

Thoughtful Interdisciplinary Thinking – The Future Is Now

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In this paper I argue that our concerns about the future of the humanities are more correctly viewed as present concerns rather than future concerns. Following Hannah Arendt I argue that it is the present, that ‘gap between past and future’ which provides our arena of possibility. Our action or inaction in the present inevitably leads to a future of regret or fulfilment. The question regarding the future of the humanities has been around for decades but I argue it is often our concerns with the future which displace us from urgent action in the present. The future is now. It is only by thoughtful action in the present that we can alter all our tomorrows. I go on to argue, following the later Heidegger that the type of thinking now called for is thoughtful, open interdisciplinary thinking. Our thinking needs to exhibit care and empathy.

‘Thinking itself is a way...we have to open ourselves to the emerging prospect and direction of the way itself... Only when we walk it,... by thoughtful questioning, are we on the move on the way...Thinking clears its way only by its own questioning advance.’¹

In my paper I draw on two interdisciplinary approaches which model this thoughtful interdisciplinary thinking in the present. Firstly, my own interdisciplinary PhD project which combines a formal philosophical analysis of the relational beginnings of human subjectivity with a creative reflection on subsequent beginnings through a fictional work: a novel. The novel attempts to manifest what the philosophy thesis cannot, which as Simone de Beauvoir argues is the raw feel of human lived experience, ‘the taste of another life.’

Secondly, the recent establishment of a physical and virtual interdisciplinary learning environment at our University of Galway campus called an Empathy Lab: the Empathy Lab aims to develop human centric solutions to real world problems and has multiple applications. One example is where engineers / designers of public spaces and amenities can physically wear an older person simulation suit which enables them to personally experience a variety of age related physical and sensory challenges regarding access and the usability of these spaces by older people, thereby affording them the opportunity of factoring these sensitivities into their designs. Both of these endeavours forge meaningful connections, in the first case between philosophical reflection and lived human experience and in the second case between engineering design and lived experience.

¹ Heidegger, *What is called Thinking*, p.168 – 170