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Interdisciplinary Studies

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IN THE strict sense of the term, *interdisciplinary studies* is not a "field." Even if many scholars and critics think of themselves as participating in interdisciplinary studies, they do not, by virtue of this understanding, share anything like a set of interests, methods, or problems. What they share, instead—for want of a better term—is a predisposition to pursue their questions into areas of critical inquiry that cannot be mapped at all by the cartographic practices of contemporary disciplines or that can be mapped only when one redraws the critical coordinates supplied by those disciplines. Either way, students of interdisciplinary studies are marked by their willingness not simply to challenge, but also to cross, traditional disciplinary boundaries. Their hope, or at any rate their assumption, is that important dimensions of human experience and understanding lie unexplored in the spaces between those boundaries or the places where they cross, overlap, divide, or dissolve.

These practices involve risks of several kinds. The first relate to the disciplinary structure of the university system itself, at least in the United States, and the possibility that attempts to question its territorial boundaries and experiment with changing them may look like subversive activities. These risks are particularly high for junior scholars who lack the protection of tenure but possess the creative impatience necessary to the continuing development not only of the university but also of any particular field. Youthfulness—or, rather, inexperience—often entails a second kind of liability for interdisciplinary study. To bring two or more disciplines into significant interaction with one another requires considerable mastery of the subtleties and particularities of each, together with sufficient imagination and tact, ingenuity and persuasiveness, to convince others of the utility of their linkage. Such mastery, and the finesse that must accompany it, is not often acquired quickly or without extensive research and reflection. In rapidly changing fields such as the natural and physical sciences, where the bulk of graduate education is devoted to the state of the art of particular discipline or subdiscipline, interdisciplinary reconfigurations of methods and subject areas can—and often must—occur quite swiftly, but in the humanities, where one can scarcely learn the state of the art of any discipline without acquiring considerable knowledge of its history, they occur more slowly. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that boundary-crossing is either an infrequent practice in humanistic studies or a recent one.

The humanistic practice of interdisciplinary excursions into foreign territories goes all the way back in the West to classical antiquity, when Greek historians and dramatists drew on medical and philosophical knowledge, respectively, for

clues to the reconception of their own material. It has continued down to our own time, where much social thinking has been "refigured," to use the coinage of the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, by encouraging social thinkers from a variety of disciplines to explore analogies between their own material and such aesthetic activities as play, ritual, drama, symbolic action, narrative, speech acts, games, and writing ("Blurred Genres"). In the Middle Ages, literary study put itself in the debt of systematic theology for its theories of interpretation and language. In the Renaissance, or early modern period as it is now called, the theologians, philosophers, and scholars known as the "humanists" differentiated themselves as a semiprofessional class by adopting, over against the medieval schoolmen, the theories and practices of the classical Greek and Roman philosophers. The movement known as the Enlightenment, in the eighteenth century, could easily be described as a raid by the philosophes on the conceptions and methods of the physical sciences, and what we call nineteenth-century Romanticism is only another term for what might be thought of as the intellectual appropriation, by fields such as theology, philosophy, literature, and the fine arts, of biologic and organic metaphors drawn from the natural sciences.

But if there is nothing unusual about humanists conducting sorties into alien "disciplinary" territory (students of comparative literature have made a virtue of such necessities), there is nonetheless something distinctive and exciting about the modern interest in such cross-field and cross-disciplinary peregrinations. This has to do with the reasons why, and the ways in which, contemporary literary scholars and critics have permitted such sallies to redefine both their subject matter and the kinds of questions they put to it. That is to say, the interdisciplinary move to explore the alien terrain of nonliterary genres and fields has amounted to considerably more than an attempt to draw different disciplines into conversation with one another, or to broaden the horizons of one discipline by borrowing some of the insights and techniques of another. Even where the interdisciplinary impulse has been prompted by motives no more suspect than the desire to improve communication across territorial boundaries or to expand the parameters that define them, it rarely ends there. What may have begun as the simple promotion of a kind of good neighbor policy, or as an innocent exploration of the exotic material of some foreign field, often results in something less benign than boundary-crossing and more unsettling than boundary-changing. What is at stake, to return to Geertz, is not just another redrawing of the disciplinary map but the principles of mapping as such. In this more contemporary sense, then, interdisciplinarity is not achieved through simple confrontations between specialized fields of knowledge—literature with history, chemistry with engineering, art history with the history of ideas—or through the placement of the insights and techniques of one discipline on loan to another—textual study borrowing the methods of computer science, history utilizing the techniques of demographers. The effect, if not the purpose, of interdisciplinarity is often nothing less than to alter the way we think about thinking ("Blurred Genres" 165–66).

CONTEMPORARY INTERDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

The process of interdisciplinary revisionism usually begins with a period of courtship between two distinct and often diverse disciplines that suddenly discover spheres of mutual interest and complementary resources, then proceeds to a kind of marriage based on the belief that there are significant areas of compatibility between their respective methods and intellectual focus, and culminates in the production of offspring who share the parental genes and some of their dispositional features but possess a character all their own. Hence interdisciplinary exchanges depend on something more than ratcheting up the level of sophistication with which one explores the relations between literature and another endeavor—myth, psychology, religion, film, the visual arts—by utilizing methods appropriate to the study of each in a close, perhaps even symbiotic, cooperation. Interdisciplinarity requires, instead, an alteration of the constitutive question that generates such inquiry in the first place. Thus where relational studies proceed from the question of what literature (in its traditions, its formal conventions, and its thematic concerns) has to do with some other material (like music or social behavior) or some other field (such as history, political science, or sociolinguistics), interdisciplinary inquiries proceed from the double-sided question about how the insights or methods of some other field or structure can remodel our understanding of the nature of literature and the "literary" and, conversely, about how literary conceptions and approaches can remodel our conception of the allied field and its subject material.

An excellent example can be found in the emerging field of ethical criticism, first explored by moral philosophers like Iris Murdoch, Mikel Dufrenne, Bernard Williams, and Hilary Putnam, and now being developed by, among others, Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum. An outgrowth of an ancient interest in the relations between literature and philosophy that has been maintained for moderns by writers such as Friedrich Schiller, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, John Dewey, Stuart Hampshire, Isaiah Berlin, Stanley Cavell, and Nelson Goodman, the interdisciplinary challenge of ethical criticism is conceived to be the transcendence of two related views. The first is that literature possesses moral dimensions even though it is not a form of moral experience. The second is that philosophical conceptions of morality can be illustrated by literary forms despite the fact that such forms are incapable of reflecting systematically on moral questions.

In *The Fragility of Goodness* and *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum in particular is concerned to revise both nostrums by arguing, first, against most academic moral philosophers, that certain conceptions of the good life, both individual and social, are not fully or adequately represented in forms of writing as abstract and affectless as traditional philosophical disputation; and, second, against many literary critics and theorists, that the conventional aesthetic prejudice against the ethically heuristic value of forms of writing like prose narrative or lyric poetry derives in part from a false assumption (widely shared by most moral and other

philosophers as well) that the emotions lack cognitive content even where they convey felt quality.

Nussbaum's argument against both fallacies turns on their traditional resistance to the view that aesthetic forms play an educative as well as illustrative role in practical reflection on ethical issues, and it expresses itself in the assertion that while works of art often represent and express emotional effects, their deeper significance stems from the fact that their forms "are themselves the sources of emotional structure, the paradigms of what, for us, feeling is" ("Narrative Emotions" 236). Nussbaum is therefore interested in developing a new structure of interdisciplinary inquiry that will demonstrate, at the same time, the extent to which certain kinds of moral reflection and insight are dependent on narrative and other aesthetic structures and the extent to which practical ethical reasoning is in many instances a concomitant result of literary interpretation.

However, it must be added immediately that ethical criticism is by no means confined to Nussbaum's adroit and compelling practice of it. The term—which has been the source of opprobrium by critics as various as Northrop Frye and Fredric Jameson, and of praise by the likes of F. R. Leavis, Lionel Trilling, and David Bromwich—can be applied more widely to various kinds of interdisciplinary study that go by different names—feminist criticism, African American criticism, postcolonial criticism, ideological criticism, cultural studies—that also seek to submit literary forms to moral scrutiny or to challenge ethical reflection with metaphoric restructuring (see the essays by Schor, Allen, Gates, and Bathrick in this volume).

The interdisciplinary field of American studies provides another example of how such inquiry reconfigures the constituent disciplines that compose it. Beginning in the 1930s as an attempt to link literary and historical studies—when literature was viewed by historians as little more than a set of illustrations of themes, ideas, and events from beyond the world of literature, and history was seen by critics as merely the background of literature—American studies quickly turned into a more complicated attempt to examine the interactions between forms of collective mentality such as myths and archetypes, products of individual consciousness such as works of art and intellect, and social structures such as institutions and practices. In this interdisciplinary reformulation, accomplished by the "myth and symbol" school, as it is now called, a loose grouping of critics that included Henry Nash Smith, John William Ward, and Leo Marx, literature was reconceived both as a repository of historical value and as an example of historical practice; history, as a perceptual as well as material field significantly defined by large imaginative constructs such as myths and other metanarratives that can fuse concept and emotion in an image. In more recent years, with the help of conceptual and methodological insights borrowed from Marxist criticism, social history, feminist criticism, and other areas, the notions of literature and history operative in American studies have been revised even further as studies like Myra Jehlen's *American Incarnation* and Alan Trachtenberg's *Reading American Photographs* have shown how figurative representations

become a historical force in their own right and operate like any other material factor in the public world.

It has lately been claimed that the American studies movement failed because it never led to the creation of separate departments of American literature, but this claim amounts to measuring the success of an interdisciplinary field of inquiry in terms of whether it achieves full institutional recognition by various fields it succeeds in at least partially redefining (Culler 8; Graff 211). The success of the American studies movement derives, rather, from the number of separate undergraduate programs and majors it has generated throughout the United States and the world, the kinds and quality of graduate programs it has produced, the new areas of research it has opened up, the professional associations it has sponsored, and, most important, the creativity, integrity, and resilience of the scholarship produced in its name. Judging by these standards, American studies has been as efficacious an interdisciplinary initiative as any undertaken in American higher education in the postwar period.

But this only indicates how difficult it is to demarcate precisely where, and how, to draw the boundaries not only *between* different kinds of interdisciplinary study but also *within* them. For example, feminist criticism, like cultural critique or African American or postcolonial criticism, is more of a composite methodological site where other interdisciplinary modes cross and recross—reader-response criticism, semiotic analysis, psychoanalytic inquiry, ethnic studies, cultural anthropology, gender studies—than a unitary mode of interdisciplinary study all its own. Furthermore, there are sharp and sometimes seemingly incommensurable differences between and among, say, feminist critics over whether to organize their research around biological, psychological, cultural, or linguistic models. What this suggests, to repeat, is that interdisciplinary studies may not refer to anything as specific or unified as a "field" in itself so much as to a predisposition to view all fields as potentially vulnerable to re-creation in the partial image of some other or others. This, in turn, renders the fields in question what Roland Barthes calls "transversals," whose reconfiguration seeks to produce or recover meanings that their formerly configured relations tended to blur, camouflage, or efface ("From Work to Text" 75).

THE THEORY OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

As numerous students of interdisciplinarity in all fields can attest, the process of converting disciplines into transversals can be not only discomfiting but also potentially violent. When the parameters of traditional fields grow permeable or suspect under the pressure of questions that, as presently constituted, they cannot address, such fields grow ripe for infiltration, subversion, or outright assault. Such military metaphors may seem excessive, but they are apt. When the academic field now called anthropology first attempted to carve out a space for itself between history and sociology, it was described by one of its proponents,

and not altogether inaccurately, as "a disciplinary poaching license." Thus images of encroachment, trespass, offense are inescapable: interdisciplinary studies risk disciplinary transgression in the name of interdisciplinary independence, disciplinary revisionism in the name of interdisciplinary emancipation and creativity (Fish, "Being Interdisciplinary" 15–21).

But the ideology of interdisciplinary freedom captures only those aspects of interdisciplinary activity that are potentially invasive and disruptive. There is another side to interdisciplinary practice that, according to some, is by contrast peremptory, juridical, prescriptive, and imperialistic. This threat derives from the fact that the redescriptive impulses of interdisciplinary studies almost of necessity place one discipline in a position of subordination to another. As a result, the subordinated discipline is not only destabilized but threatened with subsumption in an anomalous, substitutionary structure that on the pretext of situating itself, as the prefix *inter* implies, between the two more traditionally constituted matrices, actually manages to incorporate them both in some larger hegemonic framework. Whether one construes the new interdisciplinary formation as merely a product of the merger of the other two, or as itself a metadiscipline beyond them, seemingly matters scarcely at all. A new field has been produced, the imperiousness of whose procedures often runs counter to the redemptive heuristics used to justify it. Thus if interdisciplinarity is most often legitimated in the name of greater intellectual autonomy and openness, the transdisciplinary exploration it sanctions possesses the capability of masking another form of metadisciplinary despotism. Barthes writes:

> Interdisciplinary work is not a peaceful operation: it begins *effectively* when the solidarity of the old discipline breaks down—a process made more violent, perhaps, by the jolts of fashion—to the benefit of a new object and a new language, neither of which is in the domain of those branches of knowledge that one calmly sought to confront. . . . [T]here now arises a need for a new object, one attained by the displacement or overturning of previous categories.
>
> ("From Work to Text" 73–74)

Barthes defines this new mutational object as the *text*, arguing that it displaces or overturns the old "Newtonian" concept of the "work." By "text" Barthes means to refer less to a specifiable entity than to a site or intersection of productive activity—that is, to processes of signification rather than to forms of the signified. But whether the metadiscipline Barthes invokes is described as textual studies, or intertextuality, or—as certain contemporary critics now argue—cultural studies, his view that interdisciplinarity always supplants one set of structures with another, still more encompassing and dominant is by no means shared by all scholars. What looks to Barthes like a monolithic metadiscipline rising from the imperialistic subversion and partial fusion of two others appears to another group of scholars and critics rather more like the integration of strategies, methods, and queries that acquire their particular sense of authority from what the two disciplines on which heretofore they have traditionally drawn

have customarily dismissed, repressed, or occluded. I cite but two examples. Feminist studies, as the chapter by Naomi Schor in this volume suggests, arose initially as a protest against the stereotypes created about women in the literature written by men and sought to recuperate the very different representations that women had furnished of their experience in their own writing. In like fashion, the successive stages of African American criticism—from its inception in the Black Arts movement of the 1960s to its attempt, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to retheorize social and textual boundaries in all American cultural contexts and thus turn black studies into a critique of American studies generally—demonstrate, as the essay by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in this book reveals, that African American criticism arose in part out of discoveries of what more conventional inquiries had typically omitted.

MAPPING THE INTERDISCIPLINARY TERRAIN

For purposes of this discussion, it is perhaps enough to say, then, that there is a loose historical connection between the various associations that literature has for some time, and in some instances for many centuries, enjoyed with other fields or structured forms—forms like painting, film, sculpture, architecture, discursive argument, dogmatic and speculative theology, social thought, music, and, now, photography and the law; fields like jurisprudence, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, musicology, philosophy, religion, science, history, and politics—and the development of at least some interdisciplinary approaches to such relations. But this assertion needs to be qualified to the bone. These developments have not followed an orderly pattern; they are by no means fully descriptive of all the fields with which literature has possessed important conceptual and methodological filiations; and they are related closely, as might be expected, to developments in literary and critical theory as well as to the emergence of new notions of textuality and intertextuality, particularly as they apply to the concept of culture itself. More exactly, genuinely interdisciplinary modes of study have usually developed through the crossing, displacement, or alteration of the boundaries between forms of relational study, or have otherwise constituted themselves in the spaces between those forms as attempts to understand the asymmetric relations between the protocols and perspective that divide them.

As a case in point, deconstruction arose as a joining of the philosophical interest in the critique of Western metaphysics and the new science of linguistics that in Ferdinand de Saussure's version stressed that language is composed of signs that can be differentiated as to function: the material means of transmission or acoustic image of any sign is known as the signifier, the conceptual image or intellectual referrent of any sign as the signified. The relation between signifier and signified is what becomes problematic for the deconstructionist by virtue of his or her perception of the irreducible *differance*—as in the words *differing* and *deferring*—between them, and the inevitable suppression, repression, and

[illegible] construction as a

dissemination of meaning to which it leads. Often misdescribed as a method or critical theory, its chief aim, according to its founder and most famous exponent, Jacques Derrida, is to deconstruct all the classical oppositions on which literary criticism (like theology and philosophy) is based—between word and referent, language and being, structure and process, text and context—in order to see what such oppositions have traditionally veiled or disguised. By contrast, the new historicism, discussed in detail by Annabel Patterson in this book, has taken up methodological residence somewhere between deconstruction's preoccupation with the conflicting, if not self-canceling, forces of signification in any text and the neo-Marxist fascination with how processes of textualization not only reflect material circumstances and institutional patterns but frequently, and often simultaneously, generate them.

But if interdisciplinary studies is sometimes formed by traversing inherited disciplinary boundaries, sometimes by transfiguring them, and sometimes by exploring the spaces between them, how is one to go about mapping the studies' own permutations and forms? The simplest answer is probably to be found by reverting to the set of critical coordinates that have conventionally been employed to model literary texts—the author, the reader, the material or linguistic components of the text itself, and the world to which the text refers. This model, first delineated by M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, has been vastly complicated in recent years as our sense of each one of its coordinates has been extended, but its use can nonetheless be instructive (Hernadi). Such a model helps clarify immediately, for example, that much of the activity in interdisciplinary studies in recent years has been selectively focused. Because of suspicions about the status of the author in contemporary criticism and the whole question of authorial intention, and the no less grave theoretical misgivings about the mimetic properties of art and the role of representation generally, interdisciplinary work has placed far less emphasis on the first and last coordinates of this literary model, the author and the world, than on the middle two, the reader and the work.

This selectivity is apparent everywhere. It is as visible in all the contemporary variants of psychological criticism, which tend to be preoccupied with the mental and emotional states of individuals, even when such states are taken to represent real-life psychological processes in the world, as it is in social and political criticism that is typically concerned with the way the material environment serves either as a source of literary production, as an object of literary representation, or as a determinant of literary reception and influence. Thus Freudian criticism has for some time been less interested in the psyches of individual authors, or the capacity of literary texts to mirror the psychological processes of persons and groups, than in the way psychological structures, such as the unconscious, can be viewed as analogues to literary structures like language, or in the way strategies of literary typification and signification, such as metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, can be read psychoanalytically both as representing and as enabling processes of repression, displacement, transference,

and countertransference. Similarly, much of the most influential interdisciplinary criticism promoted by the newer Marxist theories has abandoned careful examination of the class background of writers, or the sociopolitical verisimilitude of the world they create, in favor of exploring the manner in which works of literature and other art forms not only reflect discursive traces of the class struggle and resolve social conflicts symbolically but also inscribe stylistically the modes of production by which they were first legitimated.

The map of interdisciplinary studies would look rather different, however, if only one of these critical coordinates were used as the cartographic axis. Take, for example, the focus in recent criticism on the reader, which links the phenomenological criticism that Wolfgang Iser practices in *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading* with the *Receptionsästhetik* of Hans Robert Jauss that examines, in studies like *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* and *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, the changing responses of entire peoples or communities over time. Nevertheless, under the same heading one could make room for the parallel, and much more empirical, emphasis of critics like Nina Baym, in *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, and Cathy N. Davidson, in *Revolution and the Word*, who seek to rehistoricize the reading experience itself by examining the recorded responses of the readers of any text or the history of the use of particular books, and align such criticism with the stress that Frank Kermode, in *The Classic*, and Stanley Fish, in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, have placed on the roles, respectively, of interpretive institutions and interpretive communities. Such a map would reveal that much recent interdisciplinary criticism focusing on the experience of the reader has been propelled by a grammar of feminist, ethnic, or class-oriented ideological motives, but it would also disclose that some of this criticism—Norman Holland's *Dynamics of Literary Response*, Barthes's *Pleasure of the Text*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*, Robert Scholes's *Textual Power*, and Mary Jacobus's *Reading Women*—has reflected interests that were psychoanalytic, structuralist, feminist, deconstructionist, semiotic, or a combination of all five.

Were one to redraw the map of contemporary interdisciplinary studies in relation to the critical coordinate of the text itself, however, one could similarly highlight, as well as link, a variety of still other kinds of interdisciplinary studies. One point of departure for such a cartographic exercise might be the extraordinary developments that followed on the emergence of modern linguistics, a field that grew out of the convergence of work by Russian formalists, like Viktor Shklovsky and Yuri Tynyanov, and Czech linguists associated with Jan Mukarovsky and the Prague school, with, again, the language theory of Saussure and the semiotics theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, all of which conspired to produce methods that applied linguistic insights to the study of culture conceived as a system of signs. A key figure in these developments was Roman Jakobson, who, in emigrating first from Moscow to Prague and then from Prague to the United States, helped bridge the gap between linguistics

linguistic insights applied to the

and semiotics and thus encouraged interdisciplinary activities as widely varied as the stylistics criticism of Michael Riffaterre, the poetics analysis of Juri Lotman, and the narratological studies of scholars like A. J. Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, Claude Bremond, and, now, Paul Ricoeur (see also the essay by Finegan in this volume).

But the emergent field of linguistics also promoted interdisciplinary work in areas quite distant from the study of the structure and properties of language. In one direction, it influenced the structuralist orientation that Claude Lévi-Strauss, and later Edmund Leach, brought to ethnographic studies and the development of social anthropology in general (see the essay by Baron in this volume). In another, it helped shape formalistic and generic interests that run from the conservative, archetypal criticism represented by Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* to the radical dialogic criticism associated with Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* and *The Dialogic Imagination*.

But the field of linguistics and its many affiliations (indeed, far more than can be enumerated here) is only one of the interdisciplinary modes of study promoted by (even as it promoted) the study of the literary coordinate known as the text. To draw out the lines of interdisciplinary relation that emanate from this textual coordinate, one would have to take into account everything from the development of hermeneutics (or interpretation theory), starting with the work of Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger and continuing through that of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, to the new criticism of what Fredric Jameson calls "the political unconscious." The latter has its roots in the work of Walter Benjamin and other members of the Frankfurt school (Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno), as well as in the writings of Antonio Gramsci, and its expression in the writings of critics as various as Lucien Goldmann, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, Pierre Macherey, and Robert Weimann (see also the essay by Marshall in this volume).

Still another way to map the varieties of interdisciplinary study would be to start with some of the new subjects it has helped make available for critical analysis—the history of the book; the materialism of body; the psychoanalysis of the reader and the reading process; the sociology of conventions; the semiotics of signification; the historization of representation; the ideology of gender, race, and class; intertextuality; power; otherness; and undecidability—but it would be necessary to add that each of these topics, as currently, though variously, construed, has also served both to attract and to project still further lines of interdisciplinary investigation. Studies like *The Body in Pain* by Elaine Scarry, for example, have woven psychoanalytic, cultural, materialistic, neo-Marxist, and new-historicist strands of disciplinary interrogation; studies of representation such as Stephen J. Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* have drawn into new combinations historicist, reader-response, cultural materialist, hermeneutic, semiotic, and often deconstructionist inter- and cross-disciplinary modes. But in much of the newer interdisciplinary scholarship, studies of the body become studies of representation. Thus the threading of disciplinary principles and procedures is frequently doubled, tripled, and quadrupled, in ways that are not only mixed but, from a conventional disciplinary perspective, somewhat off center.

So described, the overlapping, underlayered, interlaced, crosshatched affiliations, coalitions, and alliances toward which these cartographic operations lead can become truly baffling. Furthermore, insofar as they imply that disciplinary traditions of descent or influence always flow in one direction and in continuously visible and hence traceable channels, such mapmaking exercises can also become misleading, since the inevitable result of much interdisciplinary study, if not its ostensible purpose, is to dispute and disorder conventional understandings of the relations between such things as origin and terminus, center and periphery, focus and margin, inside and outside.

These observations raise an obvious question about whether the simplest, or at least the most coherent, way to conceptualize the kinds of interdisciplinary studies that have emerged from relational or interrelational studies might not be to focus directly on the associations that literature, or rather literary study, has developed with other recognized, institutionalized fields of academic inquiry. On this basis one could simply describe the interdisciplinary endeavors that have grown out of the study of, say, literature and philosophy (phenomenological criticism, hermeneutics, deconstruction, neopragmatism, ethical criticism, the new rhetorical criticism), literature and anthropology (structuralism, ethnography, or "thick description," folklore and folklife studies, myth criticism), literature and psychology (psychoanalytic criticism, reader-response criticism, anxiety-of-influence criticism, cultural psychology), literature and politics (sociological criticism, cultural studies, ideological criticism, materialist studies), literature and religion (theological apologetics, recuperative hermeneutics, generic and historical criticism, rhetoric studies), and literature and linguistics (Russian formalism, stylistics, narratology, semiotics). However, what has to be borne in mind is that these correlate fields (anthropology, philosophy, religious studies, psychology, etc.) have themselves changed—and sometimes dramatically—during the last quarter century, and among a variety of factors generating that instability and revisionary ferment has been the success of the particular interdisciplinary initiatives they have either stimulated or helped sustain. It is also worth noting that fewer than half the academic fields with which literature has historically enjoyed or established important ties are even mentioned here (some of the others cited in specific chapters of Barricelli and Gibaldi's *Interrelations of Literature* include myth, folklore, sociology, law, science, music, the visual arts, and film). Among those omitted, several, like law and science, are tethered to literature's earliest beginnings, and at least one—film studies—is intimately connected ~~to literature's future fortunes~~.

But if relational and interrelational studies have precipitated and promoted the creation of certain kinds of interdisciplinary studies, they have clearly discouraged the development of others. Consider, for example, the relations between literature and music. Study of the relations between literature and music goes back to the prehistory of literature itself, when verbal forms were first

emancipated from their sedimentation in sound and song. This interest has taken a variety of forms over the ages, from the study of such musical elements as rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, tone, voice, variation, balance, repetition, contrast, and counterpoint, to the vast and complex historical ties between particular musical types, like the rondeau or the symphony, and the verse forms of Alfred de Musset and Algernon Swinburne or Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Herman Broch's *Sleepwalkers*. The musicality of literature and the literariness of music are synonymous with works like Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth* and *Otello*, Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*, Franz Liszt's *Dante* and *Faust* symphonies, Richard Strauss's *Don Juan*, Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, Novalis, Heinrich Heine, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Giuseppe Mazzini, Friedrich Nietzsche, André Gide, Bertholt Brecht, Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot have all sought to translate musical technique into literary practice. Yet despite the eloquent arguments of critics like George Steiner that the quintessential form of art in literature is its music, or the testimony of distinguished musicologists like Leonard B. Meyers that music can never rid itself completely of the element of story, the venerable association of music with literature and literature with music—so intelligently interpreted in texts like T. S. Eliot's *Music of Poetry*, Calvin S. Brown's *Music and Literature*, Carl Dahlhaus's *Musikästhetik*, Steven Paul Scher's *Literatur und Musik*, John Hollander's *Untuning of the Sky*, or even the chapter "Literature and the Other Arts" in *Theory of Literature*, edited by René Wellek and Austin Warren—has rarely led to the programmatic development of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of either the musicality of literary forms and meanings or of the literary dimensions of music. In musical studies itself, however, the case is different, as the interdisciplinary fields of opera studies, ethnomusicology, and even the aesthetics of music amply attest.

Similarly, despite countless distinguished examples, the long record of informed study of the relations between the visual and the verbal arts has only rarely resulted in the creation of interdisciplinary, as opposed to cross- or transdisciplinary, modes of study, in which disciplinary boundaries, instead of merely being bridged, are actually redrawn. While there have been numerous disciplinary exchanges between the literary and the plastic arts, there has been surprisingly little reconception of each in the image of the other. This is the more to be marveled at both because of the existence of academic programs organized to examine this relationship and because of the brilliant interdisciplinary research in which it has issued in the work of Rudolf Arnheim, E. H. Gombrich, Erwin Panofsky, Meyer Schapiro, Richard Wollheim, Ronald Paulson, Arthur C. Danto, Barbara Novak, and Michael Fried. There are countless literary texts that treat works of visual art or the things they delineate, that employ visual techniques, that are linked to historical movements and manifestos associated with the visual arts, that call on interpretive skills they have helped develop, or that otherwise inscribe visual modes of conception and assessment; but none has proved capable of overcoming either one of two kinds of resistance—the

first to interpretation itself on the part of many art historians, the second to the intellectual power and percipience of the visual on the part of many literary scholars and critics. If art historians routinely eschew criticism for cataloging, evaluation for description, literary historians and critics have typically treated all the fine arts as mere complements, adjuncts, illustrations of the verbal arts.

Striking evidence of this latter phenomenon can be found in Thomas Bender's *New York Intellect*, a study of the intellectual life of New York City from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. By the end of this period, the culture of the city was recognized throughout the world for its eminence in at least three of the fine arts—painting, dance, and music. By mid-century it had also nurtured an extraordinary group of critics, known as the New York intellectuals, who were associated with the *Partisan Review* and other magazines. Yet despite the cosmopolitanism of figures like Lionel Trilling, Philip Rahv, Alfred Kazin, Irving Howe, and Sidney Hook, virtually none of the New York intellectuals, with the occasional exception of a Harold Rosenberg and a Clement Greenberg, paid any attention to the artistic areas in which New York culture had achieved international recognition.

This is not to suggest, then, that there have been no interfield or transfield studies of literature and art or literature and music, much less that these initiatives have failed to produce work of enormous and lasting value. Nor is it to claim that in the future such initiatives may not generate still more systematic and more institutionalized modes of interdisciplinary inquiry that reconstitute the materials and methods that currently compose those modes. It is merely to assert that a new confederation of practices, however salutary, is not a new configuration of methods, however experimental; and until a new configuration of methods produces a refiguration of material, one does not have what can be called a genuinely interdisciplinary form of study. Interdisciplinarity involves a rethinking not just of conceptual frames but of their perceptual ground, as Alan Liu has argued in an as yet unpublished paper entitled "Indiscipline, Interdiscipline, and Liberty: The Revolutionary Paradigm." What gets reconceived, as Liu notes, are not only the paradigms by which one discipline makes sense of itself to itself with the help of another but the way such processes of reconception provide both disciplines with new ways of representing their own knowledge to themselves.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Where did this new interest in interdisciplinarity come from? Was it the result of factors confined to the institutional culture of academic literary studies or the product of wider educational and social forces? Did it emerge all at once or in successive historical stages? What forms of resistance has the development of interdisciplinarity met? How is one to assess its benefits, and what sorts of problems is interdisciplinary study likely to confront in the future?

These difficult and important questions are being vigorously contested. In addition to admitting of different and frequently conflicting answers, they are questions whose very form can be challenged as prejudicial. What they presume is that interdisciplinarity can be treated as a unified or coherent movement whose progress has typically been forward and uninterrupted, when its development seems more often to have described a course of successive, tentative, often uncoordinated forays and retreats whose progress was more crabwise than linear. Another way to put this would be to say that just as intelligent theory always holds out the possibility of unintelligent practice, as Gilbert Ryle once observed, so it is equally possible that intelligent practice can sometimes be performed in the name of unintelligent, or at least unconscious or only half-conscious, theory. If this notion tells us anything, it should confirm the fact that forms of interdisciplinary study often emerge by accident. When not driven simply by the vagaries of fashion or the metaphysics of theory, they are usually occasioned by critical conundrums and simply offer themselves as workable solutions to practical problems. In other words, interdisciplinarity is the pragmatist's response to the dilemma of disciplinary essentialism.

Yet this is not to say that interdisciplinary study can flourish in an unfavorable environment. After World War II, for example, when the pedagogy known in the United States as the New Criticism was in full sway, interdisciplinary literary studies were in a state of noticeable arrest and, where not arrested, were seriously eclipsed by other, more formalistic and inward-looking methodologies. But the ideology of interpretive refinement then epitomized by the New Criticism, or rather epitomized by its pedagogic practitioners in the schools—among its various proponents, like John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Kenneth Burke, Cleanth Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren, there were sharp and sometimes irreconcilable differences in poetics and procedure—had a much more deleterious effect (and still does) in England than in the United States; and even where similar prejudices were at work on the Continent, Europeans have always been more responsive to interdisciplinary initiatives than either the British or the Americans. Part of this difference stems, no doubt, from the looser departmental structure of the European university system, and part, as well, from the role that philosophical discourse and ideas generally have traditionally played in European intellectual culture.

But generalizations like this are notoriously porous. The American university in the twentieth century has been surprisingly hospitable to a variety of interdisciplinary experiments without altering the way it organizes the structure of knowledge. With respect to literary study, this paradox has been explained by Gerald Graff as the result of the "field-coverage principle" (6–9). According to Graff, the principle enables departments of English to retain their power and organization by welcoming new fields and methods to the fold without permitting them to challenge their established hierarchies concerning the nature and teaching of literature.

The trouble with this explanation is that it may concede too much to the

leftist view that identifies the American university with other institutions of the corporate state and postulates that its expansion, like that of capitalism generally, derives from its ability to absorb the elements of conflict it produces. While academic institutions certainly exhibit something of the "repressive tolerance," as Herbert Marcuse called it, of late capitalism, it would be more accurate to say that the movement toward interdisciplinary studies has no doubt resulted from many factors, both institutional and conceptual. If the field-coverage principle has proved influential in determining the way the field's intentions and achievements have been perceived and assimilated, the seismic theoretical shift that Roland Barthes first noticed from *work* to *text* has influenced the way interdisciplinary studies has, insofar as it can be said to possess an integrated vision at all, construed itself.

The discovery of the new world of textuality and intertextuality has served to question a number of interpretive shibboleths that controlled literary study for many decades. Among them are the following: that there is one "definitive" meaning of any text that is to be associated with the intentions of some transcendent Author; that there is any such thing as an Author, transcendent or otherwise, who is alone, or even chiefly, responsible for what a text means; that texts must be read independent of their relations, anxious or imperialistic, to other texts; that reading can be viewed only as a process of reception and absorption but not of production and intervention; and that when reading, interpretation, criticism are seen as creative and not merely reflective activities, their operations must still be restricted to individual works and cannot be expanded to apply "literary" modes of analysis to the entire spectrum of cultural phenomena (Macksey).

Recent exploration of the new world of the text and the intertext has brought with it a new diversification of our sense of the relations not only between one text and another but also between any text and its putative "context." Not only has the notion of "context" been broadened to encompass things that had never been construed as "literary" before—the experiences of women, of people of color, of members of so-called underclasses like the poor, the illiterate, and the homeless, of ethnic minorities, of regions like the South, the West, or the Northeast, and of marginalized groups like gays, the aged, and, now, thanks to the hospice movement and the awareness of AIDS, the terminally ill—it has also been reconstrued as a concept no less "artificial," "constructed," or "fictive" than that of "text" itself.

In modern literary study, the notion of "context" has been most closely associated with the notion of "culture," but in recent years "culture" has itself been radically historicized. As the concept of culture has been viewed against the background of its appearance in the eighteenth century and its transformation in the nineteenth century in response to such complex social and political developments as the rise of nationalism, the emergence of the middle class, the industrialization and urbanization of commerce, the democratization of social life, and the professionalization of the arts, it has become clear that cultures

Cultures as "Supreme Fictions"

function in different ways in different historic communities, and even in various ways at different times in the same community. Like canons, cultures are always in the process of revision as their constituent elements are challenged, refashioned, and replaced. This same process of historicization has also raised important questions about whether the culture concept has not outlived its usefulness. As the anthropologist James Clifford has proposed (21–54), cultures are not only unstable, selective, contingent, strategic, and incompletely integrated; in actual historical experience, they tend to function less as enduring forms than as, in Wallace Stevens's phrase, "Supreme Fictions": ways of creating collective identity in the face of forces that threaten it.

The problematization of the concept of culture has in turn contributed to skepticism about the idea of the "West." This skepticism has naturally been aroused by discoveries by social and cultural anthropologists, but it has also been generated by the results of postcolonial criticism (in the work of, to name only a few, Octavio Paz, Nadine Gordimer, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Stuart Hall, and Carlos Fuentes) and the new interest now beginning to be displayed by departments of English and comparative literature in writers from Central and South America, the Caribbean world, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and Eastern Europe. Causing further erosion of the boundaries between cultures and contexts, these interdisciplinary undertakings have revealed how, when used comparatively, the idea of the "West" has been employed repeatedly to the disadvantage of its discursive opposites (the "Orient," the "Third World," "newly liberated peoples"), and how, when used normatively, as a broadly monocentric cultural entity, it has served to cloak many of the tensions, confusions, conflicts, and divisions that characterize it.

Taken together, these factors have created a more pluralistic and, in some ways, more adversarial, or at least more disputatious, climate in criticism, a climate that has opened the way for what Paul Ricoeur once called "the conflict of interpretations." Aside from the fact that some critics take this conflict of interpretations to be a cacophony, what really has occurred is not an increase in the level of discord so much as a realization that dialogue, contestation, diversity of opinion may be all that interpretation shall ever finally attain. But if the achievement of interpretive consensus, or agreement, or uniformity has come to be recognized as quite possibly an illusory ideal in the human sciences—just as, earlier, Thomas Jefferson perceived it to be an illusory ideal in political affairs—then one can begin to appreciate how essential, how really crucial, interdisciplinary studies are to that "refinement of debate," in Clifford Geertz's phrasing, that can be achieved in its place (*Interpretation* 29).

THE PROSPECTS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Interdisciplinarity will remain integral to this deepening of the debate in the human sciences only so long as it remains suspicious of its own grounds, only so

long as it refuses to hypostatize or totalize its methodological fascination with discrepancies, divergences, disjunctions, and difference. The threat of hypostatization or totalization in interdisciplinary studies comes from one of two temptations. The first is disciplinary reductionism, or the temptation to think that the methods of one field are sufficient to interpret the materials of many. The second is the appetite for metaphorical transfer, or the temptation to treat the materials of one field as mere epiphenomena of the subjects of another. The future of interdisciplinary studies depends, of course, on avoiding such temptations. But it also depends on a number of other, more institutional and material factors, such as the availability of funds to support the development of graduate programs, centers for study, summer institutes, visiting and permanent professorships, outlets for publication, interdepartmental colloquia, and scholarships.

Chief among these more objective elements is the ongoing controversy within the humanities (and beyond them) about whether universities are to be defined as institutions devoted principally to the reproduction and transmission of culture or, rather, to the critique and re-creation of culture (Culler 33–36). While this is not a distinction anyone would have thought of making, at least in American higher education, twenty or thirty years ago, it now shapes much of the debate about the reorganization of knowledge and the politics of the academy. Within the humanities the debate centers on the nature and effect of cultural representations, and within interdisciplinary studies (if not also outside) the division takes place between those who see the study of cultural representations as a political struggle over the sources and symptomatics of power and those who view that study, instead, as a hermeneutic struggle over the hierarchies and heuristics of value. In studying cultural texts, what are we trying to do: determine how and by whom the world should be governed, or decide which values should organize our experience of it?

While these purposes are by no means unrelated, neither are they the same. The long-term challenge for interdisciplinary studies is to remain undaunted by the tension between them without being seduced into thinking that this tension can be easily reduced or overcome. What is most productive intellectually in the current practice of interdisciplinary studies is neither the utopian hope that the tension can ultimately be erased nor the complacent belief that it finally doesn't matter; what has been most productive is the inescapable fact of the tension itself and the deepened, pragmatic appreciation to which it has given rise: of how knowledge is always open to further interpretation and criticism, of how understanding is always susceptible to further correction and realization.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

It is well to remember that reflection on interdisciplinary studies possesses a long and illustrious genealogy. In the West it begins with such texts as Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and proceeds through Francis Bacon's *Novum*

Organum and Giambattista Vico's *New Science* to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Charles Sanders Peirce's pioneering essays on the theory of signs, and Wilhelm Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften*. As we move closer to the present and confine ourselves to works that have developed general models for the reorganization of disciplinary inquiry with particular bearing on literary studies, we must make special mention of Northrop Frye's compendium of myth and archetypal criticism, *Anatomy of Criticism*; Hans-Georg Gadamer's magisterial study of the theory of interpretation, *Truth and Method*; Michel Foucault's highly influential attempt to create an archaeology of the human sciences, *The Order of Things*; Umberto Eco's elaboration of a theory of signs, *A Theory of Semiotics*; Jacques Derrida's development of the theory of deconstruction, *Of Grammatology*; and Pierre Bourdieu's attempt to reground the social sciences in a theory of symbolic capital and authority, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

In American literary study, interdisciplinary thinking in a number of fields has been been broadly influenced by a variety of important late-twentieth-century texts. Among the most important are Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*, Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology*, E. D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation*, Georg Lukács's *Realism in Our Time*, Clifford Geertz's *Interpretation of Cultures*, Hayden White's *Metahistory*, Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, Jacques Lacan's *Ecrits*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*, John Searle's *Speech Acts*, Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* and *Dialogic Imagination*, Paul Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy*, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Stephen J. Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, and Roger Chartier's *Cultural History*.

The most readable history of interdisciplinary initiatives, and the resistances they have encountered, in the formation of American literary study is Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*. The most accessible summary of the ideology of interdisciplinarity in contemporary literary studies appears in Stanley Fish's "Being Interdisciplinary Is So Very Hard to Do." But the most impressive demonstrations of the efficacy of interdisciplinary inquiry are still to be found in the way it has helped redefine and extend research in every period of literary study, from the Age of Pericles to postmodernism, and in every methodological orientation, from philology to phenomenology and from history to hermeneutics.

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