

### **“Literature and ...? Perspectives on Interdisciplinarity”**

Over the past few decades, interdisciplinarity has been gaining in popularity. In some contexts, it even seems to have become a “must” for innovative and successful research, the *sine qua non* for certain funding contexts. Indeed, interdisciplinarity can be extremely beneficial, and to enter a dialogue with other disciplines enables entirely unforeseen approaches, questions, and outcomes. It fosters, to borrow formulations from Dame Gillian Beer, the transformation of ideas and the destabilisation of knowledge, and thus helps “uncover problems disguised by the scope of established disciplines” (Beer 115). Interdisciplinarity is fundamentally, and productively, transgressive, and this already signals its appeal to literary and cultural scholars.

Yet interdisciplinarity also comes with its problems, both on a purely pragmatic as well as on a conceptual level. Knowledge from other fields can be difficult to acquire, and sufficient “interiority” (Shattock 54) to other disciplines almost impossible to gain. Indeed, how much we need to learn of other skills and about other processes of enquiry in order to enter a dialogue with representatives of other fields, what, in other words, is deemed “enough” knowledge, remains a complex question. What some see as interdisciplinarity, others dismiss as a mere retooling of concepts from other disciplines (see Huggan), and the boundaries and transitions between multi-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity are sometimes hard to gauge. It also makes a difference whether interdisciplinarity is pursued on an individual level, or within larger networks. Moreover, while some fields and research contexts allow us to make productive use of our core competencies as scholars in literary and cultural studies, we can be little more than either amateurs or marginal contributors in other fields. Thus, interdisciplinary research contexts frequently also challenge us to defend our own discipline and to reflect on the legitimacy and “relevance” of the questions and forms of analysis that typically concern us.

This panel aims to explore the challenges and difficulties of interdisciplinary research as much as its benefits. Fields of enquiry may include collaboration between literary/cultural studies and the natural and life sciences (biology, chemistry, climate research, physics, medicine, etc.), and the social sciences (anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science, etc.). Basically, the panel asks how we “do” interdisciplinarity both in research and in teaching.

Papers might address, but are not limited to, the following aspects:

- What literary studies has to offer to other disciplines, both through its subject matter and material, as well as through its specific methodologies, forms of enquiry, and types of analysis.
- The communication between different fields and their representatives.
- The role of literature and literary studies for the grand societal challenges, and the “relevance” of our discipline.
- Historical perspectives on interdisciplinarity and its changing meanings and practices.
- Specific fields of interdisciplinarity, such as cognitive literary studies, ecocriticism and the environmental humanities, literature and science research, literary and cultural urban studies, literature and political science, literature and economics, literature and material culture.

Please send abstracts (300-400 words) and a short biographical note to Jens Martin Gurr (jens.gurr@uni-due.de) and Ursula Kluwick (ursula.kluwick@ens.unibe.ch) by 15 January 2019.

### **Works Cited**

- Beer, Gillian. *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter*. Oxford UP, 1996.
- Huggan, Graham. *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*. Postcolonialism across the Disciplines 1. Liverpool UP, 2008.
- Shattock, Joanne. "What Do We Mean By Interdisciplinarity". *Victorian Review* vol. 33 no. 1 (Spring 2007): 55-58.