



Chapter Eight

The Ethico-politics of  
Dedisciplinary Practices

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An ethical and political problem for those in the academy becomes visible when we consider the long-term social effects of postsecondary institutions of learning. Many have argued from different perspectives that the social effects of the academy are to preserve and even exacerbate social hierarchies and inequalities (Althusser; Apple; Bourdieu; Foucault, *Order*; Messer-Davidow in this volume). If we support the honorable virtues of equality and justice, then how might we respond to the apparent complicity for those of us in the academy with these antiegalitarian hierarchies?

To develop academic practices that refuse this complicity, I draw on Michel Foucault's analysis of the academy as a site for instilling docility and ease of governability (Foucault, *Discipline* 30, 159, 181–83, 199–201, 215, 299; Foucault, *Order*; Burchell). In exploring approaches to social justice that refuse determination by the disciplinary apparatuses of the modern academy, I develop briefly an analysis of three approaches to what, following Foucault, we might call dedisciplinary academic practices, as discussed shortly. The first is based on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, whose critique of modern knowledge practices has been influential in a wide range of disciplinary (philosophy, literature, history, art history) and interdisciplinary fields (postcolonial studies, feminism, queer studies) in its reconsideration of the importance of modern conceptions of power. The second approach examines Joan W. Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* as a major extension of Foucault's historical work on the topic of gender, focusing on ways in which Scott's interdisciplinary work has been appropriated back under the modern power/knowledge regime. The



1 final approach I examine is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's interdisciplinary  
2 reconstruction of comparative literature in her 2003 volume *The Death of*  
3 *a Discipline*. Spivak's comparativist practice of interdisciplinarity links a  
4 language-centered deconstructivist analysis to social justice concerns shaped  
5 by feminism and Marxism and centers on reconstituting the relation of the  
6 writing and teaching self with her Others. Taking these three approaches  
7 as sources of critique of dedisciplinary practice suggests specific ways to  
8 approach interdisciplinary work that critically engage with complicities of  
9 the academy with inequality and injustice.

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12 Dedisciplinarity within a Foucauldian Critique  
13 of Interdisciplinarity  
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15 A Foucauldian view of disciplines finds them to be mechanisms for objec-  
16 tification and subjection, a way to "analyse space, break up and rearrange  
17 activities" of the body that subjects them to an hierarchical economy of  
18 subjection interrupting horizontal solidarities and constituting the body as  
19 both subject visible for regulation and productive social participant (*Dis-*  
20 *cipline* 157, 172, 178–81, 187). Foucault argued that the establishment of  
21 these disciplines installed the bourgeoisie as the politically dominant class  
22 in eighteenth-century France through the double-edged combination of a  
23 formally egalitarian juridical framework of the representative parliamentary  
24 regime (guaranteeing rights and freedoms and the authority of all) that also  
25 guaranteed the docile submission of bodies to diffused modern formations  
26 of power/knowledge (26–27, 222). The double sense of the term "discipline"  
27 as both an academic field and a larger social mechanism instilling docility  
28 and limits to power/knowledge that many have noted (Gore; Hoskin and  
29 Macve 107; Kondo 25–27; Messer-Davidow et al.; Shumway and Messer-  
30 Davidow 201–22, 211–12) provides a frame for rethinking the relation  
31 between interdisciplinarity and social justice.

32 From this perspective, the social effects of incremental changes in the  
33 academy resulting from the emergence of interdisciplinary fields may be  
34 usefully compared with the effects of reforms in the penal system, another  
35 major site of the modern disciplinary regime. Foucault noted that persistent  
36 critics of the modern penal system argue that the penal apparatus consis-  
37 tently fails to reduce legal offenses through repression, yet the criticisms are  
38 consistently accompanied not by the abolition but by the maintenance of  
39 the penal system through reform programs. Foucault concluded that what

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is served by this failure is that the prison and punishment more generally 1  
are “not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to 2  
distribute them, to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile 3  
those who are liable to transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate 4  
the transgression in a general tactics of subjection” (272). Foucault made 5  
similar comments in his later work on the failure of social attempts to 6  
eliminate child sexuality, in which “[t]he child’s ‘vice’ was not so much an 7  
enemy as a support [ . . . ] to proliferate to the limits of the visible and the 8  
invisible . . . power advanced, multiplied its relays and its effects . . . pene- 9  
trating further into reality. . . .” (*Sexuality* 42). By examining some specific 10  
power effects of this distributional economy of subjection and differentiation, 11  
a Foucauldian perspective suggests that the emergence of interdisciplinary 12  
fields as part of such a reform movement would not be sufficient to change 13  
the power effects of the modern academy. According to this perspective, if 14  
it wishes to be something other than part of a general tactics of subjection 15  
that advances modern power/knowledge relations, interdisciplinarity must 16  
instead become something substantively different from a modernist reform 17  
of the objects of knowledge, tools and methods, protocols and theoretical 18  
foundations of the modern academy. 19

Foucault’s analysis of discipline suggests why this is so. Through the 20  
disciplinary generation of visible, intelligible objects of power/knowledge, 21  
such as the delinquent, Foucault finds the prison system to have succeeded 22  
in naming and placing in full visibility a form of illegality that has multiple 23  
important social effects. The first social effect is the generation and regula- 24  
tion of a grid of intelligibility based on differences between delinquency 25  
(through courts, police, prisons) and social norms (through schools, work- 26  
places, heteronormative families). By rendering visible a specific type of 27  
illegality, the general economy of subjection isolates it as a limited object of 28  
regulation, thereby rendering it less politically and economically dangerous to 29  
the structure of power than are the widespread forms of popular illegalities 30  
(refusal of taxation and conscription; popularly forced sales of products at 31  
“fair” prices; confrontations with political authorities; prohibited coalitions 32  
and associations) that characterized the frequent upheavals of France in the 33  
mid- to late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (*Discipline* 273–77). 34  
Isolated from popular illegalities, delinquency becomes an agent for the 35  
illegalities of dominant groups (277, 279, 282ff.), so that people are no 36  
longer fighting the authorities but instead are fighting the law itself (274). 37  
Thus popular illegalities are constricted through the disciplinary regime 38  
as delinquents in their prisons are divided from students in school and 39  
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1 from productive youth in the workplace, interrupting potential horizontal  
2 solidarities and delimiting the population that is willing to join in illegal or  
3 illicit behaviors, however popular.<sup>1</sup> The tactics dividing delinquents from  
4 the poor include the moralization that, according to Foucault, serves the  
5 profit and power of the bourgeoisie: the rules of property, thrift, docility  
6 at work, stability of residence, the heteronormative family, and so forth  
7 (278–86). The intelligibility of objects of power/knowledge in this way  
8 divides modern society into a hierarchically differentiated field of compul-  
9 sory objectifications limiting illegalities, supporting norms, and disrupting  
10 horizontal solidarities in support of modern forms of moralization that are  
11 still widely practiced in the modern academy.

12 A second social effect is seen in the docility and productivity of the  
13 bodies of those subjects successfully subjected to the apparatuses of the  
14 normative institutions. The effectiveness of this subjection may be seen  
15 when comparing those bodies in such normative sites as schools, families,  
16 the military, and the workplace with those bodies subjected to the appa-  
17 ratuses of institutions contrasted with the normative, such as asylums and  
18 prisons. The docility is produced on a day-to-day basis through the repeated  
19 enforcement of what Foucault termed a “micro-physics of power” (26)  
20 administered through the pervasive apparatuses and mechanisms at work  
21 consistently across the multiple institutions that make up the disciplinary  
22 regime. These apparatuses make up a “micro-economy of perpetual penalty”  
23 (181) in the academy, where Foucault emphasized the hierarchizing effects of  
24 examinations and the fields of surveillance constituted in academic settings,  
25 just as they are at work in such sites as the medical clinic, the conjugal  
26 household and the orphanage, the factory and the military barracks, the  
27 asylum as well as the prison.

28 A third social effect is seen in the separation out, isolation of, and  
29 rendering visible of a small, isolated, and thus useful illegality as only one  
30 part of a general economy of illegalities, some of which are deemed illegal  
31 and subjected to surveillance and some of which are not. This rendering  
32 intelligible selected parts of the general economy of illegalities that defines  
33 the modern limits of tolerance for some illegalities, “of giving free rein to  
34 some, of putting pressure on others, of excluding a particular section, of  
35 making another useful, of neutralizing certain individuals and of profiting  
36 from others,” results in the distribution of illegalities into a general economy  
37 or tactics of disciplinary subjection (272). The tolerated illegalities are those  
38 actually practiced by the bourgeoisie, of which Foucault mentions police  
39 surveillance, secret infiltrators, and sociologists who use police data (280–85)  
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while also discussing nineteenth-century workers' newspapers' emphasis on thefts on the stock exchange or starvation and murder by exploitation (287–88). These illegalities are not subjected to surveillance and the carceral, instead continuing apace or expanding under a power/knowledge regime colonized by the dominant illegality. Under this regime of truth, the knowledges of subjugated groups, most obviously prisoners but also other groups, are also obscured, as they are overshadowed by the internal and other forms of surveillance given to the objects of knowledge rendered visible by modern forms of power/knowledge.

Foucault's analysis highlights how modern constitutions of intelligibility render visible only a limited range of objects of knowledge while simultaneously rendering invisible the domination at work in the modern power/knowledge regime. The consequent grid of intelligibility produces "a whole horizon of possible knowledge" (277) that produces specific aporias for modern knowledge and obscures subjugated knowledges and the power effects of knowledge (disruptions of horizontal solidarities, internalized surveillance, bodily docilities and productivities). It was the naming and betrayal of the erasure of these power effects that was behind Foucault's development of the term "power/knowledge" (27, 187–88). In sum, a Foucauldian perspective on the social effects of the academy centers on complicity with (or refusal of) social divisions that disrupt horizontal solidarities (between delinquents and the poor or visible and obscured groups), with the erasure of subjugated knowledges ("Two Lectures" 84) and tolerated illegalities (such as police brutalities, the drug trade and prostitution, or murder by exploitation), with modern moralizations (virtues of private property ownership, bodily docility, heteronormative family stability), and with the rendering docile of bodies in the modern economy of subjection.

Some have argued that interdisciplinary work, particularly in fields deriving from social justice movements, may be able to counter the disciplinary effects of the apparatuses consolidating and enforcing established twentieth-century academic fields (Blacker; Gore; Shumway and Messer-Davidow 213–18). Yet interdisciplinary fields linked to social justice through the social movements from which they have emerged have struggled with the pressures toward subjection within the modern disciplinary regime. They find that the apparatuses of the disciplinary regime persistently bring them back into the episteme and the complicit ethico-politics of modern academic practices through the multiple mechanisms of the academic publication industry, the hierarchizing classroom, hiring practices dependent on disciplinary graduate training, and other sites for the subjection of modern subjects to

1 the power/knowledge regime of which Foucault was so critical. Resistance  
2 to and critique of the double sense of disciplinary tendencies resulting from  
3 this pressure are found scattered through the academic literature, but the  
4 news from these fields is not encouraging in women's studies (Allen and  
5 Kitch; Blee; Coates, Dodds, and Jensen; Messer-Davidow), Asian American  
6 studies (Nakatsu 8–9; Liu; Wong), and other interdisciplinary fields. From  
7 a Foucauldian critique, these forms of interdisciplinarity may carry out  
8 their business, expanding slowly, certainly, but still hopefully toward the  
9 promised rights and forever deferred equality of modernity, but they do so  
10 with the burden of legitimation and complicity with the brutal effects of  
11 the microeconomy of perpetual penalty and with the everyday illegalities  
12 and moralizations of normative social groups.

13 Foucault identified social practices that successfully refused these  
14 disciplinary apparatuses in considering how philosophers and historians  
15 might respond to power/knowledge not as an interdisciplinary encounter  
16 but as the “common labor of people seeking to ‘de-discipline’ them selves”  
17 (“Poussière” 39; qtd. Goldstein 3). Foucault develops his notion of dedisci-  
18 plining in an essay presented for the same events as those just quoted, in  
19 which he emphasized his own search for knowledge centered on “the will  
20 to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of  
21 dividing up true and false” (“Method” 82). In this sense, the ethico-politics  
22 of dedisciplining are found not only in the politics of constituting the truth  
23 and falsehood of the object of knowledge but simultaneously in the ethics  
24 and politics of the constitution of the self. Comparable perspectives may  
25 be found in Foucault's earlier work, in which, for example, he evaluated  
26 scientific knowledge produced as “a new object, calling for new conceptual  
27 tools, and for fresh theoretical foundations . . . a true monster, so much so  
28 that [modern knowledge] could not even properly speak of [it] . . . [unlike  
29 someone] committing no more than a disciplined error” (*Archaeology* 224).  
30 Although some have used this characterization as a description of Derrida  
31 and other post-structuralists, in considering interdisciplinarity, we may take  
32 it as a constructive program for more than disciplined errors: for social  
33 justice work that rejects the modern power/knowledge grid in order to  
34 produce the monstrosities of new objects of knowledge with new tools on  
35 fresh foundations.

36 I now turn to brief evaluations of attempts at articulating social justice  
37 and interdisciplinary academic work by three authors, Foucault, Scott, and  
38 Spivak, in terms of the practice of dedisciplinarity, that is, the pursuit of new  
39 ways of governing the self and others through the refusal to be determined  
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by disciplinary mechanisms and modern apparatuses that divide true from false. I will take up this question in terms of Foucault's own subjection to modern disciplinary apparatuses at four sites: three defined by specific regulatory sites that modern academics inhabit (publication, classroom teaching, and the individualized body); and one defined by mechanisms managing the relation between different sites. This last mechanism is the most important in a Foucauldian analysis and is perhaps the best obscured and most difficult to render visible in the modern power/knowledge regime, as it deals with the overall operation of the general economy of subjection and the overall distributional economy of the body discussed above. My discussions of Scott and Spivak will return to these different sites where relevant and where material is available in order to examine critically each approach to draw conclusions about the limits and strengths of a dedisciplinary approach to interdisciplinarity and social justice.

#### Limits to Foucault's Dedisciplinary Practices

Michel Foucault's work may be considered interdisciplinary in a number of ways not limited to the intersection of philosophy and history, including critiques of the natural sciences and of the academy more generally (*Order*; "Polemics" 386–88). Whereas *The Order of Things* became a major statement for growing non-Marxist left concerns with social justice, Foucault engaged with social justice concerns from 1966 to 1968 while teaching in Tunis and particularly from 1971 in many social justice issues: antiracism; immigration; opposition to U.S. interventions in Vietnam and the Gulf area; public awareness of prisoner views on society; gay liberation; labor issues in Poland; the health effects of toxic pollution; profit margins in the pharmaceutical industry; the limited range of political perspectives in the French mass media; and more generally with the role of the intellectual in society (Macey 257–323ff.). This political work is not seen directly in his academic teaching and publication, however, but came to public attention through other forms of writing.

In Foucault's engagement with the apparatuses of modern discipline through academic publication, his use of philosophical critique in writing history returned the protocols of twentieth-century history writing to its roots in European historiography before it became subject to modern European natural scientific truth claims. The enlightenment writings of Edward Gibbon, Hegelian historians, and the historical philosophy of

1 Nietzsche were characterized by an infusion of history with philosophy and  
2 morality. Foucault's histories did not escape conventions of earlier European  
3 historical writing, including an emphasis on white males and the archive,  
4 but it breaks with the discipline in refusing to affirm the social order of  
5 the historians' own day as a telos of history. In dystopic characterizations  
6 of the modern, Foucault's work joins other critiques of modern claims to  
7 a politically neutral, scientific objectivity that happens to ratify the social  
8 practices and humanist beliefs of modern Euro-American domestic and  
9 transnational social order (Feierman; Spivak, "Race" 38; Hartman 6).<sup>2</sup> The  
10 power effects of history written as refusal of modern Eurocentric narra-  
11 tives is key in a dedisciplinary approach to social justice practices in the  
12 academy, for it shifts the focus of agency away from institutions supporting  
13 established social norms and toward ways to refuse subjection, domination,  
14 and objectification.

15 There are several clearly identifiable gaps in Foucault's relation to  
16 social justice concerns for which he was criticized, the best-known being  
17 his exclusive focus on French history, a persistent failure of interest in  
18 gender and race difference with implications for colonialism and imperia-  
19 lism, and his unwillingness to work at the forefront of the gay and lesbian  
20 movement. Foucault's emphasis on France reifies and subtends the claim of  
21 nation-states to a totalizing sense of identity for its citizens, so that his work  
22 toward a refusal of legitimating the state did not prevent him from falling  
23 into a subjection to the state in this way. Foucault also was charged with a  
24 certain racism during his lifetime for his focus exclusively on a seemingly  
25 whites-only France, criticisms answered in part with closer attention to his  
26 lectures (Stoler) and the publication of some of his lectures (*Society*). His  
27 work has also been extended to incorporate important studies of coloniza-  
28 tion, as in the writings of Edward Said and Ann Laura Stoler, and to the  
29 topic of gender by many, to which we return below.

30 When we turn to evaluating Foucault's dedisciplinary practices in  
31 the classroom, however, we see less success at refusal of the apparatuses  
32 of the academy. Foucault persuasively critiques the traditional classroom  
33 mechanisms of the examination, of grading differentials, and of bodily  
34 docility (*Discipline* 170–94), yet inside the lecture hall and seminar room  
35 Foucault's engagement with the apparatuses of modern technologies of  
36 the body seems to have closely followed social norms with the exception  
37 perhaps of his participation in specific, localized disturbances while he was  
38 teaching at Vincennes.

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A third site for evaluating Foucault's dedisciplinary work, questioning the degree of subjection of the body to modern discipline, is not one that is part of the traditional academic evaluation process. His subjection to the general economy of the body is seen in his stable residence with a lifetime partner in the fixed home that modernity demands, in commuting bodily from residence to places of stable employment adored by modernity, and in the docility of remaining quietly seated while reading his archival documents. There were a few exceptions, such as his teaching in North Africa and his travels to Iran while researching a series of journalistic reports (Macey 406–10) and to Japan, where he experienced Buddhist meditation at Koryu-ji temple in Kyoto (Macey 401–14). None of these exceeds the bodily economy of modernity significantly, however, just as leaving the archive or the university campus does not guarantee any release from modern disciplinary regulation.

There are three significant ways in which Foucault refused the modern docility of the body that require brief comment. The most direct example is his well-known rejection of the heterosexual activities of the body and his historical research into the uses of pleasure and the cultivation of the self that resists subjection (Macey 446–49, 468–70). From biographical records, some have surmised that Foucault was also experimenting with anonymity and the body later in life, and in this way he was not only refusing the sexual monogamy demanded by the record-keeping machinations of the modern state and morality but may also have been exploring the limits of bodily responses (Macey 425–27). A second is his refusal of the bodily role as parent and head of the heteronormative household, which must be understood in terms of his study of the family in collaboration with the historian Arlette Farge (Macey 450–54). Finally, his willingness to enter jail not only as a researcher but also as an incarcerated person also shows how he underwent subjection to the modern state apparatus of the penal system in ways that have been very important in numerous modern social movements.

The final place of subjection to disciplinary apparatuses and their participation in general economies of subjection is less easy to identify but very fruitful for the present purposes: his entanglement with mechanisms working to manage the distribution of bodies between sites, what was termed above the distributional economy of subjection and differentiation. Through his Prison Information Project and his writing on the history of sexuality, Foucault worked to bring the experiences and knowledge of two groups

1 who were excluded from public purview in normalized society (Macey  
2 268–69). By rendering these subjects into visibility, Foucault built bridges  
3 across social divisions that modern disciplinary mechanisms worked to gener-  
4 ate and enforce, facilitating horizontal solidarities that modern disciplinary  
5 effects work to disrupt. Interventions in modern distributional economies  
6 of visibility and legibility of this sort are among the most suggestive and  
7 effective for social justice and organizing concerns from a dedisciplinary  
8 Foucauldian perspective.

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11                   Joan Wallach Scott's Dedisciplinary Practices  
12                   and Their Limits  
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14 Joan Wallach Scott of *Gender and the Politics of History* is operating in a  
15 Foucauldian vein at the intersection of an academic discipline, history, and  
16 an interdisciplinary field, women's studies or feminism. By constituting  
17 her work and the governance of herself and others in terms of a single  
18 academic discipline, she is subjected to comparatively strong pressures to  
19 subject herself to the disciplinary protocols of history. Despite these pressures,  
20 Scott carries out a series of skirmishes in which she attempts to change the  
21 subjects of history from the past contents to histories critically aware of the  
22 present-day power effects of the historian's construction of the past (7–8).  
23 In this refusal of the protocols of the discipline of history, Scott works to  
24 render visible the contested processes by which categories such as gender  
25 come to regulate societies, thereby destabilizing a truth regime anchored in  
26 the biology of gender difference in order to carry out political interventions  
27 (xi, xiii). Scott gives considerable attention to the academic discipline of  
28 history, working to make its limits and its politics visible for investigation  
29 rather than accepting them as uninterrogated determinants for work (8). In  
30 this way, Scott articulates her academic work with social justice concerns  
31 almost exclusively through feminism and the women's movement, focusing  
32 on gender and particularly on the workplace.

33         An evaluation of Scott's dedisciplining practices centered on the site  
34 of academic publication finds that she rejects the normative exclusion of the  
35 working women in historians' narratives of the early history of capitalism  
36 in France, England, and elsewhere, instead clearly indicating the subtle  
37 ways in which men's work as well is gendered (75, 89). By succeeding in  
38 institutional terms in this struggle, such as through her appointment at  
39 the Princeton Center for Advanced Studies and prolific publication with  
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prestigious university presses, Scott has not only been successful in changing the discipline of history but also in furthering gender studies beyond the frame of French history.

An inquiry into the status of race in Scott's constitution of objects of knowledge, as in Foucault's work, unearths several aporias in Scott's dedisciplining practices. In *Gender and the Politics of History* and more recent publications (*Parité; Only Paradoxes*), she follows Foucault in limiting the object of knowledge to the territorial boundaries of the modern French nation-state, and some modes of subjection to the modern racialized truth regime occur, as was the case in the previously discussed work of Foucault. For example, Scott writes in *Gender and the Politics of History* about France in the 1830s to 1850s, yet she overlooks entirely the consolidation of modern racial categories in these same decades following on the Haitian Revolution threatening French claims to democracy and universal egalitarianism (Dubois).<sup>3</sup> France also carried out a racialized overseas expansion during these decades in Algeria in the 1830s, established naval bases to suppress the slave trade in Gabon in 1839 and in Tahiti in 1843, and pursued treaty ports in China in the 1840s and 1850s, in New Caledonia in 1853, and in Saigon in 1859. This history of antislavery struggles, colonial expansion, and emerging race-based categories for differentiating and legitimating social hierarchies not only reconstitutes the colonized populations, but also consolidates new modes of power for the dominant racial group, including the women and men whom Scott studies (Cherniavsky; Spivak, "Race"; Young). In her more recent work in which she considers the topic of race explicitly, she emphasizes public opinion and government policy and overlooks how the body might be constituted by racialized groups as modes of resistance and agency (*Veil*, 42–89). In a study of the veil prohibition controversies in *The Politics of the Veil*, the body is almost completely erased, as if there were only veils to lift and to outlaw without a gendered and racialized body for them to cover. In this way, Scott subjects herself and her others to modern, racialized inequalities and constructions of the body as historically constituted through practices of imperialism and colonization.

The legitimacy of universalist claims implicit in modern forms of political sovereignty is precisely what Foucault's notion of dedisciplinary practice encourages us to critique. The unthinking subjection by the writing subject to the implicit, naturalized claim of the workers Scott examines to be French citizens is destabilized and interrogated when the horizon of analysis is opened up to question the limits of France by including the transnational. What were the relations to the construction of the nation France of the

1 mixed-race and maroon children of French merchants and bureaucrats  
 2 in French Guiana or Gabon? Why is the labor of those in the territories  
 3 annexed by the French during the period Scott considers (Algeria, Tahiti,  
 4 New Caledonia, Saigon) not considered by Scott? Similar blind spots are  
 5 found in Scott's *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism*,  
 6 in which she considers the abstract individual that provides the foundation  
 7 for the republic while overlooking late eighteenth-century struggles about  
 8 whether women, Jews, and blacks were to be included (Offen 282). By  
 9 subjecting herself to the universalized terms of the modern nation-state,  
 10 Scott constructs "a whole horizon of possible knowledge" that occludes the  
 11 race-based forms of domination in France and renders the governing of  
 12 self and others in her work complicit with modern inequalities constructed  
 13 through the modern power/knowledge regime.

14 It is also important to examine the distributional economy of subjec-  
 15 tion and differentiation in Scott's case. Her entanglement with mechanisms  
 16 working to manage the distribution of bodies between sites, sending some  
 17 to penal institutions and others to be students or teachers, is clear from  
 18 her affiliation with an elite academic body, as it is for all three of my  
 19 case studies. She has written critically about the weakening of affirmative  
 20 action practices in U.S. postsecondary education, a modest mechanism for  
 21 attempting to redirect the racialized and class-stratified flow of bodies into  
 22 the academy ("Governance"). Scott has found effective ways to render into  
 23 visibility the politics of the historical struggles excluding women workers  
 24 and artisans and political agents from histories of the early modern period,  
 25 excluded despite the best of intentions by the egalitarian commitments of  
 26 historians such as E. P. Thompson (*Gender* 75, 107). This interrogation of  
 27 the limits of visibility renegotiates not only the limits of specific objects of  
 28 knowledge but also the claims to universal surveillance and truth of the  
 29 modern truth regime.

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 32 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:  
 33 Destabilizing the Limits of Dedisciplinary Practices  
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35 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, like Scott, has responded to Foucault's cri-  
 36 tique of modern disciplinary knowledge in developing interdisciplinary  
 37 research and teaching, but Foucault remains less central to her work than  
 38 to Scott's. Spivak explicitly describes her own work in contested relation to  
 39 interdisciplinarity, problematizing interdisciplinary work in the humanities  
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(“Marginalia”) while arguing for interdisciplinarity construed as an ethical  
 supplement to the social sciences centered on close analysis of agency in  
 texts of the global South (“Culture Studies” 280; *Death*). Spivak consistently  
 frames her interdisciplinary approach around the intellectual and social  
 movements of deconstruction, Marxism, and feminism so that “each of these  
 things brings the other to crisis. And that’s how it ought to be: serious cri-  
 sis” (“Violence” 138). Such crises in this approach to interdisciplinary work  
 are not moments of weakness or confession but productive interrogations  
 of a theoretical perspective (e.g., feminism) by a social movement (e.g., the  
 women’s movement) (“Violence” 139).<sup>4</sup>

Spivak construes justice in a way that diverges from traditional social  
 movements, aligning herself with post-structuralist rejections of metanarra-  
 tives that tell how social justice is to be achieved to emphasize instead what  
 is left out when a narrative is constructed, as in narratives of social change  
 and resistance (“Post-modern” 18–19). In one of her reflections on Foucault’s  
 notion of power/knowledge, she agrees with Derrida that deconstruction  
 itself is “justice,” in its emphasis on the subject centered without closure in  
 the act, the decision, the affirmation rather than as an exposure of error or  
 of some pathology of logocentrism. In this way, Spivak affirms a responsibil-  
 ity toward the Others who are often subordinated through the disciplinary  
 hierarchies instilled by modern power/knowledge, a responsibility enacted  
 not simply by reversals of hierarchies but through their displacement, even  
 as she recognizes the “anguish that knowledge must suppress difference as  
 well as differance, that a fully just world is impossible, forever deferred  
 and different from our projections, the undecidable in the face of which  
 we must risk the decision that we can hear the other” (*Critique* 199). It is  
 through the careful political practice of strategic essentialism that she works  
 with deconstruction and feminism and Marxism to practice a responsibility  
 to the radically Other that is both impossible and necessary (“Subaltern”  
 214–26), even as she has moved away from strategic essentialism toward  
 an emphasis on ethics in more recent work. Spivak prefers to renegotiate  
 the ethics and politics of movement practices and objectives rather than go  
 along with those activists she sees as “resolutely anti-intellectual communalist  
 political activists whose slogan seems to be ‘if you think too much about  
 words, you will do no deeds’” (“Marginalia” n. 14, p. 49).

In evaluating how Spivak’s work may be seen as dedisciplinary, I begin  
 with her approach through deconstruction to the disciplinary apparatuses  
 of academic publication, working with considerable success to destabilize  
 and displace many of its fundamental assumptions and practices. Although

1 she has published regularly with very well-respected journals and presses  
2 in several fields both in the United States and internationally, she also per-  
3 sistently refuses the terms with which academic publication is supposed to  
4 make sense and divide the true from the false. The most fundamental way  
5 in which Spivak refuses the basic assumptions of the modern academy is  
6 in the insistence that we cannot know the wholly Other (“Power/Knowl-  
7 edge” 38), a marking of the limits of modern forms of knowledge and of  
8 the limits of appropriation of the subaltern into modern intelligibility and  
9 power/knowledge. This becomes, in *Death of a Discipline*, an emphasis  
10 on comparativist work not as defined in terms of an Other whose social  
11 conditions need to be studied or alleviated or whose poverty requires help  
12 or who requires anthropological diagnosis (*Death* 50), but as learning from  
13 below through teacher-training work with indigenous peoples and associa-  
14 tion with counterglobalizing networks in the global South (*Death* 28, 35–36;  
15 “Righting Wrongs”). This learning from below is grounded in imagining  
16 what is not known in the metropole, based on careful textual readings of  
17 culture of the global South, a perspective and an agency from below that  
18 interrupts the universalist knowledge of the disciplines (*Death*, 49–50).

19 The way in which this presents a new mode of governing the self  
20 and Others is seen in Spivak’s presentation of herself not as expert but as  
21 learning how to be at home in the cultural idiom of the place of the global  
22 South, a literary skill as opposed to the academic or health professional or  
23 nongovernmental organization (NGO) representative who learns language  
24 with social science fluency (*Death* n. 12, 106). This learning does not grow  
25 from some automatic affinity she has with the global South because of  
26 deterministic affiliations through national or cultural identities but through  
27 Spivak’s lengthy commitment to work in the global South (some ten years  
28 as of 2003), a major point of difference with Scott and Foucault.<sup>5</sup> The new  
29 comparativist practices she proposes construct forms of responsibility to the  
30 global South through attention to the politics of Othering that refuses to  
31 demystify the global South as Other, instead preferring to “surpris[e] the  
32 historical” through staging unexpected maneuvers toward collectivities  
33 (55–56) and thereby refusing fixed conceptions of the Other in generating  
34 the collectivities that are required for a politics. Spivak’s emphasis on the  
35 politics of comparisons of global South and North facilitates her refusal of  
36 the terms that modern constructions of alterity provide, thereby producing  
37 new collective/Other configurations of social relations that may facilitate  
38 justice in social relations.

39

40

41

The implications of Spivak's dedisciplinary practices for the boundaries of true and false are found in her deployment of deconstruction. She persistently returns self-reflexively to a critique of the academy, as in her summary of "[a] careful deconstructive method . . . displacing rather than only reversing oppositions (such as between colonizer and colonized) by taking the investigator's own complicity into account. . . ." (*Critique* 244). Thus the disruption of the claim to fixed, noncontradictory universal meaning in modern academic writing also consistently displaces the universalist modern narrative frame by repeatedly inserting the writing subject's own ethically and politically troubled positioning into the picture. We see an application of this principle to the university classroom in a brief statement of the title of an essay collection regarding metropolitan teachers with origins in the global South, such as her own origins in Bengal: "[R]adical teachers at universities . . . should attend to the nature of the institution that is their contractual space—and not ignore their obligation by claiming a spurious marginality. . . . I believe the teacher, *while operating within the institution*, can foster the emergence of a committed collectivity by not making her institutional commitment invisible: outside in the teaching-machine" ("Marginality" n. 2, 294; emphasis in original). Through problematizing middle-class status and affiliation with the academy, the teacher can work even while in the institution toward a responsible politics and perhaps foster an ethics of organized political commitment of self and Others by betraying his or her own complicity and thereby displacing totalizing claims to oppositional practices, such as decolonization. This refusal of such binarisms as colonizer/colonized renegotiates the means by which alterity is produced, rejecting the subject as the source of a fixed alterity or as part of a dialectic of affirmation of one and a negation of the Other (*Death* 73). By reducing the degree to which the self may be formed and governed through such identifications and their inevitable alterities, Spivak is taking aim not only at the disciplinary mechanisms of the academy, but also at the fundamental way in which the ethical and political are construed.

Spivak's interest in language does not deter her from a certain precisely targeted dedisciplining of the body, centering on refusals of the ways in which modern constitutions of race and gender make claims on bodies. For example, in discussing young, white, male undergraduate students, Spivak encourages them to refuse a determinism or an essentialism based on skin color (chromatism) or genitalia (genitalism) based on "an *historical* critique of your position as the investigating person" ("Multi-culturalism" 62; emphasis

1 in original). Her own persistent refusal of attempts to be rendered marginal  
2 in the academy is closely comparable to this practice, as she rejects attempts  
3 to subject her to such hierarchies as margin/center or colonizer/colonized  
4 through their claims at rendering her intelligible. This practice is what  
5 Spivak terms "negotiation," meaning "try[ing] to change something that  
6 one is obliged to inhabit" as a form of intervention, a practice that seems  
7 closely comparable to Foucault's notion of dedisciplining.

8 Spivak is well-known for her intervention in our final topic for  
9 dedisciplining: mechanisms that work to manage the distribution of bodies  
10 between sites, or the distributional economy of subjection and differentia-  
11 tion. Her persistent emphasis on the subaltern renders visible the object of  
12 knowledge that remains perhaps unavoidably at the margin of the objects  
13 of knowledge that the modern disciplinary regime wishes to isolate and  
14 highlight (*Critique* 140–146, 268–76; *Death* 16–17, 32; "Speak?"). In this  
15 area, her work is closely comparable to Foucault's emphasis on the tolerated  
16 illegalities that remained in the shade when delinquency was isolated from  
17 among other illegalities and highlighted in order to render it manageable.  
18 In the case of the subaltern, the modern power/knowledge regime tolerates  
19 the presence of the subaltern in the shade of objects of knowledge that it  
20 would rather render manageable when studying the global South, such as  
21 the metropolitan migrant of whom Spivak is so critical. Through displacing  
22 the normative from the center in the workings of these mechanisms, what  
23 she sometimes terms the white educated male as unacknowledged universal,  
24 she attempts to render intelligible the subaltern even as she subjects herself  
25 and the subaltern to the terms of power/knowledge relations that attempt  
26 to silence the subaltern.

### 27 28 29 Conclusion

30  
31 In closing, we may return to the problem faced by many interdisciplinary  
32 fields as they are pressured through multiple disciplinary mechanisms back  
33 into the complicit ethico-politics of modern social hierarchies and bodily  
34 docilities. Foucault, Scott, and Spivak have all been successful in dedisci-  
35 plinary practices that pursue what Foucault characterized as "analyz[ing]  
36 the connection between ways of distinguishing true and false and ways of  
37 governing oneself and others" ("Method" 82), even as they all have certain  
38 complicities that remain. First, all three give attention to objects of knowl-  
39 edge obscured and displaced to the margins by the modern disciplinary



regime: prisoners, gay men and lesbians, contested conditions for women's work, the subaltern. Second, Foucault and Spivak are particularly effective at constituting spaces for building horizontal alliances disrupted by the modern power/knowledge regime, particularly of the poor and students with delinquents in the case of Foucault, and of the comparativist with the Others and subalterns of modernity in the case of Spivak. Finally, there was significant attention paid to the dedisciplining of the body by Foucault in terms of sexuality and docility and by Spivak in her attention to refusing attempts at making racialized, gendered, and marginalizing claims on the body.

Justice, one of the central terms under which this paper is written, seems troubled by the operations of these authors. Foucault's notion of justice seems to refuse any easy closure, centering itself in a critique of modernity even as he carried out many of the traditional practices of the social activist: participating and founding social movements; contributing to public debates; writing for general audiences; confronting political authorities and being imprisoned. The academy is still sorting out its response to Foucault's emphasis on what in social justice movements was once considered the private sphere, including not only sexuality but also the body in a broader array of practices and settings. His focus on the body as a site for domination of the subject interrupts the turn away from the body toward claims to objectivity that erase the observing (presumed white, male, straight, bourgeois) subject in modernity. This disruption of the erasure of the body from visibility may be one of his most important contributions. Spivak's emphasis on the limits and erasures of justice seems designed to produce a restless political and ethical practice that will never settle easily into any single academic discipline or social movement, and she has paid the price for this approach through the resistance of many in several fields to respond seriously to her work. This displacement comes with the promise that the resulting movement will produce new solidarities and flexibilities that strengthen multiple social movements as modernity works to appropriate and subject them to its terms.

Scott's work may serve as a warning about the pitfalls of dedisciplinary work. She erases the construction of her own subjectivity in a manner that follows Foucault in his historical writings, but she does not problematize her own subjection in a manner comparable to that achieved by Foucault in his interviews. She also overlooks the centrality of the body and follows Foucault in neglecting the comparative across the divide of the global South and global North. As a result, Scott's notions of justice are more readily

1 appropriated into modernist notions of economic and social equity than  
 2 are those of Foucault and Spivak, suggesting that attention to the self-  
 3 reflexive, to the body, and to the comparative are important components  
 4 of dedisciplinary practice.

5 Foucault's more general argument regarding justice in *Discipline*  
 6 *and Punish* centers on the ways that the disciplinary regime disrupts links  
 7 between multiple social conflicts. In the decades around 1800, popular  
 8 struggles against political regimes were linked with resistance to increasing  
 9 industrialization and the effects of recurring economic crises. The multiple-  
 10 issue solidarities that developed aimed to do more than extract concessions  
 11 from the state or change specific policies: They aimed to change the very  
 12 structure of power (*Discipline* 273–75). According to this view, it is the  
 13 horizontal solidarities disrupted by the modern disciplinary regime that  
 14 threaten the modern power/knowledge regime (219, 273–78, 285), such as  
 15 between the poor and the delinquent or the student and the incarcerated,  
 16 and it is to reinvigorating comparable solidarities from our own day that  
 17 a dedisciplinary practice must give its attentions. Foucault participated in  
 18 many efforts to produce unexpected solidarities in his activist work, though  
 19 not in his historical writings. Spivak's emphasis in *Death of a Discipline*  
 20 centers on the generation—not in traditional forms of activism outside  
 21 the academy but within the limits of the modern academy—of collectivi-  
 22 ties that surprise both its participants and its history, a practice that seems  
 23 prototypical for dedisciplinarity.

24 Foucault tells a delightful story at the end of his *Illegalities and Delin-*  
 25 *quency* section in *Discipline and Punish* that may illustrate the possible life  
 26 of a dedisciplined academic. In 1840, at the very beginning of the modern  
 27 penal system in Foucault's rendering, a child of thirteen without home or  
 28 family testified in a court that named him as a delinquent. When asked by  
 29 the court about the offenses under which they rendered him intelligible, a  
 30 local newspaper captures how he reformulates each offense:

31  
 32 What is your station in life?—My station: to begin with, I'm  
 33 thirty-six at least; I don't work for anybody. I've worked for  
 34 myself for a long time now. I have my day station and my  
 35 night station. In the day, for instance, I hand out leaflets free  
 36 of charge to all the passers-by. . . . I turn cart-wheels on the  
 37 avenue de Neuilly; at night there are shows; I open coach doors,  
 38 I sell pass-out tickets; I've plenty to do.—It would be better  
 39 for you to be put into a good house as an apprentice and learn  
 40  
 41

a trade.—Oh, a good house, an apprenticeship, it's too much  
trouble. And anyway the bourgeois... always grumbling, no  
freedom. (290–91)

The practices of indiscipline without being fixed in definite relations  
of domination are what the failure of discipline looks like: no single station;  
no fixed home; a vanished family; a roving, wheeling body; no compulsory  
insertion; no intelligible identity.

For those of us who work in the academy, it is as if we are constantly  
if subtly and implicitly being queried by our colleagues and, most impor-  
tantly, by our own internalized self-surveillance and discipline, just as this  
free-spirited youth was being queried by the court. Finding ways to reply,  
as this boy did, not only to our colleagues and our internalized discipline  
but also to the various mechanisms and apparatuses that so persistently  
ask us to discipline ourselves would help dediscipline ourselves and our  
others. These dedisciplined practices become relations to social justice only  
through a future that is as yet indeterminate, through those we impact in  
our refusals and our limited freedoms, through the politics of our govern-  
ability and that of our others, through what we write and where we do  
our work, through the erased horizontal solidarities that we build, and  
through the prohibited multi-issue collaborations we constitute. It is in  
these relations that interdisciplinary work has its social justice or power  
effects, and although dedisciplinarity certainly has its pitfalls, it may also  
render visible aspects of academic work that are both politically troubling  
and ripe for new practices.

Notes

1. Such observations in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* echo later observa-  
tions in *The History of Sexuality* about the open transgressions, shameless discourse,  
and "tolerant familiarity with the illicit" of seventeenth-century French sexual  
practices (3), popular illegitimate behaviors that became likewise incarcerated not  
in the prison but in the modern home and the conjugal family.

2. Thanks are due to Leila Neti for bringing Hartman to my attention.

3. We see these emerging theories most notoriously in one of the founda-  
tional texts for European white supremacist racial theory, J. A. Gobineau's *Essay  
on the Inequality of the Races*, published in the mid-1850s (Young 15, 99–101).

4. Spivak follows Derrida in directing this conception of interdisciplin-  
arity as a productive bringing to crisis at Foucault's interdisciplinary linking of

1 philosophy and history mentioned above, for example, by arguing that the problem  
 2 with Foucault's early work in *Madness and Civilization* is one of "not yet having  
 3 brought each other to the crisis that this new politics of practice must assiduously  
 4 cultivate" ("Power/Knowledge" 38).

5 5. Foucault's teaching in Tunis and journalistic research in Iran were inter-  
 6 ventions of shorter duration, a year or two, whereas his travels to Japan seemed  
 7 much more in the vein of other major poststructuralists who have dabbled in an  
 8 exoticized Asia, such as Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. With the exception  
 9 of essays in her edited volumes, I have not found evidence of work by Scott on  
 10 topics outside the global North.

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