

Book Reviews

Klein, Julie Thompson. *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice.* Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Pr., 1989. 331p. \$37.50 (ISBN 0-8143-2087-2). LC 89-035166.

Is there a librarian even remotely concerned with education or research who does not routinely use the word *interdisciplinary*? The selection, classification, indexing, and accessing of library materials are all activities directly concerned with the organization of knowledge. Academic librarians have a ringside seat at the spectacle of shifting departmental boundaries, core curricula, interdisciplinary programs, and research institutes. Librarianship itself is referred to as an interdisciplinary field. But how often do we stop to ask ourselves what the term *interdisciplinary* really means? Is it an organizational structure, a political stance, a process, or an idea?

The label *interdisciplinary*, says Julie Thompson Klein, is rooted in ideas of unity and synthesis: "Interdisciplinarity has been described as both nostalgia for lost wholeness and a new stage in the evolution of science." Klein, a former president of the Association for Integrative Studies, attempts in this book to synthesize the growing literature on interdisciplinarity, and thus contribute to a more unified discourse on a phenomenon riddled with confusion and apparent contradiction.

She begins with a history of interdisciplinary movements from the early twentieth century to the present, and goes on to survey the origins, purposes, structures, ideologies, and practices found in today's international "interdisciplinary archipelago." A clear distinction is

made, for example, between the terms *multidisciplinarity* (an essentially additive combination of two or more disciplines, as in many team-taught courses); *interdisciplinarity* (an integration of material from various fields of knowledge into a new, coherent entity); and *transdisciplinarity* (a higher-level conceptual framework, such as systems theory, Marxism, structuralism, or behaviorism, that transcends individual disciplines).

Klein is at her best when she exposes the simultaneous struggle and interdependence between established disciplines and interdisciplinarity. The chapter "The Rhetoric of Interdisciplinarity," for instance, is a brilliant pastiche of the geopolitical imagery of departmental boundary disputes. ("Some will come to rest in the 'bureaucratic foothills of interdisciplinary cooperation' or in designated interdisciplinary programs, the 'Switzerland of academia.'") There is a perceptive chapter on borrowing between disciplines, with a candid admission of the dangers of reductionism. Also outstanding is the discussion of the activist thrust motivating ethnic, women's, and area studies and of the vicissitudes of these "studies."

Detailed chapters follow on problem-focused research (IDR), interdisciplinary health care, and interdisciplinary education (IDS). The theoretical and practical problems encountered by projects in government, industry, and academia prove to be rather similar, and practitioners in any of these settings can benefit from the experience of others. The book concludes with thoughts on "the interdisciplinary individual" and "the interdisciplinary process," fol-

lowed by a ninety-page bibliography.

As a survey and literature review, Klein's book fills a real need. A vast array of projects is described, from local history to biophysics, American Indian law, ecology, child development, archaeology, American studies, immunopharmacology, urban studies, holistic health care, and undergraduate liberal studies. The book does not, however, quite achieve its goal of synthesis. The material is very compressed; much of it remains only partially digested. Individual chapters adhere to the focus and emphasis of the existing literature on various branches of interdisciplinarity, which can range from recommendations on the best physical layout of office space for interdisciplinary teams to the structure of the universe. Nevertheless, this is a good introduction to an important subject. It answers questions we may not have had the wit to ask and challenges us with problems still unresolved.

The cumulative evidence compiled by Klein suggests a paradox at the heart of the idea of interdisciplinarity. It aims at a holistic, integrating synthesis, an alternative to the fragmenting specialization of modern knowledge. But it has consistently failed to achieve this ideal. One might even argue that, in practice, interdisciplinarity represents the deconstructive, disintegrating force of new perspectives, and that every interdisciplinary project is an ad hoc, temporary solution to a particular problem. As Klein and others openly admit, it may be that modern thought simply defies classification.—*Jean M. Alexander, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.*

Veaner, Allen B. *Academic Librarianship in a Transformational Age: Program, Politics, and Personnel.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990, 520p. \$40 (ISBN 0-8161-1866-3). LC 89-27335.

Allen Veaner's book is interesting, worthwhile, and at times exasperating. Although it is intended chiefly for "academic librarians holding or aspiring to administrative positions," Richard DeGennaro rightly observes in his brief

foreword that "anyone with a serious interest in the evolution and future of academic libraries" would profit from it.

The first chapter, "The Transformed World of Academic Librarianship," introduces the larger context. Particularly imaginative is the author's description of the traditional academic library as a "manor," a relatively self-sufficient and autonomous entity in which "on-site staff provided services almost entirely from local holdings, custom-tailoring their own bibliographic control systems." In less than a generation, Veaner finds, the academic library has shed its manorial trappings and become part of a community, transformed via "linkages to a vast . . . worldwide array of bibliographic resources and services." The academic library as one-time manor now transformed is an image at once provocative and deserving of further critical reflection.

In his second chapter, "The Academic Community as Institution and Workplace," Veaner correctly observes that "the academic workplace is highly political and strongly elitist, an island of exclusivity in an openly democratic society." But most academics, on most days at least, probably would not share his bleak views of "the viciousness of academic politics. In their relentless and egotistic competition for resources, the faculty manifest bad behavior toward each other that, although refined in execution, is no less savage than that prevailing in the outside world: extreme pettiness, backstabbing, treachery, malicious destruction of colleagues' careers, one-upmanship, and dark and mean-spirited power plays." If this was the environment with which Veaner had to cope during his twenty-six years of library experience at Harvard, Stanford, and the University of California at Santa Barbara, it is no wonder that he left the academy to establish his own consulting firm. The following chapter, "Administrative Theories, Business Paradigms, and Work," contains a number of insightful observations about the nature of library work, who and what librarians are, and the "duality of employment"