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Advancing Interdisciplinarity: Reflections on the 2005 AIS Conference

By Rick Szostak, Professor of Economics, University of Alberta, and AIS Vice President, Relations

The Association for Integrative Studies has been blessed in recent years by a series of well-organized conferences. We continue to attract new members as a result, and have a growing number of regular attendees. This year, Janette Muir and her colleagues at George Mason University, in collaboration with Ron Daniel and colleagues at Virginia Tech, took on the special challenge of hosting a joint conference between AIS and the Association for General and Liberal Studies. There were well over 200 attendees. The facilities were first-rate, the dinner circles and excursions warmly applauded, and student volunteers took extremely good care of everyone.

The joint conference worked very well. AIS regulars, AGLS regulars, and newcomers to both organizations mingled in all sessions. At a joint wrap-up session it was agreed that we should not wait so long—it had been over a decade since we last collaborated on a conference with AGLS—before doing this again.

The theme the two organizations most obviously share—interdisciplinarity within general education—motivated several sessions. These discussed the myriad advantages of interdisciplinary general education in the context of particular courses

and requirements. For AGLS, interdisciplinarity is important in providing both overall coherence to general education programs and giving students a set of critical thinking skills invaluable for lifelong learning. For interdisciplinarians, general education provides an obvious and central curricular venue for interdisciplinary analysis. Interdisciplinarians have much to contribute to general education, and can perhaps best showcase the curricular value of interdisciplinarity there. Interdisciplinary general education courses can also encourage students to consider an interdisciplinary major. For this Canadian, who has to encourage his colleagues to keep any sort of general education requirements, general education requirements within American higher education seem to provide a wonderful opportunity for interdisciplinarity.

After the Drury University AIS conference in 2001, I have noted an increased interest in explicitly teaching students about integration itself: what are disciplines, interdisciplinarity, and integration, and how is integration best performed? While modeling best practices is invaluable, students can benefit from explicit instruction in how to integrate. Just as disciplines teach students their methodology(es), it was argued that interdisciplinarians can teach

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Call for Papers

ISSUES, now in its 24th year, is the peer-reviewed journal of the Association for Integrative Studies. It offers an annual venue for publication of manuscripts on interdisciplinary and integrative themes.

Co-editors Joan Fiscella (jbf@uic.edu) and Francine Navakas (fnavakas@noctrl.edu) welcome your submissions on such topics as interdisciplinary theory, pedagogy, research methods, performance, and other forms of interdisciplinary scholarship, practice, and inquiry. Critical reviews are also welcome.

You may submit manuscripts by email or post. Additional publication guidelines and further information about the journal can be found at the AIS website (<http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/>).

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students how to perform interdisciplinary analysis.

Four years later it is clear that many more universities are striving to teach this material. The AIS continues to foster a healthy debate concerning the advisability and practicality of doing so. At least one session this year addressed the question of if/when during a student's college years they will be (best) able to appreciate and absorb explicit training in interdisciplinary practice. The answer seems to be that they benefit from repeated exposure, interspersed with courses that perform interdisciplinary analysis. Several sessions at the conference addressed different aspects of the question of how students can best learn about integration.

The AIS Board has organized and encouraged sessions at each conference since 2001 on how to teach about interdisciplinarity. This year I chaired a panel discussion on interdisciplinary capstone courses. These courses tend both to reinforce understanding of how to integrate introduced to students earlier in their respective programs (most of the panelists had participated last year in a session on introductory courses about interdisciplinarity) and guide students toward the completion of integrative research or creative projects. A detailed resource guide of outlines and student assignments was provided to over forty participants.

Bill Newell at this session and elsewhere reported on his analysis of senior interdisciplinary projects within the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies program at Miami University of Ohio. After being acquainted with how to perform interdisciplinary analysis, his students proved quite able to perform key steps in their own research: identifying conflicts among disciplinary insights, seeking a common ground, and applying their coherent understanding to the problem at hand. Notably, Bill's students remarked that they would have liked to have been exposed to this material very early and often in their program.

The AIS conference always provides a range of sessions from the practical to the theoretical. The AIS and successive conference organizers have been successful over the years in encouraging *all* presenters to ground their presentations in an understanding of the literature about interdisciplinarity. Discussions of individual courses or programs almost always addressed how these advance integrative learning and how they cope with many of the challenges to interdisciplinary learning. The AIS has perhaps been less successful in encouraging presenters to utilize different pedagogical practices: though many sessions *addressed* the value of interactive pedagogical approaches, relatively few *modeled* such approaches.

The AIS has always cared not just about interdisciplinary teaching and research but also the appropriate administrative structure for interdisciplinarity. Stuart Henry organized a panel discussion this year on administrative challenges to the maintenance and growth of interdisciplinary programs at a time of budgetary stringency. Attendance at this session suggests that these challenges are widely experienced. Panelists outlined a number of practical strategies for encouraging the support of senior administrators (hopefully these will be pursued in greater detail in a future issue of *Issues in Integrative Studies*).

One challenge is that the word "interdisciplinary" is used widely in academia to describe practices that are multidisciplinary at best. It is too easy then for interdisciplinary programs to be told that they duplicate efforts elsewhere. It is important that AIS members continue, both locally and globally, to articulate a coherent vision of an interdisciplinary enterprise grounded in appropriate integrative practices.

Likewise, interdisciplinarians need to carefully establish their role relative to disciplines. The word 'interdisciplinary' hints that interdisciplinary analysis is an optional add-on to the centrally important task of disciplinary analysis.

Interdisciplinarians can and should articulate the fact that both specialized and integrative work are essential. By applauding specialized research we can calm fears that we are opposed to disciplines (while allowing those of us skeptical of the present structure of disciplines to continue to advocate reform). By emphasizing that integration is an essential element of both the scholarly research and teaching enterprises we can ensure that interdisciplinarity maintains a central role in the academy.

Interdisciplinary programs are sometimes accused of being too costly. While ideally interdisciplinary programs employ team teaching and interactive pedagogies that work best in small classes, many interdisciplinary programs operate on a similar budgetary basis to disciplinary programs.

The advantages and disadvantages of different types of faculty appointments were discussed. Dedicated appointments to interdisciplinary programs add an important element of stability to these programs (though they do not guarantee their survival). However, there is a risk that interdisciplinarians are then seen by those in disciplines as outsiders. If interdisciplinarians emphasize interdisciplinary research or the scholarship of teaching, their *vitas* may be disdained as well by colleagues in disciplines. Cross-appointments between disciplines and interdisciplinary programs limit these concerns but create their own problems: it is easier to dismantle a program if all of its faculty have other homes, and cross-appointed faculty often shoulder administrative loads in both programs. When faculty based in departments teach on an occasional basis in interdisciplinary programs, it is critically important that appropriate incentives are in place for both the faculty member and their department.

A brief article can never do justice to the full range of presentations at a conference that had some fifty sessions, most with multiple presenters. It is useful
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Interarts-Interdisciplinarity: *Collision Symposium fosters exploration of commonalities*

Collision: Interarts-Interdisciplinary-International Symposium, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, September 8-11, 2005

Symposium reviewed by Tanya Augsborg, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Arizona State University

What are the interdisciplinary arts? What are the relationships between the interdisciplinary arts and the interdisciplinary humanities? What are the links between interdisciplinary arts practice and interdisciplinary research? These questions and more were asked during a small but ambitious inaugural conference on interdisciplinarity and the arts at the University of Victoria's bunny-friendly campus in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, which took place September 8-11, 2005. An international and eclectic mix of scholars, musicians, dancers, performers, theater practitioners, visual artists, multimedia artists, and artists who defy classification were all in attendance. Only thirty-five scholarly lectures, performative lectures, and performances were presented during the four-day event, so there was only one concurrent performance session. The participants were able to experience the conference together for the most part, and they became collectively struck by the similarity of some of the themes that emerged.

The first theme that emerged was the relative scarcity of knowledge regarding the links between interdisciplinary arts discourse and the academic discourse about interdisciplinarity. Conference participants were invited to submit definitions for relevant terms prior to the conference for a creative "Terminology Project," the results of which were included at the back of the conference program. I submitted Barthes's (1986) definition of "interdisciplinary studies" as well as Klein and Newell's (1998) authoritative definition of the term almost on a lark, expecting that the conference organizers and participants were familiar with both definitions. I even included a note along with my

submission, apologizing for sending the obvious and redundant. At the conference I discovered that the term was not as well known as I had anticipated. I met many conference participants who are unfamiliar with the professional literature on interdisciplinarity, but would like to know more. Many of the same participants as well as others were curious to learn more about what is meant by "interdisciplinary art." According to the entry provided by Gillian McIver (2005), "interdisciplinary art is art that is made by incorporating, using or applying more than one discipline. Mixing different elements, the art work sits 'between' the often-rigid categories of disciplines" (p. 22). Other terminology project entries included the following: "Extradisciplinary," "On Interdisciplinary Practice," "Multidisciplinary," "Context-Specific Sensitivity," "Body Intelligence," "Improvisation," "Heuristic Method," "Performance-Led Research," "Critical Thinking," "Linguistic Imperialism," "Concert Theatre," "Instrumental Theatre," "Word and Images," and the Wagnerian term for a total work of art, "*Gesamtkunstwerk*." Benjamin M. Evans (2005) added to the list during his presentation by offering neologisms such as *megadisciplinary* and *maxidisciplinary* for further consideration.

A second and related theme was the desire among conference-goers for more theory regarding interdisciplinarity. A common complaint was that there was never enough time during sessions to discuss theory. Conference organizers Dylan Robinson and David Cecchetto (2005) presented a dialogue on theorizing authorship in musicology that drew from poststructuralist, feminist, and literary theories. Arthur Kroker (1980; 2005),

who is known by many readers of this newsletter for his 1980 seminal article, "Migration Across the Disciplines," presented an excerpt from a forthcoming work in a keynote address but did not discuss or even mention his important contributions to the professional literature.

A third theme was the close interrelations between interdisciplinary arts practices and interdisciplinary arts scholarship. Four types of conference participants seemed to be in attendance: 1) scholars who hold doctorates in the interdisciplinary humanities yet are currently engaging in both scholarly and interdisciplinary arts practices; 2) interdisciplinary artists who are currently pursuing doctorates; 3) interdisciplinary artists with MFAs who either have taught or are teaching at the university-level, and 4) professional interdisciplinary artists who conduct rigorous scholarly interdisciplinary research, engage in interdisciplinary arts practices, and attend academic conferences in order to present their interdisciplinary research/art practices.

This blurring of boundaries between interdisciplinary scholars and artists became readily apparent during the question-and-answer period following the presentation on the Canada Council for the Arts by Claude Schryer, the Head of the Interarts Section at the Canadian Arts Council. Schryer's responses to some of the questions made it patently obvious that while artists and scholars may no longer maintain clear-cut boundaries between interdisciplinary arts practice and interdisciplinary arts research, grant-awarding government agencies

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**28th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INTEGRATIVE STUDIES
OCTOBER 5-8, 2006
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

Hosted by Emory University and Oxford College of Emory University

**“Bridge-Building: Connecting Hearts and Minds, Arts and Sciences,
Teaching and Research, Academy and Community”**

The Association for Integrative Studies will hold its 28th annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia from October 5 to October 8, 2006 at the Westin/Atlanta North Hotel. Co-hosts Emory University, home of the Institute of Liberal Arts, the oldest freestanding department of integrative liberal studies in North America, and Oxford College of Emory University, one of only twelve Carnegie-sponsored centers for the Scholarship of Teaching nationwide, are working with other Georgia institutions such as the University of West Georgia to organize the conference. Given that the overarching theme of the 2006 conference is “Bridge-Building: Connecting Hearts and Minds, Arts and Sciences, Teaching and Research, Academy and Community,” we look forward to a broad spectrum of presentations dealing with the multiplicity of ways in which integration of human capacities, academic disciplines, career practices, and social institutions increasingly characterizes higher education in the United States and around the world. We welcome formal papers, panels, workshops, roundtables, book and research reviews, and poster sessions on topics such as the following:

***Hearts and Minds:** the roles which capacities like the affective, the ethical, the spiritual, the imaginative, the intuitive, the creative, and the physical can and do play in integrative teaching and learning, and programming issues involving diversity, multiculturalism, citizenship, and leadership.

***Arts and Sciences:** the many ways curricular offerings draw professors and perspectives from different disciplines into interdisciplinary coursework, especially coursework involving those supposed opposites, arts and sciences, and issues that arise with the liberal arts in connection to other kinds of education.

***Teaching and Research:** best practices in both, the integration of the two, those innovative redefinitions of both “teaching” and “research” which have evolved in the last decade, and the “Scholarship of Teaching” movement which has encouraged research into teaching itself.

***Academy and Community:** the variety of integrative programming that involves collaboration between those in educational institutions and those in local communities or in the larger world, such as service-learning courses, internships, and travel-study programs, and programming that draws faculty, staff, and students in educational institutions into community with one another and into collaboration in coursework and in other endeavors.

***Continuing Concerns of Educators Involved in Integrative Studies:** the challenges and opportunities individuals and institutions face in researching, planning, practicing, assessing, and altering interdisciplinary programming; the need for networking and outreach for moral and practical support as we seek to sustain initiatives and encourage new ones.

TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL:

Complete and submit the Proposal Submission Form available on-line in the Conference website, or mail, fax, or e-mail the information requested on the Proposal Submission Form to AIS Conference Committee, c/o Gretchen Schulz, Associate Professor of English/Humanities, Oxford College of Emory University, Oxford, GA 30054; fax: 770-784-4660; e-mail: AIS2006@learnlink.emory.edu (On-line submission is preferred.)

GRADUATE STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS:

There are some limited travel funds for those accepted to present. If their presentations focus on interdisciplinary issues, they may apply to the AIS for up to \$200 in travel funds (see website for applications: <http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/conf/travel.htm>).

**PROPOSALS ARE DUE BY MARCH 30, 2006.
NOTIFICATION OF ACCEPTANCE BY MAY 30, 2006.**

CONFERENCE INFORMATION:

- *Conference website: www.ais.oxford.emory.edu
- *Conference e-mail: AIS2006@learnlink.emory.edu
- *Conference Coordinators:

Gretchen Schulz, Associate Professor of English/Humanities, Oxford College of Emory University, Oxford, GA 30054; phone: 770-784-8372; e-mail: gschulz@learnlink.emory.edu

Kevin Corrigan, Professor and Director of Interdisciplinary Studies and Medieval Studies, Institute of Liberal Arts, Callaway Center S410, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322; phone: 404-727-6460; e-mail: kcorrigan@emory.edu

*Questions on the conference? Please send questions to the conference e-mail address listed above. Someone will respond as soon as possible. Should a question require a phone call, please call the Administrative Assistant for Conference Planning before calling either coordinator:

Melissa Shrader, Administrative Assistant in Humanities, Oxford College of Emory University, Oxford, GA 30054; phone: 770-784-8466; e-mail: mshrade@learnlink.emory.edu

AIS INFORMATION:

- *AIS website: www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg
- *Questions on AIS? Please send questions to the AIS Office, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056; phone: 513-529-2659, or e-mail: aisorg@muohio.edu

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definitely still do. Currently Canadian interdisciplinary artists cannot receive travel funding for presenting conference presentations on their research, nor can Canadian scholars apply for interarts grants for work that is not based on artistic practice. The session nevertheless ended on a somewhat positive note, with Schryer announcing that the current policies regarding artist research funding would be reviewed by his office, although he quickly added that he could not make any guarantees or promises.

Finally, the fourth theme that emerged from the conference was the relentless probing of the academic lecture as a performance genre. The unspoken performance conventions of the academic lecture were challenged right from the start. The first session was a keynote address by Christopher Butterfield, Associate Professor in the School of Music at the University of Victoria. Arguably, it was not a conference presentation at all. It seemed to be a type of question-and-answer session as several audience members were given small scrolls of paper. A disembodied voice invited those with scrolls to read the questions written on them. The voice turned out to belong to Butterfield, who spoke behind three opaque panel curtains that were specially designed and installed for his keynote address. An interesting performance moment occurred when the question, "Why are you naked?" was read aloud. Butterfield exclaimed emphatically relief—he confessed that he had been cold from being in the nude. Then he got dressed. Listening to shoes dropping and zippers zipping provided audience members with the opportunity to ponder what exactly do we hear and see when we attend an academic lecture.

This theme threaded its way throughout the entire conference. One presenter parodied the academic performance genre as he spoke too loudly and gave too many lists. Other presenters staged disturbing interventions: Christine Stoddard (2005) played rather perilously with a butcher knife during her well executed

performative conference presentation on pain and the diseased body in recent performance art, and Leslie Merrill (2005) compulsively chewed and spat out gum while reading a paper on the work of Pina Bausch. These performative lectures were especially interesting given the fact that feminist interdisciplinary scholar and artist Joanna Frueh attended this conference. Frueh is widely known in art history and among feminist circles for her virtuoso ability to frame her provocative conference presentations as performance art. Frueh's (2005) challenges to the academic conference lecture format at this particular conference consisted of her choice of subject matter, her transgressive use of explicit language, her recollections of childhood sexuality, and her uniquely seamless blend of autobiographical, lyrical, and academic discourses. A scholarly lecture presented by the author of this essay (Augsburg 2005) identified two historical precedents to Frueh's trailblazing conference presentations as performance art: Robert Morris's 1964 parody of a lecture by the renowned art historian Irwin Panofsky in *21.3*, and John Baldessari's satiric "reading" of art theory in his 1972 video, *John Baldessari Sings LeWitt*. The differences between the feminist scholar artist Frueh and the artists Morris and Baldessari are worth noting briefly: while all three critique scholarly and/or critical performance conventions, only Frueh offers an alternative that remains loyal to scholarship and to academia.

What do the performance conventions of the academic lecture have to do with interdisciplinarity? Apparently a great deal—that is, if the recent AIS 2005 Conference at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, is any indication. During the 2005 AIS conference there was much discussion during breaks, receptions, and dinner circles about what constitutes an academic conference presentation and how academic conference presentations should be presented. I heard these subjects ardently debated from multiple disciplinary perspectives the night before my presentation, and these friendly yet serious-minded debates prompted me to make some last-minute changes regarding

how I was going to deliver my paper. The standard practice of reading aloud one's written text no longer seems to make the grade. Interdisciplinary artists interested in the academic conference presentation as a topic of inquiry would certainly benefit from learning more about current interdisciplinary arts practices such as those showcased during the Collision Symposium.

In addition to provocative lectures, much incredible interdisciplinary art was presented during the conference. I came away from Collision, which was organized by graduate students and recent graduates, with a great deal of information regarding current developments in the interdisciplinary arts. I learned that there is considerable interest in interdisciplinarity among interdisciplinary artists and scholars of the interdisciplinary arts. I also learned that interdisciplinary research is an essential practice among interdisciplinary artists. If I had to boil everything that I learned to two key points, they would be the following: 1) There seems to be a momentum of interest building about research and scholarship on the interdisciplinary arts, and 2) clearly more scholarship needs to be written on this timely subject.

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to note briefly some characteristics of this conference that can hopefully be built upon at future conferences. There were a handful of sessions that dealt explicitly with the natural sciences, often discussing courses or programs that integrate these with the humanities or social sciences. The AIS would very much like to see greater involvement by natural scientists in our conferences and in our organization. Likewise, it was heartening to see that several sessions explicitly addressed questions of how to perform interdisciplinary research. As a classifier I was particularly struck by Brian McCormack's efforts to classify types of interdisciplinary problems: this could be invaluable to the first step of interdisciplinary analysis—framing an interdisciplinary question—and will likely suggest different strategies for later steps depending on the type of problem addressed. The questions of how to do interdisciplinary teaching and interdisciplinary research are linked in many ways, and our collective ability to maintain a central place for interdisciplinarity in the academy depends on our being able to articulate how and why to do both. A couple of sessions each dealt explicitly with faculty development and service learning; these are both areas where further speculation at AIS conferences would be welcome.

This joint conference had not one, or

even two, but three plenaries. Only brief summaries can be attempted here. Jane Spaulding of University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific noted that only a minute fraction of American students study abroad, a fact rarely mentioned when government agencies celebrate the fact that these numbers are growing. Moreover, many study-abroad programs provide little real interaction with foreign cultures. She pointed to several programs, though, that do allow students to enhance cross-cultural understanding. Randy Bass of Georgetown University celebrated pedagogical initiatives that empower students in their own learning. In particular he noted the myriad advantages of having students teach material to others. Nathaniel Pollard of Johnson C. Smith University discussed how recent advances in the scholarly understanding of how students learn support the ideal of general education programs that have students integrate across disciplines. Students, he noted, also need to be able to connect theoretical and practical knowledge.

In sum, this conference was a great success, advancing our collective understanding of how best to pursue, support, and strengthen interdisciplinarity. The conversation continues next October in Atlanta, and the following September in Phoenix. The AIS has strong organizing teams in place in both locales, and we look forward to great attendance and exciting conversations. ■■■

Janus Head editors taking submissions for special '06-'07 issue

Janus Head: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Continental Philosophy, Literature, Phenomenological Psychology and the Arts is accepting submissions for its Winter 2006/2007 special issue which will have for its topic “the situated body.”

In recent phenomenological and analytic philosophy, as well as in the cognitive sciences, emphasis has been given to embodiment. Concepts of embodied, enactive, and situated cognition have been developed. This special issue of *Janus Head* would like to explore questions about how the body is situated in both

physical and social environments. What various ways can we characterize a situated body, and how does “situatedness” affect (or effect) perception, feeling, and cognition more generally? The *Janus Head* editors encourage interdisciplinary approaches to these questions, including perspectives informed by phenomenology, philosophy of mind, neuroscience, Gibsonian and developmental psychologies, and discussions of self, the experience of others, narrative, metaphor, architecture, etc.

Shaun Gallagher, Professor and Chair

of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Central Florida will serve as Guest Editor for the Winter 2006/2007 special issue.

Poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, and visual art that in some way address the topic of “the situated body” will be considered for the peer-reviewed journal. For submission guidelines, see www.janushead.org/jhguidelines.cfm. The deadline for this special issue is March 1, 2006. Submissions should be mailed to: Editors, *Janus Head*, P.O. Box 1259, Amherst, NY 14226. ■■■

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October 5-8, 2006, Atlanta, Georgia

Hosted by Emory University
and Oxford College of Emory University



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