

ASPECT NEWSLETTER

Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought

An interdisciplinary Ph.D. program at Virginia Tech

Spring 2014, Issue 5

EDITOR'S WELCOME

Claudio D'Amato, first-year ASPECT student

This issue of the ASPECT Newsletter opens with a letter to our community from our Program Director, Prof Francois Debrix, summarizing the academic and cultural events that ASPECT has sponsored this past year as well as previewing the main upcoming Spring events.

You can learn more about these events from their dedicated pages in this issue, such as the annual ASPECT graduate student conference and the call for submissions for ASPECT's peer-reviewed journal SPECTRA, which will publish a special issue on Hannah Arendt this summer. ASPECT students are working hard to make these events exciting and relevant to their learning.

ASPECT students are also active in ASA—the ASPECT Student Association—and participate in a variety of disciplinary and multi-disciplinary events on and off the Virginia Tech campus, taking full advantage of their ASPECT training. To this end, this Newsletter features two brief notes by third-year Ph.D. candidate Christian Matheis on the benefits of interdisciplinary research and teaching on his (and our) scholarship.

Assembled here is also a comprehensive list of the dissertations and research areas of current ASPECT students. We take pride in our diverse interests, ranging from postcolonial theory and social justice to Appalachian studies and Chinese urbanization, taking the form of theoretical treatises, empirical studies, ethnographies, and much else.

Finally, please consider helping ASPECT continue its commitment to academic excellence by contributing to the Friends of ASPECT fund, as detailed on page 5. Thank you for your support!

IN THIS ISSUE

A note from the ASPECT program director (Dr. Francois Debrix)	2
Interdisciplinary research: climbing out on a branch (Christian Matheis)	3
ASA: The ASPECT Student Association	3
Dissertations and research of current ASPECT students	4
Friends of ASPECT Fund: Help us support ASPECT!	5
Call for submissions to SPECTRA: The ASPECT Journal	6
Interdisciplinary dissertation writing (Christian Matheis)	6
Symposium: Thinking and Writing Critically in International Relations	7
Fall 2013 kick-off event and Spring 2014 graduate conference	8

A NOTE FROM THE ASPECT PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Prof. François Debrix

Dear ASPECT students, faculty, and friends,

A year has gone by since the students produced the last issue of the ASPECT newsletter. During this past year, the ASPECT program celebrated several milestones and achievements. Two ASPECT students graduated: Lyusyena Kirakosyan (Spring 2013) and Aaron Stoller (Fall 2013). Many more ASPECT students reached doctoral candidate status and are set to graduate in the Spring of 2014. We welcomed four new students into our program: Claudio D'Amato, Jordan Laney, Melissa Schwartz, and Anthony Szczurek.



The second ASPECT Graduate Conference (March 2013) was a resounding success, with student presenters coming from outside Virginia Tech and, in some cases, from overseas. In cooperation with Core ASPECT Departments and other VT partners, ASPECT continued to organize lectures and symposia with leading scholars in a variety of fields related to the program's thematic strengths. Last but not least, during our annual Fall Kick-off Event in September 2013 we celebrated the fifth year anniversary of the launch of the ASPECT program. To mark this special occasion, ASPECT awarded its annual Outstanding Dissertation Award to Lyusyena Kirakosyan and a special Outstanding Faculty Award to six meritorious faculty affiliates: Dr. Brian Britt, Dr. Tim Luke, Dr. Marian Mollin, Dr. Joe Pitt, Dr. Max Stephenson, and Dr. Janell Watson.

2014 will be another exciting year in the life of ASPECT. This Spring we look forward to a new Working Paper series featuring presentations by colleagues at VT, new lectures and symposia (including a symposium on "Literature and Religion" to be co-hosted by the Department of Religion and Culture on April 11th), and our third ASPECT Graduate Conference that will take place on March 21-22, 2014 in the Squires Center at VT and will feature keynote presentations by Professors Sarah Sharma (UNC-Chapel Hill), Antonio Vazquez-Arroyo (Rutgers), D. E. Wittkower (Old Dominion), and Tim Luke (Virginia Tech). It is worth noting that we received over 40 paper submissions for this year's conference, from graduate students in various programs at VT and from other universities (including submissions from Germany and the United Kingdom).

On a related note, SPECTRA, the ASPECT journal, had a banner year last year, and this path-breaking journal promises to have another very successful year with two issues already in the making, including a special issue on Hannah Arendt. Another important development in Spring 2014 will be the conclusion of our current search for an Assistant Professor in Contemporary Global Ethical/Political Thought. The successful applicant will join the ranks of our Core ASPECT faculty members in August 2014. Finally, I personally look forward to the doctoral defenses and graduations that will take place in the Spring (some defenses are already scheduled), and to welcoming a new incoming class of ASPECT students in the Fall.

As always, I am honored to serve as the director of this unique, prestigious, and ambitious program. I am most grateful for the faculty's and the students' support and dedication to ASPECT. I wish you all a wonderful, productive, and enriching year during which I look forward to celebrating your (and our) program's successes.

With warmest wishes,

François Debrix
ASPECT Director

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH: Climbing out on a strong branch

Christian Matheis, ASPECT Ph.D. candidate



A few weeks ago I had a chance to spend a couple of days at the annual meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association (APA) in Baltimore, Maryland. Though I always find interesting and provocative sessions at the APA, I had a more specific motive for attending this year. As the conference opened, the Society for Women in Philosophy honored Dr. Alison Wylie as the 2013 Distinguished Woman Philosopher. Wylie's contributions to philosophy include unprecedented work to help establish the field of feminist science studies, to expand work in feminist epistemologies, and to advance feminist scholarship in philosophy, as well as in the humanities and social sciences more broadly. As a scholar truly committed to interdisciplinary work, Wylie built on feminism, archaeology,

and various social sciences to craft an entirely new theory relevant to each field, belonging solely to none.

To honor Wylie, a panel of her peers and colleagues shared their reflections on her accomplishments. As I listened, it occurred to me just how the prior interdisciplinary work of such scholars influences and sets the stage for my own research. I count myself incredibly lucky to have studied feminist epistemologies with one of the panelists, Sharyn Clough, for whom Wylie was a mentor. Clough, now an associate professor of philosophy, completed an interdisciplinary doctoral program in philosophy, psychology, and women's studies. One by one, Clough and the other panelists explained with precision and gratitude how the persistent work of Wylie and her colleagues made their own interdisciplinary research feasible.

Despite the frequent messaging that interdisciplinary research is "the future," the honoring of Wylie pointed out to me in an important way that interdisciplinary work is also the present and the past. Unless we pay attention to the achievements of predecessors for whom interdisciplinary research plays an indispensable role, we may fall prey to misleading doubt or doom and gloom about our own studies and research. As role models of an important kind, Wylie, Clough, and their peers working in feminist philosophies and feminist science studies exemplify the future of sophisticated, socially relevant, scholarly and intellectual discourse. And as progeny of ASPECT we probably do not benefit from thinking of ourselves as if out on a seedling's limb, but instead on a very strong and growing branch. When we consider specific figures like Wylie amid the scholarly communities grown out of interdisciplinary work, we find that a great deal of persistent and creative labor came before to make this all possible and, quite importantly, will help to keep us going.

ASA: THE ASPECT STUDENT ASSOCIATION

The ASPECT Student Association mediates the relations between the ASPECT student body, ASPECT faculty, and the University. We manage our funding from Virginia Tech to organize academic events on campus and to assist ASPECT students in their conference travel, national and international.

The ASA is headed by second-year ASPECT students Taulby Edmonson (President) and Sascha Engel (Vice-President) and ran by ASPECT students Richard Curtis, Claudio D'Amato, and Anthony Szczurek.

DISSERTATIONS AND RESEARCH INTERESTS OF CURRENT ASPECT PH.D. STUDENTS

Student	Dissertation (D) or research (R)
Ryan Artrip	D 19th and 20th century continental philosophy, modern political and social theory, critical theory, and ethical theory
Dana Cochran	R labor, class, and gender studies in the Appalachian coal field; social justice
Katharine Cross	R social justice & nonviolence in social movements, critical & postcolonial theory, indigenous and local knowledges, alienation & violence, engaged Buddhism & non-dualistic cosmology
Richard Curtis	R democratic engagement, public space, and sovereign power
Claudio D'Amato	R postcolonialism, development, anti-neoliberalism, global distributive justice, cultural ethics
Michele Deramo	D effects of forced migration on identity, agency, and transformation; auto/ethnography of a Somali Bantu family
Komal Dhillon	D "Fifty Shades of Black: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of Pigmentocracy in India"
Taulby Edmonson	R the contemporary impact of <i>Gone with the Wind</i> in the perpetuation of the Lost Cause in historical memory and public history
Sascha Engel	D "Sovereign Debt Revisited: The Steady Non-Static Disequilibrium of Persistent Crisis"
Joseph Forte	R popular culture, consumption, identity, and citizenship
Barbara Hassell	R labor, class and gender studies in the Appalachian coal field; social justice
Jordan Hill	D "'Memories of Citizen Slaughter': Creating Memory Sites to Mass Murder in the United States, 1986-2010"
Elizabeth Jamison	D corporate social responsibility, social justice, and immigrant labor in Alabama's poultry processing plants
Holly Jordan	D "Marriage, Family, and Security in Israel and Palestine: The Paradox of Zionist Orientalism"
Jordan Laney	R American cultural history, musical/sonic identities, music as memory, the agency of voice, constructions of home, feminist theory and Appalachian Studies
Jennifer Lawrence	R social justice, critical theory, and the environment
Christian Matheis	D "What do we make of one another? A Theory of Relations for Fostering Liberatory Solidarity"
Kent Morris	D US national security policies and American ontology
Pamela Mullins	R history of Africana art
Francine Rossone de Paula	R temporality in Brazilian development discourses, critical development, decolonial studies, int'l relations and political economy, global inequality and hierarchization of difference
Martin Saavedra	R institutional and social memory, cultural theory, public/private space, political protests, identity issues and critiques of capitalism
Nina Salmon	D the racial integration of the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia and the unintended consequences of Bishop William Marmion's push for desegregation
Jamie Sanchez	R urbanization in China, marginalized minorities and state power, ethnic identity

DISSERTATIONS AND RESEARCH INTERESTS OF CURRENT ASPECT PH.D. STUDENTS *(cont'd)*

Student	Dissertation (D) or research area (R)
Melissa Schwartz	R philosophy of creativity, arts, and science; environmental philosophy, ethics, justice; arts and activism; feminism and ecofeminism; comparative philosophy and literature; phenomenology
Anthony Szczurek	R democracy studies, international political theory, postcolonial theory
Tyler Suggs	R political and social applications of virtue ethics in a contemporary setting
Marc Thomas	R democracy, race theory, power, identity, ethnicity
Alfonso Vergaray	R history of political philosophy, liberalism & its critics, American political thought, religion & politics, Latin American political thought, risk & uncertainty studies, theories of democracy
Dana Volk	R racial and social passing
Drew Wallace	R new paradigm in marketing through social media technologies
Julie Walters Steele	R women in the labor force; American Indian governance
Scott Westfall	R synchronous failure, propaganda, energy security, food and water security, environmental degradation, destabilization, global warming/climate change, privatization, dissent, classism and class dynamics, consumerism

FRIENDS OF ASPECT FUND

Help us support ASPECT!

Please consider making a gift to the Friends of ASPECT fund! The fund supports many initiatives that are crucial to the ASPECT doctoral program at Virginia Tech and to ASPECT students' professional and academic success, including: conference travel, small grants for students, summer dissertation research funding, student support for field research, the annual ASPECT graduate student conference, and other ASPECT lectures and symposia.

The Friends of ASPECT fund also contributes to the annual ASPECT Outstanding Dissertation Award, which recognizes the best completed ASPECT dissertation from the previous academic year. So far, ASPECT has recognized the following awardees: Michael Butera (2010), Juan Carlos Sierra (2011), Scott Tate (2012), Robert Kirsch (2012), and Lyusyena Kirakosyan (2013).

For more information about giving to ASPECT, please contact us by phone, e-mail, or letter:

ASPECT
202 Major Williams Hall (0192)
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24060
Email: aspect@vt.edu
Tel: 540.231.0698



SPECTRA: THE ASPECT JOURNAL

Social, Political, Ethical, & Cultural Theory Archives (SPECTRA) is a student-led online scholarly journal established as part of the ASPECT (Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought) program at Virginia Tech. The journal features inter-disciplinary work and is designed to provide an academic forum for students to show-case their research, explore controversial topics, and take intellectual risks. We welcome submissions of refereed articles, book reviews, essays, interviews, and other works within theory-driven, problem-centered frameworks.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Special Issue 3.1s, Spring 2014

Deadline: Monday, March 15

For more information about which kinds of submissions we are looking for, along with detailed submission guidelines, please visit us online at the SPECTRA website:

spectrajournal.org/cfs

Hannah Arendt: Fifty Years after *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* stirred controversy when originally published in 1963. The recent biographical film *Hannah Arendt* (2013) attempts to portray her efforts to chronicle the trial of Nazi administrator Adolf Eichmann and to theorize the legal prosecution of crimes never before tried in a court of law. Now, fifty years after the trial in Jerusalem and the publication of Arendt's analysis, we aim to further the conversation in a special issue of our journal.

WRITING A BOOK OF SPELLS? MAKE A LIST OF YOUR MAGIC TRICKS!

*Dissertation writing advice
by Christian Matheis, ASPECT Ph.D. candidate*

Prepare for the cliché: it takes a village to raise a doctoral dissertation. Many advisors, mentors, and peers have shared their advice in helping me devise strategies for developing a dissertation. Below, I have summarized some of the key advice that I put into practice (or at least try to!):

- **Build.** One does not “write a dissertation”: one builds it using the necessary parts. Constructing it out of parts allows you to assemble, disassemble, and reassemble when necessary.
- **Sort.** Some things you once thought you would need, you leave out. Some things you left out, you may find a need to include. Try to unlearn the anxiety associated with this kind of sorting. It may feel odd to remove some paragraphs you have built with your labor, but only if you think of them as wasted as one might “waste” a commodity. Removing and replacing certain parts happens as part of the laborious process, and the parts you remove help make the parts you keep.
- **Limit.** Set a short page limit (e.g. 20-25 pages) for each chapter/section and plan to write drafts within that limit. This takes the project from “giant nebulous thing” to “workable parts.” Once you decide to make short initial drafts, you may find it easier to both conceptualize the project and to actually do the work.

(continues on the next page)

("Dissertation writing" by Christian Matheis – continued from page 6)

- **Mimic.** Gather up a few well-written essays by accomplished scholars and mimic how they do what they do. Take some of their particularly poignant sentences and paragraphs and put your concepts, terms, thesis, etc. into the same structure. No, mimicking a rhetorical strategy does not count as plagiarism (but mimicking content does!). Creative writers use this approach in order to understand how an author writes, specifically to understand by application in ways that reading does not elucidate.
- **Voice.** Read each paragraph out loud after you finish it. If it sounds confusing when spoken out loud, revise it before moving on to the next paragraph.
- **Refine.** While working on a chapter, pause from time to time at each sub-section and ask whether you can put the current sub-topic into a single sentence. If you can, great! Take that sentence and put it at the start of that sub-section as an invitation for readers to follow along. If you cannot provide these signposts, you invite readers to get lost.
- **Apply.** Transition how you think about yourself from a “student who studied” to a “scholar who researches.” This helps you to replace the book-report style of telling about what you read with applying your scholarly resources. Remember, hiring committees who will review your work want to recruit a faculty colleague—not another doctoral student. The sooner you develop a sense of your work as that of a researcher, the more likely you will forgo telling that you have knowledge and instead work to apply that knowledge. This changes the efficiency, tone, and sophistication of the writing.

Whether or not this works for you, I think it helps to list and articulate the strategies and practices that do the trick. Some people I know actually post their lists in their workspace, make it their desktop backgrounds, or carry hardcopies with them like a scholarly totem for occasional consultation. At the times when you worry you might go a bit off the rails, these can help you get back on track (or melt the tracks down and build another means of conveyance, as the case may be for some).

Symposium: “Thinking and Writing Critically in International Relations”

On Thursday, October 17, 2013, ASPECT was proud to host an interdisciplinary discussion panel featuring scholars from multiple fields and institutions. Moderated by ASPECT director Dr. Francois Debrix, it featured:

Dr. **Priya Dixit** (VT)
 Dr. **Harry Gould** (FIU)
 Dr. **Scott Nelson** (VT)
 Dr. **Brent Steele** (Utah)
 Dr. **Edward Weisband** (VT)



Pictures from the Fall 2013 ASPECT Kick-off Event

During the annual Fall Kick-off Event in September 2013 we celebrated the fifth year anniversary of the ASPECT program. To mark this special occasion, ASPECT awarded its annual Outstanding Dissertation Award to Lyusyena Kirakosyan and a special Outstanding Faculty Award to six meritorious faculty affiliates: Dr. Brian Britt, Dr. Tim Luke, Dr. Marian Mollin, Dr. Joe Pitt, Dr. Max Stephenson, and Dr. Janell Watson.



THE 2014 ASPECT GRADUATE CONFERENCE

Critical Ecologies: Digital Habitats, Material Governance, and Global Inequalities

March 21-22, 2014 – Squires Student Center – Virginia Tech

Plenary sessions

Actually Existing Sustainabilization: Developing, Designing, and Deploying Global Inequalities

*Timothy W. Luke,
Virginia Tech*

The Inhabitants of Time

*Sarah Sharma,
UNC Chapel Hill*

Unseen Catastrophes; or Catastrophes as Non-Events

*Antonio Vazquez-Arroyo,
Rutgers-Newark*

On the Political Value of Hanging Out on Facebook

*D. E. Wittkower,
Old Dominion*

Panel sessions

Materiality and the Global Political Economy
Cultural Displacements and Transnational Governance
Geopolitics from the Colonial to the Contemporary
Local Ecologies of Place, Memory and Media
Digital Habitats and Networked Society
Global Inequalities and Ethics of Identity
Security, Public Knowledge and Political Ontology
The Ethics and Aesthetics of Violence and Disaster

The full conference program, including all times, locations, and speakers, is on the ASPECT website ([click here to see it](#))