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## Dysfunctional disciplinary borders, and the need for a new foundation discipline ?

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**Call for Papers**  
**Ideology in Words and Music**  
**2nd Conference of the Word and Music Association Forum**  
**November 8-10, 2012, Stockholm University**

**Abstract**

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**Dysfunctional disciplinary borders,  
and the need for a new foundation discipline?**

As the heading suggests, my conference presentation aims to discuss how existing aesthetic disciplines, such as musicology and comparative literature studies, is unsuited to the understanding of a large number of cultural phenomena. The complex flow of intermediality and the multimodality of every form of expression make the mutual borders between such disciplines dysfunctional. But since intermedial studies has sprung from comparative literature studies it rests to a large extent on ideas and concepts taken from that discipline. This poses not only a problem for the study of *music* as an intermedial phenomenon, but also a challenge for the future of the discipline. One reason for music still being a subordinate medium in relation to literature (words) has to do with the ongoing conflict about music being a non-representative medium. The idea of representation appears crucial to the intermedial discourses; the question of whether a medium can represent anything outside itself, or another medium, has partially informed the struggle between different theoretical positions – and this is the case with music and musicology. Some have argued that the difference between music and language can be identified as the source of the division within musicology between formalist practice and forms of criticism dealing with representation of music. This means that music still seems to suffer from the myth of being a non-representative medium. *Paradoxically*, when music entered the interdisciplinary field of intermedial studies, it still seems to be studied not for its own sake, but as something subordinate to literature.

The specific question asked in the call for papers – *how existing or changing academic structures have reconfigured the field's ideological foundation in a subject area as obviously interdisciplinary as word and music studies* – seems, at least to me as both a musicologist and intermedialist, to be grounded on the problem for intermedial studies to not yet having developed a "solid" *intermedial* theory instead of its current intermedial *literature* theory. Can one thus say that intermedial studies is suffering from a *coherent* intermedial theory? This question leads to another one: what is needed to create a new humanities discipline such as intermedial studies? I would argue that in order for intermedial studies to continue establishing itself as a "new" scholarly field, the word "inter" must be taken seriously, since this is what makes the difference between aesthetic disciplines such as musicology and comparative literature studies on the one hand, and intermedial studies on the other hand.

*Biographical statement*

Mats Arvidson defended his Ph.D. thesis in musicology at Gothenburg University in 2007. He has taught intermedial studies at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University since 2002, and was appointed Senior Lecturer in that subject in 2010. He has, among other things, written on the concept of *image-text* and its relation to music in Gustav Mahler's third symphony.