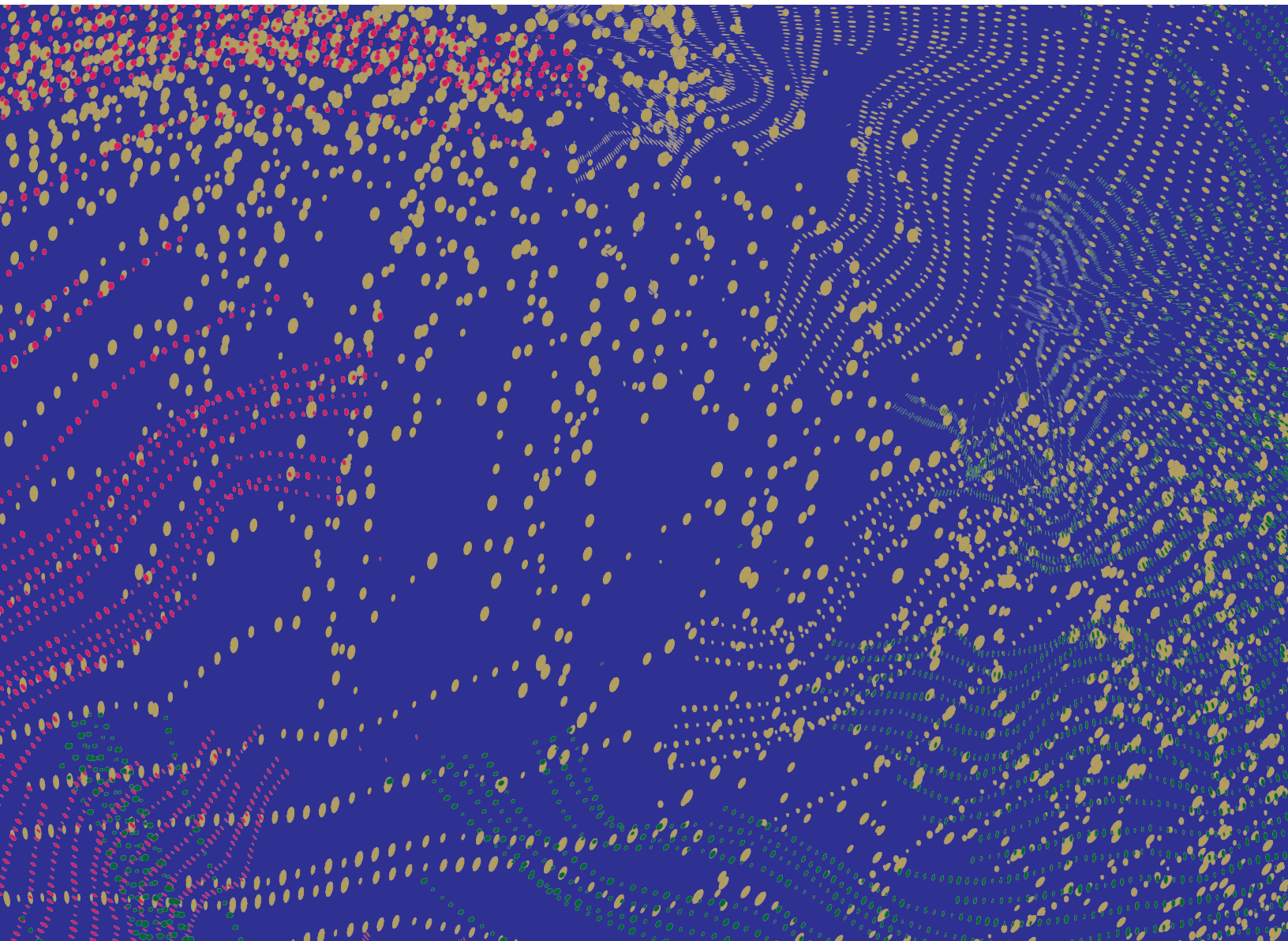


The World Humanities Report

Director's Report: Strategies for Persistence in a World under Duress

Sara Guyer



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Director's Report: Strategies for Persistence in a World under Duress

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Today, across the world, states and universities are focusing on technology and engineering in order to advance national and economic interests, increase competitiveness, and forge solutions to sustainable development goals and grand challenges, including climate change and artificial intelligence (AI). This is understandable. Yet, climate change and AI are not challenges that will be *addressed by* technology and engineering; rather, they are challenges *brought about by* technology and engineering. Technology and engineering alone do not provide the tools needed to live with unprecedented risk to human life and to the planet. In this urgent context, the World Humanities Report insists upon the critical role of the humanities in a world under duress and outlines a strategy to ensure their persistence.

The World Humanities Report demonstrates for a broad audience how the humanities contribute to human flourishing. The humanities—in particular, the global and critical humanities—are essential to understanding society. They reveal who we are, who we have been, what we have thought, and how we think today. They constitute the archive of human accomplishment and failure, of human imagination and aspiration. They serve as resources for individuals seeking to understand themselves in the world and for communities and society in constant search of greater good.

Begun in 2018, the World Humanities Report assembles the voices of scholars and writers from around the world to document both the contributions and the conditions of the humanities. The project does not undertake to assess how each country or region is doing on a scale of indicators. Rather than code and taxonomize using a universal model or general consensus, this report instead offers examples, arguments, readings, and cases that bring into relief the value and diversity of the humanities and their crucial role in reflecting and enriching

human experience and in addressing existential urgencies. A key outcome of the report are ten core strategies that should inform the work of university leaders, non-state agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local and federal governments, private philanthropies, policymakers, and scholars.¹ Taken together, the contributions that comprise the World Humanities Report reveal the conditions under which the humanities will persist in the near term as well as the threats posed by the risk of their disappearance. They show how institutional recognition, investment in research, and support for the public humanities will sustain the humanities going forward in a context that includes the rise of authoritarianism and censorship, which attack critical inquiry and the free exchange of ideas.

Work on The World Humanities Report began during the Trump presidency and is finally launched as we face the threat of another. This eruption and the rise of governments across the world run by similar figures—Bolsonaro, Erdogan, Melel, Johnson, Putin, Netanyahu, Orbán, Xi, and Modi—cast an ominous shadow on this report. Policies and actions in the US, Turkey, Russia, Brazil, China, Israel, India, and elsewhere have produced displacements and degradations of persons in the service of nationalist agendas. Unsurprisingly, these governments—directly or indirectly—also attack the humanities within universities and schools; for example, banning critical accounts of US history (as described by James Shulman and Eugene Tobin in the report on the humanities in North America), dismantling the entire research infrastructure in Russia (as outlined by Ilya V. Gerasimov and Alexander M. Semyonov in the report on the humanities in Russia) and prohibiting the expression of dissent in Turkish universities (as explained by Pinar Tadesmir in the report on the public humanities in Turkey). The forced removal of the Central European University from Budapest to exile in Vienna in 2018, repeating an earlier political strategy that foreclosed international investment in research at Russian universities, is another well-documented example.² The rise of authoritarian leaders and

¹ By comparison, see Poul Holm, Arne Jarrick, and Dominic Scott, *Humanities World Report 2015* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), which its authors describe as “an attempt . . . to map on a global scale what humanists think about what they do and how the field is changing” (1). The authors focus on producing “cool analysis and reflection” rather than a “battle cry” (2).

² In addition to the Russia report, see Rector Shalini Randeria’s account of Central European University in “Lessons for Universities Facing Authoritarian Pressure,” *University World News*, October 22, 2022, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20221021143435473>.

antidemocratic tendencies in the US, Europe, Asia, and South America reveals a new type of global interconnectedness and risk that had seemed out of the question not so long ago. Today, societies built on equality and the rule of law appear fragile. No one can sit comfortably outside the challenges to democracy and intellectual freedom.

Three other contexts shape the World Humanities Report. First, the period in which we initially had planned to undertake the most significant work on the report turned out to be the moment in which our deep interconnection and separation were revealed simultaneously. In early 2020, the pandemic caused by COVID-19 moved swiftly, if unevenly, across the globe, foreclosing the kinds of travel and collaboration that are a central feature of international academic projects, while also accelerating our access to digital platforms and virtual exchange. New negotiations of risk, vulnerability, urban life, and the social contract ensued, as did new experiences of remote connection, interruption, and isolation. Freedom and exposure, no longer opposed, came to be thoroughly entangled. Second is the international recognition of pervasive and institutionalized anti-Black racism, and the challenge of recognizing the impact of racism—explicit and implicit, past and ongoing—in the form of slavery, caste systems, economic privation, incarceration, segregation, and colonialism. Developing an understanding of the world and its possibility that is not defined by race and racism became an urgent matter that informs many of the strategies and examples offered here. Third, the uncertain state of the planet means that we are living in a time of anticipatory grief, constantly unsure of whether a future will be possible or whether our actions have meaning. Each of these conditions has changed our questions, collaborations, and institutions, even when these changes are not explicitly named.

The World Humanities Report focuses on strategies to facilitate the persistence of the humanities rather than on the crises that beset them, but it is clear that economic austerity, instrumental education, monolingualism, climate change, and myriad forms of cultural repression compromise the humanities today.³ As we bear witness to democracy under threat, and as the freedoms of expression and capacity to hold common principles waver, even in universities, the necessity of the humanities as modes of witnessing, critique, and world-

³ Climate change may stand out in this list as a force that does not differentiate the humanities from other forms of knowledge; however, the risk of wildfire, heat, and sea rise, among other effects, especially threaten the archives and institutions of the humanities. See, for example, the contribution from Australia, with its focus on bushfire.

making is brought ever more clearly into view. Many of our contributors describe the crisis conditions in which their work takes place—from wildfires in Australia to collapsed economies in Lebanon to war in Russia and Ukraine. Our appeal to funders, international and government agencies, and policymakers to support the humanities includes a call to support academic inquiry, freedom of expression, multilingualism, and diversity in the face of threats that cut across the globe. This is not an argument for the humanities as vital to national security, as in the American Academy of Arts and Science's *Heart of the Matter* report, or as a resource of national or regional identity, as in the "Recommendations for Reinvigorating the Humanities in Africa" report (2015); rather, it is an argument for the humanities as vital to our complex, risky, and interconnected world.⁴ Funders, government agencies, and university administrators committed to democratic values, including critical inquiry, will understand through the essays presented here that the persistence of the humanities will depend upon a reinvestment in them, particularly in universities.

Beyond Crisis

Over the past several decades, scholars and journalists have focused on the humanities in crisis. Notably, in 2014, the Columbia Global Humanities Project convened a set of scholars from the Global South to address the crisis of the humanities. Sheldon Pollock's introduction to the published proceedings opens with an account of their stakes: "One of the most astonishing developments in the past fifty years across the globe is the endangerment of the world's humanities capacity. While the crisis is far from unknown in the United States—and has complicated variations in China—it is acute across the global south, where the loss of humanities knowledge bears striking resemblance to the loss of biological species."⁵ The analogy to species loss is a prescient one, and the ongoing threat of extinction—even within North American universities—is real, regardless of whether the causes and on-the-ground conditions are always accurately represented.⁶

⁴ Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, *The Heart of the Matter* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2013); The Forum on the Humanities in Africa of the African Humanities Program, University of South Africa, *Recommendations for Reinvigorating the Humanities in Africa* (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 2014).

⁵ Sheldon Pollock, "The Columbia Global Humanities Project," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 1 (2017): 113.

⁶ See, for example, the many articles about the humanities at the University of California, Berkeley, such as Ellie Yun, "Increase in Humanities Majors at Berkeley Opens Conversation for

In identifying what risks disappearance, Pollock has a particular focus: the interpretive approach to studying worlds outside of the Euro-American modernities. Global languages, texts, and knowledges cannot be studied in universities in the places where they originated, because they are not valued as research, and so they depend upon European and North American universities or international funding agencies to affirm their value. This imbalance establishes a precarious dependence and overinvestment in European and North American intellectual tastes as a condition of local knowledges. It also reflects the damage wrought when new and postcolonial universities vie to compete, out of economic necessity, in a global market amid international rankings that do not yet recognize research in the humanities. The humanities in universities can become corrupted or radically diluted by ideology or a will to global competitiveness that unmoors them from their powers.

The Columbia Global Humanities Project introduced two issues that we continue to address nearly a decade later: the place of humanities research in universities; and the role of China in shaping the future of the humanities.

In the first case, the authors argue that one challenge to the humanities in universities is their popularity and ubiquity *outside* of universities, which contributes both to their devaluation and to the perception that they belong to the realms of domestic practice and pleasures rather than professional labor and technical knowledge. Sundar Surakkai analyzes this situation in his essay “The Location of the Humanities,” where he explains that a source of the crisis of the humanities is their place outside of the university and the fact that philosophy, literature, art, and even history are debated, enjoyed, watched, and read in non-professional spaces.⁷ Such work often does not appear to be radically different from the work of academic humanists, as it too involves analysis, interpretation,

the Value of a Humanities Education,” *Berkeley Arts & Humanities*, January 10, 2023, <https://artshumanities.berkeley.edu/news/increase-humanities-majors-uc-berkeley-opens-conversation-value-humanities-education>. Although the conventional narrative about the humanities is one of radically decreased interest, that claim does not correlate to the actual number of humanities students enrolling in any given year, which is on a par with (or greater than) students in biological sciences, math and physical sciences, and even social sciences. Similarly, stereotypes about humanities “regret” and employment prospects are not aligned with local reports that demonstrate humanities majors are more satisfied than and have generally equivalent job prospects to students in other parts of the university. See American Academy of Arts & Sciences, *The State of the Humanities 2018: Graduates in the Workforce & Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2018).

⁷ Sundar Sarukkai, “Location of the Humanities,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 1 (2017): 151–61.

and the discussion of complex ideas and texts. In many parts of the world, particularly the US and Canada, there has been a renewed effort to recognize the public humanities, creating a more porous relationship between the academic and the public and identifying institutional means of recognizing, incentivizing, and valuing work that is publicly oriented. Yet, Surakkai points to a different challenge, which is that this broader circulation and ubiquity undercuts the role of the humanities within universities, particularly in the Global South where new technology has become a powerful means of participation in global modernities. Can the humanities thrive in the university without at the same time diminishing the humanistic work that takes place in everyday, domestic, and religious spaces? The Indian example proves especially instructive because, as Surakkai writes: “the early involvement of the family in the domains of humanities education is itself the obstacle for the professionalization of these disciplines.”⁸ He goes on to explain that this is true in the study of both philosophy and languages, including Sanskrit and Tibetan, raising the question of where the humanities are located. (The latter point is true in many parts of the world, where heritage and religious languages are rigorously taught outside of universities.) As Surakkai continues, “Humanities education in India is placed between the secular and the religious, between a utilitarian science and a disinherited tradition, between the hope of an egalitarian society as against the pull of ancient systems.”⁹

Confirming this position, many of the contributors to this report reflect on the growth of the humanities outside of universities. Whether an effect of displacement or a project of the “new” humanities, this movement outside of universities remains part of a longstanding tradition of domestic and religious education that signals as much the importance of the humanities to the lives of individuals and communities as it does the risk to the humanities as an area of research within institutions of higher education. This tension between pervasiveness and scarcity and the attendant conception of value tied to ready access at home (and inaccessibility in the university) has produced a narrative about the humanities that is repeated in many parts of the world. How can that which

⁸ Sarukkai, “Location of the Humanities,” 156.

⁹ Sarukkai, “Location of the Humanities,” 159–60. The essay’s conclusion, that the humanities serve as a bulwark against technological modernity, is not wrong, particularly given the rise of AI since its publication in 2017; however, it misses some of the inherent complexities in the relationship between the humanities and technology, particularly as Sarukkai notes, from the outset, that digitization has been one of the major contributions to improving global access to texts.

is omnipresent also be a source of prestige and value of the sort conferred by universities? Is there a distinction between professional expertise and the forms of generational transmission that occur in temples and households? What is the relation between secular or academic and spiritual or personal forms of engagement, which both reflect and undermine the value of the humanities? These questions help bring visibility to the set of pressures faced by the humanities as a scholarly, but not always scientific, field of inquiry.

Further, there remains an additional challenge that Sarukkai does not address, but that emerges at the edges of some of the contributions here as well as in their methods. For several decades now the academic or technical languages of the humanities, the vocabularies through which the humanities emerge as areas that require professional expertise and linguistic nuance, have been disparaged as overly technical and inaccessible. Complaints about the obscurity of the humanities are too ubiquitous to detail; they occur in every sector.¹⁰ Taken together, Sarukkai's insight into the difficulty of accruing value to that which is overly familiar and belongs to the household and the persistent dismissal of technical or professional approaches to the humanities as too difficult and jargon-filled reveal a paradoxical position. While the contributors to this volume do not address this bind specifically, it does produce the context in which all of them undertake their work.¹¹

The ambivalent position of China presents a different challenge. Wang Hui contributed to both the Columbia project and this one. For the World Humanities Report, Wang Hui commissioned and coordinated a complex and comprehensive account of the state of the disciplines in modern China that provides historical insight into the tensions between the classical and critical humanities. This is the most comprehensive account of the disciplines in Chinese universities published in English. This collection makes accessible knowledge about one area of the world where it appears funding for the humanities, both the classical disciplines and emerging fields, including the digital humanities, is *not* in at risk in the conventional sense. This unusual situation raises questions about debt, access, and freedom. In a universe where US and international foundations

¹⁰ For a rejoinder to these complaints, see, for example, *Just Being Difficult: Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, ed. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹¹ See John Guillory, *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022). Guillory outlines some of the tensions between literary study taking place outside of the university and finding a place in some universities and the rise of professions and professionalism.

historically invested in the academic humanities with the understanding that intellectual independence, historical knowledge, and critical thought are resources for political freedom (as documented in reports from Russia, the Arab Region, and Africa), withdrawal of these funders from supporting the academic humanities in favor of other urgencies—public health, poverty, social justice, climate change—leaves an opening for new funders to emerge with different priorities and values. Without the investment of democratically minded organizations, humanities scholarship—a powerful resource of agency, citizenship, and self-determination—will be diminished or, more worrisome, it will capitulate to the alternative path and become a vehicle of ideological power and exclusion. This threat is not always visible outside of local conditions; however, when Chinese universities disenfranchise the study of minority literatures and languages or when core texts in African American history are removed from the curriculum in parts of the United States, the effect on life and livability is significant. The abandonment of the academic humanities and its networks on the part of a range of international funders will inevitably lead scholars to seek new resources in order to survive. These acts of survival will introduce serious risks that will alter the shape of knowledge and critical inquiry—and the freedoms that they reflect.

Principles, Methods, Forms

Previous reports have used a range of methodologies to understand the state of the humanities. The *Humanities Indicators* in the US primarily uses surveys,¹² and the 2015 *Humanities World Report* used interviews with scholars.¹³ Although not strictly about the humanities, the *World Social Science Report 2016* focuses on one overarching theme: inequality.¹⁴ Although the *Humanities Indicators* has produced significant data about the state of the humanities within universities and their relevance for American life, its methods do not provide the analytical range necessary to understand the current conditions of the

¹² *Humanities Indicators*, American Academy of Arts & Sciences, <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators#:~:text=The%20Humanities%20Indicators%20is%20a,of%20concern%20in%20the%20field.>

¹³ The key instruments for Holm, Jarrick, and Scott's *Humanities World Report 2015* were interviews with "leading humanities scholars" (61 percent of whom were male) and data mining of existing reports (4).

¹⁴ *World Social Science Report 2016: Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World* (Paris: UNESCO, 2016).

humanities in other parts of the world, especially their diverse concepts and practices. Similarly, while the *World Social Science Report* overlaps with our range of inquiry, particularly in world regions where the distinction between the humanities and social sciences is porous, mirroring its thematic approach would have limited the scope of our research. Other attempts at accounting for the global humanities or the history of the humanities, in particular, the journal by this name, have not been able to shed an overreliance on European and Eurocentric models and measures.¹⁵

Many valuable humanities reports, including the US's *Heart of the Matter*, the *New Charter in South Africa* and the British Academy's *Studying SHAPE: 2022*, respond to commissions from state agencies, yet their national focus by definition limits their scope.¹⁶ The European Union's *METRIS: Monitoring Emerging Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities in Europe* offered useful precedents as we developed the methodology and set of principles that ultimately informed this project.¹⁷ These examples demonstrated the importance of establishing a model that was textured enough to provide meaningful information but also forgiving enough to adequately reflect the diversity of the global humanities, both the unevenness of resources and capacities and the range of defining categories and methods. Finally, establishing an overarching definition of the humanities that would remain applicable across the world's languages and institutions, many of which have no word for the humanities, would have stalled this project. Such a definition may be an outcome of this report but is not a part of its foundation.

In pursuing this project, we decided from the outset to organize the report's core content regionally. While this approach risked repeating an area studies model of regional inquiry, indicating that the world is just a set of regions, rather than movements shaped by the global flow of finance, ideas, beliefs, and bodies, it was an important step toward avoiding the pitfalls of eurocentrism and monolingualism that have befallen other humanities reports.

¹⁵ *History of the Humanities*, University of Chicago Press Journals, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/hoh/current>.

¹⁶ Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, *The Heart of the Matter*; Ari Sitas, Sarah Mosoetsa, Bianca Tame, and Aisha Lorgat, *Report on the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences in South Africa* (Pretoria: South Africa Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011); The British Academy, *Studying SHAPE 2022* (London: The British Academy, 2023).

¹⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Emerging trends in socio-economic sciences and humanities in Europe—The METRIS report* (Luxembourg: European Union Publications Office, 2009).

This approach benefitted from the existence of organizations that already appraise the global humanities regionally, including the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and Arab Council for Social Sciences, which had the infrastructure and networks to contribute to reports. Through these partnerships, and through the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI), which had over a ten-year period initiated a series of international collaborations, and the International Council of Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH), which initially commissioned the report, we established networked teams in Europe, East Asia, South Asia, the Arab Region, Australia, Africa, and the Americas. This regional approach also ensured that the US and European organizations supporting this project were not dominant voices in it, but some among many.¹⁸

Four broad themes served as the cornerstones of this report. They are:

The Legacies of Europe and Affirmation of the Global

What happens to the humanities if universities and foundations in Europe and the United States stop supporting them? Who will recognize the humanities' value, and what will we lose in the process? Such questions are indissociable from a rethinking of the humanities' Eurocentrist history. We must also ask: does dependence upon European funding and institutions reproduce the colonial and nationalist histories of the humanities? Moreover, while many authoritarian states are quick to dismiss the global humanities and the attendant commitments to feminist, LGBTQ+, decolonial, and anti-racist projects, others, China in particular, have begun to invest in the humanities for myriad reasons that we should question and understand.

The Role of Institutions

How are the humanities practiced, sometimes as a lifeline or political intervention, outside of universities? What should the university in the twenty-first century do? Who or what is it for? How can we ensure a place—in fact, multiple places inside and outside of universities—for untimely knowledge and forms of analysis, sometimes called basic or curiosity-driven research, in the arts, literature, history, and culture? How can inquiry that addresses human complexity and struggle and that affirms the value of historical research and critical inquiry

¹⁸ Here it is worth noting the apparent absence of a European contribution.

remain integral to academic and public institutions?

Critical Interventions

If the humanities transformed society and our worldviews in the twentieth century—as evident in the rise of feminist, LGBTQ+, critical, and decolonial movements that have become part of the mainstream; deepened insight into language, mind, and body; and the acknowledgement of new forms of violence that temper the celebration of enlightenment reason—what will become of the humanities in the twenty-first century? What strategies are needed to define and recognize the continuing value of the humanities? What renewed understanding of their history and place will improve their chances of survival?

Integration and the Common

Since World War II, the disciplines, once rigidly divided, have become porous. Inter-, cross-, and trans-disciplinarity have become the norm. Nevertheless, the disciplines continue to organize many areas of teaching, hiring, and research within universities. So too do two divisions continue to shape the humanities: a historico-geographic division between Europe and the World, and an institutional-methodological division between the humanities and the sciences. These are two divisions that have structured value and recognition. How do we establish non-dichotomous conceptions of knowledge in the face of current urgencies and longstanding curiosities about the world and its inhabitants?

Contributors to the report addressed these topics in order to present a fuller picture of the humanities than existed before now. Their research and case studies reveal how, in the face of powerful political, technological, and ecological threats, scholars at every career stage are transforming their institutions and disciplines to make the humanities more accessible and collaborative. They also reveal the difficulty of this commitment. Examples of scholarly interventions include a new university in Siberia that replaced conventional disciplines with thematic areas to foster cross-disciplinary inquiry and collaboration at every level and a working group based in Senegal and the US that is undertaking to reimagine the African university.¹⁹ Our contribution to our report from the Americas includes a conversation between University of California, Berkeley Professor María del Rosario Acosta López and Elizabeth Deligio, a Colombian philosopher in California working with a community center for victims of

¹⁹ School of Advanced Studies, University of Tyumen, <https://sas.utmn.ru/en/about/>; Group of Action and Critical Study-Africa, <https://gaecafrica.org/>.

police torture in Chicago to build an institution founded on Latin American principles of memory work. Like so many others, these scholars are working simultaneously within and at the edges of the university, creating new spaces where the humanities are being defined beyond assumptions that historically constrained them. Their value is not quantified here, even as it is described. The work of individuals willing to take risks, whether in scholarly inquiry or institutional practices, requires imagination and collaboration, but their work's viability ultimately depends upon institutional resources and infrastructures, including resources of time, access to libraries, archives, and media, and diverse intellectual communities.

Because the research groups were given wide latitude to determine the shape and form of their contributions, the World Humanities Report reflects the global humanities through a diversity of voices and methods that vary widely in their structures, questions, and topics. Its methodological framework embraces multiplicity and unevenness with the hope of generating a picture of the global humanities appropriate to a vast and nonuniform set of conditions.

At the same time, the World Humanities Report adopted a set of framing assumptions:

First, the humanities are not universal. Local and regional knowledges and experiences, informed by a diversity of languages, institutions, and environments, matter for the humanities; they shape research questions, provide vocabularies of inquiry, and expand what counts as a scholarly archive.

Second, the inclusion of the Global South as well as underrepresented areas of Europe and North America (Russia and Mexico, for example) transforms conventional accounts of the humanities.

Third, universities and academic networks are essentially important for sustaining the humanities, whether as a set of disciplines, degrees, or methods.

Fourth, the humanities are part of the world, its technologies, conflicts, freedoms, and repressions.

Universities, far from isolated ivory towers, also belong to the worlds beyond or around them, leading many contributors to identify critical locations of the humanities beyond the university, whether as evidence of institutional

impact or as signs of institutional limits. Under these conditions, the humanities are not “pure” or isolated; rather, they contribute to and are limited by institutional and social spheres. In recent years, this broader conception of scholarship in the context of community engagement and intentional impact has been called the public humanities. It is a term that surfaces in several of the contributions. *Public Humanities* in the report refers to the integration and importance of the humanities within communities outside of the university and is part of a broader movement to expand participation in research, open universities to serve society, and reimagine the role of a humanities education and who has access to it.

However, because of the contributors’ local circumstances and the contingencies of scale, our pluralistic approach gave rise to a variety of challenges. In relying on the convening capacities of partner organizations, we also introduced some gaps. For example, as already noted, the ACLS prepared the North American contribution, even as their remit typically only focuses on the US with peripheral projects in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. In this instance, we addressed the regional absence by commissioning separate reports on Canada and Mexico. Similarly, we worked with the Arab Council of Social Sciences, which has an ongoing commitment to the humanities in the Middle East and North African Region, but which does not include two crucially important, non-Arabophone members of the region: Iran and Israel. Many efforts to translate or commission an Israeli contribution proved unsuccessful, and while scholars in European and North American Universities work in Iranian and Persianate Studies, we did not identify a partner who could report from Iran. Similarly, the Australian Academy of Humanities does not extend beyond Australia to include New Zealand and other Pacific Islands. The report on China includes only mainland China. As a result, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Southeast Asia are not yet represented, and there is just one essay from Japan. In a similar fashion, the European research group, which did not reflect an existing organization, but the coordination of several research groups in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Western Europe, and the Balkans, left out Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine. In the end, this research, convened and supported by the Volkswagen Stiftung appeared as an independent report on the website neh21.net. This separation reflects some of the ongoing tensions between the global, American, and European approaches to the humanities, which, unfortunately, remain unresolved. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult and, in some cases, impossible for those working in more difficult

settings to undertake collaborative research, which was the case with the research group based in Mozambique and focused on Africa. In the absence of their contribution, we acknowledge the African Academy of Sciences' 2021 report on *The State of Research Leadership Capacity Development in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts in Africa* and include an excerpt from that publication. It is our hope that in the future scholars will address these and other notable absences. When they do, we are certain that new questions and insights into the humanities also will emerge.

The geographic frameworks that make up the report ultimately reflect specific, rather than uniform, conditions. This is most evident in our treatment of the US. While we have been cautious to maintain the global focus of this report, the US example and experiment is of outsized importance, due to the role of the US in defining the academic humanities within the global research university, the dominance of English, and the vast network of university presses and academic journals located in the US. This report therefore reflects the singular place of the US within an uneven landscape and its distinctive structure of research funding, but it also acknowledges its place within a deeper concept of the Americas whose multilingualisms, migrations, and colonial histories are often overshadowed by the towering position of the US research university. Many contributors are situated across the Americas and work under border conditions, and so we decided to bring together contributions from North and South America. This framing, rather than the more conventional national or linguistic ones, emphasizes both the colonial inheritance and the decolonial, anti-colonial, and Indigenous work that is reshaping our conception of the world. Yet, we did not apply this insight equally across the world. Our approach to situating the US differs from our approach to situating Russia and China, for which we commissioned stand-alone reports to complement contributions focused more broadly on Europe and on South and East Asia. This is because, in both cases, a deep understanding of the humanities in the regions remained limited in the anglophone world and also because their intertwined and distinctive histories informed our recommendations somewhat more than others, affirming Ilya V. Gerasimov and Alexander M. Semyonov's conviction, the report from Russia, that Russia's "perceived particularity only highlights the aspects of general trends and structures that remain concealed or even censored in the mainstream discussions of other societies and cultures" (1). With these contributions, we aim to make clear what is at stake when universities in other parts of the world are called upon to support dissident scholars and engage in

international partnerships, just as these universities reflect the fragile state of academic freedom. One area where the diversity of the humanities is not adequately reflected is language. Most contributions are in English. There are two exceptions: contributions focused on Central and South America appear in both Spanish and English and the chapters on China were all written in Mandarin. We anticipate that Mandarin and Spanish editions of these chapters will be published independently and locally.

By now it should be clear that the decision to produce a narrative, rather than a data-driven, report was based on core analytic principles. But, in the course of this project, we came to accept that it also was born of unacknowledged privilege, decided in North American and European university offices where, despite budget cuts and austerity measures, the humanities are nevertheless still valued and their contributions recognized and measured. In North America and Europe, vast databases reflect dissertations filed, articles published, and books reviewed. However, as Seteney Shami points out in her introduction to the contribution from the Arab Region, gathering data in places where the humanities are overlooked, bundled with other fields, or perceived to have insufficient value to warrant measure remains critically important. Similarly, in regions where neither numerical nor narrative accounts of events—degrees granted, dissertations completed, articles published—are trusted, a world monitor would be a valuable measure of intellectual and social freedom. Going forward, a neutral and trusted global agency with the participation of critically minded scholars in the humanities or some of the organizations that contributed to this report should monitor the global humanities on an ongoing basis.

In acknowledging these gaps and outlining the decisions that led to them, I recognize that even the capacious methodology manifest here is not fully adequate to the scale of the global humanities. Despite the achievements of our many contributors, even more work will need to be done to reflect the diversity and vitality of the humanities across the globe. I hope that others will continue to identify lacunae and work to fill them.

The Emergence and Persistence of the Critical Humanities

As noted earlier, the World Humanities Report emerged in partnership with CIPSH, the international organization formed in 1949 to serve as the “conscience” of UNESCO. Prior to its revitalization in the 2010s, and apart from its publication of an international journal of philosophy, CIPSH’s most significant contribution was the massive volume *The Third Reich*, published in 1955 and

designed to provide a comprehensive account of the National Socialist Movement.²⁰ The World Humanities Report, while more diffuse in its approach and more diverse in its contributions, is a parallel project, commissioned during a global authoritarian turn, undertaken during a global pandemic, and completed in a period during which the planetary climate crisis intensified and became increasingly unavoidable.

The ties between CIPSH's two commissioned reports—this one and the 1955 report on the origins of German fascism—are not just accidental, for it was in the aftermath of the Third Reich that the humanities underwent overarching transformations. World War II and the Cold War set the institutional, political, and intellectual stage for a dramatic shift in the global humanities and the institutions that would support them. In addition to CIPSH, two of the primary funders of the World Humanities Report were born in this period: the Mellon Foundation (1969) and Volkswagen Stiftung (1961). In the postwar period, humanities disciplines, particularly philosophy, history, and literary studies, underwent a period of radical self-reflection and reorganization in order to determine how to bear witness to Europe's self-destruction. At the same time global movements for democracy and liberation transformed society in the US, Africa, and South Asia, while indelibly shaping the humanities and universities. In other words, not only do the institutional sponsors of the World Humanities Report—CIPSH, Mellon, Volkswagen—emerge in this period, so too do the global humanities, which are generated by expanded student access to universities and colleges, existential intellectual crises, and international literary and academic alliances. Although it is impossible to isolate the pivotal event of World War II from all that preceded it—from empires and colonialism, slaveries and displacements, global economies of extraction, enlightenment philosophy and the critique of religion, the destruction of Indigenous communities, and the growth of modern science—the responses to World War II set in motion an array of developments in human and civil rights, global student movements, decolonization and independent self-governance, as well as dramatic changes in universities from mass and international education in the US and Europe to new universities throughout the Global South. These projects remain today, and it is within their frameworks that the global humanities come into view.

To paint the picture more fully: The GI Bill in the US and the displacement of European Jewish and dissident thinkers, including members of the Frankfurt

²⁰ International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences, *The Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1955).

School, to the Americas; the rise of an internationalist liberation movement, including Afro-Asian thinkers who situated the humanities and social sciences at the heart of their project; and the new social movements—and attendant theories—that destabilized patriarchal power all reflect a turning point in the humanities, experienced differentially, but consistently in the Americas, Europe, South Asia, and Africa. The fragmentations of the humanities are also indissociable from these transformations. The realization that rational thought could not preclude violent destruction (and, to the contrary, over and again played a role in it); the failure of democracies to recognize all of their citizens; and the absence of literary canons adequate to new, postcolonial institutions all left a fragmented social and intellectual environment. A new humanities emerged from the critique of shared universals held together by texts held in common and a limited set of disciplines. The expansion of intellectual inquiry opened new fields of African and African American Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Critical Theory. Once radical, these disciplines are now ubiquitous and their methods are part of the core, rather than the periphery, of the humanities.²¹

By turning to this landmark moment for the global and critical humanities, I do not wish to dismiss previous accounts of the early modern or nineteenth-century or philological origins of the humanities, including the humanities as the training of pastors and priests in Europe and the early US or of the military in China. The former story has been told multiple times, most recently in Christopher Celenza's effort to recover social values and to acknowledge, while also underplaying, the profound exclusions that a religiously formed, enlightenment strategy permitted. The latter story is recounted here, and in several other essays by Wang Hui.²² While the humanities may not be more deeply imbricated in

²¹ This same period saw the founding of new, leading research universities in the Global South, like the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India (1969); the establishment of Title VI of the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based upon race, color, and national origin in educational institutions that receive federal funding; the investment in language study in the US as part of the Cold War; and the remaking of the Chinese university in its distance and relation to the Soviet universities. For a discussion of the current state of Area Studies in the US, see Mitchell Stevens, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, and Seteney Shami, *Seeing the World: How US Universities Make Knowledge in a Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

²² See Christopher Celenza, *The Italian Renaissance and the Origins of the Modern Humanities: An Intellectual History, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Wang Hui, "Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity," *Social Text* 55 (1998): 9–44.

these exclusions than are the biological, physical, and social sciences, the humanities are where the constitution of knowledge can be examined, questioned, and understood.

Additionally, the *global* is uniquely important for the critical humanities and has the power to multiply the number of perspectives and possibilities that we can recognize as valuable and worth our attention.²³ Far from unproductive, the humanities have a liberatory power—through feminisms, Indigenous languages and knowledges, and the vast project of democratization and decolonization. In other words, the global humanities are the critical humanities—and vice versa.

At times the critical and global humanities appear to be merely fragmented. This was a concern that surfaced in 2009, with the Committee on the National Plan for the Future of the Humanities in the Netherlands, which set out to establish a blueprint for the endurance of the humanities, albeit on a more modest, national scale. As Job Cohen, then mayor of Amsterdam, writes in his introduction to their report, *Sustainable Humanities*, “nearly everyone is sympathetic to the humanities, but at the same time inclined to underestimate what is required for them to continue to thrive and what the Netherlands would miss out on without their ongoing strength”²⁴ The report emphasizes the need to invest further in the humanities. Even if in most cases the humanities do not require expensive equipment, as do the laboratory-based sciences and engineering, they nevertheless do require platforms, time, and materials. Cohen also outlines several related strategies for ensuring that the humanities thrive, including the creation of new incentives and prizes. Yet, in addition to addressing state ministries, the report also calls upon scholars in the humanities to contribute to their own persistence: “Do away with the tradition of internal fragmentation which has developed as a result of diversity and differences in structure and scale. It is demonstrably in the interests of the humanities to cooperate as much

²³ In “The Columbia Global Humanities Project,” Pollock distinguishes the importance of the global for the humanities from the global for the sciences. Given how much of STEM work includes grand challenges, the design of algorithms, and interventions in biomedicine and health, I would argue instead that we need a more truly global (that is, less universalizing) approach to science that registers uneven access, different definitions of health and risk, and the importance of multilingualism. Scholars like Rishi Goyal at Columbia University in the US and Wendy Chun at Simon Fraser University in Canada are making significant contributions to this effort.

²⁴ Job Cohen, *Sustainable Humanities: Report from the National Committee on the Future of the Humanities in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 9.

as possible.”²⁵ This final imperative, like several of those that precede it (“Take the initiative in promoting a more positive climate within the humanities” and “Prepare an analysis of the state of affairs in your Faculty along the lines of this report”), is addressed internally in an effort at normative, cultural change within the humanities, built on the assumption that the humanities are valuable and yet will require some degree of coherence in order to flourish.²⁶

While this report echoes several of the recommendations that Cohen proposed in 2009, the critique of fragmentation, with its implicit call for re-disciplining and the overcoming of differences, today rings a sharp note of concern, particularly as it issues from a country that has collapsed over its leader’s desire to restrict immigration. Cohen’s imperative prompts a question: can the humanities persist without fragmentation? This question recurs throughout this report as it does at universities across the world, and especially in the US, where there may be five times as many individual humanities departments in a single university as there are departments of Biological or Physical Sciences—even as the number of humanities students may be around the same. Today, the humanities are configured as multitudinous—with areas of research uncompromisingly organized around national and Indigenous languages and literatures, each with their own variations and needs. What other strategies could organize the humanities within universities? Are we in need of a new model of institutional coherence that supports diversity and difference, in which internal and inclusive pluralism becomes a form of power and in which difference is held in common, as a value that binds?

Considered from another perspective, it may be that the fragmentation of the humanities is a problem only when viewed from the outside. Perhaps from within, forms of diversity, akin to planetary biodiversity, are a resource that protects against domination. Through these differences and related multiplicities of languages, cultures, and perspectives, humanities scholars collectively define the humanities’ critical project. That project is not the search for universals but the engagement with singularities, texts, events, art works, and expressions that provide insights but not totalities. In general, despite its regular recurrence in external analyses of the humanities, fragmentation is not a concern regularly voiced by contributors to this report, even as many of their contributions present vast degrees of diversity, notably in South America, South Asia, and the

²⁵ Cohen, *Sustainable Humanities*, 45.

²⁶ Cohen, *Sustainable Humanities*, 45. Holm, Jarrick, and Scott make similar recommendations in the *Humanities World Report 2015*.

Arab Region.²⁷ The one exception here is the contribution from the US, which laments the country's highly fragmented system of higher education, although unlike many of the contributors, and more like Cohen, the authors are not currently involved with universities from the inside.

Diversity, in large part spawned in response to the discriminatory and violent universals of earlier periods, is valued in the humanities, and only in recent years have other disciplines begun to ask questions about the exclusions that their coherence has fostered.²⁸ Therefore, we cannot call for coherence over and above diversity or difference, but we do argue for collaboration and the crossing of disciplinary and institutional boundaries. We also acknowledge that universities have a role to play in recognizing the value of interdisciplinary and collaborative scholarship. In many instances—through roundtables, interviews, collaborations, and coauthored contributions—this report models how humanities scholarship can amplify diversity, coordinate across disciplinary registers, and marshal pluralism.

In this context, we are positioned to resume the project of rethinking the university. COVID-19 brought about urgent financial shortfalls, and many state- and government-funded universities have taken the opportunity to close programs in areas that appear underenrolled or divorced from contemporary modes of productivity (technology, finance, and the priorities of the state). Almost everywhere, there is little government funding for the humanities, by comparison to funding for technology and the sciences. However, as we return to a world that resembles the one that the pandemic disrupted, we see more clearly that fundamental research into human experience—past and present—continues and that historical, visual, and cultural literacy and techniques of inquiry remain integral to understanding human freedom and survival. We know that economic productivity, new technology, and finance are inadequate tools. The value of democracy, durable paths to equity, the certainty that one can live in the place where one was born, the habitability of the planet, and the cosmopolitan point of view all are at risk at this moment, and, with them, so is the security of individuals and communities on every continent. To address these problems, some of which are problems of unrecognized value, definition, and

²⁷ On fragmentation, and its sister concept, specialization, see, for example, Guillory, "The Institution of Professions" in *Professing Criticism*, 3–43.

²⁸ See for example the editorial, "How *Nature* Contributed to Science's Discriminatory Legacy: We Want to Acknowledge—and Learn from—Our History," *Nature*, 609 (September 28, 2022): 875–76.

disposition, we urgently need to reinvest—financially and affectively—in the humanities and its forms of literacy. Although we cannot underestimate the importance of funding the humanities, we must also emphasize the importance of including humanities scholars in collaborative projects across disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and medicine. Nowhere is this more urgent than in the context of AI, which is rapidly disrupting assumptions, policies, norms, and futures. Around the world, this process of integrating the humanities does not begin or end in universities, but universities will play a central and essential role, as destination, foundation, generator of value, and site of institutional support.

The humanities are a resource of critical analysis and interpretation. At the same time, this report reveals a tension between the humanities understood as core practices of national identity formation, imperialism, and dominance, and the humanities understood as the critical global humanities: resources through which nationalism, imperialism, and dominance have been questioned, analyzed, dissected, and displaced. Although contributors argue for the uncompromising preservation of archives, languages, texts, and artifacts, often as a means of ensuring that minority positions are retained in the face of new nationalisms, a broader commitment of this report is to preserve institutional spaces for the critical global humanities. In some instances, the classical and critical humanities are conjoined, and, in others, preservation and critical inquiry have little in common. Contributors to this report reflect these faces of the humanities from perspectives that are diverse and sometimes dissonant. It is within this duality that, today, the humanities are treated unequally in different parts of the world. The critical humanities threaten a purist concept of national identity, whether by looking outward to question the assumptions of national projects or by looking inward to identify repressions of indigenous or minority knowledges. Literary and religious texts, and the threatened languages in which they are sometimes constructed, are essential to the formation of identities that may or may not be critical. In Wang Hui's analysis of the humanities in China, what I have been calling the global humanities are the "western" humanities—a salient expression of this tension. At the same time, global and postcolonial perspectives ensure that what European and American scholarship has more conventionally called the "western humanities" and tied to historical civilizational movements can no longer be understood simply as evidence of democratic principles or freedoms of inquiry and expression.

Further tensions involve universities and other "official" institutions.

Although universities can be powerful resources for inquiry, truth-seeking, and critique, when the humanities are defunded or nationalized, universities can also become sites of repression. Even as intellectual and academic freedom enables change, the humanities are particularly vulnerable to monitoring and appropriation. It is under these conditions that we tend to find the persistence of the critical humanities occurring outside of universities—on the streets, in small publishing houses, or in exile. Contributors to this report show that the value of the humanities is not only in the preservation of languages, texts, artifacts, and artworks or the creation of new archives but also in the ongoing, critical reinterpretation of these archives, which can entail a radical revaluation of them. Contributors show that this complex program of creation, preservation, and reinterpretation requires both local and international investment.

The tensions between the global and the national humanities and the institutional and adjacent sites of their flourishing are not likely to disappear. However, bold leadership in universities, government agencies, and philanthropic foundations and the supportive reinvestment of these institutions in the academic humanities and global networks will be essential to future access and critical inquiry. The World Humanities Report, in introducing us to the various forms and locations of the global humanities, demonstrates how the global humanities have come to be and what humanity stands to lose when they are not valued. Their persistence is our responsibility.

Ensuring the Persistence of the Humanities

We live in a world and planet under duress. We are wanting for tools and concepts that will foster change and help us live under these shared, if still uneven, conditions. The World Humanities Report demonstrates why the humanities are of critical importance to that future, how they have been supported and diminished in different world regions, and how we can make important institutional adjustments that will help us to instigate change.

The World Humanities Report identifies ten strategies for persistence. Although other strategies could emerge and over the course of this report have emerged—for example, *establish a world monitor*; *educate on ethics*; *improve messaging*—the ten strategies included here indicate interventions that should be made immediately in order to ensure that the global humanities persist.

Today, the future of the humanities is not only in the hands of scholars and students, but it is also the responsibility of universities, funders, governments, and policymakers who can:

1. **Affirm the Place of the Humanities in Higher Education.** Ensure that critical and interpretive inquiry, literature, philosophy, and the arts are supported in colleges and universities and ensure that they remain available and accessible to all students, from early education through high-level research.
2. **Invest in Humanities Research.** Develop and support institutional strategies for advancing research in the humanities including fellowships, institutes and centers, scholarly networks, journals, and university presses.
3. **Protect Freedom of Inquiry as a Right.** Recognize and defend freedom of inquiry as a right and protect academic freedom and freedom of speech.
4. **Preserve Archives, Both Physical and Virtual.** Archives are essential resources for understanding human experience past, present, and future. Ensure the creation and protection of accessible archives, including libraries, museums, and collections, both physical and virtual. Develop strategies to ensure that digital archives remain accessible and up to date.
5. **Address Inequality.** Ensure that heterogenous voices are heard in all areas of research and teaching in the humanities. Question gaps in knowledge, limits to access, ongoing racism and gender exclusions, and inequalities in value in order to establish and sustain inclusive practices.
6. **Advance the Public Humanities.** Acknowledge that the humanities are part of the public good and advance both the scholarly and the applied (public) humanities.
7. **Recognize the Global Humanities.** Value a global approach to the humanities, one that recognizes global entanglements over national interests and that exposes the multiple histories and origins of the humanities including, but not determined by, Europe. Emphasize global interconnectedness and support local and regional research in order to provide a fuller and more inclusive understanding of human experience.

8. **Preserve Languages and Language Study.** Defend language as a unique window into human understanding, connectivity, and experience. Identify at-risk Indigenous languages and implement strategies to ensure their preservation. Support multilingualism and invest in translation of texts and web-based media to ensure that languages remain viable and local knowledge circulates globally.
9. **Foster the Open Circulation of Scholarship.** Invest in the design and implementation of equitable digital infrastructure for research and teaching. Support open access and freely available scholarly resources. Ensure freedom from political, algorithmic, and corporate media censorship of information.
10. **Facilitate Collaboration and Knowledge that Cuts across Disciplines within and beyond the Humanities.** Recognize interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration as necessary for improving our understanding of the human condition and addressing grand challenges and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Strive to integrate the humanities into higher education and research across fields and disciplines.

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