what you feel
is a rare happiness.
—Tacitus¹

I begin with an epigraph by Tacitus. The quote has been taken up by figures such as David Hume and Benjamin Franklin, something of a cliché in writings on censorship. Most writers translate *sentire* as “to think”: “An age in which we can think what we want and say what we think is a rare happiness”. Karl Marx also centres his first publication on censorship around Tacitus’s quote. Marx’s use of the quote is unusual, however, because he translates *sentire* as “to feel” rather than “to think”, suggesting that the censorship of emotion is at once the censorship of thought. This paper looks critically at modes of censorship that target the emotional tone of discourse rather than the content of speech. Despite the affective turn in the humanities, led by feminist epistemologists and affect theorists, I suggest that objectivity and impartiality—qualities thought to be dispassionate—remain the standard tone or style of what is considered rigorous scholarship. Even our writings on affect can be somewhat guarded against sounding overly emotional. The restriction of emotion in the humanities causes critical thought to suffer in two ways: first, when certain seemingly dispassionate tones and styles are held as the standard of “serious” scholarship, a variety of underrepresented voices are excluded from contributing to critical discourse; second, the restriction of emotional speech inhibits the potential of scholarship to inspire critical action in response to that which it analyses. Turning to Marx’s early work on censorship of emotional writing, I identify laughter as one subversive emotion that has the capacity to challenge normative tones of speech that are presented as dispassionate. Laughter is one emotion that can break the seal of seriousness, allowing us to experience and express a variety of emotions important for a flourishing intellectual community.

Guiding Questions in this Project

What affective tones or moods are discouraged in academic or critical discourse? What are the epistemic and political consequences of the historical labelling of certain affects as divisive or anti-intellectual? In what ways are our emotions censored and what are the given justifications for this censorship? What forms does censorship take? What is the relationship between the censorship of affect and the censorship of thought? How can drawing on a greater variety of emotions make critical discourse capable of inspiring transformative action?

Traditional Western epistemology holds that the passions obscure our understanding on a number of levels: a deep emotional investment in one's subject matter, for example, may compromise one's research with the bias of one's personal desires or fears; our passions make us vulnerable in a way that allows us to be manipulated by advertisements or political propaganda; strong emotions can quickly escalate into fanatic belief or violence. It is on account of these real dangers regarding emotions that academic speech has traditionally been guarded against rhetoric that moves its audience on an emotional register. However, while emotional rhetoric is often marked as unreliable and divisive, one of the problems with cut-and-dry, analytic accounts of critical issues is their inability to galvanise an audience. As David Simon, creator of the HBO series *The Wire* and former journalist of *The Baltimore Sun*, claims, a critical account that fails to make an emotional appeal is impotent when it comes to initiating critical action from its readers. In an interview with Bill Moyers, he talks about the difficulty of communicating through a medium that is heavily dependent on statistical data and severely limited in its affective tone and style:

I did a lot of journalism I thought was pretty good. I was very careful as a reporter... I was trying to explain how the drug war doesn't work. And I would write these very careful and very well-researched pieces. And they would go into the ether and be gone. And whatever editorial writer was coming behind me would then write, "Let's get tough on drugs". As if I hadn't said anything. Even my own newspaper. And I would think, "Man, it's just such an uphill struggle to do this with facts". (Simon 2009)

As we have seen through the massive popularity of *The Wire*, when the same information is presented through characters that arouse and enrage us and plots that provoke laughter, sadness, and disgust, "people", as Simon puts it, "jump out of their seats". In Simon's view, the short-sightedness of his colleagues at *The Sun* was that they were too easily satisfied with an erudite presentation of raw data, which they saw as the end goal rather

than something that could alter the conditions they exposed. As Simon suggests, when our accounts of crucial issues do not cause our audiences to “jump out of their seats”—when critical theory fails to initiate critical action—then perhaps the issues we sought to expose have not been effectively understood at all.

We can look to 17th-century debates concerning the relationship between knowledge and passion to see how the scholastic notion of dispassionate *scientia* became the model for all intellectual discourse. However, even among early modern philosophers, there were important voices of dissent who noted the obvious limitations of epistemologies that sought to neutralise the passions. Hobbes, for one, insisted that reason alone is not able to stimulate the amount of attention and rigour required to discover how things are actually connected (Hobbes 2003, esp. Ch. 5–7). Only a strong passion can grab and focus our attention, allowing us to follow a causal sequence to some end. The stronger our passion, the more chance we have at arriving at a clear and meaningful understanding of our object of enquiry. Spinoza makes an even stronger claim, which is perhaps closer to Marx’s position: it is not that passion must accompany reason in order to initiate and sustain our quest to understand something, as Hobbes sees it; *the epistemic process of overcoming confusion or ignorance can also be understood as a transformation of our affects and this transition is itself an emotional experience that is intrinsic to knowledge*. As we move from superstitious or misguided beliefs to rational ideas, we do not become less emotional; rather, our fickle passions grow into affects that are more intense, constant, and deeply satisfying. While the passions of confused ideas leave us feeling incapable of acting on our environment which overwhelms us, emotion *as understanding* empowers us by allowing us to actively affect and be affected by our environment in a greater variety of ways (Spinoza 1988).

The equation of rigorous critique with dispassionate discourse is not only an epistemic error but also has the consequence of alienating individuals from the realisation of their own political agency as a community. Marx highlights this point through two specific emotions: *seriousness and laughter*. In Marx’s view, like that of Spinoza, superstitious or confused accounts of the world and ones that expose certain aspects of our social and political conditions have an affective character. And again like Spinoza, Marx suggests that understanding takes the form of emotions that are more intense and more powerful than the passions of misguided ideology. As a young revolutionary journalist and philosopher, Marx expresses frustration with journalism’s reliance on statistical data over compelling narratives and the fact that academic

writing is rarely as passionate as the proponents of that which it critiques. Even the advocates of the censorship of emotion, he claims, were more passionate in their conviction than the philosophers they sought to silence. Marx's concern is not so much with narratives that explicitly seek to rouse their audiences' emotions, but with those that are falsely presented as without affect and therefore ostensibly more closely aligned with truth.

Marx defines seriousness as an affect that falsely appears to be without an affective character and identifies seriousness as the dominant mood of both academic discourse and journalism. Serious scholarship takes on the "modest" yet demanding task of presenting its subject matter through a balanced perspective in the most objective manner possible. His critique of seriousness, given as the normative and proper mood of critical thinking and writing, is that it censors a variety of stronger emotions that can be of epistemic value: anger, audacity, irreverence, humour. It therefore places us at a distance from that which we seek to understand. Our education, social practices, and media train us to treat certain concepts and practices with an attitude of absolute seriousness and reverence. Such learned attitudes make it difficult for us to think critically or call the normativity of an idea or practice into question. *Laughter*, in contrast, is an emotion that erupts out of seriousness, when seriousness can no longer generate the gravity or "neutrality" it demands. As Marx claims, scholarship that takes itself too seriously, and thus does not take its subject matter seriously enough, becomes farce. As he puts it: "I treat the ludicrous seriously when I treat it ludicrously" (Marx 1975, 109). Laughter can be a detection of confusion or contradiction in our normative accounts of ourselves and of the world even before we can articulate the need for revision. Laughter can mark the transitory moment that challenges learned attitudes, opening us up to experience a greater variety of epistemic emotions capable of inciting critical action.

Marx's early writings on censorship, composed in the form of fiery pamphlets intended for a wide audience, receive less attention than his later works, which are seen as representing his mature political philosophy. However, it is in these writings that Marx takes up the early modern theme of political affect and argues that the restriction of affects such as humour and laughter makes critical scholarship feeble. The 1842 Prussian censorship statute titled "Laws on the Freedom of the Press" was an amendment to the censorship laws adopted in 1819. The original statute named a series of subjects that could not be criticised by the press or in academic writing. The new amendment claimed to release the public from these temporary strictures. It claimed to "free the press from improper restrictions" and "any undue constraint on the activity of writers" (Marx

1975, 109). It went on to address the individual articles of the 1819 law, lifting the former limitations on the content of critique. However, the right to freedom of expression only applied to the content of a speech. The censorship was redirected to focus on the spirit in which such critiques were delivered and took on the ambiguous task of monitoring what was identified as certain extreme or disruptive tendencies of different kinds of speech. For example, the amendment states that law can no longer prevent the media from conducting a “frank discussion of the international affairs of the Prussian state”. However, such discussions must also take caution to present the state in a “favourable light” to countries that threaten the security of the State (Marx 1975, 115). In another instance, the amendment prescribes that the law can no longer silence critiques of religion. However, a serious critique of Christianity must also avoid sounding either too “frivolous” or too “hostile” (Marx 1975, 116). Conversely, a religious body can no longer be prevented from voicing disapproval of the state, but any opposition must not adopt a tone that is too fanatical (Marx 1975, 117–18). While the 1819 law directly dictated which subjects of public speech are legitimate and illegitimate, the 1842 amendment made an appeal for objective and respectful public discourse. Affects or tones, such as frivolity or hostility—two modes of humorous speech, as Marx points out—were identified as a threat to “the need of frank and decent public speech”.

At first glance, the 1842 amendment, which both lifts former strictures on the subject matter of speech and claims to create a civil environment for public debate, may seem laudable. Who could object to a call for philosophical discourse that is open and polite to all perspectives, or a call for religious discourse that is tolerant and measured, or a call for the media to be frank and objective? Yet, as Marx sees it, laws or values regarding speech that have the appearance of fostering an atmosphere conducive to “serious critical inquiry” are in fact more pernicious than laws that directly inhibit what we may do or say. Without the freedom of affect, our commentary on the world becomes complacent. In Marx’s view, the Prussian censorship tells us, “you may write freely, but at the same time every word must be a curtsy to the liberal censorship, which allows you to express your equally serious and modest opinions. Indeed, do not lose your feeling of reverence!” (Marx 1975, 114). Marx argues that both the affects of seriousness and modesty place an individual at a distance from whatever she might seek to understand. In the end, Marx seems to think, this regulation of affect is barely tenable. “Serious and modest!” Marx responds,

What fluctuating, relative concepts! Where does serious cease and jocularly begin? Where does modesty cease and immodesty begin [...] if

you want to be consistent [...] forbid also a too serious and too modest investigation of the truth, for too great seriousness is the most ludicrous thing of all, and too great modesty is the bitterest irony. (Marx 1975, 113)

Marx insists that when seriousness and modesty are given as the proper attitude of one seeking to understand her social and political conditions, a third affect is suppressed—humour. Marx identifies humour as a political affect, specifically because it challenges an attitude of reverence. Insisting that one approach laws and norms with reverence prohibits one from approaching them at all. Furthermore, the greatest threat to critique, in Marx's view, is boredom. A serious and modest investigation, which lacks the ability to incite laughter at the absurdity of the object of critique, also lacks the ability to excite, not only an audience, but also the author herself. "I am humorous", Marx declares, "but the law bids me to write seriously. I am audacious, but the law commands that my style be modest. *Grey, all grey, is the sole, the rightful colour of freedom*" (Marx 1975, 113). If we are too serious in our critical enquiry, we grow bored with ourselves and forget the real power of critical writing to destroy the contradictions it observes. Critique gains power when we have the audacity to laugh in the face of that which was once upheld with reverence.

Marx sees humour as the rising spirit of a society that can no longer defend the contradictions of its values. Communal laughter is necessary to challenge laws or norms that have been reinforced by appealing to our sense of appropriateness and seriousness. As Marx frames it in "The 18th Brumaire", powerful critique takes effect through two stages. The first stage is refutation, which offers only partial or superficial liberation from a deeply ingrained order. At the first stage of critique "the tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx 1979[a], 103). For while we may openly mock that which we once revered, the object of laughter is sustained by the structure of habit, ritual, and law. The second and final phase of critique is the comic destruction that accompanies public laughter. Here, Marx writes, critique is

not as a scalpel but a weapon. Its object is its enemy, which it wishes not to refute but to destroy for the spirit of these conditions (which it aims to destroy) is already refuted [...] indignation is its essential pathos, denunciation its principle task. (Marx 1979[b], 177)

As Spinoza claims, only an affect can defeat an affect (Spinoza 1988). By breaking the seal of seriousness, laughter allows a community not to mock, but to *destroy* that which it formally held as sacred.²

Notes

¹ “*Rara temporum felicitate, ubi sentire, quæ velis et quæ sentias dicere licet*”, from Tacitus (*Histories*, 1.1.4), quoted in David Hume’s *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Benjamin Franklin (*The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Vol. 6, ed. Leonard W. Labaree, 1959, 29), and Karl Marx (*Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction*).

² My aim in turning to Marx’s writing on censorship of emotional speech is not to mark affects such as seriousness and laughter as oppositional. Any discourse that does not take that which it critiques seriously enough remains an empty farce that serves to reinforce rather than destroy the contradiction it seeks to expose; and yet, at times, responding to such contradictions with laughter is the most serious treatment of that which we seek to critique. When seriousness and laughter show themselves as intrinsically connected to the other, critical speech can result in transformative action.

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THE CRISIS IN MUSICOLOGY: TRANSDISCIPLINARY SOLUTIONS

ŽARKO CVEJIĆ

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary of English, “musicology” denotes an academic discipline in the humanities that focuses on “the study of music as a branch of knowledge or field of research as distinct from composition or performance”. However, as I attempt, among other things, to show in this paper, even a cursory glance over the last 30 years or so of musicology’s existence as an academic discipline, focused on the most prominent texts in and on musicology published during that time, reveals that even in such a pithy and purposefully general definition as Merriam-Webster’s, little is beyond doubt, debate, and, not least, crisis, including musicology’s standing as a discipline in the humanities, as well as the very concept that constitutes its object of study—music. On the other hand, what most major figures in the discipline who have addressed the state of musicology in depth over the last 30 years or so would agree about, whether implicitly or explicitly, is that the discipline has been and still is in a state of crisis—conceptual, intellectual, institutional, political, ideological, even ethical. Given that only a handful of musicologists have actually addressed this crisis in major studies or at least parts thereof—in itself another symptom of musicology’s current state—virtually all of them are discussed below, albeit in various degrees of detail.

Therefore, the crisis of musicology forms the topic of this paper, in line with the topic of the conference and project that gave rise to this book, heeding its call to address the (alleged) “long” crisis in the humanities along with the often heated debates that have periodically raged around it since the 1960s and trying to position musicology in contemporary society and the ways it has addressed its topic—music, whatever that is—in recent theoretical discourses. Hence the admittedly less than original title of my paper, a close paraphrase or, rather, a lifting of the title of the conference and project without which this paper would not have been written in this form. Also, it is a way of drawing attention to the ongoing crisis in musicology, a predicament shared with the humanities as a whole, which

has arguably brought musicology closer to its fellow disciplines in the humanities than it has ever been since its inception some 150 years ago; if every cloud has one, this would be the proverbial silver lining of the present crisis of musicology and that of the humanities in general.

But if, to cite another piece of proverbial wisdom, every crisis is also an opportunity, the ongoing “long” crisis in musicology may also be a chance to rethink and reconstitute the discipline, bringing it closer to the rest of the humanities and making it more relevant and engaged in social and political terms, which was another stated goal of the conference and project that spawned this volume. Therefore, the rest of the text contains not only a discussion of musicology’s place among the humanities, its crisis and its historical roots and causes, but also an argument for transdisciplinarity as a promising, if not the only, way out of or, indeed, beyond the crisis of musicology.

But first, a few lines on the “long” crisis of the humanities. That the humanities are and have been in a state of profound crisis is, of course, old news and a rather long story, going back to the emergence of post-structuralism and post-modernity in the 1960s—hence the “long”. Since the story has been told and retold many times, by much more informed and apt narrators than myself, there is neither need nor space, for that matter, to rehash it here. Suffice it to note, as did the call for this project, that the crisis was primarily triggered by that of the (human) subject, the foundation of the entire project of the humanities since at least the Enlightenment. The wholesale loss of trust in that “free, rational, independent, reflective, self-determining subject” (Pippin 2005, 5), inevitably undermined the foundations of the project that had rested on it for over 200 years. As Robert Pippin and many others have noted, this was by no means a sudden disenchantment, but rather the culmination of a process that had started as early as 1800: in Pippin’s summary, much of European 19th-century thought was dominated by “profound suspicion” about the subject of the Enlightenment, starting with the likes of Schelling, Schopenhauer, and other early German Romantics, and continued by such disparate thinkers as Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. The latter’s view of the subject as constituted and torn by unconscious drives beyond his control was then taken over and translated into the linguistic domain by Lacan, Freud’s most prominent successor and founder of theoretical psychoanalysis. In turn, this breakdown of the subject of the Enlightenment was followed by a wholesale collapse of all universal truths including the very concept of truth, or, in François Lyotard’s terms, by the decline of all master narratives and all universal schemes of explication,

such as those of progress, religion, positivism, etc. This has been most evident in the work of by and large French post-structuralist thinkers such as, in addition to Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, and others.

Meanwhile, throughout the 1960s and '70s, musicology was still ensconced in positivism, continued from the post-war period, ignorant of the upheavals in other disciplines of the humanities, such as literary and arts studies. In the words of Susan McClary, one of the few musicologists who were dissatisfied with that state of affairs, concerning musicology's total disregard of second-wave feminist theory of the 1970s:

When feminist criticism emerged in literary studies and art history in the early 1970s, many women musicologists such as myself looked on from the sidelines with interest and considerable envy. But at the time, there were formidable obstacles preventing us from bringing those same questions to bear on music. (McClary 1991, 5)

In fact, as McClary goes on to remind us, and rightly indeed, not only was there no feminist criticism in musicology before the 1980s, there was virtually no criticism or interpretation in musicology at all, no interest in exploring what the discipline's object of study—music, or, rather, Western art music—might have meant to its original creators and consumers in their own socio-historical contexts and, indeed, what it might mean to us today:

The intellectual obstacles that have impeded the development of feminist music criticism are rooted in the assumptions that have long informed and sustained academic musicology in general. It is important to remember that there is very little resembling criticism *of any sort* in musicology. For many complex reasons, music has been and continues to be almost entirely exempted from criticism as it is practiced within other humanities disciplines. (McClary 1991, 19–20)

Instead, historical musicology throughout the 1960s and '70s still sought to “discover” (in fact, construct) teleological narratives of “progress” in the musical past of Europe's social elites based on “facts” (archival and source studies and the like; for a more detailed discussion and critique, see Treitler 1999), while music analysis continued to “discover” and “demonstrate” (but really, in fact, impose) “unity” and “coherence” in (on) select works of Western art music, without any regard for or interest in their “extra-musical” context, function, or meaning (for an early critique, see Kerman 1980).

As McClary notes in the quotation above, there were many complex reasons for this state of affairs. To be fair, at least one of those reasons was an objective given: the ultimately unbridgeable gap between musicology's object of study—music—and language, meaning that whatever we can think or say about music is always already a metaphor, one step away from the actual object of study, a predicament that other humanities, such as literary studies, do not share with musicology. While a poem or novel may be discussed in terms of its subject matter and a painting or a statue in terms of whom or what it represents (at least in pre-abstract art), an abstract piece of music such as a sonata or fugue cannot, since it seems to represent only itself. Another reason, related to this, is the notion of the aesthetic autonomy of art, which first arose in relation to music (that is, Western art music, *Tonkunst*) in German early-19th-century aesthetics and philosophy in general and remained stubbornly associated with music throughout the 19th and for much of the 20th century. This was the idea that “proper” works of art are autonomous from all extraneous concerns and functions (e.g. social, political, economic, etc.) and subject only to their own laws of construction—in music's case, those of composition, including counterpoint, harmony, formal structure, and the like. This effectively plotted the course of musicology right from its inception as an academic discipline in the latter half of the 19th century, in the works of its “founding fathers” such as Eduard Hanslick and Guido Adler, all the way to McClary's positivist colleagues of the 1970s.

All of this brings us to the painful question of whether and to what degree musicology belongs in the humanities at all. Not only did musicology effectively ignore the crisis in the humanities throughout the 1960s and '70s (in the case of feminism, according to McClary, it somehow even “managed miraculously to pass directly from pre- to post-feminism without ever having to change—or even examine—its ways”; McClary 1991, 5), but it is also debatable whether musicology shares any of the main concerns of the humanities, namely, the study of (human) culture, given that it only addresses a tiny fraction of it—Western art music and not music in general, despite its name, with “popular” (for want of a better term) and all non-Western music left over to ethnomusicology—and even that tiny fraction mostly in isolation from its socio-cultural environment, context, and meaning. Within musicology itself, in 1985, it was Joseph Kerman who finally and most prominently drew the discipline's attention to this stifling restrictiveness:

But in academic practice, and in broad general usage, musicology has come to have a much more constricted meaning [than the study of music].

It has come to mean the study of the history of Western music in the high-art tradition. (Kerman 1985, 11)

Citing the limitations of musicology's positivist methodology and concerns, Kerman then rightly concluded: "musicology is restricted not only in the subject matter it covers but also in its approach to that subject" (Kerman 1985, 12).

In fact, one might argue that with Kerman's 1985 book, musicology finally entered into a crisis of its own, lagging, as usual, behind its fellow disciplines in the humanities by some 20 years. Even though Kerman stopped short of referring to musicology's then-current state as one of crisis, he did offer a profound and wide-ranging critique of the discipline as it then stood, especially its loyalty to positivism and disinterest in any criticism or interpretation, and issued a call for change, which did change musicology, but perhaps not entirely to Kerman's liking. Kerman's main point of contention with his discipline as he saw it in 1985 was its perceived clinging to positivism and disinterest in criticism and interpretation; in Kerman's own words: "Musicology is perceived as dealing essentially with the factual, the documentary, the verifiable, the analysable, the positivistic" (Kerman 1985, 12);

academic music criticism [...] does not exist as a discipline on a par with musicology and music theory on the one hand, or literary and art criticism on the other. (Kerman 1980, 17)

Further, and more damningly, Kerman accused musicology of "conceptually lagging behind" other disciplines of the humanities, on account of its disinterest in criticism:

[C]ritical thought in music lags conceptually far behind that in the other arts. In fact, nearly all musical thinkers travel at a respectful distance behind the latest chariots (or bandwagons) of intellectual life in general. Semiotics, hermeneutics, and phenomenology are being drawn upon only by some of the boldest of musical studies today. Post-structuralism, deconstruction, and serious feminism have yet to make their debuts in musicology or music theory. (Kerman 1985, 16–17)

The result, Kerman argued, is "a widespread phobia as regarding historical interpretation" in post-war musicology (Kerman 1985, 44), partly due to positivism, which "is still probably the dominant mode in musicology today" (Kerman 1985, 59).

Writing around the same time, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, another major American musicologist, voiced her own dissatisfaction with the

discipline along similar lines, including the lack of serious criticism and interpretation: “Criticism, including the study of criticism, remains an unestablished field of musical scholarship” (Subotnik 1991, 88). In Subotnik’s view, this was due to musicology’s not merely lagging behind, but hostility to challenging ideas coming from other disciplines, showing “remarkably little tolerance for divergent schools of thought” (Subotnik 1991, 11). Like Kerman, Subotnik blamed this state of affairs on the continued hold of positivism over musicology, evident in its “positivist reverence for the so-called hard certainty of empirical fact” and “an outmoded worship of science” (Subotnik 1991, 90–95). However, Subotnik went a step further than Kerman and explicitly questioned the status of musicology among the humanities, much along the lines discussed above: in her view, musicology

tends to narrow rather than broaden its field of study whenever possible, thereby excluding considerations of meaning and denying itself a specifically humanistic value. (Subotnik 1991, 11)

Another reason for doubting musicology’s standing as a discipline in the humanities, in Subotnik’s view, also includes its then-exclusive focus on Western art music, already noted above; a “highly normative system”, musicology “excludes from consideration virtually all music that does not fit into the canons of Western art music” (Subotnik 1991, 10). Nonetheless, like Kerman, Subotnik stopped short of explicitly invoking the term “crisis” in her otherwise highly critical description of contemporary musicology.

That term was invoked only in the next decade. One of the earliest major works where the crisis in musicology was acknowledged, if only in passing, was Lawrence Kramer’s 1995 book, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, whose introduction ends by mentioning “the current crisis of the discipline” (Kramer 1995, 32). Things had hardly improved by the end of the decade, given that in 1999, in the preface of their widely read collection of essays, *Rethinking Music*, Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist described the recent history of musicology as “one of loss of confidence; we no longer know what we know” (Cook & Everist 1999, v). Although highly critical of Kerman (and, for that matter, Kramer as well), they did acknowledge the impact that Kramer’s book had made on musicology of the late 1980s and ’90s:

the sense that there is work to be done, and that there are known ways of doing it [...] has largely collapsed in the ten years since Kerman’s book came out. [...] it is not just the disciplinary integrity of musicology that has

become problematic; it is, to put it bluntly, the relationship between musicology and the rest of the universe. (Cook & Everist 1999, vii)

And, like Kerman, they also critiqued the restrictiveness of musicology in terms of its exclusive focus on Western art music, even in the work of such seemingly radical figures as Kramer (Cook & Everist 1999, ix).

But in the 14 years separating Kerman's from Cook and Everist's book, things had changed, if not necessarily for the better (by everyone's account), then certainly in terms of variety, for this was a period that witnessed "a dramatic expansion of the musicological agenda" (Cook & Everist 1999, viii). The late 1980s and early '90s saw the emergence of so-called New Musicology, spearheaded by a group of American musicologists, including McClary, Kramer, Subotnik, as well as a handful of other authors, such as Ruth Solie, Carolyn Abbate, Richard Leppert, and Gary Tomlinson, among others. Already in 1985, Kerman had noted "attempts [...] to develop a new musicology", partly as a "reaction to positivism" (Kerman 1985, 115). By most accounts, New Musicology involved a turn toward repertoires that had been neglected in musicology (e.g. popular music and non-Western music), that sought to address music as a social or cultural practice (and not only as *poiesis*) and individual works in terms of their meaning, especially in relation to the discrimination and struggle for emancipation of various oppressed groups, such as women, sexual minorities, racial and class others, etc. New Musicology answered the calls for more engagement in terms of criticism and interpretation, such as those issued by Kerman, Subotnik, and Kramer, as previously discussed. Also, to that end, New Musicology had to enlist the help of a number of other disciplines in the humanities, including critical theory, literary studies, arts studies, feminist, gender, and queer theory, among others, thus seemingly bringing musicology back into the fold of the humanities.

That, however, did not solve the crisis, although it did significantly change it in character. Although New Musicology did, at least partly, become part of mainstream musicology by the middle of the last decade, "old musicology" (or "modernist musicology", as Kramer dubbed it) did not cease operation but continued along essentially the same lines as before, still privileging (although now only implicitly) the Western canon over other repertoires and seeking to demonstrate (again, implicitly) its aesthetic autonomy and value. The result has been the parallel existence of at least two, if not many more, incommensurable musicologies, unable to engage in any, let alone fruitful, sort of dialogue, because even the most basic premises that used to underpin musicology, for better or worse, as a (non-)humanistic discipline, such as the above-discussed notion of

aesthetic autonomy, or even the notion of aesthetic value as such, are no longer commonly accepted; even the concept of music itself—an art? or *poiesis*? or a cultural practice?—had lost its universality within the discipline. Thus the crisis of the humanities, the breakdown of all universals, had finally caught up with musicology.

This state of affairs is discussed and analysed at length in a 2003 study by Kevin Korsyn titled *Decentering Music*. Korsyn openly addresses a crisis in the discipline: “This book seeks to change musical scholarship by addressing a crisis confronting us today” (Korsyn 2003, 5). It is a “crisis of discourse”, in which the divergent and mutually incommensurable discourses of musicology “cannot engage each other” (Korsyn 2003, 6).

[T]he discussion of music has split into hostile camps and embattled factions, torn by angry debates [...] the debates increasingly seem to involve fundamental disagreements in which the participants do not share even the most basic assumptions about methods, priorities, or goals. (Korsyn 2003, 15)

To show that Korsyn’s claims still command validity in 2015, one need only look at the contents of a recent issue of any of musicology’s leading journals. Thus, for instance, this year’s volume of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* still features such titles as “Fragments of an Eleventh-century Beneventan Gradual” (by Alejandro Enrique Planchart; Vol. 68, No. 1) and “The Exegetical Motet” (by David Crook; Vol. 68, No. 2), both typical “old musicology” studies, predicated on archival and source research and “old-fashioned” fact-finding. If the authors of such studies could actually engage in constructive dialogue with more critical and interpretative musicology, this could indicate a welcome sort of variety in the discipline, but as Korsyn rightly points out, such dialogues are impossible and therefore non-existent, because there is no conceptual common ground whatsoever between these divergent strands in musicology that run in parallel and never intersect.

In Korsyn’s view, a possible way out of that impasse is transdisciplinarity, although Korsyn prefers *postdisciplinarity*, which brings us back to one of the topics of the conference and project that gave rise to this paper. In Korsyn’s own words:

Music studies will become postdisciplinary. I prefer this term to others such as *interdisciplinary*, *transdisciplinary*, *crossdisciplinary*, or *multidisciplinary*, all of which suggest that disciplines have definite boundaries that can be crossed or violated, that they are first constituted as distinct entities and only subsequently combined. (Korsyn 2003, 40)