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Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/perspectives/vol6/iss1/4
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By Bryan Lindsay

It's Tuesday, almost 5 PM, and Maxwell Goldberg still won't let me go. He puts those gentle hands together, turns his head just so, and smiles. "You keep on talking about content, and we're dealing with affective and cognitive perception. Are you lumping all content into one big bag," he acknowledges the quiet laughter as my own jargon is brought to bear upon me, "or are you separating the two?"

I watch my colleagues, a bit weary after a busy day with the undergraduates, as they wait for me to return to the fray. "Content," I reply, "should probably be identified as 'subject matter,' or maybe 'the discipline.' You ought to see by now, Max, that I make a very clear distinction between the affective and the cognitive."

"No," Max counters, "I see frequently where you display a tendency to oversimplify and dichotomize. There are a multitude of contents. . . ."

"I know that," my feelings ruffled a bit, "and if I oversimplify it is because I presume that we all know that there are a variety of contents!"

"It's five o'clock," our moderator, Fred Ritsch, announces. "If everyone is willing we'll meet again in two weeks, OK?" There is
nodded assent, although several members of the interfaculty discussion group are already picking up a thread and weaving it among themselves. Rick and I walk to his VW, ready to continue our conversation as I bum a ride home.

Lap dissolve to Thursday morning, 11:15. The Hum 201 team is in a skull session.

"Here are the study questions on the Iliad," Jim Harrison, team leader, announces. "I'll lecture tomorrow, we'll all have discussion groups with the students on Monday, and I'll do the second lecture on Tuesday."

Jim Parker shakes his head. Al Schmitz and I watch, wait, knowing where the question will lead. Parker studies the questions, shakes his head again. "We're looking at a series of telic models in this course, right?"

Harrison has anticipated the question. "Now wait just a minute," he chides. "I think that if you give this enough time you'll be able to find a great many human values in Achilleus."

"Human values?" I'm the newcomer to this course, having walked with Achilles, Hector, Priam and that bunch somewhere long before Sputnik, when Achilles was taken as a literary figure at face value without concern for much more than name, rank, and serial number in the long files of the mythic military. Oedipus, yeah. I can find a great deal of humanistic significance in Oedipus, but Achilles, wow! "Human values allow for a wide variety of possibilities, but I'm more interested in humane values." (Much later I find myself elated when Harrison refers to values as human[e].)

End Scene 2. Cut to Scene 3, the Wednesday Evening Humanities Seminar: more than a double handful of undergraduate majors, six faculty, a gaggle of interested visitors. The topic is Dan Fabun's Dynamics of Change, and the debate rages.

"Here we all sit talking about the family, parents, children, and yet no one has been able to point to anything concrete." Al Schmitz has his head in the bulldog position. "You speak of parental love," he continues; "why don't you give me some concretions of that love?" The students look a bit perplexed. This is the nitty-gritty of experience, communication. It's not supposed to be like this, one feels. Somebody is supposed to be lecturing; somebody ought to be taking notes. Silence hangs heavy, everyone is searching for something to feed back.

Debra Robinson, our lone black student, begins, hesitantly. "I can't really tell you what it is," she states, "but I can tell you what it is not. It's not all that lying, about Santa Claus and all that jive. It's not that kind of thing. . . ."

Tommy Reeves, theologian, campus chaplain, important member of the Humanities team, leans in. "You don't feel that that's lying, now do you, Debbie?"
Another student picks up the questioning: "Aw, Debbie, you don’t really . . . ?" Around the room everyone senses that Debra does feel that way, and the quiet hurt is conveyed sympathetically to all of us. Fred Ritsch breaks the uncomfortable silence with a different line of questioning and the seminar recoups. It’s supposed to break up at 9:15 but it rarely dissolves before 9:30; the faculty hangs on until ten or so, sometimes adjourning for some good sippin’ whiskey at a brother’s house as the discussion moves toward that hour when most of us turn into pumpkins, if not workaday mice. Another day has ended, and the pilgrimage continues.

Reading back over that I find myself feeling strangely in the face of fiction. Not so, though, I promise you. The quotes are paraphrased, granted, since I don’t have total recall, but the style, the content, the interest and dedication are all there. This is the recycling of the Interdisciplinary Humanities faculty at Converse. It might also be considered as the reorienting of the Humanities students at Converse, if they were aware of another humanities prior to this. Most of them find the Contemporary Humanities, or Interdisciplinary Humanities, a new ball of wax, and they are to a man (or woman—Converse is a private liberal arts women’s college) like bees building hives with it: busy, involved, excited, and alive to the promise that the program has for them. For student and faculty alike a definite recycling is taking place and the results thus far have been extremely beneficial to all.

Apologia

Even this early in the essay I can sense a quiet shaking of heads among my more conservative colleagues, gentlemen of stature in the academic world, who find much of this talk about “innovation” and “experimentation” distressing, to say the least. Unconcerned over decreasing enrollments, collapsing departments, the extinction of entire disciplines, secure in the certainty of their expertise and their tenure, they see little or no need for any sort of reorganization, new designs. In spite of the omens that plague administrators, legislators, and educators with regard to a lessening of interest in traditional higher education, the steadfast hold true to their antiquarian ideals in the face of aquarian onslaughts, defending “tradition” with the same Hasidic elan that Tevya brought forth all those many seasons on Broadway, hefting up “academic freedom” as a cudgel against the barbarian war-cry of “accountability,” girding their loins with that chainmail jockstrap of scholarly objectivity in order to maintain an intellectual chastity that would have given Marvell himself a hernia.

Therefore we apologize at the onset, stating that if these items of concern are not significant then the essay itself is beneath consideration. We are convinced, however, that a great deal of re-examination is
necessary, a literal rethinking of both the aims and the avenues of higher education, with an eye upon an uncertain future in which little of the past can be plugged in without extension cords, AC/DC converters, improved electronics, and indeed, increased voltage to guarantee the success of the new circuits. Today's world roars on outside the cloister with a dynamism unmeasurable and therefore unfathomable. If we are to observe, interpret, and analyze that world, and educate our students for responsible action in it, then we must design alternative methodologies, strategies for doing so. Anything less, if you will, is a betrayal of our cause and our commitment. Higher education can no longer function in a vacuum away from the battlefield, the marketplace, the TV studio. It must assume responsibility for reshaping all of these areas along more humanistic lines, if the very traditions themselves are to survive long enough for scholarly analysis. Rethinking, recycling, retooling. Each of these interrelates with the other for the betterment of the classroom, the college, the community. Therefore let us be done with apologies so that we might look at the retooling process and the way it alters both methodology and curriculum.

**The Natural Holism of the Humanities**

To anyone involved with research, writing, or teaching within the framework of the humanities, it will seem superfluous to point out the fact that the humanities are by nature holistic, interdisciplinary. Anyone attempting to explore any significant body of knowledge housed beneath the humanities “umbrella” discovers this immediately, and several references to this are made later in the essay. Nonetheless, as the sciences began to supersede the humanities, as isolation, specificity, and fragmentation became the guidelines for scholarly analysis in physics, chemistry, biology, and math, there was a general clamoring for a new scientism in dealing with the stuff of the humanities. Ph.D. programs, eager to apply this new expertise, jumped on the bandwagon, forcing doctoral candidates into tighter niches, more isolation, until the highest pinnacles of Academe were crowded with more and more scholars probing deeper and deeper into the viscera of single specimens so that the holistic skein of the humanities was snipped into so many tiny bits in the name of scholarship. Likewise, the construction of generalities growing out of such scientific research brought into being a wide range of more or less syncretic structures, various procrustean molds into which everything in a particular form or style was supposed to fit. Buried beneath all this pseudo-scientific probing, dissecting, was a forgotten central shaping concept: each element in the humanities is at its core a unique and distinctive piece of humanistic achievement and must be treated as such within the situational matrix from which it emerged. This particularity will be
discussed later; here the consideration focuses upon the natural way in which the elements of the humanities relate to other elements within the same situational matrix. Where generalities, comparisons are made they must be made gently, with great care, since like the human lives which they reflect they are based upon highly individualized perceptions, realizations, communications. Once the cadavers have been exhumed, dissected, science has to surrender its hold on a Haydn, a Mozart, a Beethoven; that is where the humanities take over. By dealing with individual minds, spirits, creative efforts, the humanities begin to build upon the fragmentation of scientific inquiry, reweaving the variegated threads of human experience into its beautiful holistic tapestry. Whether you are dealing with a poem or a frog, once you apply the scalpel, peeling, slicing, splitting, you suddenly discover that while you may have brought to light some new bit of information, maybe even some new knowledge, you no longer have the poem, the frog. It takes the humanities man to put the pieces back together again, and to relate them to the world from which they came. Thus a natural holism unifies the humanities while allowing the sensitive scholar or professor to identify, illuminate those particularly distinctive qualities which make each segment significant. This certainly requires both intellectual and aesthetic retooling, but more than that it requires that the faculty look at itself in a different light.

The Faculty As Team

It appears that if anything new is to be done within the humanities it must first be done with regard to the faculty, for if the faculty is incapable of change then the discipline will not be changed. Therefore by establishing a sense of peerage among the Humanities faculty, a kind of camaraderie evolves which begins by saying, "I am as eager to learn from you as I hope you are to learn from me, so what can you give me that will help me do my work more effectively?" Every member of the Humanities staff thus becomes a member of the Humanities team. There is an obvious corollary here which requires discussion: In order to teach the Interdisciplinary Humanities successfully one doesn't necessarily have to be a renaissance man, versed equally well in trivium, quadrivium, tap-dancing and home economics. This grows out of an awareness that every course in the undergraduate curriculum isn't a 600-level seminar, a fact that has escaped many a learned professor over the past several decades. This isn't to say that undergrad humanities courses are "crip" courses, either. Ask any of the Converse frosh and sophomores about their 100 course. It's hard, thorough, extremely invigorating and exciting, and it's taught individually by a group of teachers consisting of a theologian, a drama specialist, a fine arts/humanities generalist, and a philosopher, all of whom spent untold hours designing, discussing, selecting materials,
laying out a format, until the result burst like a multimedia Athena from the head of the departmental Zeus, the acting chairman. Such is the case with several of the interdisciplinary courses here, which accounts for much of the richness of the Contemporary Humanities curriculum, a program attracting a very significant number of new majors each semester.

Of course the Humanities faculty isn’t locked into the interdisciplinary curriculum ad nauseam. Each member has his speciality, his “Rolls Royce” course, and it gets wheeled out of the faculty garage every so often. But the interdisciplinary courses bring about the recycling, and that is our purpose here. A look at the course offerings will reveal a wide range of interests and accomplishments, ranging from filmmaking to the exploration of relatively unstudied ethnic groups as models for humanistic comparison and contrast; it is this diversity that makes the Contemporary Humanities major attractive to today’s students. After all, Converse is primarily an undergraduate liberal arts college, its students seeking a liberating education, in touch with the world and its crises, one that will equip them to live more contributive self-enhancing lives. We feel that the Contemporary Humanities moves forward dynamically to meet this need, a characteristic which sets our discipline apart from its more traditional counterparts. But what are the characteristics that make our discipline so distinctive? Let’s outline a few.

Attachment, Then Detachment

Among the significant discoveries that the Humanities team has made is the fact that if the materials being explored, examined, analyzed, and evaluated did not have within themselves an intrinsic excitement, worth, it became quite difficult for the instructor to get his students “into” them, so to speak. Earlier, less accurate analysts have referred to this magnetic attractiveness as “relevance,” but I would quarrel with the term, since relevance has come so frequently to mean “here-and-nowness.” More pertinent to this essay is the idea that, if the faculty is willing to pick and choose, sort, weigh, dissect that large body of materials commonly labeled “the humanities,” they would discover that much of it is without any great vital value, carried forward instead by an army of scholars who earn their livelihood by “moving skeletons from one boneyard to another.” This also might be said for the vast quantity of work with which we burden ourselves in the name of scholarship and intellectual pursuits when we surrender to simple traditional content purely because “it’s always been there.” What we must begin with is that alive and kicking body of knowledge that squirms whenever we prod it, even yells perhaps, which continues to thrive no matter what we do to it. Dr. Marjorie Reeves, visiting us here from Oxford, gave us the idea of “attachment then
detachment," and we like it. It means that the truly good stuff of
the humanities will "grab" us (à la McLuhan) and hold us until we
develop the skills necessary to separate ourselves from it, dissect it,
then reassemble it within the context of the discipline, giving it rela­tive perspective and value.

Of course this requires that each member of the team be willing
to relearn the material time and time again, in many cases for the
first time since undergrad school, and this can take quite a bit of time
and energy on the part of everyone. That should have gone without
saying, though, since it is implicit throughout the essay. Retooling in­cludes a reshaping of the basic equipment. In education that involves
every aspect of the professorial consciousness: interests, intelligence,
emotions, spirit. From attachment to the materials to the detachment
of scholarly analysis, then to the final operation of evaluation we can
move from the traditional realm of purely cognitive involvement into
a synthesis of both aesthetic and intellectual apprehension, exploration,
and appreciation.

Aesthetic and Intellectual Apprehension

Just as we looked at the way the content needed to "grab" us in
the paragraphs above, so it becomes necessary to establish a balance
between affective and cognitive modes of apprehension, and it is here
that recycling becomes most painful. This pain grows out of the aware­ness that, traditionally, higher education has almost completely
avoided any consideration of aesthetic involvement on the part of
students or faculty, even though feelings have played a great part in
shaping the effectiveness of the learning process. To explore the his­toric rationale for that behavior here, though, would be impertinent
to the purpose of this essay. It seems more meaningful to point out that
if we are to reshape and revitalize the contemporary classroom, a con­cern on the part of all the participants for more total involvement in
the environment is mandatory. Students come to us hungering for
significant learning reinforced by positive feelings of self-worth, com­mitment, growth, and a sense of "belonging" in the learning situation.
This is quite different from the traditional learning environment where
an atmosphere of calm, quiet intellectual detachment appeared to be
the rule. This is not to say that there were not those of us who always
considered ourselves "evangelists," or "shamans," or "song and dance
men." Yet we always recognized ourselves as the Ausländer, much
akin to Huxley's savage. The mark of the college prof usually was
austerity, aloofness, a kind of self-effacing dignity, a bemused gaze
through inexpensive horn-rims. The mark of the college student was
a kind of unobtrusive nonchalant boredom, at least until the '60's
rolled around. But let's not disturb ourselves with "times of tribula­tion"; we'd best be back to the lyceum.
Affective and cognitive perception. A balance of the aesthetic with the intellectual. Involvement on an interpersonal level in the quest for knowledge, understanding, wisdom, not a follow-the-leader game aimed at the goal-line of the GRE and grad school. Joyful sharing in the process of discovery, not the anxiety of scheduled regurgitation, measurement, followed by another dose of academic salts. Pain? All of these considerations require that the professor surrender much of his autonomous authority so that the students do feel free to participate totally in the learning experience. That is bound to produce pain, even in the best-adjusted members of the faculty, at least until they discover the pleasure of such a relationship. If these dichotomies seem to be rather stark, remember that Max Goldberg finds fault in me for that, and I acknowledge it without rancor. My commitment to this balancing of all the aspects of humanistic involvement in the humanities classroom makes me cry out at times, and if the noise is distressing I again apologize. Let's continue, however, rather than dally in the shade of our own rhetoric. One other consideration merits illumination.

The Situational Matrix

The most disastrous pitfall ever thrown in the path of the peregrine professor was that of particularity, but not necessarily because particularity in its own right is bad. Rather the fault lies in the fact that traditionally the scholarly expert has moved deeper and deeper into the dig of specific analysis, decryption, frequently losing sight of the real world in which his esoteric masterpiece finds its true meaning. Actually particularity is the name of the game, whether we read Crane or Reeves, but it is the particularity of human experience and expression within a given situational matrix that makes each significant human utterance, be it in literature, music, art, dance, philosophy, theology, or what-have-you, so extremely valuable to us in the humanities. In order for us to understand Rembrandt we must know about Holland in the Seventeenth Century, we must be acquainted with Hals, Vermeer, Rubens. To talk about Beethoven we must be conversant with Goethe, with the Vienna of the early Nineteenth Century, with Napoleon. So it goes. For the interdisciplinary humanities to do its job well it must deal in particularities, but always within the frame of the situational matrix. To do less is to do an injustice to the students and to emasculate the discipline. Once again we can hear the quiet shaking of hoary heads, particularly among the department chairmen. "How are we going to get all our Ph.D. specialists to get into this kind of program?" they ask with a kind of removed curiosity. "They are much too busy doing research, writing articles, refining their expertise." Whenever I hear this I am tempted to ask the always irreverent question, "Why?" Since that also is not pertinent to the
essay, I will bypass it, leaving such debate to those who find value in it. I am much more concerned with our pilgrimage, for that is what first motivated me to write.

**Designing A New Discipline**

Perhaps we will be called to task for describing our efforts here "innovative." Scholars familiar with the history of humanism within the liberal arts tradition will no doubt cite incident after incident where similar attempts have been made. Even the label "new" has been used earlier in this century.

In the literature on the subject, "new humanism" seems most frequently associated with the efforts of Hutchins and his colleagues at the University of Chicago before World War II, but even those exciting pioneering attempts appear to have lost their momentum after a relatively short time. Nonetheless, the concept itself has remained viable; it has simply been seriously overshadowed by the neo-scientism of the post-Sputnik panic. That rush toward salvation-by-technology has cost us dearly, however, and the humanities perhaps have paid more than their share of cosmic dues. Now, in the face of the social and ecological destruction wrought by the corporate state with its rampant technocracy, it seems understatement to announce that there is a real and pressing need for alternative approaches to liberal arts education, for new content, new curricula, new methodologies. Where the Converse concept differs from Chicago's "new humanism" has been illustrated above. Perhaps handles are not that important if the participants understand and respect each other while acknowledging their mutual commitment to the task at hand. In this respect the pilgrim image is apt, though we are indeed a motley crew. The metaphor is borrowed loosely from Chaucer, Bunyan, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., that mix of media, manner, and methodology typical of the contemporary interdisciplinary Humanities. It illustrates clearly the rigors of the training, the ramblings of the quest. This wide-ranging probing of the wealth of human experience, this energetic search for universals that might be actualized as life-enhancing values in the minds of our individual students, this thorough sifting of diverse materials in order to identify those commonalities of human endeavor that link the aborigine with astronaut, those explorations constitute the spadework of our discipline. Sometimes serendipity is our rule of thumb, as when a student brought Dante to bear on a lecture by Dr. Reeves on Joachim, after which Pico, Blake and Yeats were experimentally stirred into her potent telic mix, to the effect that everyone present found themselves excited and motivated by the pure and simple exhilaration of a moment of delight, discovery, and learning! When that occurs, that truly puissant fragment of time well spent in unearthing a new way of looking at an old well-worn idea, then we sense we must be on the right track!
Granted, if the reader remembers Carmen Miranda, "We gotta get goin', where we goin', what-a we gonna do? We're on our way to somewhere..." Enough said. Balancing Carmen Miranda with Bob Dylan we could just as easily point out, without interpretation, "The times, they are a-changin'." Yet it isn't necessary to grease the wheels of progress with the homilies of the age; that has been done regularly since we first moved into our present millenium. What is much more important is that we know who we are, why we are here, and what we hope to accomplish. Bringing to our new-found roles all our traditional accomplishments, expertise, our apparently successful careers, we still find ourselves somewhat like Patroclus donning Achilles's armor, Sancho Panza on Quixote's horse, Truman sitting in FDR's chair for the first time, filled with the excitement and apprehension of David winding up, Goliath smiling condescendingly.

That might be the best metaphor, for if programs such as these succeed, many former giants will be farmed out to the bush leagues as the bonus babies step up to the mound. We feel confident, though not overly so. We feel virtuous, though there is some uncertainty as to the reason for such a feeling. We know we have given of our best thus far, and our investment is paying off in students who are discovering the real dynamism of an enriched liberal arts education. We are in the process of designing a discipline which may be the cornerstone of tomorrow's education.

Coda

Recycling the faculty and the curriculum—what makes the Converse program so significant? It seems to be the realization, stressed so regularly above, that higher education must assume responsibility for at least staying abreast of the times, if not slightly ahead. There must be real academic leadership in terms of tomorrow's education, world. I feel the moment has come when Academe must assume more responsibility for the destiny of the planet, the species; it is no longer practical to sit in calm, bemused detachment as the earth continues to collapse in upon itself with a most inhumane and dehumanizing sense of its own madness. That marks our shield and buckler—what about the rest of Academe?

Everywhere else I have been, a kind of patronizing democracy has prevailed that makes no demands upon the faculty (other than that they show up for class), requires no intra-faculty (department to department) dialogue with regard to course or curriculum improvement, all in the name of "academic freedom" (which I translate loosely as "you leave me alone, I'll leave you alone, and for god's sake don't excite the students!"). How sad! Somewhere along the line the whole boatload of intellectual and aesthetic goodies has gotten shipwrecked, while those shipping magnates in their private offices up-
stairs continue to pore over their bills of lading, much more interested in paper profits than in the real richness of industrious intercourse. We have come to that point in our history where we can no longer justify ourselves on our own terms, simply because we have educated so few to understand the glory and delight of the academic quest! Now our own guns of apathy and uninvolved are turned upon us and we are completely bereft of armor; just a handful of 3x5 cards and membership in the faculty club. It didn't take that much to give Hector a bleeding ulcer.

Not here among the pilgrims, though! We yell, we scuffle, we continue to debate, and we learn, we grow, and we have truly strong positive feelings for each other and for our mission. Granted, one of us sings "Gaudeamus igitur," another seems to prefer, "Nearer My God To Thee"; yet another yodels, "On The Road To Mandalay." Al, our resident tympanist/philosopher, leans toward "Also Sprach Zarathustra," and I find delight in Lionel Hampton's "How High The Moon?". None of us sings alone, however. In our combined caterwaulings there is indeed a magical and mystical concord. It brings to our more staid colleagues a kind of gentle melancholy and to the students it must be reminiscent of the Sirens' song that lured Odysseus to the rocks. The rocks of Converse are a bit different, though. They represent hard knowledge, sculpted intellects, colorful imaginations, blazing spirit, churning waves of excitement. Philosophy, history, literature, drama, music, art, dance, classical studies, theology, the rock solid pillars of a rich and delightful liberal arts education designed for today and tomorrow, woven out of that golden skein of man's significant endeavor. With one foot on the moon, the other in Lascaux, we try with much difficulty to perform an acceptable pas de chat to music we haven't even heard yet. Wish us luck. Or better yet, come and watch. It promises to be a sparkling performance.