

**BEYOND THE CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES:  
TRANSDISCIPLINARY TRANSFORMATIONS OF  
CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES ON ART AND CULTURE**

Collection of Papers

Edited by Žarko Cvejić, Andrija Filipović and Ana Petrov



Faculty of Media and Communications  
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# Play, Ivana, Play!

## Constructing a Hybrid Identity “Betwixt and Between”

### Musicology and Music Performance

Jelena Janković-Beguš

#### **Part I – The Notion of “Hybridity” in the Humanities**

In my understanding of the notion of “hybridity” as a theoretical concept deployed in the humanities in the last three decades or so, I am influenced – not surprisingly – by the elaboration of the term in Miško Šuvaković’s book *Studije slučaja* (Šuvaković 2006). In biology, where the term originated, a hybrid is a *mix of two* animals or plants of different breeds, varieties, species, or genera. Šuvaković analyses the historical uses and meanings of the term, starting from its negative meanings in 19<sup>th</sup> century discourses on racism. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the term was used positively, applied to various *interdisciplinary* developments in the humanities and social sciences, as well as theoretical activities in the second half of the century. At present, the use of the term is commonly associated with post-colonial studies; however Šuvaković speaks about “hybrid theory” which he understands as stepping outside of one’s primary field of competence, as having more than one origin of knowledge and being ready to tackle interventional material social practices (ibid., 7–8).

#### **Part II – Hybrid Discourse**

In my personal practice of musicology as a profession, I have always been driven more to the “literary” than to the “scientific” aspect of the discipline. Although I am naturally interested in musicological “research” as

an academic approach, in my mind writing about music is more about the opportunity to *write*, to challenge my own creativity with words and paragraphs, to share personal views on certain topics that I find interesting, than trying to give definitions and explanations. Still, topics are important because I cannot imagine writing about something – be it a musical style, a composer and her work, a performer, a context of music production or anything else – without sensing a “connection” to the object of my “research”. This connection has never been stronger or more obvious than in this particular case where I am analysing the life and work of my identical twin sister, “disguised” as an objective researcher and trying to maintain a serious face while doing it.

Seriously, how can I be “objective” in my consideration of the chosen topic? It is my very intention to show that there is no such thing as “objective judgement” in the field of art. The framework of this publication has given me the right to introduce the special case of a “performing musicologist”, Ivana Medić, and to demonstrate how academic discourse is, and can be, intertwined with personal, non-academic discourses. The obvious inscription of my body – and soul – in this text and the sheer pleasure of it, testifies to the shifting nature of the humanities in general and musicology in particular: from a positivistic science to a textual practice. The position I am adopting now is that of *women’s writing* (*écriture féminine*), which, according to Dragana Stojanović, “is not limited to the writing of women; women’s writing is also every textual practice that in a similar way points to the fragility of phallogocentric construction by using the techniques and strategies of fragmentation, resemantisation, and *hybridization of the text*, while also re-examining the phallogocentric system by examining the structure of language and writing itself” (Stojanović 2013).

This tricky term, “hybrid discourse”, was loosely defined in a 1999 article by Patricia Bizzell as nonacademic discourses blending with traditional academic discourses (Bizzell 2002, 21). Patricia A. Duff adopts the same approach, describing hybrid discourse (she also calls it *intertextuality*) as the “interweaving of non-academic and more academic texts”, and also speaks of “pop-culture infused talk” (that is: with spontaneous references to pop culture, Duff 2004). In my interpretation, discursive hybridity is revealed in various “interpolations” of non-academic nature in the predominantly traditional musicological writing. For instance, real-life anecdotes which I am going to share with the reader do not usually belong in a research paper – but I am going to relay them nonetheless.

However, Judith Hebb argues – rightfully, in my opinion – that it is difficult to say what the exact characteristics of “traditional academic discourse” are. Furthermore, since discourses are inherently “ideological”, composing a list of traditional academic discourse traits would serve to

reinforce its privileged socio-political position within the academe (Hebb 2002, 22). Bizzell coined the term “hybrid discourse” by borrowing the word “hybrid” from postcolonial theory; however, cultural and postcolonial scholars have negative associations with “hybridity”, a term they link to the context of the colonial subject (ibid., 28).

Hebb cites Mikhail Bakhtin, possibly the first scholar in discursive theory to have used the word “hybrid” (Bakhtin 1981, 358),<sup>1</sup> who, throughout his seminal essay “Discourse in the Novel”, characterises discourses as public and private, external and internal, centripetal and centrifugal (*heteroglossia* (Ibid., 324)), direct and indirect, literary and everyday, personal, and impersonal, authorial and “other”, and authoritative and persuasive. Interaction (or inter-animation) between these diametrically opposed systems creates a dialogic tension that results in multi-layered creative relationships with new contexts and new perspectives. This purposeful mixing of languages results in an enriched language with the potential to produce meaningful discourse both creative and intellectual that would otherwise not be possible in the expression of only one language (Hebb 2002, 23). Hebb’s observation that hybrid discourse is the language of possibility, not restriction, describes quite accurately my approach to writing, whether it is a musicological text, a poem, or an essay that I am producing at any particular moment. Here I tend to disagree with Bakhtin’s observation that in the case of scientific thought “the significance of discourse as such is comparatively weak” (to be fair, Bakhtin’s remark relates to the language of mathematical and natural sciences, Bakhtin 1981, 351). My discourse here is *intentionally, consciously hybridised*.

Another useful characteristic of this “hybrid perspective” and the introduction of *women’s writing* in academic discourse is the triumphant realisation that Goethe’s Faust is no longer the ideal scholar.

### Part III – Hybrid Identity

But enough about me! Let’s move already to the real *subject* of this paper which is Ivana Medić, who has been a lifelong source of inspiration for me. Let me just briefly point to the life-defining set of circumstances which occurred at the very moment the two of us entered the world arena: she popped out ten minutes before me; or as she likes to put it, I arrived late to my own birth. Thus, she was the one destined to carry the heavy weight of expectations that this society puts on first-borns. And boy, has she delivered! As a non-native speaker of English, she obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Manchester; her scholarly workload is way too extensive to quote here. This is where things get interesting: her present

research interests include, among other things, Serbian rock 'n' roll scene from 1990 to the present; she is active not only as a pianist specialising in contemporary music, but also as a self-taught bass guitarist and performer on various other instruments (for example she recently learned to play Pan's flute specially for a live performance of Louis Andriessen's *Hoketus* at Radio Belgrade's Studio 6!). Here I will focus on her "classical" piano performances, which have been, from my perspective, a point of difference between her and me who wasn't sufficiently interested in practising the piano.

Once, a well-known Serbian music critic told Ivana after her concert that she had "really great legs for a musicologist" – aside from the misogynist aspect of this statement, he was actually complimenting her piano playing. Why this is important: *he was paying attention to the performing body of a musicologist, not to a written or spoken "trace" of her intellect.* According to Miško Šuvaković, the representative of the body is a *figure* which is a symbolic or imaginary "space" in the non-literal relationship between *meaning* and *expression* (Šuvaković 2006, 7). It can be said that Ivana's *figure* confused the critic. When one watches her recent concert performances (live or video recordings), two things immediately come to mind. Firstly, the musicological voice – the trace of the intellect – *is present*: she presents a form of a "narrated concert", whereby she interprets the chosen pieces in words as well as in notes. Secondly, she does not play the pianists' favourites – Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Schumann etc., but the music she plays *is* pianistically difficult: it requires not only technical prowess, but also an understanding of the complexities of the musical tissue. One may say that her repertoire choices serve to mask the fact that she is not a "real" pianist, namely that her main competence lies elsewhere. However, there is another reason, a "hidden agenda", which fuels her desire to perform soloist concerts and influences her repertoire choices, as I am about to show. To do so, I am going to reflect briefly on the notions of identity and, later on, of hybrid identity.

Really, what is an identity? As Šuvaković points out, answers to this question usually derive from two different and contrasting approaches: *essentialist* and *anti-essentialist* (Ibid., 34) (or *constructivist*, according to Tim Rice who also identifies these positions, Rice. 2007, 24). The former approach adopts the perspective that, for any specific entity there is a set of attributes which are necessary to its identity and function. By contract, the second, anti-essentialist approach argues that identities are not something that exists as a fact or an attribute, that there is no "essence" or a universal characteristic. Rather, entities are *discursive constructions*, social *products of discourse* in the world of cultural and socially presented relationships (Šuvaković 2006, 35). These two approaches have had far-reaching

implications in feminist theory, but since it is not the main focus of this article, I will just say that the essentialist approach does not allow a full grasp of the particular case of a “performing musicologist” since it would be impossible to enumerate the defining characteristics of a “performer” and a “musicologist”, and even more so of a “hybrid” between those two. Therefore, I have adopted the second perspective, arguing that the concepts of a performer or a musicologist can only be understood under certain socially defined conditions and “rules of the trade”.

Speaking from the same, anti-essentialist position about the relationship between music and identity, Simon Frith elaborates two premises:

first, that identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; second, that our experience of music – of music making and music listening – is best understood as *an experience of this self-in-process* (frith 2011, 109).

According to Frith, whose views I tend to share,

[...] an identity is always already an ideal, what we would like to be, not what we are. [...]

But if musical identity is, then, always fantastic, idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits, it is, secondly, always also *real, enacted in musical activities*. Music making and music listening, that is to say, are bodily matters, involve what one might call social movements. *In this respect, musical pleasure is not derived from fantasy – it is not mediated by daydreams – but is experienced directly: music gives us a real experience of what the ideal could be* (Ibid., 123).

I find most exciting Frith’s conclusions that music is a “fusion of imaginative fantasy and bodily practice” and that “music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives” (Ibid., 124). And also: “Identity is thus necessarily a matter of ritual, it describes one’s place in a dramatized pattern of relationships [...]. Self-identity is cultural identity; claims to individual difference depend on audience appreciation, on shared performing and narrative rules” (Ibid., 125).

How does this work in the case of Ivana Medić? Šuvaković argues that identities are often constituted with a practical, concrete, and contextualised intention (Šuvaković 2006, 36). This is an important realisation and it inevitably provokes the question: why is Ivana doing what she is doing? Why does she feel the need to spend hours practising the piano, balancing it with her busy research schedule and family life? What is the *purpose* of her hybrid scholarly-artistic presentation?

The answer is, actually, very simple: Ivana is deploying her pianistic talent in order to make her musicological research more visible! I

concluded this myself, but as I was finishing this paper, and in order to avoid unpleasant situations later, I had to verify with my topic (my sister) whether this observation was actually correct. Guess what – I do know my sis very well, so she happily acknowledged that this was indeed the reason why she was crossing the boundaries of the disciplines which are clearly separated in our educational system and professional practice of artistic music. This also explains why she does not tackle more popular segments of pianistic literature – it is not (primarily) in order to avoid comparison with academically trained pianists, but because this music is of no interest to Ivana as a researcher. It is sufficient to see her list of published articles and reviews to understand that her concert programmes are designed to complement her present musicological work. This is where subversion takes place. She does not care what naysayers might think about the idea that she is occupying the concert stage in place of a “real” pianist – after all, these categories are, as we have seen, only a product of habit and discourse and they are not solid, impenetrable, or invariable truths.

To tell you the truth, Ivana has always been an extrovert (bordering on exhibitionism) and she happily basks in the spotlight. So yes, she enjoys playing the piano and performing before an audience. She was also the one who worked well with all her piano teachers who all happened to be elderly ladies, which also explains her longstanding association with the Prof. Milanka Mišević’s Piano Music Workshop. Then, there is the pedagogical dimension of her concerts which aim to make audiences familiar with piano compositions of less well known authors or those whose oeuvres do not fall in the “easy listening” category. Her concert performances have gained her a following of people who do not belong to narrow scholarly circles and do not read specialised musicological magazines. The appreciation of her concert performances contributes to the feeling of self-worth and to the promotion of a musicological practice that is no longer seen as dead letter on a piece of paper but as something alive and breathing and, would you believe it, *interesting*.

Final remarks about hybrid identity: I have deliberately stayed away from the meaning of the term as used in ethnology and ethnomusicology, for example, as it was my intention to show that such a vague syntagm can be given different meanings. One might argue, though, that Ivana is an “expat” on the concert stage – if one assumes that her “homeland” is the field of scholarly research. Either way, hybridity in this case is nothing but crossing the borders of the disciplines of musicology and musical performance, which are institutionally and discursively delimited in Serbian “art world”.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin defines hybridisation as “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor” (358). He also distinguishes *intentional, deliberate, conscious hybridization* which is an “artistic device” from *unintentional, unconscious hybridization* which has enabled all languages to evolve and change in the course of time (Ibid., 358–59). This essay has had a great influence on my understanding of language(s) and discourse(s).

## Disclaimer

In no way has Ivana Medić contributed to this article.  
Any similarity with real persons and events is purely intentional.

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