

Reflection: On Interdisciplinarity & Liberal Arts Education

The working definition that we have of interdisciplinary in class is given to us as such: "Two or more disciplines used to solve or address a more complex problem or issue toward the goal of a transformative result."

In my own words, being interdisciplinary means knowing as many systems that make up the work you are engaged in and being able to incorporate them in the creative process. I think the best way to model the idea comes from some old advice I've heard in the world of digital (visual) art. Always start your composition on pen and paper. Even if you're working in raster or vector based art in the end, nothing can give you the immediacy and hands-on work flow of a pen and paper in front of you with nothing else to distract you. To the uninitiated it might seem like the most counter-intuitive way to start, as it adds an extra step. Now you have to convert your sketches in real life to a digital image if you want to follow them up! But that's not the point. The idea is that what we make starting in a more tactile medium influences the end result, and strengthens the foundation of the ideas to take to the next process. Regardless of medium, starting from another place will warrant different results. Knowing this, it allows us to pick and choose what disciplines we want to incorporate in our process, and thus allow for different workflows and results.

I think a liberal arts degree is in somewhat of a strange split. Being that we are required to complete general education requirements, but otherwise our studies seem to veer in the other direction. Other STEM based degrees might be able to focus on a general discipline and their basic requirements form a foundation for the rest of their degree. However, I think the value of participating in general classes comes in the form of something less tangible. Being able to have a basic understanding of research and attribution is a critical skill for any scholar, something an English class excels in. The critical thinking involved in any math is important for anyone trying to problem solve. And the sciences are there to invoke an understanding of systems at play in our world, and perhaps spark interest in the knowledge that there's always more than meets the eye. I used to think the general requirements needed in any liberal arts education were somewhat of a sham, and maybe part of me still does. But when looking at things through more of an interdisciplinary approach, it makes sense to educate everyone to a similar level in regard to the basics, as now we all have those disciplines to draw from, whether we intended to or not.

In the case of Black Mountain College, none of the courses were required and nor formally graded, which draws into question if we've been doing it all wrong in the first place. Being that graduation wasn't guaranteed, I don't think it would actually fly today, except for those with the time and money to do so. I think we have more to be inspired by the spirit of the school than its actual merits. The collaboration on display between student and professor alike is amazing. Granted this was through some pseudo-commune like

campus, but what college (living on campus) isn't in some way or another? Being an online student it can be harder to be inspired by others as we are all aware, but I think giving the opportunity for collaboration is the next best thing we have. Being in a class Discord is a first for me after almost two years at ASU! For the format, I think that's probably the most practical way for us to embody the spirit of Black Mountain.

Film/Stage Analysis

Long Day's Journey Into Night

The first performance initially feels much more light-hearted and its tone reminds me of American sitcoms. All of the tensions characters have with each other seem to be resolved almost immediately, and they express more animatedly than what an actual family might seem to do. The conversation plays out more like an intro to an episode than what I would expect from a play, especially when the boys come in and they ask about what they were grinning about, I could imagine a studio audience cheering with their entrance and a big *OOOH* once they're questioned.

In contrast, the second performance feels more grounded in reality, and the characters have a more natural conversational tone. The set surely helps push this approach further, as it's shot in a full house rather than the three walls of a stage. I found that they talked over each other in a more natural way, rather than seeming to wait for their cue more like the first. The characters had a more somber tone to their speech, making it feel like a more serious approach to the subjects. Personally, I feel like the actors had a much more modern approach to the material, as it felt more like a drama to me, whereas the first performance seems a bit stuck in its era of the American Dream.