

Panel Proposal:
 72nd Annual Meeting of the GAAS/DGfA at Münster University – Kinship in American Studies

Panel Chair:
 Michael Aaron Mason, University of Münster, Graduate School Practices of Literature,
mmason@uni-muenster.de

Panel Title:
 Interdisciplinarity as Political & Pedagogical Kinship: MAGA's Targeting of the Sciences and the Humanities

A kind of folk academic wisdom has maintained for at least a century that the humanities and the life/natural sciences are fundamentally at odds. From one side of the discourse: one is pragmatic, realistic, and stalwart in its search for reproducible and communicable knowledge, while the other is frivolous, paranoiac, and a gadfly in the face of knowable reality. From the other side: one is critically attuned to epistemic forms, conscious of hegemonies' self-reproduction, and willing to account for history diachronically, while the other remains embedded in modes of racial and colonial domination and is a tool for the construction and maintenance of the master's house. Mid-century author C.P. Snow dubbed this divide the "Two Cultures," suggesting that American pragmatism gives the US a scientific edge while the continental educations of Europe remained cloistered to the stodgy and out-of-date realms of language and history. Interdisciplinary skeptics—often from the interstitial fields of Linguistics, Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology, and the History and Philosophy of Science—have maintained that the Two Cultures divide is at best a folk shorthand for divergent scholastic strengths, and at worst a symptom of a much broader conflict over institutional funding and field recognition.

This panel holds that within 2025's political climate, a vision of unification across the Two Cultures is not only critical to the survival of the university as such, but both sides ultimately share an epistemic position that is fundamentally at odds with authoritarian epistemologies, pedagogies, and politics. We want to interrogate the decidedly political consequences of "reality" as a shared object of study across disciplinary divides. Perhaps a shared notion of "reality testing" is possible across disciplines as a means of intersubjective verification. Our discussions will consider how robust social institutions provide modes of maintaining commitment to a commonly accessible reality to all members of a *demos*—e.g., public education; publicly run environmental and consumer protections; a media that is independent, public, and critical; an independent judiciary; coequal branches of government. In short, a robust *commons*. Finally, we consider how the concept of the *commons* features as a particular site of conflict between democratic and emerging authoritarian visions of pedagogy.

Our exploration can be guided by the following research questions, along with others we have not yet considered:

- How can we read the current administration's targeting of universities' race, gender, and ethnic studies programs (in short, the humanities) through withholding of federal funds for scientific research? Has this revealed critical ways that the Two Cultures have been stitched together all along in a commitment to an image of reality that is united in its opposition to authoritarian over-coding? Does this also outline a path of shared political resistance?

- Does the notion of the Two Cultures hold or explode when reading the administration's dismantling of empirically driven institutions (Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP)) under the rubric of them being “too woke?”
- Can a historicist account of the administration’s attacks on the university reveal pre-existing commonalities across the Two Cultures, especially given that both share a common practice: pedagogy?
- Is a commitment to an common external reality also a commitment to letting that reality speak for itself? Are university research methods themselves palliatives against mass political/pedagogical coercion?
- What about a common reality principle itself is and can be democratic?
- Has the unification of the humanities and the sciences under the umbrella of the university itself been a mark of democratic functioning? If so, how? If not, what went wrong, and what could be done?
- How can European universities and academic institutions resist the coercive disciplinary policies of the current administration in ways that US universities are having a difficult time doing?

We encourage cross-disciplinary submissions from both within and outside of our own fields of expertise. For us, our reading list has begun with:

- la paperson, *A Third University is Possible* (2017)*
- * especially the concepts of first, second, and third universities
- Jennifer Berkshire & Jack Schneider, *The Education Wars* (2024)
- Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (1995)
- N. Katherine Hayles, “Constrained Constructivism,” *New Orleans Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1991, pp. 76–85.
- Ellen Spolsky, “Darwin and Derrida,” *Poetics Today*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002, pp. 43-62.
- Sara Marcus, *Political Disappointment: A Cultural History from Reconstruction to the AIDS Crisis* (2023)
- Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (2017)
- *The Cold War and the University* (1996), edited by Noam Chomsky, Richard Lewontin, and Ira Katznelson

Abstracts should be a maximum of 250 words. We invite scholars and researchers—those who are already working in interdisciplinary fields as well as those who want to cross disciplines in search of shared commitments—to consider points of unification where a joint politics of resistance can be maintained.

Contact Michael A. Mason for inquiries: mmason [at] uni-muenster [dot] de