ORPHEUS MANIFESTOS

The Undisciplined Prism

Bruno Forment

Orpheus Instituut
Advanced studies and research in music

To mark the thirtieth anniversary of Orpheus Instituut, this series of manifestos reimagines knowledge through music as an essential form of understanding. The eight statements, written by the institute's principal investigators with rigour, humour, and artistic verve, situate musical knowing in the spaces between music-making and reflection. They trace the entanglements between performers and technologies, and the confrontation between archived fragments and virtual entities. Musical understanding here emerges as a makers' knowledge, built upon recursive feedback between minds, bodies, interfaces, and sound. What artistic research in music generates remains multifaceted, provisional, and alive: it can always be produced differently.

Orpheus Instituut
Korte Meer 12
B – 9000 Ghent
Belgium
www.orpheusinstituut.be

The Undisciplined Prism: Artistic Research as Method(s) of the In-between

Bruno Forment

THE CONFLICT OF THE DISCIPLINES

What is knowledge, who is entitled to produce it, and in which institutional conditions? Across centuries, these questions have driven thinkers. Today, they arrive with a particular urgency, since the academic apparatus that once organised knowledge into stable compartments—disciplines, faculties, departments—is in trouble. For decades, academia has partitioned knowledge into circumscribed territories, policing them with a rigour that would be admirable if only it yielded richer, less incremental forms of understanding. The result of this territorial zeal has been a peculiar form of self-inflicted "epistemic violence," from which the arts and humanities in particular now suffer. (Sub)disciplines in those fields decide in advance what the medium and problem look like, and what tools might be used to address them. They seem to function less as tools for inquiry than as institutionalised forms of closed-mindedness: structures marked by what Quassim Cassam calls a "high need for cognitive closure" (2019, 29)—a reluctance to consider new information once a given frame or conception has been settled upon. Disciplines are not merely prejudices about knowledge in that regard; they are prejudice and closed-mindedness formalised, funded, and defended. On top of that, they generate a kind of institutionalised opacity,

with processes of categorisation and arrangement shaping what can be perceived and understood, while simultaneously rendering other things obscure, ignored, or unintelligible.

However, multiple disciplines in the arts and humanities are crumbling, and we have not yet agreed upon what should replace them. This manifesto argues that we should not simply add new boxes to old ones. It argues, instead, for the abandonment of the disciplinary model as a governing logic of humanistic inquiry, and for its replacement by something more intellectually honest, more flexible, and ultimately more productive: an undisciplined prism.

A prism does not contain light. It refracts it. And it does not organise the spectrum into permanent categories; it reveals what was invisible in the apparently unified beam, waiting for the right angle of encounter. Artistic research is one such prism. It is not a discipline. It never was. And that, precisely, is its power.

MUSIC AS A MOVING TARGET

If we are to argue for the end of disciplines in the arts and humanities, we need a demonstration. Music provides one of the most instructive ones available, simply because music, across its long history, has never agreed to stay in one place. It has been, at different moments and in different hands, a branch of mathematics, a cosmology, a rhetorical representation and mover of the passions, a psychology, physiology, and cognitive architecture of sound, a social and embodied practice, a political weapon, a digital object, and an affective experience that resists all these definitions while requiring all of them simultaneously.

Consider where music was placed in the intellectual architecture of the past. In the medieval quadrivium, the upper division of the liberal arts, music stood alongside arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy as a

robust science. For Johannes Kepler, the music of the spheres was not a metaphor but a structural principle of the cosmos, its architecture both musical and mathematical in its proportional organisation. Late seventeenth-century authors such as Andreas Werckmeister and Johann Kuhnau argued that mathematics rescued harmony from arbitrariness. Numbers reveal proportions; proportions generate intervals; intervals determine tuning. Pure auditory experience, unmoored from mathematical structure, yields only confusion. Yet this framework carried its own hierarchies. The medieval distinction between *musicus* and *cantor*—between the theorist who understood music's mathematical rationale and the singer who performed it without comprehension—was already a form of gatekeeping. The scholastic tradition, for all its synthetic ambition, was not without its own policing instincts: to perform without understanding was, in Guido of Arezzo's memorable phrase, to behave like a beast. Pre-modern polymathism was never innocent of power; it just organised that power differently.

Yet music could be other things entirely. Still in the Baroque, Marin Mersenne imagined a universal philosophical language in which scientists conversed in song or played lutes to one another—a vision of music as an epistemological rather than aesthetic phenomenon. Simultaneously, the rise of musical drama and *Affektenlehre* drew music into the orbit of rhetoric and language: if numbers governed music's structure, words and passions governed its purpose, and the two were increasingly difficult to disentangle. Thus, Angelo Berardi's complete musician had a perfect command of arithmetic, geometry, grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, philosophy, and history (Berardi 1689, 23–24).

What united these polymaths, for all their differences, was the idea of music as a valued mode of knowing the world. Indeed, to create music was to know—speculatively (Thomas Aquinas's *cognitio speculativa*), but also experimentally (*cognitio experimentalis*). Music theory developed no sterile, abstract wisdom, isolated from empirical conditions. Most of the authors named above were competent, trained masters in one or more

*SYSTÊME FIGURÉ
DES CONNOISSANCES HUMAINES.

ENTENDEMENT.

MEMOIRE.

HISTOIRE

- SACRÉE. (HISTOIRE DES PROPHETIES.
- ECCLESIASTIQUE.
- CIVILE, ANC. ET MODERNE.
  - Hist. Civile, *proprement dite*,
    - MEMOIRES.
    - ANTIQUITÉS.
  - Histoire Litteraire.
    - HISTOIRE COMPLETE.
- NATURELLE.
  - UNIFORMITÉ DE LA NATURE. — HISTOIRE CELESTE.
  - UNIFORMITÉ DE LA NATURE. — HISTOIRE
    - DES METEORES.
    - DE LA TERRE ET DE LA MER.
    - DES MINERAUX.
    - DES VEGETAUX.
    - DES ANIMAUX.
    - DES ELEMENS.
  - ECARTS DE LA NATURE.
    - PRODIGES CELESTES.
    - METEORES PRODIGIEUX.
    - PRODIGES SUR LA TERRE ET LA MER.
    - MINERAUX MONSTRUEUX.
    - VEGETAUX MONSTRUEUX.
    - ANIMAUX MONSTRUEUX.
    - PRODIGES DES ELEMENS.
  - USAGES DE LA NATURE.
    - ARTS.
    - METIERS.
    - MANUFACTURES.
      - *Travail et Usages des Fers et de l'Or, et de l'Argent.*
        - Monnoyeur.
        - Batteur d'Or.
        - Fileur d'Or.
        - Tireur d'Or.
        - Orfevre.
        - Plumeau.
        - Metteur en œuvre, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages des Pierres fines et precieuses.*
        - Lapidaire.
        - Diamantaire.
        - Joüailler, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages du Fer.*
        - Grosses Forges.
        - Serrurerie.
        - Taillanderie.
        - Armurerie.
        - Arquebuserie, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages du Verre.*
        - Verrerie.
        - Glaces.
        - Miroitier.
        - Lunettier.
        - Vitrier, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages des Peaux.*
        - Tanneur.
        - Chamoiseur.
        - Pausier.
        - Gantier, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages de la Pierre, du Plâtre, de l'Ardoise, &c.*
        - Architecture pratique.
        - Sculpture pratique.
        - Macon.
        - Couvreur, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages de la Soie.*
        - Teard.
        - Metiniage.
        - Ouvrages, comme Voiles, Draps, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages de la Laine.*
        - Drapier.
        - Bonneterie, &c.
      - *Travail et Usages, &c.*

RAISON.

PHILOSOPHIE.

SCIENCE DE L'HOMME.

Métaphysique générale, *ou* Ontologie, *ou* Science de l'Etre en général, de la Possibilité, de l'Existence, de la Durée, *&c.*

SCIENCE DE DIEU.
- Théologie naturelle. — RELIGION, *D'où par abus,*
- Théologie révélée. — SUPERSTITIONS.
- Science des Esprits bien et mal faisans. — DIVINATION. MAGIE NOIRE.

Pneumatologie, *ou* Science de l'Ame — RAISONNABLE. SENSITIVE.

LOGIQUE.
- ART DE PENSER.
  - Appréhension. — Science des Idées.
  - Jugement. — Science des Propositions.
  - Raisonnement. — Induction.
  - Methode. — Demonstration. — Analyse. Synthese.
- ART DE RETENIR.
  - Mémoire. — Naturelle. — Artificielle. — Passion. Emblême.
  - Supplément de la Mémoire. — Ecriture. — Alphabets. — Chiffres. — Arts d'écrire, d'imprimer, de lire, de déchiffrer. — Orthographe.
  - Imprimerie.
- ART DE COMMUNIQUER.
  - Science de l'inaturement du Discours. — Grammaire.
    - Signes. — Geste. — Pantomime. Declamation.
    - Caractères. — Ideaux. Hieroglyphiques. Heraldiques ou Blason.
    - Prosodie. Conjugaison.
    - Syntaxe. Philologie. Critique.
    - Pedagogique. — Choix des Etudes. Maniere d'enseigner.
  - Science des qualités du Discours. — Rhétorique. Mechanique de la Poesie ou Versification.

MORALE
- GENERALE. — *Science du bien et du mal en general. Des devoirs en general. De la vertu. De la necessité d'etre vertueux, &c.*
- PARTICULIERE. — Science des Loix, ou Jurisprudence.
  - Naturelle.
  - Œconomique. — Commerce interieur, exterieur, de Terre, de Mer.
  - Politique.

SCIENCE DE LA NATURE.

Métaphysique des Corps, ou Physique générale. De l'Etendue, de l'Impénétrabilité, du Mouvement, du Vuide, *&c.*

MATHEMATIQUES

PURES.
- Arithmetique. — Numerique. — Elementaire.
- Algebre... — Infinitesi-mall. — Differentielle. Integrale.
- Geometrie. — Elementaire. (Architecture Militaire. Tactique.
- Transcendante. (Theorie des Courbes.

MIXTES.
- Statique. — Statique, *proprement dite.* Hydrostatique.
- Mechanique. — Dynamique — Dynamique, *proprement dite.* Ballistique.
- Hydrodynamique — Hydraulique. Navigation. Archit. Navale.
- Astronomie-geometrique. — Cosmographie. Uranographie. Geographie. Hydrographie.
- Chronologie. Chronologie.
- Optique... — Optique, *proprement dite.* Dioptrique. Perspective. Catoptrique.
- Acoustique.
- Pneumatique.
- Art de conjecturer. — ANALYSE DES HAZARDS.

PHYSICOMATHEMATIQUES.

PHYSIQUE PARTICULIERE.
- Zoologie...
  - Anatomie — Simple. Comparée.
  - Physiognomie.
  - Medecine.
    - Hygiene... — Hygiene, *proprement dite.* Cosmetique. (Orthopedie. Athletique. (Gymnastique.
    - Pathologie. Semeiotique.
    - Therapeutique. — Diete. Chirurgie. Pharmacie.
  - Veterinaire.
  - Manege.
  - Chasse.
  - Peche.
  - Fauconnerie.
- Astronomie Physique. — Astrologie. — Astrologie Judiciaire. Astrologie Physique.
- Meteorologie.
- Cosmologie. — Uranologie. Aerologie. Geologie. Hydrologie.
- Botanique. — Agriculture. Jardinage.
- Mineralogie.
- Chimie... — Chimie *proprement dite.* (Pyrotechnie, Teinture, *&c.* Metallurgie. Alchimie. Magie naturelle.

IMAGINATION.

POESIE

SACRÉE. PROFANE.
- NARRATIVE.
  - POEME EPIQUE.
  - MADRIGAL.
  - EPIGRAMME
  - ROMAN, *&c.*
- DRAMATIQUE.
  - TRAGEDIE.
  - COMEDIE.
  - OPERA.
  - PASTORALES, *&c.*
- PARABOLIQUE. — ALLEGORIES.

- *Musique.* — Theorique. Pratique. Instrumentale. Vocale.
- *Peinture.*
- *Sculpture.*
- *Architecture civile.*
- *Gravure.*

of performance, composition, improvisation, or instrument-building. What they taught to budding musicians was the result of thorough reflection resting upon living engagement with audible music. Life as a theoretician was not separable from that of a practitioner—it was continuous with it, arising from it and returning to it in a productive loop. The two modes of musical knowledge—the "drastic" and the "gnostic" (Abbate 2004)—were not opposites but complements, neither sufficient without the other.

It is this very unity—of speculation and practice—that the nineteenth century would fracture, institutionalise, and harden beyond repair. Disciplinary hairsplitting and power politics caused music itself and the study thereof to pursue their separate paths, the European conservatory and university becoming their respective institutional prisons. The composer and performer were no longer expected to theorise; the musicologist was no longer expected to compose or perform. Polymaths became historical anomalies rather than models—not because the conditions for polymathism had never existed, but because the new institutional architecture actively penalised it. Writer-musicians retreated to double lives, being scholars in one room, practitioners in another, forbidden by academic decorum to bring their two selves into conversation.

The institutional divorce between musical practice and theory is not merely an organisational inconvenience: in Cassam's terms (2019, 181), it reflects the epistemic vice of intellectual arrogance. Those music scholars who dismiss the knowledge embedded in performance do not simply neglect a line of inquiry; they actively produce ignorance by treating the practitioner's knowledge as epistemically subaltern. When musicians find their knowledge dismissed as non-rigorous, they are not merely failing to meet disciplinary standards—they are excluded from full participation as knowers by institutional standards that, even without explicit intent, render them outsiders. But the wrong runs in both directions: to dismiss musicological knowledge as academic abstraction with no bearing on practice is to mirror the very gesture of

exclusion—refusing, in turn, to recognise a form of knowing that does not necessarily arrive through the body.

However, music has not stood still to await the resolution of these quarrels. In the digital age, music has migrated again. Today, it occupies sites no nineteenth-century discipline was designed to handle—social media, intermedial environments, AI, and decentralised systems such as the blockchain. As sound, performance, and multimedia art, music refuses to be contained by any disciplinary boundary. And far from retreating into mere aesthetics, music—like any art form—presses outward, making broad claims about planetary existence, politics, identity, ethics, and so on. Practitioners and researchers do not shy away from engaging with "extra-musical" phenomena; and vice versa, music as a phenomenon is being studied across a wide range of disciplines. The shifting site of music is not a problem to be solved, nor is it a matter warranting a disclaimer; it should be the central premise of any musical inquiry. Music should not tell us what it is; rather, it shows us what kind of restless and relational knowledge it can produce. And it is precisely that restlessness—that refusal to be contained—which points us toward a different model of inquiry altogether.

INTERVALLIC KNOWLEDGE

I wish to place a concept at the centre of this manifesto, one that emerges from the practice of artistic research—including the author's own: *intervallic* or *in-between knowledge*. The musical interval is, first of all, the relationship between two pitches—a measured distance from which harmony, tension, and resolution arise; but it is also, more broadly, any relationship between discrete elements separated by difference, distance, or time. An interval is always temporal—it does not exist outside duration.

I propose that the most significant knowledge produced by artistic research is similarly intervallic: it is an *inter-est*, which arises in the temporal space between the making and understanding of music, hence between musical production and the *re*-flection upon it. In my view, the (performing) artist and (reflective) scholar occupy *sequential temporal*—rather than coincident epistemological—registers.

Although creating, performing, experiencing, and knowing music occur in a continuous, overlapping flow of pastness, actuality, and potentiality, these processes compete for attentional and neural resources such that no musician can play, experience, and reflect with equal dominance at precisely the same moment. Musical *reflection* constitutes a form of metacognition—thinking about one's own thoughts—that operates by re-representing musical experiences rather than directly engaging in them. While it can also occur during ongoing experience or in anticipation of future states, as the brain dynamically reconfigures between externally and internally oriented processing networks, it is commonly retrospective, drawing on memory to allow experiences to be interpreted from a partial distance.

This temporal interval between experience and reflection is not necessarily a limitation. Because thought can view different moments together—comparing, relating, and interpreting them—it transforms experience into understanding while simultaneously opening new horizons of action. The compositions and writings of, say, Hildegard of Bingen, Giulio Caccini, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Richard Wagner, and Karlheinz Stockhausen enact this principle, each implying a combination of revision and anticipation, generating meaning in the oscillation—or interval—between them. Some of these writer-musicians theorised their practice retrospectively; others elaborated systematic thinking before their creative output had even established their reputation, their most daring artistic choices arriving in the wake of ideas already set down in writing. Reflection follows the act; but the act, in turn, is shaped by prior reflection. Many thoughts are, in this sense, structured as *after-thoughts*,

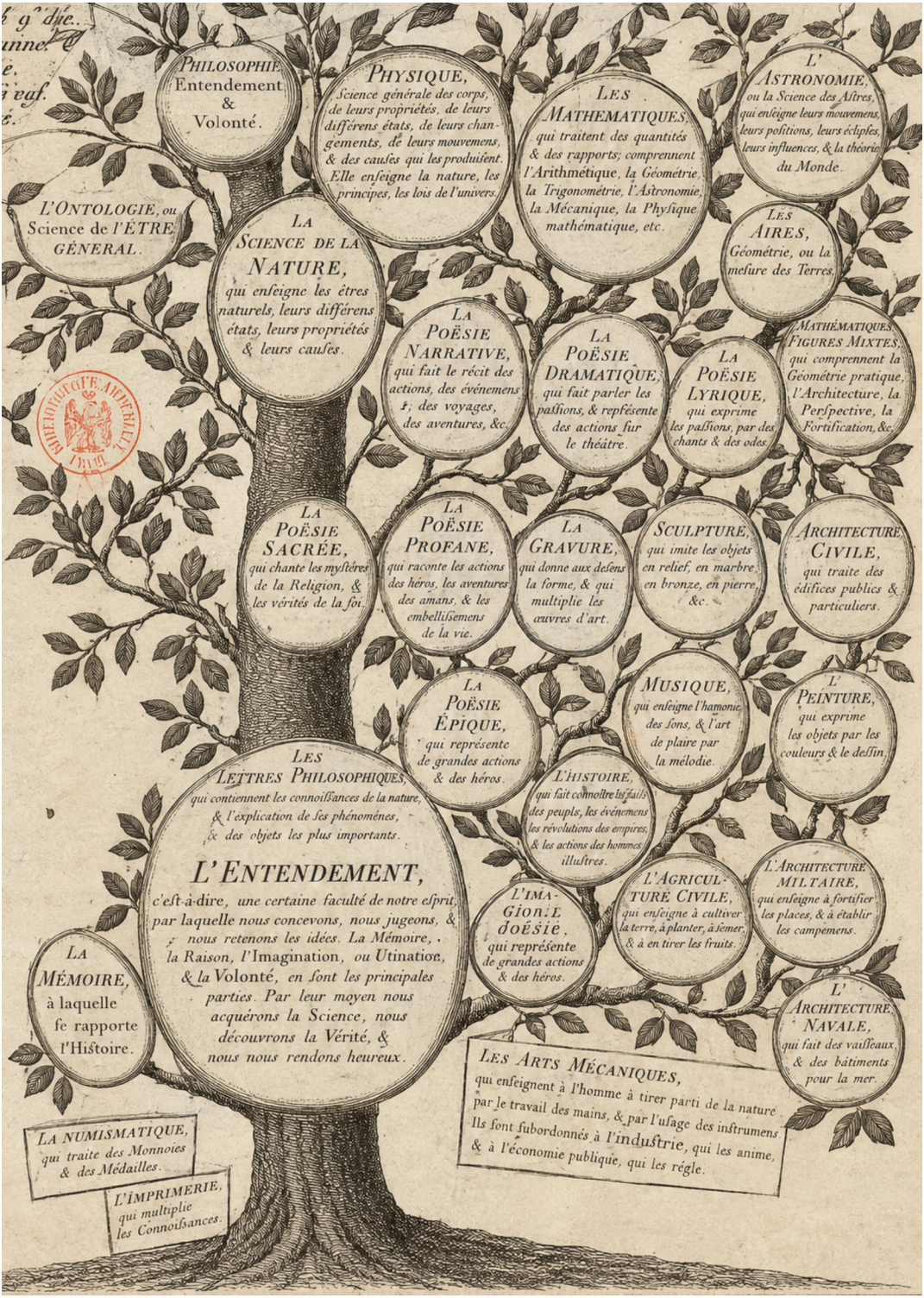
yet ones that re-enter the stream of experience and redirect it. The loop is never closed. The interval is recurrent.

Intervallic knowledge is not produced *despite* the difficulty of occupying these between-spaces; it is produced *because* of it. Artistic research, which I take to be fundamentally preoccupied with that in-between, should seek not to collapse artistry and reflection into one another, but rather to sustain the structural dialogue and productive tension between them. The interval, after all, is not a deficiency; it is a generative space between two modes of knowing, each incomplete without the other, their very incompleteness the condition that keeps the dialogue open. Artistic research, then, should be the attempt to inhabit both positions alternately: not to transcend their difference, but to move between them with intellectual honesty and creative purpose.

AGAINST DISCIPLINE, FOR METHODS

The term *undisciplined* demands precision: we must be clear about what we are rejecting and what we are preserving. I am not arguing against scholarly rigour, nor am I questioning the oft-debated requirement of discursive articulation of practice-based work. No composition, artwork, artefact, performance, action, or recording alone can serve as a complete representation of the process of artistic research. The reflection must be made legible, not because discursive reflection is more valuable than practice, but because the interval between practice and reflection is precisely where the knowledge lives. That interval must be mapped if others are to learn from it and build upon it. There is *discipline*, indeed, in that requirement—not the discipline of a field, but the discipline of a mind taking responsibility for its own operations.

What I am arguing against, by contrast, is the *institutional rigour* of the academic discipline as a closed system, with its canonical methods, its approved objects, its credentialled gatekeepers. As argued above,


PHILOSOPHIE Entendement & Volonté.
PHYSIQUE, Science générale des corps, de leurs propriétés, de leurs différens états, de leurs changements, de leurs mouvemens, & des causes qui les produisent. Elle enseigne la nature, les principes, les lois de l'univers.
LES MATHEMATIQUES, qui traitent des quantités & des rapports; comprennent l'Arithmétique, la Géométrie, la Trigonométrie, l'Astronomie, la Mécanique, la Physique mathématique, etc.
L'ASTRONOMIE, ou la Science des Astres, qui enseigne leurs mouvemens, leurs positions, leurs éclipses, leurs influences, & la théorie du Monde.
L'ONTOLOGIE, ou Science de l'ÊTRE GÉNERAL.
LA SCIENCE DE LA NATURE, qui enseigne les êtres naturels, leurs différens états, leurs propriétés & leurs causes.
LES AIRES, Géométrie, ou la mesure des Terres.
LA POËSIE NARRATIVE, qui fait le récit des actions, des événemens, des voyages, des aventures, &c.
LA POËSIE DRAMATIQUE, qui fait parler les passions, & repésente des actions sur le théâtre.
LA POËSIE LYRIQUE, qui exprime les passions, par des chants & des odes.
MATHÉMATIQUES FIGURES MIXTES, qui comprennent la Géométrie pratique, l'Architecture, la Perspective, la Fortification, &c.
LA POËSIE SACRÉE, qui chante les mystéres de la Religion, & les vérités de la foi.
LA POËSIE PROFANE, qui raconte les actions des héros, les aventures des amans, & les embellissemens de la vie.
LA GRAVURE, qui donne aux desens la forme, & qui multiplie les œuvres d'art.
SCULPTURE, qui imite les objets en relief, en marbre, en bronze, en pierre, &c.
ARCHITECTURE CIVILE, qui traite des édifices publics & particuliers.
LA POËSIE ÉPIQUE, qui représente de grandes actions & des héros.
MUSIQUE, qui enseigne l'harmonie des sons, & l'art de plaire par la mélodie.
L'PEINTURE, qui exprime les objets par les couleurs & le dessin.
L'HISTOIRE, qui fait connoître les faits des peuples, les événemens les révolutions des empires, & les actions des hommes illustres.
LES LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES, qui contiennent les connoissances de la nature, & l'explication de ses phénoménes, & des objets les plus importants.
L'ENTENDEMENT, c'est-à-dire, une certaine faculté de notre esprit, par laquelle nous concevons, nous jugeons, & nous retenons les idées. La Mémoire, la Raison, l'Imagination, ou Utination, & la Volonté, en sont les principales parties. Par leur moyen nous acquérons la Science, nous découvrons la Vérité, & nous nous rendons heureux.
L'AGRICULTURE CIVILE, qui enseigne à cultiver la terre, à planter, à semer, & à en tirer les fruits.
L'ARCHITECTURE MILTAIRE, qui enseigne à fortifier les places, & à établir les campemens.
L'IMAGINATIVE POËSIE, qui représente de grandes actions & des héros.
LA MÉMOIRE, à laquelle se rapporte l'Histoire.
L'ARCHITECTURE NAVALE, qui fait des vaisseaux, & des bâtiments pour la mer.
LES ARTS MÉCANIQUES, qui enseignent à l'homme à tirer parti de la nature par le travail des mains, & par l'usage des instrumens. Ils sont subordonnés à l'industrie, qui les anime, & à l'économie publique, qui les régle.
LA NUMISMATIQUE, qui traite des Monnoies & des Médailles.
L'IMPRIMERIE, qui multiplie les Connoissances.

disciplines are, at their core, structures of exclusion, mapping out their territory in advance and, in doing so, demarcating and discriminating as much as they illuminate. Disciplines are never epistemically neutral: they determine in advance which voices are heard and which methods count as rigorous; they silence practitioners whose knowledge does not conform to disciplinary norms; and they wrong those whose ways of knowing fall outside the recognised canon. Artistic research has no place in such a rigid epistemological architecture.

Instead, artistic research acquires its full value as a set of methodological dispositions and gestures that arise from the creative conditions of artistic practice: the deliberate entry into a practice without predetermined outcome; the maintenance of a reflective distance that does not interrupt but shadows the making; the externalisation of that shadow in a form—written, spoken, built, scored, staged, coded—that renders the interval legible to others. Artist researchers do not apply their methods to an object from the outside; they are implicated in the object, transformed by the encounter, and the methods emerge from that implication rather than preceding it. What distinguishes this from mere unreflective craft is precisely the commitment to articulation: the interval must be mapped, its contours made available for scrutiny, its findings offered not as the private property of the practitioner but as a contribution to a shared—if perpetually contested—body of knowledge.

Contrary to disciplines, methods are transferable, moreover. They can migrate between epistemic fields, carrying insight from one territory into another without the imperial ambition of a discipline. Experiment, fieldwork, re-enactment, and reverse engineering, for instance, have all travelled across disciplinary borders and produced knowledge that no single discipline could have generated alone. In my view, artistic research, too, is such a constellation of methods, which can be applied, with appropriate modification, across the humanities and sciences. Advocates and critics alike too often miss this point. Artistic research does not need to be defended or rejected as a discipline, confined to an

academic context of its own; it needs to be liberated exactly from the demand that it become one. Enclosed within the academic fences of doctoral programmes, professorships, and peer-reviewed journals, artistic research risks replicating the very disciplinary logic it was designed to unsettle. The experimental vitality of artistic research lies precisely in its disciplinary fluidity, its resistance to being pinned down as a singular topic and mode of inquiry with a fixed set of proper deliverables. Artist researchers should be compelled to pursue versatile models of art and research, producing creative outcomes that range from concerts and audio-visual recordings to written essays and books, from musical interfaces to apps and knowledge graphs. No single modus operandi should be declared exemplary, no single output format declared normative. This plurality is not a weakness; it is artistic research's very proof of concept. Neither should the outputs of artistic research be evaluated by disciplinary standards; rather, they must be evaluated by the richness of the knowledge they produce—by their capacity to illuminate something that was previously obscure.

TOWARDS A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

If artistic research offers a family of methods that can be transferred across disciplines, then the logical conclusion is radical: the humanities should be reconceived as a single, undivided playing field—not a collection of territorial disciplines, but an open, methodologically diverse space of inquiry into human experience, expression, and knowledge-making. This case against disciplinary fragmentation in the humanities rests on several distinct arguments.

First, there is the historical argument: the boundaries between disciplines are historical artefacts. As shown above, the nineteenth-century remapping of knowledge fractured the humanities from within—severing disciplines once joined by shared histories and practices, and leaving behind a persistent imbalance in our understanding of what knowledge

is and how it is made. The walls between musical practice, musicology, and other disciplines were built at a particular moment for particular reasons, and those reasons no longer apply. The walls have long been crumbling, as any stack of CVs will confirm, with their claims to inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinarity, or their telltale proliferation of the phrase "my work is situated at the intersection of disciplines X and Y."

Which leads us to the second, epistemological argument: the most significant knowledge is transdisciplinary by default, being produced on the fringes of disciplines, rather than within their secure centres. Where musical performance intersects with, for instance, curatorial practices and the historiography of science, we get new artistic dramaturgies that reframe all fields in question. Where musicology intersects with hermeneutics, critical theory, pragmatism, or postcolonial feminism, we get a critique of the embodied assumptions that have structured musical knowledge production across centuries. Such intersections are not supplements to the discipline; they are the sites of innovative work.

Third, and most fundamentally, there is the ethical argument: disciplines, as forms of organised seeing and not seeing, produce epistemic violence and injustice. They determine in advance which voices are heard, which questions are legitimate, which methods count as rigorous. Thus, the humanities have too long privileged the cognitive over the affective, the cerebral over the embodied, the propositional over the experiential, the gnostic over the drastic. Artistic research insists on the inseparability of these modes—not their synthesis into a comfortable unity, but their productive coexistence, their mutual provocation. Let it find its place in a large playing field—not undifferentiated but genuinely open, methodologically inventive, and epistemically scrupulous.

THE UNDISCIPLINED PRISM IN PRACTICE

What do *undisciplined humanities* look like in practice? It looks like artist researchers who have trained as performers generating knowledge that can be simultaneously music(ologic)al, philosophical, pedagogical, political, and/or ecological. It looks like projects that begin with, for example, early music and Baroque writings, and end with live electronics and board games. It looks like experiments that refuse to end at all because the research has been designed as an ongoing practice rather than a finite project. It looks like refusing the demand to choose between the theoretician and the practitioner.

An undisciplined prism does not dissolve difference; it refracts it. Music, refracted through artistic research, reveals its historical plurality—the shifting sites it has occupied across the centuries, from the medieval sciences to today's digital data-spaces. Each refraction illuminates something that a single disciplinary lens would obscure. And the method, once established, can be turned on any object: literature, visual art, performance, history, philosophy, chemistry, astronomy, and so on. The prism is portable.

The promise is, once again, not the elimination of rigour but its relocation—from the policing of borders to the demanding of methodological responsibility. When we ask what knowledge music produces, we are asking a question no single discipline can answer. Music produces propositional knowledge (in theory and history), procedural knowledge (in performance and improvisation), affective knowledge (in the listener's encounter with sound), cultural knowledge (in the transmission of traditions and identities), and intervallic knowledge, all of which arise in the spaces between these, when a practitioner is forced to hold them simultaneously in view without reducing any to any other.

That intervallic knowledge is what we are celebrating, and what we are arguing must be the model for inquiry going forward. It is not

comfortable knowledge. It does not resolve into clear propositions or replicable protocols. It lives in the tension, and it requires the tension to live. But it is sincere about what humanistic knowledge actually is: not a mirror of the world, but a prism through which the world's plurality of meaning becomes momentarily visible.

THIRTY YEARS, ONE COMMITMENT

This is a utopian proposal. I am aware of that. But utopianism is not the same as fantasy. Utopianism is the imagination of a better arrangement, and it is a necessary corrective to the inertia of academia. Orpheus Instituut was founded thirty years ago on a utopian commitment to take musical practice seriously as a form of knowledge-making. That commitment has never wavered, even as the institutional landscape around artistic research has changed—sometimes in ways that threaten to domesticate artistic research into a disciplinary niche and to convert its productive unruliness into another set of boxes.

This manifesto is a declaration that the commitment must be renewed and radicalised. Artistic research should be a demonstration that the disciplinary model is inadequate to the questions that matter most. It should prove that the arts, humanities, and sciences can be organised around questions rather than territories, around methods rather than memberships, around the quality of the knowledge produced rather than the prestige of the organisational framework in which it is produced.

We do not know what music will be in thirty years, nor can we predict how it will be made and understood. Nor do we know what the humanities will look like, or whether the term *humanities* will even still be in use. What we know is that the questions—about knowledge and its limits, about practice and reflection, about the relationship between making and understanding, about the sites music has occupied and will occupy in the architecture of human knowing—will still be pressing.

And we know that the undisciplined prism is equal to those questions in a way that no single discipline ever was or ever will be: not because it resolves them, but because it has learned to live productively in the intervals between them.

Artistic research, as a set of methods of the in-between, does not promise arrival; it promises generative movement—between making and reflecting, and between what we know and what we are only beginning to sense. That intervallic knowledge is uncomfortable, irreducible, and inexhaustible. It is also, I believe, the most truthful account we have of what humanistic inquiry actually is and does. Let us, therefore, not fence off. And let music remain what it has always been: not a stable object awaiting interpretation, but a moving provocation and a question posed to every form of knowledge it encounters.

Let the prism refract.

REFERENCES

Abbate, Carolyn. 2004. "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (3): 505–36.

Berardi, Angelo. 1689. *Miscellanea musicale*. Bologna: Monti.

Cassam, Quassim. 2019. *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Page 6: "Système figuré des connaissances humaines" from Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire to the Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751).

Page 11: Fragment of the tree of disciplines depicted in Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire to the Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751).

COLOPHON

Author
Bruno Forment

For an extended biography of the author, scan



Production manager
Heike Vermeire

Managing editor
Edward Crooks

Orpheus Manifestos editor
Bruno Forment

Lay-out and cover design
Theo van Beurden Studio

Published in 2026 by Orpheus Instituut with support from the Flemish Government and in collaboration with Leuven University Press

All rights reserved. Except in those cases expressly determined by law, no part of this publication may be multiplied, saved in automated data files or made public in any way whatsoever without the express prior written consent of the copyright holder.

ISBN 978 94 6165 415 1
eISBN 978 94 6166 835 6 (ePDF)
eISBN 978 94 6166 843 1 (ePUB)
https://doi.org/10.11116/9789461668431
D/2026/1869/61
NUR: 664

This booklet is only an overture.

Discover sound, thought, and artistic research beyond these pages through podcasts, recordings, videos, and other materials from Orpheus Instituut.

Scan to continue.



This publication is part of the Orpheus Manifestos, a collection of eight statements written by the principal investigators for the thirtieth anniversary of Orpheus Instituut:

— Paulo de Assis, *Artistic Intelligence: Before and Beyond Knowledge Production*
— Paulo de Assis, *Artistic Research: For a Minor Science*
— Tom Beghin, *Making a Case for Materially Entangled Performance*
— Bruno Forment, *The Undisciplined Prism: Artistic Research as Method(s) of the In-between*
— Jonathan Impett, *If It's Magic: Music as a Knowledge Portal*
— Catherine Laws and Emily Worthington, *Embodied Knowledge in Artistic Research*
— Arabella Pare, *"Ungeschickt lässt grüßen": Fragments of Arbitrary Knowledges*
— Luk Vaes, *Variations in se*

Continue the conversation and access all manifestos for free via

Printed in a limited edition of two hundred copies of each manifesto.

With support from the Flemish Government

Flanders
State of the Art

In this manifesto, Bruno Forment argues that artistic research produces "intervallic knowledge"—an understanding that arises not within disciplinary boundaries but in the gap between artistic practice and reflection upon it. This insight grounds his proposal for an "undisciplined prism": a flexible, methods-based approach that treats knowledge as transferable across epistemic fields rather than confined within them. The author furthermore calls for reconceiving the humanities as a single, open field organised around questions and methods rather than disciplines and institutional prestige.

Bruno Forment is the Principal Investigator of the Resounding Libraries cluster and Director of Research at Orpheus Instituut.

Orpheus Instituut
Advanced studies and research in music