Conversations with Pragmatism: A Multidisciplinary Approach bills itself as breaking new ground, in presenting work that extends the insights of pragmatism to disciplines outside its home in philosophy. John Shook claims in the "Editorial Foreword" that: "Some intrepid inquirers, each having discerned something of value in the pragmatic method, have been brought together here for an omnilogue of creative conversations that exemplify the model of creativity gestured at by the term 'interdisciplinary'" (p. vii). This promise isn't fulfilled to the degree one might hope, yet there is much of value here. Regarding the set of scholars and the variety of their backgrounds represented, Shook says, "[d]enyng ourselves this abundance of experience, whether in exchange for a firm sense of identity or for the presumption to have attained ultimate and unchanging truth, is, from a pragmatist perspective, unfortunate" (p.xiii). That is a sentiment heartily to be agreed with.

The essays in this collection find their origin in a 1994 NEH seminar on the topic "Pragmatism and Cultural Criticism." The preface introduces the themes, prevalent throughout, of methodological and disciplinary eclecticism and a corresponding anti-foundationalism. As well, the preface joins the introduction in framing "conversation" as the suggested performative mode of this work.

Contradicting the claimed wide interdisciplinarity of this collection, the majority of the essays deal with one connection in particular: that between pragmatism on the one hand, and literary theory and communication on the other. These would include: Peter Caulfield’s "A Room in the Pragmatic Hotel: William James, Language, and Epistemology," where he investigates the relationship between rhetoric and epistemology and the implications of this relationship for pedagogy; Susan Ross’ "Women’s Rhetorical Style as an Alternative Vision of Democracy," which finds a bridge between pragmatism and feminism that runs through conceptions of democratic discourses; Richard Carson’s "’A Matter for Whispered Communications’: The Bostonians, Pragmatism, and The Culture of Uncertainty," which explores the pragmatism of Henry James; and Luis E Wong’s "The Ethics of Dissensus: Literary Criticism in the Age of Relativism," where the author hopes to use pragmatism to rescue the socio-critical aspect of literary analysis from a
thoroughgoing hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur 1977, etc.) In
these considerations of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke is a continual
referent. Though he is seldom included with pragmatism’s top
names such as Pierce, James, Mead, and Dewey, his continual
presence in this volume suggests perhaps he should be.

Perhaps, though, it isn’t surprising that these authors
spend so much time talking about communication, since it is the
very form of communication they are setting forth that
constitutes a pragmatic approach to inquiry. Burke (1941, 1945,
1955, etc.), the authors and editors imply by their emphasis on
his work, provides a theory of pragmatic communication. As
such, Burke’s work competes with, for instance, the work of
Habermas (1984) and Apel (1988, etc.) in ways unacknowledged in
this volume. Jeffrey Geller’s “The Thickness Unto Death: 
Kenneth Burke on the Mortification of Thought” draws upon
Burke’s work but connects it to concerns of theology,
specifically an understanding of fundamentalism and its
failings.

Zdenka Kalnicka’s “Is the Problem of Interpretation
Illegitimate for Pragmatism?” usefully connects pragmatism to
Continental philosophy’s framing of questions in terms of texts
and interpretations. She rejects Rorty’s neopragmatism: “he
denies any differentiation between interpretation (including
language) and reality” so “the usage of the term
‘interpretation’ is quite inadequate because there is nothing to
be interpreted” (76). Instead she calls upon the “classical”
pragmatists, saying that “pragmatism from its beginning was
directly and primarily concerned with the development of a
special kind of interpretation—interpretation of a notion’s
meaning by tracing its practical consequences” (77). Her
elaboration of the debates about interpretation between
followers of classical and of neo-pragmatism indicates fruitful
directions for future developments.

A couple of the essays stay within the range of the
discipline of philosophy. Ari Santas’s “Some Consequences of
Mead’s Institutional Theory of the Self” is quite compelling in
that, while engaging in an understanding of Mead’s work, he
finds insight on a topic generally reserved for empirical social
scientists, that of “troubled youth” (110-112, 116-117). In
doing so, he seriously troubles our conventional notions of
responsibility from a significantly different perspective than
Foucault’s (1995). Bube’s “Twin Children of Different Mothers:
The Theologies of Gordon D. Kaufmann and John B. Cobb, Jr.”
strives to understanding the possibility of theology without
metaphysics, sure a pragmatist task. However, Bube runs the
danger of eliding pragmatism and process thought, rather than
explicitly acknowledging their similarities and differences.

It would be easy, in addressing a work with the title
*Conversations with Pragmatism*, to compile a long list of omitted
conversational partners. In this case, however, there are some
glaring omissions: education, political theory, and the
philosophy and practice of the sciences in particular.
Furthermore, this volume does not address a growing convergence
between pragmatists and social theory in the Frankfurt School
tradition on many of the issues the authors discuss.
Fortunately, one can turn to individual volumes on each of these
connections which, taken together with this work, form a small,
essential, interdisciplinary pragmatism library.

Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: MIT
Press.
Burke, K. (1941). *The philosophy of literary form: studies in
symbolic action*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University
Press.
Boston: Beacon.

Brian Burt

Phyllis Chiasson, *Peirce’s Pragmatism: The Design for Thinking*
Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2001.

*Peirce’s Pragmatism* is written in that old and venerable
style that goes back most famously to Plato: the dialogue. The
locale of the current dialogue isn’t the prison or the bath
house, nor is it a peaceful eighteenth-century garden. It is a
loud Italian restaurant quickly departed and a home office daily
revisited. The characters are taken from real life. They are the
author herself and her husband Hal Leskinen. The book purports