Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice
Revisioning Academic Accountability

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Chapter One

Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice

An Introduction

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Introduction

Many interdisciplinarian fields exemplify the political ambivalence that characterizes the U.S. academy: Ostensibly a critique of that institution's role in reinforcing inequalities, their very existence indicates a belief that the academy may also be an equalizing force in society. Supporters of the ethnic studies, cultural studies, and women's studies programs founded in the late 1960s, for instance, carried their battles from political movements into universities in the faith that changing the production of knowledge would transform social relations, broaden access for the disenfranchised, and thereby change the agents and the consequences of knowledge production. The pattern of scholars and activists joining forces to open fields of research and teaching continued in subsequent decades with the emergence of environmental studies, film and media studies, and gay and lesbian or queer studies. Recent additions—including critical race studies, disability studies, transgender studies, critical legal studies and justice studies, diaspora studies, border studies, and postcolonial studies—take as their epistemological foundation the inherently political nature of all knowledge production, a principle shared by the essays of the present volume.

Through trenchant critiques of disciplinary predecessors, interdisciplinary fields often have defined themselves in contrast with established disciplines. Their attempts to query the conditions and consequences of knowledge production have prompted changes that reach into traditional
disciplines and extend beyond the academy to movements for social justice (Bender). For instance, because the staffing needs of innovative programs and evolving disciplines have set in motion institutional changes necessary to accommodate new types of scholars, hitherto disenfranchised groups have gained greater access to sites of knowledge production (Boxer; Feierman; Stanton and Stewart; Messer-Davidow). From literature to sociology and into the physical sciences, scholars are engaging the difficult task of unraveling how assumptions about race, gender, class, colonization, and sexual orientation are embedded in the structure of interdisciplinary as well as disciplinary practices that, in turn, intervene to recreate the world in the image of those assumptions (Shiva; Deloria).

In addition to predictable resistance from practitioners of traditional disciplines, interdisciplinary fields have encountered some institutional, intellectual, and political criticisms from other quarters as well. Even as they have become established features of the academic landscape, they have struggled to maintain their affiliations with social movements (Boxer; Loo, and Mar; Messer-Davidow) and are now frequently subject to criticism from within those movements. Present variations of interdisciplinarity turn a critical eye to the political nature of truth production and to those who claim to be its producers. Their proponents acknowledge that interdisciplinary practices are not innocent of political and epistemological complicity with multiple structures of oppression. Moreover, the shift from Enlightenment assumptions and epistemology to postmodern practices has prompted an evaluation of the political and ethical implications of social movements that remain organized around such putatively fixed universals as identity or liberation.

Interdisciplinary fields are no longer provocative newcomers to the U.S. academy. Although their proliferation in some ways is a measure of their success within the academy, the success of their attempts to hold the academy accountable for its claims of promoting the general welfare and contributing to a just society remains an open question. Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice takes this moment in their history to review the effects of interdisciplinary fields on our intellectual and political landscape, to evaluate their ability to deliver their promised social effects, and to consider their future.

Interdisciplinarity: A Contested History

Several influential publications on interdisciplinarity render considerations of politics and social justice secondary or obscure them altogether. Two such
books were published early in the formative 1970s following international seminars organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): *Interdisciplinarity: Problems of Teaching and Research in Universities* (Michaud et al.) and *Interdisciplinarity and Higher Education* (Kocklemans). Two additional influential volumes by Julie Thompson Klein followed in the 1990s (*Interdisciplinarity; Crossing Boundaries*). Taking such fields as social psychology and biochemistry as prototypical, Klein defines interdisciplinarity as the attempt to synthesize existing disciplinary concepts with the goal of achieving a unity of knowledge for a nonspecialized general education (*Interdisciplinarity* 12). This apolitical, holistic approach to interdisciplinarity, which we would term multidisciplinarity, is found across the board in the academy from the humanities (Fish) to science research centers (Weingart) to professional associations (Newell). But Klein’s history largely disregards the social and intellectual challenges to academic orthodoxy and the politics that were the breeding ground for interdisciplinary programs. Absent that context, Klein advocates an interdisciplinarity that rejects narrow specialization in favor of an integrative blend of disciplines on the grounds that social needs are best served by the latter’s general education approach (*Interdisciplinarity* 15, 27, 38).

Area studies and development studies offer early examples of an interdisciplinarity that assumes the neutrality of disciplinary truth claims and seeks their integration. But since area studies (including American studies) emerged in the U.S. academy during the early years of the Cold War, any neutrality they claim is belied by their reliance on the category of the nation-state (Brantlinger 27; Shumway) that, in turn, naturalizes colonial territorial boundaries (Chow, “Politics and Pedagogy” 133–34; Kaplan and Grewal 70–72). The divisions suggested by Asian studies and American studies parse difference into manageable and essentialized areas domesticates a global network of contradictory power relations, whereas development studies spin evidence of inequity and injustice into tales of inevitable progress (Sbert; Rafael; Pletsch; Esteva; Escobar).

But against the neutrality of disciplinary knowledge stands an array of scholarship that uncovers the messy history of disciplinary norms linked to social inequalities and entangled in lengthy, highly politicized struggles about authoritative claims to truth (Moran 8; Steinmetz, *Politics*; Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan). Hans Flexner and others note that the emergence of modern notions of disciplinarity in European academies in the nineteenth century coincided with the industrial revolution, agrarian changes, and “the general ‘scientification’ of knowledge” (Flexner 105–06 ctd.; Klein, *Interdisciplinarity* 21; Moran 5–14). As a consequence, modern
education shifted toward specialized teaching based on research configured by
the modern disciplines, which in turn was driven by industrial demand for
emergent technologies and appropriately trained employees. Lorraine Daston
has argued that the traditional European emphasis on liberal humanism
as the basis for educational authority was replaced between the 1810s and
1840s in Germany by the research seminar that linked specialized training
to emerging professions such as philologist or laboratory scientist, university
teacher or industrial chemist (71–72, 77–78). Rather than the philosopher’s
skillful thought unifying the knowledge practices of advanced education,
in the newly configured German university, critical thought was supplanted
by the form and values of the seminar itself: diligence, punctuality, perfor-
mance of written and oral work on schedule, careful attention to minute
detail, devotion to technique, and a cult of thoroughness, responsibility, and
exactitude (78, 82). The spread of what has come to be known as the Ger-
man model of the research university throughout Europe and its colonies
combined with the attendant proliferation of specialized disciplines and
their seminar format for advanced study to produce the modern, seemingly
worldwide university.

Joe Moran notes the expanding impact of the physical sciences in the
nineteenth century, when they became the measure for all other knowledge
and the template for the new fields now known as the social sciences (Moran
5–7; Haskell; Shumway and Messer-Davidow). Following Michel Foucault
(Clinic), Michel de Certeau (1984), and Terry Eagleton, James Clifford has
argued that from the seventeenth century onward, the natural sciences
defined themselves in opposition to the humanities by contrasting their
aim of transparent signification with an emphasis on rhetoric (in rhetoric
or literature), pressing their claims to facticity against the status of fiction,
myth (in literature), or superstition (religion), and practicing objectivity in
contrast with subjectivity (Clifford 5). Thus the natural sciences pressed even
the humanities to adopt the criteria of evidence and argumentation modeled
on modern reason, as exemplified by mathematics in the physical sciences
(Moran 7). Indeed, Moran argues that the move towards interdisciplinary
study in the humanities challenges precisely the preeminence of science as
the predominant model for disciplinary truth claims. Such histories sug-
gest the importance of examining the complicity of the modern research
university with the industrialization of modern society, the enclosure of
agrarian lands, the emergence of market economies and the modern pro-
fessions, and attendant questions of exploitation, inequality, and injustice
(Flexner; Althusser; Bourdieu).
In Michel Foucault's widely influential account (Discipline; “Subject and Power”), the French Enlightenment provides the backdrop for the formation of modern discipline understood as both bodily discipline and docility and disciplined knowledge forms. Vincent Leitch summarizes a permeation of the social by discipline so detailed and thorough as to produce the modern disciplinary society:

[From] the 1760s to the 1960s—the modern era—societies became increasingly regulated by norms directed at the "docile body" and disseminated through a network of cooperating "disciplinary institutions," including the judicial, military, educational, workshops, psychiatric, welfare, religions, and prison establishments, all of which entities enforce norms and correct delinquencies. . . . In casting the school as a "disciplinary institution," Foucault has in mind specifically the use of dozens of so-called disciplines, that is, microtechniques of registration, organization, observation, corrections, and control [such as] examinations, case studies, records, partitions and cells, enclosures, rankings, objectifications, monitoring systems, assessments, hierarchies, norms, tables (such as timetables), and individualizations. The disciplines, invented by the Enlightenment, facilitate the submission of bodies and the extraction from them of useful forces. These small everyday physical mechanisms operate beneath our established egalitarian law as ideals, producing a counter law that subordinates and limits reciprocities [. . . ] Universities and colleges deploy the micro disciplines to train and discipline the students in preparations not only for jobs and professional disciplines, but for disciplinary societies. (168)

This configuration of educational institutions also accounts for the multiplication of the specialist societies and journals that still remain powerful regulatory and enforcement mechanisms in the Eurocentric academy. Foucault's account has been central to much interdisciplinary work that names the trouble with established disciplines in the Eurocentric university (Brown; Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan; Shumway; Said; R. Young).

The competing histories of the justice effects of the modern disciplinary university reviewed here suggest numerous ways to understand the relationship between interdisciplinarity and social justice. The narratives
of Flexner, Daston, and Moran indicate that the modern, disciplinary academy limits the audience of academic writing to other specialists in the academy, industry, and government, even as it supplies that audience with evaluative criteria such as originality, viability, and the regulative mechanisms of the research seminar (Daston 79). Against that backdrop, interdisciplinarity may be understood as returning critique to the center of the educational enterprise while changing the social groups that benefit from the educational enterprise. The Foucauldian account also implies that interdisciplinarity can be an intervention into a modern microphysics of power to prepare students not for disciplinary society but for practices that ground social relations outside those defined by the professions and by measures of capitalist productivity.

Justice Through New Objects of Knowledge and New Methods

Within education, interest in social justice increased dramatically in the 1960s and early 1970s as students and faculty on campuses worldwide learned from anticolonial liberation struggles in the global south and linked their language, tactics, and goals to change primary, secondary, and postsecondary education (Ali and Watkins; Katsiaficas; Committee; Editorial Staff; Omatsu). For instance, in their early years, ethnic studies in the United States resulted from broad, cross-racial coalitions demanding third-world liberation for students domestically and overseas (Caute; Naison; Acree; Whitson and Kyles; Wang). As Steven Feierman has shown in an analysis of the discipline of history, decolonization in the global south combined with multiple liberation and civil rights movements in the global north to provoke a major shift in the academy, evidenced by increasing racial, gender, sexual preference, and national diversity of scholars at work in academic institutions and consequent major shifts in historiography. Greater interest in social justice is also seen in a general crisis of epistemology, signaled by dramatically decreased satisfaction with knowledge protocols to the social effects of academic work (Boxer; Carson; Deloria; Eagleton; Feierman 84–6; Foucault, *Archaeology*; Guha and Spivak; Miller; Said; Steinmetz, “Decolonizing”; Chakravorty, this volume), or what Levinas has termed “ontological imperialism” (qtd. Feierman 167–68). From the crisis in the credibility of educational institutions emerged a number of interdisciplinary fields that refused disciplinary claims to political neutrality and objectivity,
preferring instead to direct their research and teaching openly toward the aims of social justice.4

Through a complex process of negotiated agreements with university leaders and, in the case of public institutions, with state officials (J. Cohen), the fields of study that emerged were generally named in terms of discrete social groups contextualized, as in the case of environmental studies, both as particular objects of knowledge and as agents of change. In the United States, these included fields—such as Black Studies, Chicano studies, and Asian American studies—that rejected disciplines dominated by white faculty and the erasure of non-white objects of knowledge; early women’s studies programs that emphasized the study of women as a corrective both to their erasure from the humanities and to the pervasive sexism of the academy and the society (Boxer; Messer-Davidow); and Native American studies for those who rejected imperialism in the academy. These were accompanied in England by an attention to socioeconomic class that brought the concerns of the working class to the center in the academy (Hall; Williams, Revolution 57–70). And comparable changes were occurring around the globe, as students and faculty engaged in social struggles turned their attention to transforming the academy in Tokyo, Mexico City, Lagos, Rio de Janeiro, Cairo, and across western and eastern Europe (Zolov; Ali and Watkins; Caute). The extraordinarily high level of interest in engaging the politics of knowledge production is indicated, for example, by the exponential rise in the number of women’s studies courses in the United States: from about seventeen in the academic year 1969–1970, to about seventy-three in the following year, to nearly seven hundred in 1971–1972. In the ensuing decades, some eighty campus-based research centers, autonomous professional associations, and thousands of feminist presses, book series, journals, and newsletters have been established (Messer-Davidow 83–85).

Joined under the umbrella of interdisciplinarity, disparate emergent methods and pedagogies shared a rejection of the commonplace belief in the neutrality of academic knowledge.5 Participants explored research topics and pedagogies and methods in the hope of countering inequalities naturalized by the truth claims of the academy: racial and gender inequities given the alibi by the biological and social sciences, global economic disparities defended by much of history and economics—the list is very long. One common strategy involved invading the fields once claimed by the natural and social sciences while working to redefine the terms, methods, and politics of knowledge. For example, the interest in class issues in Black Studies, women’s studies, postcolonial studies, and film studies, as
well as in literature and philosophy, may be read as an attempt to contest
the claim to ownership of the economic by the field of economics, as we see
in the work of Lindsey Barrett, Alex Juhasz, and Patrick Brantlinger in the
present volume. The emphasis on broadening the notion of the political to
include the personal, the body, and the quotidian in feminism, literature,
and ethnic studies may also be seen as an attack on claims to monopolize
the political by those in the field of political science or on claims to know
the body by biologists, as seen in the following chapters by Mary Romero,
Robert DeChaine, and Joe Parker. Questions about environmental impacts
and limits may be seen as a struggle for ownership of the natural world
between those in environmental studies and chemists, biologists, and engi-
neers. Frequently, interrogations of the modern academy came about from
questions regarding the content of scholarship, for instance as a consequence
of demands to know about topics that had been erased or demeaned by
seemingly neutral methods, canons, and protocols—for example, African
American authors in literary studies, working-class members in histories, or
the effects on women of drugs that scientists tested only on men. Indeed,
one way to understand the emergence of interdisciplinary fields is as a
struggle over ownership of objects of knowledge with high-stakes implic-
ations for social relations.

The logic of linking interdisciplinarity to social justice through naming
new objects of knowledge obtains as more recent arrivals—queer studies,
diaspora studies, media studies, critical legal studies, critical race studies,
and postcolonial studies—gain footholds in the academy. A similar logic is
pursued by fields—disability studies, transgender studies, critical whiteness
studies, and critical masculinity studies—waiting often impatiently in the
wings for their turn on the stage of academic legitimacy. The continuing
proliferation of interdisciplinary fields, along with their ongoing promiscuous
relations with each other and with the disciplines, suggests that the discipli-
ary form of the modern academy has failed to contain the challenge to its
own status as a neutral, objective institution with only neutral or positive
social effects. The larger threat to justice targeted by these newly emerging
fields is the same as that identified by the more established interdisciplinary
fields: the definitive tendency of the dominant to appropriate the emergent
under the limits of justice in modern societies (Williams, Marxism 121–27;
Spivak, Death 1–3, 10–11 and n. 15, 106).

Many scholars working in interdisciplinary fields conceptualize justice
primarily in the tradition of the European Enlightenment as retribution for
crimes or damages and as fairness of distribution. Inequality is taken as a
sign of the failure of modern institutions to render real such modern ideals; research and teaching, then, seek to promote greater equality by critiquing social and legal practices and by training young people to increase the pace of social change (e.g., Montoya-Lewis, Messer-Davidow, and Soldatenko in this volume). In this widely practiced approach, justice means a fair, universal application of public policies and legal standards to all members of society, with the goal of an equal distribution of resources. But some fields have divided because of debates about the most politically efficacious methods and epistemes, pedagogies and theories for achieving this version of justice. There are those in women’s studies (Messer-Davidow 129–213) and cultural studies (Bennett; Appadurai; Milner; Brantlinger in this volume), among other fields, who hold that the move to interdisciplinarity has been a political failure (Loo; Miller; Soldatenko in this volume). Others, such as the feminist Wendy Brown, resort to urging the abolition of their own interdisciplinary fields, so discouraged are they by the continuing complicity of those fields with modern conceptions of politics, power, the individual, and other such foundational terms (Brown; Wiegman, “Introduction”). Still others have refused to join the academy or have left it entirely in order to pursue the work of social justice in venues they believe to be less compromised by institutional forces and regulations.⁵

Changing conceptions of justice, power, and knowledge have rebounded in fields founded on putatively coherent objects of knowledge that each requires its own autonomous area of inquiry. Amy Robinson, for instance, argues that analogies between race and sexuality consolidate each as an autonomous sphere. The resulting segregation of the two leads to the presumption of “the normative whiteness of the gay subject,” a problematic development from an antiracist position (qtd. Joseph 274). Similar analogies between feminist studies and lesbian and gay studies that suggest that the two fields are discrete domains have been critiqued by Judith Butler who, using intersectionality, contends that sexual difference is central to understanding sexual orientation (“Against Proper”; ctd. Joseph 274). Rey Chow has argued against the foundational terms of area studies and comparative literature as haunted by essentializing and conservative notions of culture, history, territory, and language in their reinscriptions of the nation-state and the first world as universal norms (Writing Diaspora 16–17, 128–29). Such arguments suggest that for the purposes of social justice, the most appropriate objects of study are located at the intersections of fields separated by the linguistic-cum-disciplinary pressures of regulatory regimes. Yet there is no obvious or explicitly designated institutional basis for such
work; we will return to this point when considering the next steps for
interdisciplinarity.

Motivating these criticisms are the disciplinary pressures, both within
the academy and in social movements, to constitute coherent, readily recog-
nizable objects as grounds for social movements and fields of study. Despite
the best efforts of those working in interdisciplinary fields, the disciplines
are still largely effective at defining the terms and limits of coherence and
visibility, and thereby of academic legitimacy and credibility (Bowman,
"Alarming"; Messer-Davidow). As Wendy Brown and others have argued,
however, the politically conservative character of the very objects of knowl-
edge that shape both fields of study and social movements require caution,
critique, and constructive responses that make explicit the costs of allowing
foundational concepts to determine the politics and ethics of interdiscipli-
ary work (Brown; Wiegman, "Progress of Gender" 128; Stryker 14). Such
seemingly neutral terms as "women," "nation," "culture," "political," "libera-
tion," and "resistance" consolidate assumptions that render both academic
study and social movements complicit with problematic modern institutions,
histories of domination, and erasures of subordinated groups.

Once the motivation of interdisciplinary work, modern notions of
justice are now scrutinized and found wanting. For those who advocate
critical self-examination from within interdisciplinary fields, the principal
task now is to interrogate the limits of our understanding of justice and,
perhaps paradoxically, to render visible the injustices of simultaneously
silenced and normalized coercions and violations effected through the often
subtle enforcement mechanisms of disciplinary society. That aim requires
a constant refusal of certainty so that, in the view of Gayatri Spivak,
objects of knowledge are rendered intelligible even as the knowing subject
remains critical of every success at rendering something intelligible ("Power/
Knowledge" 28). Based on a recognition of the highly politicized history
of language in limiting the politics and ethics of practice, Spivak follows
Foucault in researching the ways that the subject subjects itself to certain
power/knowledge relations through the ability to know ("Power/Knowl-
edge" 28, 34, 39). Such scholarship, which Judith Butler identifies as "the
desubjugation of the subject within the politics of truth," places the limits
of intelligibility at the heart of work toward social justice, with the latter
conceived as spaces and relations that refuse norms that install modern
social hierarchies and the violences on which they depend ("Doing Justice"
622, 35). By marking each act of naming as overdetermined by the troubled
modern history of language and intelligibility, interdisciplinarity can open
up a plurality of ethics, so that ethical knowledge practices may, in the
words of André Glucksmann, “make appear the dissymmetries, the disequilibrums, the aporias, the impossibilities, which are precisely the objects of all commitment” (qtd. Spivak, “Power/Knowledge” 40). Inquiry is brought to productive crisis when the intelligibility of the object of knowledge is taken as its central question. Against the limits of modern knowledge, we can respond by tracking those limits as an index of the ethics and politics of the knowledge practices we perform (McClintock; Radway; Spivak, “Subaltern Studies”; Sullivan 37–56; Brown).

An interdisciplinary located at this juncture can seek to account for and resist disciplinary domestication in ways that retain social justice and ethical concerns. As in papers by Barrett, Wiegman, Parker, Chakravorty, and others in the present volume, the practice of interdisciplinary can take the social construction of knowledge as a political project focused on issues of justice. Likewise, Paul Bowman has argued for interdisciplinary practices that are “alterdisciplinary” in their thoroughgoing attention to the complicity of disciplines with social hegemonies. According to Bowman, rather than present knowledge as definitive, correct, and sacred, as the disciplines tend to do, interdisciplinary “open[s] up the fissure or wound which is the university’s very constitutive incompleteness...an injury...also an in-jury, in the sense of being tied to the injurious, the un-just” (“Alterdisciplinarity” 67). Simon O’Sullivan argues for a reconception of interdisciplinary using the concept of the rhizome developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. To oppose the disciplinary effect of fixing knowledge, to which cultural studies has been subject, O’Sullivan argues that the purpose of scholarship is “not to understand the world...but rather to create the world differently...which involves less an object of study, even less does it involve a reading, an interpretation of objects....Instead it involves a pragmatics...to reorder our selves and our world” (82, 84). Cultural studies “does not name a discipline but rather a function...a deterritorialisation from other disciplines, from academia, and inevitably from itself” (88). Here interdisciplinarity turns against the limits of its own defining object of knowledge, rendering its own practices subject to critique in order to resist the disciplinary stabilization of meanings and fields and the consequent normalization of social hierarchies and their violences.

**Justice Through the Turn Toward Difference**

As activists and academics critique their own epistemologies, some have also become unwilling to allow their scholarship to be determined by the
practices of modern social movements. Drawing eclectically from multiple
sources to rethink truth claims and knowledge protocols, they have reshaped
the politics and ethics of the object of knowledge as well. The approaches
we now consider are characterized by this cautious, even suspicious stance
toward the linkage of interdisciplinary scholarship and political action.

One of the earliest and most influential such gestures has come to be
known as the theory of intersectionality, first articulated by the Combahee
River Collective in the mid-1970s: “[W]e are actively committed to strug-
gling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our
particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based
upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (13). By
naming identities located at the intersection of multiple, linked oppressions,
the Collective made visible the erasures effected by the narrow scope both
of academic inquiry and of social movements. Their critique encompassed
traditional disciplines as well as new interdisciplinary fields and extended
from the white-dominated feminist and male-dominated black liberation
movements to the black feminists of the National Black Feminist Organi-
zation (NBFO) founded in 1973. Similar positions on intersectionality are
found in publications from the late 1970s and early 1980s, including the
important 1981 anthology of the writings of women of color, This Bridge
Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, edited by Cherrie
Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Intersectionality has led to numerous fundamental changes in social
movements and in the epistemological practice of disciplinary and also
interdisciplinary work. In particular, it has prompted a shift from identity
to difference in gender and race studies, together with criticism of essential-
ist and universalist conceptions of such foundational categories as gender,
race, sexuality, and nation. Intersectionality has also secured the function
of theory as a critique not only of epistemology and the academy but also
of power relations within social movements. In so doing, it has shifted
analyses of power away from an emphasis on the universal and toward
theories of justice that attend to difference and heterogeneity. The far-
reaching impact of this reorientation is evident in the work in critical legal
studies and philosophy (Willett) and by feminist philosophers and social
critics, such as Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser, who advocate the
modification of traditional principles of redistributive justice to recognize
the justice claims both of identitarian groups and of group heterogeneity. In
a less modernist vein, Jean François Lyotard has argued for the centrality
of heterogeneity, difference, and incommensurability in our thinking about
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justice. Rather than the totalizations of universal principles (Postmodern 66), he emphasizes working at the limits of the protocols and prescriptions of justice (Jua 100), for instance, by questioning the homogenizing categories of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and citizenship that ground many modern movements for social justice. The proliferating postmodern reconsiderations of justice (Mouffe; Nancy, Creation; Badiou; Derrida, “Legal Force”; Ziarek) are themselves examples of interdisciplinary interventions into what was once the territory of disciplines (philosophy, law) and of social movements.

Other interdisciplinary reconsiderations of epistemology resulting from an emphasis on difference and its concomitant rejection of essential and universal categories have built on dissatisfaction with modern objectivity as the prototypical convention for legitimating truth claims, with varying results. Among feminists, for example, Emma Perez and Joan Scott reject outright the possibility of objective knowledge (Perez; Scott 1–27), in contrast with others who argue for revisions of objectivity (Harding; Haraway; Moya and Hames-Garcia). The wide-ranging consequences of the move to epistemological uncertainty are evident in challenges to essentialism and naturalized conceptions of the body in race-, gender-, sexuality-, and disability-based fields, as for example in critical race theory (Delgado, “Introduction” xv). From the perspective of this analytic stance, hostility to theory appears as a reluctance to relinquish access to an unmediated and objective knowledge of transparent reality. It may also be an unintentional and contradictory refusal to mark the hierarchies, hegemonies and economies of value that render disciplinary (and institutionalized forms of interdisciplinary) knowledge “exclusive, and always in some measure violent, unethic, and biased” (Bowman, “Alarming” 70).

Suspicion of the European Enlightenment promise of transparent knowledge has had a significant impact both on long-established fields such as feminist/women’s studies, cultural studies, and critical legal studies, and on more recent arrivals such as postcolonial studies, queer studies, and disability studies. That change might be characterized as an increased vitality resulting from renewed discussions about goals and methods, epistemologies and politics. To be sure, gains in vitality and relevance have been accompanied by a loss of unity and homogeneity, as practitioners critique the inability of their own interdisciplinary fields to break with the foundational categories of modern epistemology. Moreover, critiques of disciplinary knowledge protocols have generated a number of new interdisciplinary fields that, by seeking institutional acceptance without
compromising their stance of dissent, attempt to carry the impact of epistemological uncertainty into the very heart of the academy. Some—such as postcolonial studies (Spivak, *Post-Colonialist*; Said; R. Young), subaltern studies (Guha and Spivak; Chaturvedi), queer studies (Corber and Valocchi; Kirsch; Warner), and critical race theory (Delgado, "Introduction" xv; Unger)—are associated with already well-respected social justice movements. Others name objects of knowledge comparable with those of women’s studies or ethnic studies in that they attend to social groups that have been erased, ignored, or demeaned by the modern academy, such as transgender studies (Stryker and Whittle), diaspora studies (Gilroy; Tololyan), border studies (Rosaldo; Anzaldúa), and disability studies (Davis). Several fields investigate social norms naturalized under modernity; critical whiteness studies (Rasmussen; López; Dyer; Naison) and critical masculinity studies (Sedgwick; Halberstam; Gardner; Berger) exemplify this critical tendency. Yet others emphasize newly influential technologies and industries that have not received prominent attention from the academic disciplines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; included in this list are cinema studies, film studies, and media studies.

These approaches to interdisciplinarity draw on protocols and objects of knowledge that are not possible within the terms of the modern disciplines. Roland Barthes is often quoted as arguing that interdisciplinary work creates new objects of knowledge and even a new language to produce an "unease in classification" (qtd. Moran 16) important not only for academics but also for the foundational workings of meaning itself:

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it’s not enough to choose a "subject" (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one. (Barthes, qtd. Clifford 1)

Others are inspired by Foucault’s examples of instances when scholarship has introduced “a new object, calling for new conceptual tools, and for fresh theoretical foundations . . . a true monster, so much so that [modern knowledge] could not even properly speak of [it] . . . [unlike someone] committing no more than a disciplined error.” (*Archaeology* 224) Such claims on behalf of interdisciplinarity exceed reformist demands by some interdisciplinarians for increased attention to already established, disciplined
objects of knowledge. Instead, their ambitious scope suggests that the desire to peg knowing to ethics and justice may be prompting an epistemic break as interdisciplinarians debate the most appropriate knowledge protocols and logics for achieving their aims (Bono, Dean, and Ziarek; Castronovo; Nancy, "Answering"; Gasché).

Another Justice: New Protocols and Logics

By drawing on knowledges and logics violently attacked or overlooked in the aporias of modern knowledge protocols, some interdisciplinary practitioners have argued for constituting knowledge of that which is effaced and occluded within the terms of those protocols. Included in such knowledge are the violent, frequently deadly effects of social practices, effects that contradict claims to progress and mythologies of equality (Anzaldúa 5–12; Devi 98, 118; Foucault, Discipline 265–67, 302–03; White 135). The current of interdisciplinarity examined in this section questions modern epistemologies by exposing the latter’s imbrication with overt and direct violence. It also provides persuasive critiques of the more subtle, internalized destructive effects resulting in what we have so far named inadequately as docility (Anzaldúa 20, 22, 59; Devi 109–10, 118, 127, 142; Foucault, Discipline 11–12, 16, 274–75; White 136, 41).

In lieu of modern knowledge protocols, Robyn Wiegman (among others) supports a feminist interdisciplinary politics that seeks to render legible the ways that troubled identity categories themselves reproduce exclusions and violent silencing (Wiegman, “Progress of Gender” 107, 127–33). She points out that just as identitarian logic and realist referents place under erasure such objects of knowledge as female masculinities, gay and lesbian studies, intersexualities, sexual minority cultures, and transgender identities and communities, so, too, the violent policing by the Euro-American medical tradition of normative gender boundaries—in their sanctioning, for example, of surgical interventions following intersex births—erases the very possibility of intersected subjectivities and communities. Similarly, from within disability studies, transgender studies, and queer studies come charges that, instead of positioning people with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people as subjects with agency, “numerous professional and academic disciplines . . . concentrate upon the management, repair, and maintenance of physical and cognitive incapacity” (Mitchell and Snyder 1, qtd. McRuer, "Good" 97). By challenging not
only modern laboratory science but also social welfare policy and medical
practices, activists and scholars in these fields show that they have much to
contribute to social movements that seek to restore agency to groups that
modern limits of visibility would rather objectify than empower, rather
modify or medicate than celebrate and legitimate. In a similar fashion,
Laura Donaldson has argued convincingly against the epistemic violence
of the erasure in some postcolonial work of indigenous issues and the per-
sistent “woman question,” rendering invisible the ways subalterns achieve
subject status (Donaldson and Kwok 5; Donaldson 45, 51–54). On this
important final point regarding subject status, there is some congruence
in queer, disability, postcolonial, feminist, and subaltern studies to suggest
that, insofar as it resists the normative foundations of the modern subject,
interdisciplinarity may work to reclaim subject status, political agency, and
effective organizing for members of marginal groups.

Wiegman joins Eve Sedgwick, Susan Jeffords, and Judith Butler
in rejecting the notion of fixed identities as “a conceptual framework for
rendering the body biologically determinant” and rendered subject to
social hierarchies (Wiegman, “Progress of Gender” 116, 20–21). Instead
of assuming the necessity of universal, essential, and coherent identities as
precondition for social order or for putatively neutral knowl-
edges, this approach explores naturalized norms as part of contested and
contradictory fields of power. When it examines and enacts what Wiegman
names as “non-identitarian and unpredictable mobilities of bodies, desires,
and practices” (Wiegman, “Progress of Gender” 130), interdisciplinarity
becomes a type of anti-identitarian “queer” that seeks to liberate both
knowledges and bodies from effective subjection. Rather than represent
queer as an identity extension to gay and lesbian (C. Cohen 438–39, 459–60;
Sullivan 43–56), this notion of the queer functions as a cipher for the more
destabilizing methods and aims of interdisciplinarity. In that function, it is
analogous to “crip” in relation to disability studies (McRuer, Crip Theory)
and, to a lesser extent, gender studies in relation to women’s studies and
postcolonial studies in relation to third world studies.

In rejecting stabilized knowledge practices founded on the fixity of
the disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) object of knowledge, some interdis-
ciplinary work has turned toward new criteria for determining not only
the character of knowledge but also attendant conceptions of justice. Like
Wiegman and Butler, Spivak regards the knowing subject as itself an effect
produced by conjunctures within a network of structures, forces, and dis-
ciplines, rather than as the autonomous individual will pursued by early
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subaltern studies of historiography (Spivak, “Subaltern Studies” 213–14).
If that autonomous subject is amenable to and reinforced by disciplinary
investigation, then Spivak proposes interdisciplinarity as “an institutional
calculus for recoding or instrumentalizing undecidability” (Spivak, Death
49). Spivak’s emphasis on undecidability reaches to the social hierarchies and
unequal relations between self and other inscribed in language itself (Death
52). Her rejection of the fixity and determinism carried out by language
reconstitutes not only the limits and politics of the object of knowledge,
but also of the collectivities with which writing and reading subjects align
themselves. This indeterminacy strategy thereby aims to allow readers
and knowers to “open entry into responsibility with the subaltern other”
(Spivak, Death 69).5

Such critical reflections on the conditions of knowledge lead to recon-
considerations of the concept of justice with implications that reach far beyond
the academy. A number of interdisciplinary activist-academics shift their
very construal of justice by appropriating the language of fields far-flung
as medicine or law for newly politicized ends, for instance, by naming their
goals as healing or reconciliation. The repair work (Spelman) in question
may involve healing the alienation that divides subject from object and
that arranges subjects in social hierarchies or as the centralized and the
marginalized (O’Sullivan 86; Taussig). For Anzaldúa, interdisciplinary work
carries out a healing of the bleeding herida abierta or open wound that is the
borderlands/la frontera, and of the splitting of self from other that makes
possible hatred, violence, and exploitation (Anzaldúa, Preface [n.p.], 3, 86,
202–03). According to Anzaldúa, those who are healed practice interdisci-
plinarity according to a logic that appears crazy or nonsensical to those
still under the spell of the disciplines (Anzaldúa 19, 197), but they become
mediaries comfortably at work in the ambiguities and contradictions
at the crossroads where differences meet (Anzaldúa 80).

And sometimes justice takes unrecognizable forms. For example,
Spivak argues that the most appropriate politics and ethics for interdisci-
plinary work take the form of earning the trust of the subaltern (Spivak,
“Power/Knowledge”), apparent in moments of great intimacy and even
love (Spivak, “French Feminisms Revisited” 166–71; Spivak, “The Politics
of Translation” 180–83). As one of Mahsweta Devi’s characters remarks,
despairing at the ineffectiveness of the nation-state and at the inability of
journalistic knowledge and mass-media news even to recognize the violent
effects of injustice and colonization, “To build it [real exchange] you must
love beyond reason for a long time” (Devi 195–96). Healing, reconciliation,
love—such aims sidestep the contractual logic of modern justice, in search of, as David Carrol writes, another "justice that . . . does not put an end to disputes and differences, that is continually in search of its rules and laws rather than presupposing and simply applying them to each case" (Carroll 75, qtd. Ziarek 85).

The prominence of epistemology and theory within interdisciplinary scholarship has perhaps been the most controversial factor for those who seek to emphasize the academy's obligations to foster the practice of justice. Criticisms and counter-critiques are plentiful between those, often self-named realists, who rely on objectivist or materialist measures of injustice and those who have cast off from the stable shores of realism to question its normalization, its politics and ethics, and ultimately, its utility for the ends of social justice variously conceived. One of the difficulties of these debates is that the various approaches use different methods for measuring political effectiveness: Whereas some emphasize economic redistribution or policy changes, others draw attention to redefining the limits and terms of the political, and still others promote practices that make legible forms of injustice that are rendered invisible by the knowledge protocols of modern epistememes. Certainly the debates are indicators of the contested character of academic politics. Yet they also mark interdisciplinarity as a place where competing academic protocols, standards, and logics, together with the goals and values of social justice movements, are made explicit in order to be debated, interrogated, and reshaped.

Overview of Essays

The present volume is an attempt to present a range of carefully considered responses from social justice perspectives to one or more visions for interdisciplinarity. Each essay explicitly or implicitly responds to critiques of established disciplines, while also engaging activist and scholarly literature that is critical of aspects of interdisciplinary academic work.

Essays in the first section attend to the social justice issues at stake in critiques of the disciplines. Lisa Lowe contends that the social sciences have been brought to an epistemic crisis not through the interventions of poststructuralist theory but rather through their own failure to capture the totality of globalization. She notes that social scientists have long used metaphors to explain the relations between cultures, social systems, nations, and economies that characterize globalization, thereby questioning presup-
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1. tions of socioeconomic stability while failing to capture widening economic inequalities and proliferating forms of difference. By exposing the social justice implications of the literary character of social science, Lowe displaces the hierarchy of the scientific over the literary and turns the totalizing claims of modern social science against their own truths.

Mary Romero deploys critical race theory to link the field of sociology with the history of racism in the United States and shows how the preoccupation with meritocracy, mobility, and assimilation normalizes whiteness and middle-class standards that mask privilege and sociostructural disadvantages. Using as her case study the actions of the Chandler, Arizona, police and immigration officials that infringe citizenship on the body and systematically degrade communities of color, she uncovers the failure of sociologists of immigration to learn not only from critical race theory but also from another subfield, the sociology of race. Romero’s use of an interdisciplinary method brings issues of civil rights and human rights to the forefront of research and positions them as catalytic for bringing together communities of color as allies across differences in citizenship status.

Raquel Montoya-Lewis links epistemological and socioeconomic issues with a comparative analysis of Native American tribal courtroom procedures to demonstrate how forms of justice unavailable in the U.S. courtroom may be achieved. By telling localized stories of tribal courts in which she has presided as judge through the prism of critical legal studies, Montoya-Lewis rejects generalizations that would assimilate specificity to the national legal hegemony. At the same time, she illustrates the interventions of hegemonic legal structures, such as “the law of white spaces,” in which her stories occurred.

Mrinalini Chakravorty reads the undisciplined play of juxtaposed historical, literary, and political registers by the Anglophone Arab woman writer and journalist Ahad Souef as providing a Pan-Arab yet heterogeneous catalyst for Middle Eastern struggles against Western imperialism. Chakravorty demonstrates how moments of careful transfer and translation within and between disciplinary knowledges and dominant and marginalized cultures produce alternative discourses for recognizing the claims of the dispossessed. This brings to crisis the legitimacy of the Western modernizing project that, although entrenched in institutional authority (of governments, nations, and universities), all the while bolsters its power through the capture of markets and by its logic of commodification. By identifying Souef’s tactical opposition to habits of scholarship and journalism that produce the Middle East as a particular kind of sublime commodity in the West, Chakravorty
presents Soueif as crisscrossing the bounds of fiction and history, legitimacy and marginality, and legibility and illegibility to confront urgent questions of violence, torture, and rights.

The volume's second section examines the nature of claims to social justice in interdisciplinary fields. Patrick Brantlinger anchors cultural studies in the study of value as a counter discourse to the claim of capitalist economics as the modern "science of value." Proposing that ethical considerations should be central to all academic fields, he holds that postmodern theories fail to provide meaningful opposition to capitalist globalization and to recent U.S. economic policies. In so doing, he makes explicit some of the stakes in counterattacks from the left against the postmodernist rejection of class as a foundational concept. Alex Juhasz works back and forth between personal narrative and a Marxist analysis of praxis in cinema and media studies to argue for a revived emphasis on social change in interdisciplinary fields. By focusing on histories both personal and transnational of the emergence in the academy of cinema studies, queer studies, and women's studies, Juhasz recovers a leftist tradition of activism linking academic and cultural production with social justice.

Joe Parker takes up the question of refusals of the domestication of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary academic work by critically examining the writing, teaching, and other embodied practices of Michel Foucault, Joan Wallach Scott, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Parker finds promising avenues for dedisciplining academic work in the reconstitution of the power effects of knowledge through building horizontal solidarities disrupted by the modern power/knowledge regime, in the exploration of ways the body may resist docility, and in work against the grain of the modern general distributional economy of bodies (prisoners, women factory workers, the subaltern).

In the final paper of this section, Mike Soldatenko documents how the internal colonialist model influential in the early years of Chicano studies became an important template for activist leftist research, only to fall prey to the internal colonialism of interdisciplinary fields, including Chicano studies itself. Interdisciplinarity promised an epistemological revolution within the academy and a departure from the problematic heritage of the social science and humanities disciplines. Yet it failed to recognize how its own inevitable disciplinary practices ultimately would work to manage Chicano studies as part of the hidden curriculum.

The final section reminds practitioners of interdisciplinarity that there are numerous pitfalls in attempts to render social justice central to academic
and social movement practices. Robyn Wiegman suggests that the turn to the particular, the embodied, and the local has not been a successful strategy for those who would interrogate whiteness. Based on a reading of canonical works in critical whiteness studies and of Forrest Gump’s appropriation of racialized U.S. history, Wiegman outlines how particularity is not the opposite of the universal. Instead, it is the site that affords white power its historical and political elasticity, the site for the emergence of histories and inequalities of racial asymmetries and oppressions. By illuminating how antiracist whiteness is constructed through analogies with the injury and minoritization of racialized minorities in ways that reinscribes the unified, masculinist humanist subject, Wiegman suggests that particularism in itself is insufficient for anti-racism.

Lindon Barrett argues that African American studies privilege the starkest symptomatic drives of the insistent, mass violence by which Western modernity reiterates itself, and documents that violence through an analysis of the historical role of race in modern Western commodity fetishism. Through a careful critique of the ways in which the rationalizing of “the oppression of people of color” reiterates modern Western subjectivity, Barrett draws on Slavoj Žižek to constitute a more unruly African American studies in which desire and the subject may become recalcitrant to being mapped by the administrative and intellectual taxonomies of the academy and yet still constitute communities of social justice.

Robert DeChaine works between border studies and communication studies to critique the turn towards borderlessness in postmodern figurations, taking for his central case study the medical humanitarian group Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and the sans frontière (without borders) movement its has spawned. Critical of that organization’s universalist assumption of a human that preexists the political, DeChaine follows political geographers and others in arguing for the presence of the political in all constitutions of spatial relations. Fostered by postmodern scholarship, sans frontière’s affect-charged challenge to difference can also be read as a mode of discipline that, in the name of humanity, insists that all space be available to the homogenizing reach of culturally specific norms.

Leila Neti’s comparison of black internationalism in the first half of the twentieth century with contemporary interdisciplinary academic movements suggests the need for academics to accommodate diverse sites of knowledge production within a coherent analytic structure that creates contact points while also allowing for necessary spaces of difference. Neti’s analysis attends to the risk of working with stable categories of discipline.
and nation even while attempting to displace the power dynamics of center
and periphery that they install. By contrasting W. E. B. Du Bois’s vision
for global solidarity with the cosmopolitanism of Kwame Anthony Appiah,
Bruce Robbins, and others, she argues that examinations of violence, power,
and race must avoid normalizing universalisms in favor of productive soli-
darities. Neti looks to African American involvement in global anticolonial
causes as offering a possible resolution to the debate about universalism
and particularism that perplexes social justice movements. That model of
dialogue within difference, she suggests, might also serve interdisciplinary
endeavors as they attempt to create viable points of contact across episte-
mological borders.

The successful conservative counteroffensive on the advances made
by progressive social movements inside and outside the academy comes
under scrutiny by Ellen Messer-Davidow. Messer-Davidow takes as her
main case study retrenchments in accessibility to higher education for racial
minorities, single parents, and low- to middle-income students that have
weakened egalitarian claims to social justice. Arguing that some research
must be written for deployment in public and policy-making arenas, Messer-
Davidow demands accountability to social justice concerns from academics,
and demonstrates that real-world problems are complicated cross-sector
phenomena that must be understood through an interdisciplinary or mul-
tidisciplinary approach.

Miranda Joseph’s account of one attempt to defend interdisciplinary
programs in a time of shrinking university budgets offers a cautionary tale
of the increasing commodification of scholarship. Even fields such as cul-
tural studies, founded on the critique of commodification, find themselves
in danger of being domesticated as interdisciplinarity becomes a rubric
for collaboration across the nonprofit/for-profit border, in a manner that
renders cross-sector collaboration little more than a business model. Mean-
while, accounting mechanisms used to measure the performance and hence
the value of academic programs cannot accommodate the questioning of
epistemological foundations that does not translate easily into “real world”
(which too often means revenue producing) applications. Nevertheless,
Joseph maintains that because scholars do not have the luxury of believing
themselves distanced from the market, we must attempt to shape the terms
on which our work is counted and translated.

In an afterword inspired by the essays, Ranu Samantri reflects on
the indeterminate relation between scholarship and activism. Using as her
example one of the many recent controversies about cultural expressions that
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exacerbate tensions between majority and minority constituencies, she notes that scholarship and activism each fails to provide the certainty needed by each other: Scholarship cannot stabilize the truth on which activism relies, whereas activism is not able to orient scholarship on a clear course between incommensurate claims for justice. Instead of seeking their unification, she suggests that their common hope of a good society is served best when each functions as a challenge to the other, in a collaboration grounded in mutual provocation.

Taken together, the papers of *Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice* render visible the violences, exclusions, power differentials, and occluded objects of knowledge that disciplinary and many interdisciplinary knowledge practices refuse to acknowledge. As the crisis of legitimacy for the modern academy continues apace, its claim to neutrality and the objectivity of Enlightenment-derived forms of science seems increasingly convincing amidst the ongoing proliferation and promiscuity of interdisciplinary knowledge practices. The demand for accountability to the changing epistemological landscape, whether aimed at disciplines or interdisciplinary fields, works against the domestication of knowledge that inevitably accompanies institutional success. For interdisciplinary methods that continue to rely on an objectivity supporting critical analysis of both society and the academy, that demand may come from critics of modern epistemes who caution against the risk of installing universalisms that subtly reinforce unequal power relations. Or, for interdisciplinary practices that develop new protocols for logic and epistemology, new constitutions of social relations, and new conceptions of justice, the demand may come from critics who point out a certain failure to engage with pragmatic and even urgent needs in what some see as the “real.” Each of the papers here asks that moves toward interdisciplinarity in the academy and in social movements be accountable to that once-stable, now less-easily-assumed, less-readily-knowable, and perhaps ever-elusive criterion of social justice. How will we respond?

Notes

1. We have in mind such indictments of the disciplines as the argument that the schemas for racial and gender hierarchies that confirmed the lesser civilizational status of non-Europeans, women, and the working class came from the human sciences. But for arguments against the claim that disciplines are complicit in inequitarian social relations, see, among many others, Anderson and Valente.
2. One measure of the debate about the necessarily compromised politics of the process of achieving "success" in the academy (departmental status with tenure lines, journals, professional associations, and so forth) is the proliferation of terms naming the phenomena of interdisciplinarity. Some object to "interdisciplinary" because it suggests innovation limited to interaction between already established disciplines; indeed, we prefer "multidisciplinary" as the more accurate name for that phenomenon. Some opt for "transdisciplinary," "postdisciplinary," or even "antidisciplinary" to reject the implication that fields such as cultural studies or women's studies have become little more than one more domesticated academic endeavor among already accepted disciplines. We prefer to reserve "interdisciplinary" for those fields producing new forms of knowledge that move both education and social movements towards greater social justice. For further discussion of the terms, see Bowman, Moran, Newell, and Thompson-Klein, among others.

3. Although Klein notes the sudden increases in funding for such in the 1960s and 1970s, she is unable to explain their causes or to explain the skyrocketing interest in extradisciplinary research (Interdisciplinarity 35–37). Her reading of the critiques of the modern academy by ethnic studies and feminist critics reduces those critiques to calls for pluralism without responding to the significant criticisms of educational institutions that they formulated (95).

4. Although signs of success of progressive student movements, such changes were also intended, in the words of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to "de-fuse the student rebellion" (Michaud et al. 12).

5. As Soldatenko argues in the present volume, the precise link between the rejection of disciplinary knowledge practices and claims of interdisciplinarity was not always carefully articulated, but the link was widely argued and led to important institutional changes in the academy.

6. To our regret, the perspectives of this important group are missing from the current collection.

7. We are aware of the objection that the reliance on theory indicates the persistence of androcentrism, class elitism, and Eurocentrism or white supremacy, because much of what counts as theory draws on the philosophical writings of economically privileged white males of Europe and many of its practitioners are well educated, economically privileged whites, or economically privileged members of other racial groups (hooks, "Cultural Studies" 128–33; "Postmodern Blackness"; Cook-Lynn 124–25; Smith 14, 28–40). Such objections often overlook the well-known ways in which theory has been used to attack racism (Delgado; Donaldson; Dyer; Gilroy), androcentrism (Boxer; Berger, Wallis, and Watson; Fraser), class elitism (Marx; Spivak, "Subaltern"), and Eurocentrism itself (Cixous and Clément 70–71; Derrida, "White" 213; R. Young). These critiques also often assume that theory can be clearly distinguished from activism or practice, assumptions that Marx and many others who combined theory and practice would reject. The prominence of theory in interdisciplinary scholarship may also be understood within a Eurocentric history.
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of the academy as a return to the central role of critique in knowledge protocols
and social justice work. If philosophy provided the synthesizing, critical frame
for the European and classical models of knowledge and education, if only for male
social elites, theory would seem to be a likely replacement candidate for those
who wish to see knowledge production and social practice held accountable by some
synthesizing critique (Zavarzadeh; Wiegman, “Progress of Gender” 120–21, 108, 127;
Spivak, Critique; Ransom). Moreover, much theory in interdisciplinary fields takes
as its explicit objective the imperative to reach well beyond its modern European
limits in order to reconstitute, on multiple fronts, the limits of critique.

8. Similar practices of indeterminacy have been influential in critical legal
studies (Derrida, “Force of Law”; Dalton), and in numerous other interdisciplin-
ary fields.

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