Edited by Aagje Swinnen, Amanda Kluveld, and Renée van de Vall

Engaged Humanities

Rethinking Art, Culture, and Public Life

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Foreword

Culture and Anarchy Revisited

Joep Leerssen

For some reason, the anxiety of usefulness has been itching the humanities for a long time. When Jacob Grimm in 1846 convened the *Germanisten* (scholars of the German language, literature, and legal history) to a conference in Frankfurt's Paulskirche, one of the main items on the agenda was to find themes and topics with which these scholars, newly incorporated in dedicated university departments, could demonstrate their usefulness to the public. (In one of the great ironies of history, politics would cater to their craving soon enough: two years later, in the same Paulskirche, many Germanisten would meet again, this time as delegates in the 1848 Frankfurt Parliament, and many of them would claim a role as intellectual counselors to emerging German nationalism.)

Anything to avoid looking like a bookworm, or a dilettante erudite. Perhaps the strongest argument for a socially useful humanities was made by Matthew Arnold around the same period. Drawing on the German concept of Bildung, he formulated a pedagogical usefulness in his classic *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). Writing in a dourly pragmatic, intolerantly moralistic Victorian climate, Arnold stressed society's need for a creative, mental agility to break through the blinkered vision of those he called "Philistines," "people who believe most that our greatness and welfare are proved by our being very rich, and who most give their lives and thoughts to becoming rich" (1869, p. 16). The power of the creative imagination to dispense "sweetness and light," he argued, would allow people to imagine a world beyond their narrow self-interest, to connect more easily with other people and other nations, and to replace the default attitude of mistrust and competition by an open-minded curiosity. That was the power of culture, "the best that is known and thought in the world"; and people were needed to "learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" (Arnold, 1865, p. 283).

Readers may sense how uncannily Arnold's mission reflects our modern-day needs. The heyday of the humanities culminated (and ended) in the 1970s and 1980s when humanities scholars, fired by new theories, played a vanguard role in ethnic and sexual emancipation movements. That heyday has now passed. The humanities are everywhere embattled when it comes

to their funding, their standing in the university system, their outreach in education, and their leverage in public opinion. The humanities are ill-suited to thrive in the prevailing neoliberal climate of market deregulation, in the entrepreneurial approach to higher education, and in a Darwinian model of research funding (as a competition for limited resources, with the fittest surviving and presumably achieving "excellence" in the process). The Philistine principle once again holds sway that "greatness and welfare are proved by being very rich," and as academic researchers, too, our worth is measured by that criterion.

Is it a coincidence that the neo-Philistine revival of deregulated entrepreneurial competition coincides with a decline of "sweetness and light," and with a scornful disregard for "the best that is known and thought in the world"? We live in a public sphere where the toxically wielded accusation of elitism has blunted cultural and political debate, in a public opinion at the mercy of trolls, hate speech, irate tweets, and fake news. Is the declining position of the humanities linked, perhaps, to the rise of intolerant untruth?

The point of the humanities was never just to train bookworms to become better bookworms; to develop an appreciative form of cultural wine-tasting, comparing different châteaux and vintages and capturing the character of subtle flavors in well-chosen descriptive terms. The point was always to teach people to think (clearly, critically, imaginatively) by means of teaching them how to engage clearly, critically, and imaginatively with their historical and cultural heritage and ambience.

The power of culture is to make us think differently: to empathize, to imagine how life could be different or how it might feel to others quite different from us. Culture connects us to others quite different from us: it circulates over many decades and centuries, and across great distances and cultural differences, binding people from different centuries and backgrounds into "affective communities." How could the humanities, as the academic curators of the study of culture and of its transmission to younger generations be anything otherwise than "engaged"?

The point cannot be missed. The spread of populist, intolerant anti-intellectualism and anti-cosmopolitanism has occurred in tandem with the institutional decline of the humanities, with their emphasis on the connecting and self-transcending power of the human mind – critical, empathetic, imaginative. I see before me a mental panorama of mendacious political strongmen, specious xenophobic rhetoric, manipulative social media, a dumbed-down public sphere dedicated to facile entertainment and facile political messages, and a public incapable of telling fake from real – and something within me says: that's what you get after 30 years of

disinvestment in the humanities. The pedagogical need to train people to think clearly, critically, and imaginatively has been proved, beyond all doubt, in the negative, much as the need for vitamin C was proved in the negative by scurvy. Dismiss it as useless or inconsequential and then see what you end up with.

Do not, in other words, disengage. Engagement is not a desideratum, a neglected or imminent necessity for the humanities, in order for them to emerge from what others frame as their chronically "problematic" afflictions. Humanities are not the problem; they are, if anything, part of the solution and engagement is their middle name, their very nature. Just as culture – that most refined and complex form of communication, which defines humankind as a species – connects people within and across societies, so too, humanities are about the things that connect us, that humans are, qua humans, engaged in.

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About the Author

Joep Leerssen holds the Chair of Modern European Literature at the University of Amsterdam and is an Endowed Research Chair at Maastricht University. For his work on national stereotypes and self-images and on the comparative history of European nationalisms, he received the Spinoza Prize in 2008. He is the editor of the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (2018).

Introduction

Engaged and Engaging Humanities

Miriam Meissner, Aagje Swinnen, & Susan Schreibman

Why Engagement? Why Now?

The perception of the humanities researcher persists as sequestered in the library surrounded by books or in a near-silent archive gingerly pouring over manuscripts (Nyhan & Duke-Williams, 2014). The image is of an isolated scholar, disconnected from the public and from contemporary societal concerns. And while much important research in the humanities is carried out in an isolation that provides the necessary environment for insight and reflection, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, research in the humanities is increasingly carried out collaboratively, within inter- and transdisciplinary settings, with the public as co-creators, and with the knowledge that it is important, if not imperative, that we bring a humanities perspective to current societal debates as well as influence their outcomes. Accordingly, what underpins the research in this volume, through a wide range of approaches, theories, and methods, is a focus on engagement.

This volume collects many modes of engaged research undertaken by the researchers affiliated with the research group Arts, Media, and Culture (AMC) of Maastricht University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The AMC faculty is diverse and includes (art) historians, philosophers, socio-linguists, archaeologists, and media and literary scholars. Increasingly, a majority of the faculty also does research within interdisciplinary settings, either through collaboration or by branching out from their original research domains into inherently multidisciplinary fields, such as gender and diversity studies or heritage and conservation studies. In terms of theoretical approaches, AMC scholarship follows new developments in critical theory, ethics, and digital and environmental humanities.

AMC research also relates to paradigms such as post-humanism and new materialism that may transform the humanities beyond its anthropocentric

foundations. It follows digital developments that enable us to explore new forms of data collection, analysis, and presentation, as well as new ways of audience participation. Methodologically, research projects within AMC often combine approaches from the humanities and the social sciences, linking up critical discourse analysis, philosophical reflection, or close reading with, for instance, design thinking, arts-based interventions, field observations, and qualitative interviews. Defining the identity of such a heterogeneous group is a challenge, of course – more so, at least, than for traditional departments or research groups whose scholarship fits more neatly into established disciplinary silos, such as history, classics, philosophy, linguistics, and literature. As a means to reflect on what unites AMC scholars, we organized colloquia and workshops and initiated a book project. Over the past few years, these combined efforts allowed us to identify the commitment to engagement as a common denominator.

While in our view the notion of engagement offers a particularly useful concept to capture the mode of humanities scholarship undertaken by the AMC research group, it also provides an opportunity to reflect more generally on the contribution of engaged humanities to the outside world. This introduction thus seeks to demonstrate that engagement in the humanities can be best understood as a plurivalent concept comprising both the adjective "engaged" and the verb "to engage." Both these variants of engagement carry multiple denotations and connotations. *To be engaged* means to be committed to someone or something. Beyond that, it connotes active and affective commitment. To be engaged means to work for or towards a larger commitment that is close to one's heart. In most cases, this larger commitment relates to a social institution (such as marriage) or an ethical ideal (such as justice). Of course, being engaged can just as well denote a state of being busy or occupied. In contrast to the notions of busy and occupied, however, engagement tends to connote a situation of being busy because of having one's hands full and/or one's mind captured. It suggests a state of being immersed in an activity. The verb *to engage*, on the other hand, tends to be directed toward people. To engage someone means to draw in, motivate, and/or mobilize this person. A person holding an engaging talk captures her audience. An engaging film might change viewers' thoughts and emotions. It might even encourage viewers towards a certain action or activism. Finally, to engage someone may simply mean to involve someone in a process, such as a research or reflection process. Citizen science, for example, engages citizens in the research processes, which can include data collection and analysis, metadata creation and transcription, opinion-making, and/or solution-finding.

We conceptualize engagement as a continuum: engaged research in the humanities tends to entail – to different degrees – various of the abovementioned variants of being *engaged* and/or *engaging*. This includes being committed to a social and/or ethical goal, being immersed in an activity, collaborating with, mobilizing, and/or motivating people. The point of conceptualizing engagement as a continuum is not to measure and evaluate humanities scholarship along a scale. Rather, it is as a conceptual tool that makes it possible to capture a multiplicity of engagement practices within today's humanities scholarship without reducing engagement in the humanities to any one practice, such as, for instance, public humanities, which is most often cited as engaged research in the humanities (see, for example, Jay, 2010). Clearly, not every humanist is also a well-known artist, activist, and/or public intellectual. Nevertheless, the kinds of knowledge and expertise developed within the humanities as demonstrated by the research in this volume have the power and relevance to speak with publics about socio-political, cultural, environmental, and/or ethical controversies in ways that reach beyond the academic ivory tower – to the extent that humanists sometimes directly mobilize publics for civic engagement and/or political activism.

If humanities scholars have studied extensively what makes narratives engaging, their field has rarely been studied in terms of engagement itself – an approach that we hope to stimulate through this collection of essays. Engagement characterizes the research practice of those connected to the AMC research group, defines who we are as scholars, and represents our mission. Undertaking engaged research is a political as well as an intellectual decision, manifesting itself in different ways.

For example, many of the chapters in this volume engage with topical issues characteristic of our times, such as inclusive societies (chapters Cornips et al.; Swinnen et al.; Richterich). But this volume also includes reflection on how to make historical sources relevant for the present (chapters Papadopoulos & Schreibman; Brunotte; Kluveld). AMC researchers study the whole spectrum of high-brow, middle-brow, and low-brow culture, ranging from novels, blogs, and self-help books (chapter Meissner) to installation and performance art (Laurenson, van Saaze, & van de Vall), from historical archives and oral history to television series (chapter Verbeeck) and home videos (chapter van der Heijden & Wachelder), and from online communities (chapter Meissner) to hacking spaces (chapter Richterich). What unites these inquiries is a focus on the practices in which cultural artifacts, more broadly characterized as texts, are produced, distributed, and received, with an increasing focus on their sites of production, reception, and/or co-creation, such as classrooms and factories where language practices are a means of inclusion and exclusion

(chapter Cornips et al.), websites where candidate parents present themselves to mothers of potential adoptees (chapter Wesseling), museum departments where the futures of performance artworks are shaped (chapter Laurenson, van Saaze, & van de Vall), nursing homes where people who live with dementia become co-creators in participatory arts activities (chapter Swinnen et al.), intergenerational communities where citizens meet to learn about the past (chapter Papadopoulos & Schreibman), and Facebook platforms where practitioners of minimalist lifestyles meet (chapter Meissner). This emphasis on situated practices is another form of engagement, in the social and historical as well as the material and bodily constituents of culture-in-the-making.

Many of projects reported on in this volume have an ethical and normative component and several AMC academics identify as activist-scholars. In this light, we asked contributors to this volume to reflect on what engagement means to them in relation to their scholarship. Each one of them received feedback from one or more AMC group members to facilitate an ongoing dialog. Following on the proposition to consider "engagement as continuum," this book offers contributions that can be situated somewhere between engaged research on subjects of topical relevance on the one hand and engaging scholarship through activities of practical and/or affective involvement, collaboration, and participation on the other. This is not to suggest that a particular type of engagement is exemplary, but rather to argue that this richness of engaged and engaging research is indicative of the resilience of the AMC research group in the increasingly fraught environment of higher education in general and the humanities in particular.

Stereotyping the Humanities

The concept of engaged and engaging humanities, and its profiling through examples, can work as an antidote for the decades-old and incredibly persistent "crisis" of the humanities. Emerging as a term and as a topic in the 1960s (Plumb, 1964), the sense of a worsening predicament has only intensified in recent decades due to repeated economic downturns followed by austerity measures and funding cuts to institutions of higher education, coupled with a tendency toward privatization in which society is less willing to fund higher education as a public good.[1]

1   To give a recent example from the Dutch context: the Dutch Plan van Rijn is investing significantly more in beta-technical programs which has a direct negative impact on other domains, including the humanities.

The crisis of the humanities is perceived to be both qualitative and quantitative. The sociologist Rosário Couto Costa argues that the depreciation of the humanities within higher education has, over the years, "severely disrupted the balance and the complementarity of wisdom in society" and, in so doing, contributed to "the environmental disasters and social crises that have marked the last decade" (2019, p. 4). For Costa, then, the marginalization of the humanities is much more than an academic concern. This development has actually weakened societal resilience as a whole: it has led to generalized deficits in knowledge, sensitivity, and imagination – cognitive resources crucial to the acknowledgment of real problems within society and likewise to the formulation of possible solutions. As a consequence, the ability of citizens to employ a critical mindset has been severely undermined (p. 3).

Costa calls this marginalization a "vicious cycle of devaluation" (p. 3), leading to a shrinking of resources within humanities departments and a loss of influence of the humanities in society at large. This becomes apparent in reduced enrollment figures, larger class sizes, fewer academic positions available, and lower salaries paid, while it is also accompanied by a "culture of mistrust" toward the humanities and their contribution to societal progress and wellbeing (Docherty, 2011). A 2009 report published by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, for instance, reads: "The humanities study expressions of the human mind, as representations and interpretations of the world. ... Being an academic field in which discovery, collecting, classification and interpretation are some of the predominant methods, the humanities are constantly returning to their own past. Because humanities studies are specific to their own time and context, new approaches must continually be found for the same subjects, while at the same time the old era-specific interpretations still retain their value" (p. 11). The report, which is entitled "Sustainable Humanities," expresses strong appreciation for the humanities. Simultaneously, however, it promotes a constricted understanding of what the humanities do. The wording "expressions of the human mind," for example, suggests a focus on stable and isolated expressions that reside within selected individuals (such as artists or philosophers) or selected cultural artifacts (such as novels or films). Instead, many humanists study what happens to cultural meanings when they enter social interaction or when they travel between different geographical and/or historical frames and contexts. While it is correct that scholarly efforts in the humanities return to the same subjects (such as Greek mythology, Shakespeare, or ancient philosophy), it would be wrong to assume that the humanities are exclusively about the past. Overall, the

report tends to promote an understanding of the humanities as a field of scholarship dealing with sources from the past and abstract ideas and values (such as theories and concepts).

This perception perpetuates the notion that humanities scholarship is considered a field that by and large relies on hermeneutical methods geared to the analysis of already existing primary sources (e.g., literature, archival documents, or the visual arts). Indeed, humanists excel in the practice of close-reading sources of any kind, whether textual, visual, or audio-visual, but their scope is neither limited to hermeneutical data, nor to analysis through close-reading. Humanists use a broad range of both hermeneutical and empirical methods of data construction/collection (e.g., storytelling in oral history, the creation of new corpora in the digital humanities) and analysis (e.g., "distant-reading" practices, such as network analysis and geo-spatial analysis). And while the natural sciences have been involving the public in research, such as to document birds beginning in the nineteenth century (Silvertown, 2009, p. 467) and in collecting rainfall data in the British Isles (Shuttelworth, 2015), well before the advent of the Internet, scholars in the humanities have eagerly adopted participatory practices in recent years as well. This can be seen in such participatory projects as the digital database *Letters of 1916-1923*,[2] which has created a new collection of letters focused on the Irish Revolutionary period through a participatory process, and *Transcribe Bentham*,[3] which asks the public to help transcribe the thousands of letters written by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Indeed, these types of projects signal a new mode of engagement within the humanities.

Value, Impact, and Engagement

Interestingly, mistrust is an issue not only outside but also within the humanities. Humanists question their own field, continuously inquiring about its value. As suggested by the literary scholar Louis Menand, "[i]t is possible to feel that one of the things ailing the humanities today is the amount of time humanists spend talking about what ails the humanities" (2005, p. 11). Menand here raises the issue of whether the crisis of the humanities emerged, at least in part, as a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. Could it be that the crisis of the humanities works like a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994) – a simulation with real-world consequences?

2   See http://letters1916.ie
3   See https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/transcribe-bentham

The search term "value of the humanities" shows 2,480 results within Google Scholar. Countless books and articles have been published on the topic. Within this discourse, Helen Small distinguishes between five main "claims of value of the humanities" (2013, pp. 4–6). The first is that the humanities study meaning-making practices of our culture, focusing on interpretation and evaluation, which creates their distinctive disciplinary character. The second is that the humanities are instrumental to the creation of economic value (e.g., within the creative industries). For Small, this second value claim coincides best with what contemporary governments expect from research and higher education in terms of societal use- and exchange-value. The third value claim is that the humanities contribute to "happiness" on the individual and collective scale. It stipulates that the humanities can help us understand and evaluate forms of happiness, wellbeing, and the good life. The fourth claim is that democracy needs the humanities (see also the chapter by Koenis & de Roder in this volume). This claim, made by scholars such as Martha Nussbaum in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), closely relates to the influence of critical theory – stretching from (neo-) Marxist ideology to feminist to postcolonial critique – on humanities scholarship. The fifth and final main value claim is that the humanities matter for their own sake. While somewhat unspecific, this fifth claim seems to combine all previous value claims in assuming that, due to its distinctive research subject and focus, the humanities positively contribute to societal wellbeing, politics, and cultural life (Small, 2013, p. 6).

Each one of these value claims, as demonstrated by Small, contains both strengths and weaknesses in terms of their logic. If some of the existing scholarship on humanities in crisis and/or the value of the humanities mainly aims to defend humanities scholarship, the aim of this volume is rather to showcase this scholarship in its various modes and moments of engagement. This book, in other words, is not about humanities in crisis; it is about *engaged and engaging humanities*. It is about what happens when humanities scholars do not necessarily question the humanities and its value through theoretical reflection but, instead, reflect this value through engagement. In many ways, humanities scholarship has always been engaged and engaging, but the modes of this engagement have been transforming within the context of contemporary inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship.

AMC research is performed by scholars employed by Maastricht University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, which is a pioneering institute in the Netherlands in terms of pursuing and facilitating fruitful exchanges between the social sciences and the humanities. Differences between the humanities and social sciences are often gradual and relate to focus, rather

than overall subject. For instance, a sociologist, a linguist, and literary theorist might study how novels are being debated within a contemporary feminist reading group. All three of them would probably examine issues of literary form and meaning, language, and social interaction, but their focus on these issues and their means of analyzing them would vary. Beyond that, all three scholars would probably interact in different manners with the objects of research (e.g., novels) and the people involved in it (e.g., participants). This is when questions of engagement become central. How do humanists from different sub-fields engage with their research subjects, including people and artifacts? And how do the various forms of engagement practiced by humanists affect societal constellations – from social groups to social rituals, from social media to social change?

We argue that engagement provides a process-oriented and flexible concept to grasp how humanities scholarship makes a difference in society. We suggest that engagement offers a more suitable concept to capture what would otherwise be measured as the "societal impact" of research projects within contemporary academia. Clearly, the questions addressed in this book closely align with the topic of impact, which forms a key concern in contemporary university funding. When societies, represented by their governments, allocate resources for research and education, they expect to know the impact of this resource allocation. Impact, in this context, is usually understood in terms of scientific and societal impact. Currently, scientific impact is mostly measured through peer-review and bibliometrics. Societal impact, in contrast, is more difficult to measure. Scholarship today is expected either directly or indirectly to contribute to the Global Sustainable Development Goals, which include good health and well-being, climate action, gender equality, peace and justice, and many other concerns (Brown et al., 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2018; Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017). But how is this contribution evaluated?

According to sociologist of science Lutz Bornmann, three main methods of measuring societal impact based on a citation equivalent have emerged: evaluation of citations within patents (technological impact), evaluation of citations within clinical guidelines (medical impact), and altmetrics, which measures how frequent research findings are cited in media, policy documents, and related public sources (2017, p. 778). Furthermore, impact is increasingly measured in terms of interactions between researchers and societal stakeholders. Interactions, in this context, "can be in the form of personal contact (e.g., joint projects or networks), publications (e.g., educational and assessment reports) … and artefacts (e.g., exhibitions, software or websites)" (Bornmann, 2017, p. 779). Bornmann criticizes these impact measurements – in particular impact metrics – for being distorted.

Accordingly, "science is marked by inequality, random chance, anomalies, the right to make mistakes, unpredictability and a high significance of extreme events" (p. 775), all of which affect impact unforeseeably. Contemporary impact metrics, as such, predispose impact to result from a rather constant and linear research flow, which fabricates units of impact like products from the conveyor belt. Thus, while the notion of impact increasingly co-determines the societal value of a scholar, a research project, a research discipline, or even a scholarly field (such as the humanities), we have not yet found a fair and reliable means of measuring societal impact. Moreover, existing impact measurements tend to quantify impact, while ignoring the qualitative variations that distinguish different forms of societal contribution. This, in our view, provides an important incentive for examining the societal impact of humanities scholarship beyond metrics, as well as through the notion of engagement. In the Dutch academic context, there has been a development towards a narrative approach instead of a quantitative one (cf. the discussion surrounding the position paper "Recognition and Rewards") when it comes to assessing output and impact. Our proposition to work with the concept of engagement is in line with this development.

In contrast to the concept of impact, engagement invites a focus on research as a process, rather than merely on the results of research. This can be seen in this volume's chapters that report on engagement with individuals outside academia. In this respect it is possible to distinguish three different forms. First, several AMC scholars subscribe to the need of translating, packaging, and tailoring knowledge to different groups within society at large. Secondly, more traditional formats and genres of outreach activities, such as popularizing publications (journal articles etc.), public lectures, and debates, are increasingly complemented with newer approaches, including best practice guides, exhibitions, historical re-enactments, theatrical performances, and games (chapters van der Heijden & Wachelder and Papadopoulos & Schreibman). Thirdly, the common notion – in the Dutch context – of "valorization" has promoted the development of public humanities practices whereby the conventional model of a scholar addressing an audience is replaced by more interactive and participatory forms of engagement (chapters van der Heijden & Wachelder; Papadopoulos & Schreibman; and Swinnen et al.). In an ideal scenario, such audience engagement feeds back into the scholarship.

This third form of engagement implies that more and more AMC scholars involve communities outside academia in the production of knowledge. This can vary from a more passive engagement similar to the involvement of human subjects in qualitative social sciences research to more active

engagement involving people in the processes of researching; from the formulation of research questions to the interpretation of research data. AMC faculty increasingly immerse themselves in specific communities/settings to collect/create data through online and offline (participant) observation and interviewing. Examples of such communities vary from hackerspaces (chapter Richterich) and museums (chapter Laurenson, van Saaze, & van de Vall) to schools and nursing homes (chapters Cornips et al. and Swinnen et al.). Data collection/creation through collaborations with these communities outside of academia often have the character of interventions, as they ultimately serve to change the very settings in which the research takes place, or, at least, change how they are perceived (e.g., chapter Richterich – more gender equality in hackerspaces; chapter Laurenson, van Saaze, & van de Vall – advance the conservation of contemporary art; and chapter Papadopoulos & Schreibman – using new technologies to engage secondary students with history). When activities are developed that otherwise would not exist in the given settings (e.g., films created and screened for people living with dementia in a psychogeriatric ward – chapter Swinnen et al.), this type of approach clearly has affinities with action research.

Together, these chapters exemplify how involving people from outside of academia, not only in the production of knowledge but in the entire research process from formulating questions and research design to final results, is participatory and engaged research at the same time. This research is actually part of a broader trend in the humanities in which humanists set up citizen science projects in which they invite volunteers/non-professionals to help archive, curate, interpret, and exhibit sources. This type of set-up encourages civic engagement and lifelong learning together. All these ways of engaging with people other than scholars are examples of how AMC faculty is committed to a humanities field that is more engaging than traditionally perceived. This volume in fact underscores that a diversity of modes of engagement within the humanities is flourishing already. To understand the societal impact of the humanities, these versatile modes of engagement within and through the humanities merit closer attention and narrative description.

Four Clusters of AMC Research Engagement

The chapters in this volume are divided into four clusters: "Subjectivities and Communities," "Engaging Narratives," "Collaborations," and "The Humanities Tradition: Pioneers and Longstanding Debates" which highlight and exemplify the types of engaged and engaging research described above. The

cluster "Subjectivities and Communities" brings together scholarship that inquires how selfhood is socially constructed and performed in relation to other people. It signals engagement through its specific focus on "precarious" selfhood, ranging from people who desire a child and people who live in institutionalized care settings to people with a migration background. The chapter by Elisabeth Wesseling studies how prospective adoptive parents stake out a socially acceptable identity for themselves on the American platform *Full Circle Adoptions*. This platform is organized as a dating site where adopters profile themselves to convince parents to give their child to them through a variety of aesthetics strategies. The chapter by Aagje Swinnen, Ike Kamphof, Annette Hendrikx, and Ruud Hendriks looks into how people who live with dementia in the closed wards of the long-term care facility Klevarie in Maastricht respond to three film montages. Based on visual material from the archives of the Limburgs Museum, filmmaker Joël Rabijns sought to appeal to the sensory and emotional capacities of the designated viewers (people who live with dementia) and to support their embodied being in the world. The chapter by Leonie Cornips, Jolien Makkinga, Nantke Pecht, and Pomme van de Weerd presents sociolinguistic and anthropological research conducted within the context of the Chair in Language Culture in Limburg. Through several case-studies, their contribution reveals the role of linguistic resources in regional and social identity constructions and how speakers of distinct backgrounds in various contexts identify with others, or dis-identify themselves from others, through language, labeling, and addressing practices.

The "Engaging Narratives" cluster comprises contributions that reveal the urgency of a renewed engagement with various types of narratives across media that critically intervene in the present and the past. The chapter by Georgi Verbeeck studies the reception of the German mini-series *Generation War* by academic, journalistic, and political critics. It focuses specifically on the debate surrounding moral choices and dilemmas in the series' representation of Hitler's Germany at war with the Soviet Union in 1941–1945 as an example of how popular culture feeds into contemporary academic historical research. The chapter by Amanda Kluveld reconstructs interwar life in the former Galician Jewish community of Grodzisko Dolne in South-East Poland. The reconstruction is based on the childhood memories in the oral and written life histories of Holocaust survivors born and raised in this community. The chapter by Miriam Meissner examines how advocates for and practitioners of minimalist lifestyles understand social and ecological engagement. In her reading, these lifestyles tend to focus on individual experience and choice, while foreclosing the consideration of collective

political action and institutional change. Meissner advocates an "engaged mindfulness" that demands the alignment and mutual reinforcement of individual experience and collective political engagement.

The cluster on "Collaborations" includes three chapters that offer insights into the diverse ways in which scholars, lay people, and professionals collaborate, mostly to engage in the co-construction of knowledge. The chapter by Tim van der Heijden and Jo Wachelder looks into the authors' experiences with several valorization activities developed in the framework of a project on the history of home movie making and screening as twentieth-century family memory practices. They understand valorization as a reciprocal process beneficial to all the partners involved. The chapter by Costas Papadopoulos and Susan Schreibman discusses the design principles behind and experiences with History in a Box, a technology-driven blended learning activity in which people from different generations collaborate to investigate the battle of the 1916 Irish Battle of Mount Street Bridge. The chapter by Pip Laurenson, Vivian van Saaze, and Renée van de Vall examines the dynamics of collaboration between humanities scholars and museum-based researchers who have already worked together on the conservation and stewardship of contemporary art for two decades. The chapter by Annika Richterich focuses on civic developer communities where "hacking" is understood as creative practice pushing the boundaries of technology. It asks how members of such hacker- and makerspaces establish and negotiate rules for social interactions, particularly in relation to communal values.

Finally, the cluster on "The Humanities Tradition: Pioneers and Longstanding Debates" offers insights into the important contributions of selected key figures in humanities scholarship as well as interventions in long-standing humanities debates. The chapter by Ulrike Brunotte introduces us to the work of Jane Harrison (1850–1928), the Hellenist and so-called Cambridge Ritualist who was the first to focus on the meaning of ritual in the study of culture and religion. Brunotte argues that Harrison is a pioneering scholar who paved the way for the current material, affective, and performative turn in the humanities. The chapter by Sjaak Koenis and Jan de Roder goes against the widespread assumption that reading enhances empathy and makes us better citizens by questioning the alliance between politics and literature in the work of Martha Nussbaum.

What this volume substantiates through examples is that the image of the humanities scholar withdrawn in her ivory tower's splendid isolation is a myth. It has never been exemplary of humanities scholars per se, and it is certainly not representative of what we are and do today. The members

of the faculty behind this book actively contribute and intervene in public debate and practice, involve people outside academia in varying ways, emphasize dialog and co-creation, and contribute to shaping the collective social process of creating common futures. We argue that the established notion of scholarly impact does not fully grasp these multiple and often interactive motivations and practices because by relying on this notion one will overlook the qualitative variety according to which social impact happens, focus on the end result rather than the process, and conceive of the impacting process as unidirectional (i.e., scholar impacts society). The concept of engagement, in contrast, refers to both the state of being engaged and the activity of engaging. It thus captures the multifaceted process of scholarly interaction with societal issues and actors, while it also accounts for the fact that this process is necessarily reciprocal. This implies that engagement cannot be pinned down to a single definition but needs to be fleshed out through a range of examples. This is what this volume sets out to do. Its authors draw on their experience in order to show, analyze, and critically reflect on engaged and engaging humanities scholarship. The various results, we believe, go beyond arguing the value of the humanities. Through its tools, ideas, narratives, and self-reflection, this volume may serve as groundwork and source of inspiration for future practices of engaged and engaging humanities scholarship.

Acknowledgments

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About the Authors

Miriam Meissner is Assistant Professor at Maastricht University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Her research explores the interrelation between cities, popular culture, political economy, and the environment. Her publications include *Narrating the Global Financial Crisis: Urban Imaginaries and the Politics of Myth* (Palgrave, 2017) as well as the co-edited volumes *The Routledge Companion to Urban Imaginaries and Global Garbage* (Routledge, 2018 & 2016).

Aagje Swinnen is Professor in Aging Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University. She has published on representations of aging in literature, photography, and film; meanings of art interventions in dementia care; and ways in which professional artists understand and give meaning to creativity in the later stages of their career in journals such as *Journal of Aging Studies*, *The Gerontologist*, *Dementia*, *Ageing & Society*, and *Feminist Media Studies*. Swinnen is co-founder of the European Network in Aging Studies and the open access journal *Age, Culture, Humanities*.

Susan Schreibman is Professor of Digital Arts and Culture at Maastricht University. She works at the intersections of computationally based teaching and research in the interplay of the digital archive, cultural innovation, and participatory engagement design, processes, and projects. A focus of her research is the design and critical analysis of systems that remediate publication modalities from the analogue world, while developing new born-digital paradigms.