

# Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice

## An Introduction

*Joe Parker and Ranu Samantrai*

### Introduction

Many interdisciplinary 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 multidisciplinary, is found across the board in the academy from the humanities (Fish) to science research centers (Weingart) to professional associations (Newell).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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, performance 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 German 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 suggest 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 professions, 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, workshop, 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 and with the social effects of academic work (Boxer; Carson; Deloria; Eagleton; Feierman 84–86; 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 that 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; Cauter). 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.<sup>5</sup> Participants explored research topics, 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 Lindon 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 here in essays 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 engineers. 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 implications 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 disciplinary 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" and "Progress" 131–22 and 140 n. 28). 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.<sup>6</sup>

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 suggesting 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 recognizable 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 knowledge 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 interdisciplinary work (Brown; Wiegman, "Introduction" 3 and "Object Lessons," 356–58, 378–85; Stryker 14). Such seemingly neutral terms as "women," "nation," "society," "culture," "political," "liberation," 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. Bringing these defining objects of knowledge to crisis allows those in interdisciplinary fields to "sustain the interrogation of the object" of knowledge and the politically troubled complicities and assumptions that sustain and regulate them (Wiegman, "Introduction" 3).

Once the motivation of interdisciplinary work, modern notions of justice are now scrutinized and found wanting by some. 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 violences 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/Knowledge" 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 dissymetries, the disequilibriums, 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 interdisciplinarity located at this juncture can seek to account for and resist disciplinary domestication in ways retain concern for ethics and social justice. As in papers by Barrett, Wiegman, Parker, Chakravorty, and others in the present volume, the practice of interdisciplinarity 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, interdisciplinarity “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” (“Alterdisciplinary” 67). Simon O’Sullivan argues for a reconception of interdisciplinarity using the concept of the rhizome developed by Giles 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 struggling 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 Organization (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 Cherríe 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 essentialist 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.<sup>7</sup> 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; Cornell, Rosenfeld, Carlson) 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 justice. Rather than the totalizations of universal principles (*Postmodern* 66), he emphasizes working at the limits of the protocols and prescriptions of justice (*Just* 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”; Cornell, Rosenfeld, Carlson; 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, unethical, 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-Colonial*; 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 practitioners of interdisciplinarity have argued for constituting knowledge of that which is effaced and occluded. 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 their 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 relying on politically troubled institutional terms of legibility or on exclusionary claims to commensurability between the names of interdisciplinary fields and their object domains have failed to achieve idealized relations of justice (Wiegman, “Introduction” 11, 140 n. 27). 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 intersexed subjectivities and communities. Wiegman asks us to recognize the failure of categorical completeness as a critical achievement in order that “the very issue of knowledge



formation . . . [might] be rigorously and consistently thought in the field domain of Women's Studies or gender studies." (Wiegman, "Progress" 129) Such work does not escape the violence and "exclusion, contradiction, and incommensurability" but takes the problems which accompany any object-centered work and place them at the center of the work of the field. For Wiegman resignifying interdisciplinary fields in this way makes it possible to reject a realism that carries out exclusionary violence to instead investigate the social justice implications of failures of identity, while exploring the constructive intellectual and social ends to which such incoherence may be put (Wiegman, "Progress" 129, 130-32, 140 n. 28). 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 persistent "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 assist efforts by members of marginal groups to claim subject status and political agency.

Eve Sedgwick, Susan Jeffords, and Judith Butler reject the necessity of universal, essential, and coherent identities as preconditional foundations for social order or for putatively neutral knowledges (Sullivan 38; 43-46; Sedgwick *Epistemology* 8; Butler "Proper Objects"). This approach explores naturalized norms as part of contested and contradictory fields of power, so that 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 interdisciplinary 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 disciplines, rather than as the autonomous individual will pursued by early 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).<sup>8</sup>

Such critical reflections on the conditions of knowledge lead to reconsiderations 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 as 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 interdisciplinarity according to a logic that appears crazy or nonsensical to those still under the spell of the disciplines (Anzaldúa 19, 197), but they become intermediaries 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 interdisciplinary 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 epistemes. 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 grasp the full implications 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 presumptions 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 inscribe 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 Ahdaf Soueif 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 the 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 her 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 colonialism model influential in the early years of Chicano studies