

Becoming Undisciplined: Toward the Supradisciplinary Study of Security

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In recent years we have seen increasing reflection among scholars of security studies regarding the boundaries of their field and the range of its appropriate subject matter. At the same time, scholars elsewhere in the academy have been developing their own approaches to issues of security. These various pockets of work have been undertaken in nearly complete isolation from one another and with little apparent awareness of relevant developments in the other fields. In this essay, we advance the claim that security cannot be satisfactorily theorized within the confines of disciplinary boundaries—any disciplinary boundaries. The challenge thus becomes how to develop what might be termed a “supradisciplinary” approach to the study of security that will allow us to think and engage our subject matter across a range of discourses without giving rise to an interdisciplinary hybrid or *sui generis* discipline.

An increasing number of scholars working in the field of security studies have turned their attention in recent years to the nature, limits, and possibilities of the field itself. This new focus has been wrought as much by the demise of the Cold War as by the growing *mélange* of epistemological challenges raised against the traditional foundations of the concept of security. The result has been a period of unprecedented disciplinary introspection within the field. Early efforts in this regard (see, for example, Buzan 1991; Brown 1992) tended toward the broadening of the security agenda but remained firmly entrenched in largely unproblematized conceptions of the meaning of security. Subsequent inquiry (see, for example, Walker 1997; Huysmans 1998) has turned on consideration of the nature of the referent object in the security debate and on the question of how the meaning of security is transformed with the displacement or replacement of traditional referents. Much of this deliberation, however, has been confined to discussions about whether this or that issue is a *bona fide* security concern. Attempts to treat issues related to the biosphere, for example, have occasioned considerable debate about the appropriate boundaries of the field of security studies (see Deudney 1990; Dalby 1992; Mathews 1994; Levy 1995). Precious little attention has been devoted to questions about the adequacy of the field, as presently constituted, as an intellectual terrain upon which to (re)envision security—that is, of whether the field of security studies

is, by itself, possessed of the conceptual tools and the empirical range necessary to either reconceptualize security or reconfirm traditional conceptions.

At the same time, the potential contribution that insights and conceptual innovations cultivated elsewhere in the academy have to make to the study of security is belied by the disproportionately meager attention they have so far received in the field of security studies. The point here is not to hold out the import of insights, perspectives, or methodologies developed in other disciplines as a panacea for security studies, although the field would undoubtedly benefit from serious contemplation of them. Nor should it be taken as a call for a messianic campaign to alert those working in other disciplines to the importance of their engagement with the concept of security. On the contrary, substantial and growing literatures dealing with security already exist in a range of other academic disciplines, most notably anthropology, human geography, and sociology (see Arnold and Beier 1999). Curiously, however, very little cross-pollination has taken place between these literatures and those more readily identifiable with security studies. Indeed, there is scant evidence of mutual familiarity—or acquaintance for that matter—to be found on either side of the disciplinary divide.

Pointing up the disciplinary “ghettoization(s)” of the concept of security in this way might at first be read as an implicit entreaty toward the initiation of a trans-disciplinary dialogue on security. Certainly, such would be a welcome development. More fundamentally, however, drawing attention to the existence of these relative solitudes unsettles disciplinarity itself while highlighting the considerable extent to which particular ideas of security are products of the disciplinary contexts in which they emerge and which they reciprocally help to shape. That is to say, disciplinary predispositions frame a priori the range of possibilities within which the concept of security can be imagined. The resultant conceptualizations of security, in turn, contribute to the reproduction of those same disciplinary predispositions by implicitly accepting their terms and thereby reproducing the limits within which inquiry may proceed. It is not insignificant, then, that research and teaching in the field of security studies has generally been conducted within the somewhat larger—though still limited—confines of international relations and, more broadly still, political science. Although this might well have befit (in a strictly genealogical sense) the Cold War context of the field’s emergence and growth, it otherwise seems appropriate only if we take the content of “security” to be resolved and, further, if that resolution confines the concept in its essentials to a matter of politics. In this sense, the field of security studies itself is at stake in the face of challenges raised against the particular renderings of security that have been possible within its boundaries. And even though the field might lack formal disciplinary status, it nevertheless exhibits a number of key traits of a discipline: (1) a more or less common body of core concepts, (2) relative consensus as to the appropriate objects of study, (3) a *sui generis* literary heritage, that is, its own classics, (4) isolation as reflected by a low level of fragmentation into specialties or recombination with scholars in other disciplines around a security studies specialty, and (5) any fragmentation and recombination that has occurred being met with decidedly disciplinary calls for purity (see, for example, Walt 1991:230). Indeed, by these indicators, security studies arguably evinces a much more coherently disciplinary character than many of the recognized disciplines. We, therefore, think it appropriate to treat security studies as a *de facto* discipline.

That scholars working in other academic disciplines have been developing their own approaches to issues of security does not at all mean that the established—and often jealously guarded—(metaphorical) disciplinary boundaries of the academy have been diminished in any significant way. Again, these various pockets of work have been undertaken in near complete isolation from one another and with little apparent awareness of relevant developments in other fields. Notwithstanding this fact, a small but growing number of voices have been raised in support of an

interdisciplinary approach to the study of security (exemplary of this call is Weldes et al. 1999). It may be tempting to think of this development as indicative of small cracks in the metaphorical dams separating the disciplines, through which a few small but not insignificant trickles have managed to pass. The objective for those inclined toward interdisciplinarity, then, would seem to involve expanding upon these incipient ruptures and, indeed, breaching the dams altogether. However, this image still bespeaks a persistent disciplinary chauvinism inasmuch as it is suggestive of a unidirectional flow of content from the metaphorical reservoir to the metaphorical void (or, perhaps, of the apocalyptic flooding of the idyllic valley that lies beyond). This process, it seems, is all too often the condition of efforts at interdisciplinarity—that is, they tend to involve the *appropriation* of novel ideas and insights and their integration into what is, in the end, still a decidedly disciplinary standpoint. Moreover, the metaphor is also problematic in that it naturalizes disciplinarity by accepting this phenomenon as the starting point for the project, as the given condition to be transcended. Disciplinarity, however, is not a condition; disciplinarity is a practice. And it is the failure to fully appreciate this vital distinction, we contend, that has doomed interdisciplinarity from the outset—a point with which we must engage more directly before we can begin to imagine what the *supradisciplinary* study of security might look like.

Disciplinarity/Interdisciplinarity: Rendering a Condition

As is evident from the explosion of “interdisciplinary” research centers and projects, academic programs, and conferences, there is an increasingly widespread and “mainstream” appreciation of the fact that the pursuit of knowledge and understanding may sometimes be compromised rather than facilitated by the familiar disciplinary parcelization of subject matters. In point of fact, an internet search using Google at the time of writing this essay returned approximately 2,990,000 web pages that made reference to “interdisciplinary,” 339,000 referring to “interdisciplinary research,” 54,500 involving “interdisciplinarity,” and 2,850 referring to “interdisciplinary conferences.” And, although perhaps more pronounced or obvious with respect to disciplines that have relatively close relationships or *raisons d’être*, there is a growing recognition that even apparently quite disparate disciplines have much to offer each other. As Virginia Abernethy (1994:3) has observed: “As never before, biology and physical science should inform the social sciences including economics, while history has a lesson for all.” Indeed, issues that might be grouped together under the heading “environmental studies” have particularly benefited from the engagement of scholars and activists from a wide range of diverse formal disciplinary affiliations. An examination of the table of contents of the *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review Anthology* (1999:2) is illustrative of this convergence. Contributors to the volume are variously affiliated with Departments of Systems Design, Statistics and Actuarial Science, Environmental Sociology, Accounting and Finance, Environmental Law, Criminal Law, Biology, Economics, and Engineering, as well as with Schools of Business and Natural Resources.

The literature on the subject of disciplinarity is diverse. However, the common starting point of these various visions of interdisciplinarity or interdisciplinary studies is an ontology that makes it impossible to conceive of disciplining practices rather than disciplined things. As such, much of the literature on interdisciplinarity or interdisciplinary studies takes for granted the unproblematic existence of discrete (or at least relatively so) bodies of knowledge and concerns itself, as a result, with the sharing or importation of insights from one discipline to another. Thus, the focus of this work is on the benefits to be reaped from cross-disciplinary research and on the institutional, logistical, professional, and methodological barriers that

inhibit transfer. Debates, as we shall see below, turn on questions of the possibility of individuals achieving the requisite specialization for such projects, on the ability to wear two or more hats simultaneously, and on the identification of fields that have something of importance to say to one another. Disciplinarity itself is never called into question and, consequently, these projects remain trapped within disciplinary logics, are forced to adopt problem-solving strategies, and, most important, are unable to appreciate the constructedness and contextuality of the disciplined pursuit of knowledge.

Patrick Wilson's (1996:194) contribution to the literature on interdisciplinarity is illustrative of this tendency to leave the basic issue of disciplinarity uninterrogated. Indeed, he presents the notion of interdisciplinarity as a concept that is unproblematically defined as something that "must, at the very least, involve the use of the knowledge and skill involved in two specialties from different disciplines." Immediately, we are presented with a vision of "specialties" as discrete sets of knowledge, specific enough in their subject matter to be considered distinct from each other and yet sufficiently similar to be "located" within the same discipline. By implication, there is a clear line drawn between those differences that can be accommodated within a single discipline (that is, those that are perhaps differences of emphasis, which nevertheless do not negate the essential commonality of "subdisciplines") and those which bespeak a more essential difference (that is, one which turns on an irreconcilability that cannot be accommodated within a single discipline). Inevitably then, Wilson's "interdisciplinarity" must be about crossing borders, gaining expertise in at least two discrete sets of knowledge, and bringing these distinctive perspectives to bear on a given issue.

Wilson accepts that there is a need for interdisciplinary research because, as he notes, disciplinary efforts to understand a given issue, particularly within the social sciences, typically capture only one aspect of that issue. "Understanding social reality requires crossing or ignoring disciplinary boundaries" (Wilson 1996:195). Given that Wilson's ontology requires him to see disciplines as distinctive bodies of knowledge, his sense that disciplinary efforts will capture only a part of the reality they study is understandable. More problematic is the way that he must envision the resolution of this partial vision—that is, by bringing multiple disciplinary perspectives to bear on a single issue, thereby reaffirming the fragmentation of understanding that he seeks to redress. However, Wilson is pessimistic about the ability of the individual, or "soloist," to undertake such a project due to what he refers to as "overload" or the condition of confronting more information than it is possible for any one person to assimilate and use. Therefore, the soloist is in a no-win situation. Crossing or ignoring disciplinary boundaries in order to more fully understand social phenomena results almost inevitably in overload, whereas remaining within an enclosed disciplinary space precludes full understanding of the issue in question.

None of this is to say, according to Wilson, that the soloist cannot undertake interdisciplinary research under any circumstances. He does stress, though, that the attainment and maintenance of expertise in specialties across disciplines is a time-consuming and difficult task. Wilson (1996:199) suggests that the ability of the researcher to create a "new ad hoc idiosyncratic interdisciplinary specialty," which borrows from other disciplines but concerns itself with a very specific subject matter, might provide one way to mitigate the no-win situation in which the soloist might otherwise find her- or himself, but he cautions that this approach too is fraught with difficulties. His enumeration of these difficulties is interesting in and of itself, for it illustrates the power of disciplinary logic. Wilson (1996:199) notes, for example, that the success of such "ad hoc" projects will depend in part on the degree to which other researchers accept them as simply nonstandard, as opposed to being "desecrations." For this reason, Wilson (1996:201) asserts that a team or collaborative approach to interdisciplinary research might be the only practical way to

both increase the available expertise in a given project and reduce the overload faced by individual researchers:

The simple desire to do interdisciplinary research does nothing to increase one's capacity to utilize information or to lessen the burden of overload. Research whose success requires the application of multiple specialized bodies of knowledge and skill and the utilization of vast quantities of information simply has to be done by teams, not by soloists. Serious large-scale interdisciplinary work is not for the soloist.

What is particularly interesting about this conclusion is what it reveals about Wilson's understanding of interdisciplinarity. Because individuals cannot practically become experts in multiple specialties from multiple disciplines, soloists cannot, for all intents and purposes, undertake interdisciplinary projects—notwithstanding the fact that some may successfully engage in “ad hoc” projects, which are themselves problematic. Significant here is the way in which the problem is constructed. Individual limits are presented as the reason for the restricted potential of interdisciplinary projects, and at no point does Wilson consider that the problem might lie not with the individual but with the disciplinary approach itself. Because Wilson ontologizes disciplines, he is forced by his logic to conceive of interdisciplinarity as the bringing together of discrete fields of knowledge—something that he correctly presents as extremely difficult for the individual researcher. And, insofar as such a task can only be accomplished by a collaborative approach that draws on the expertise of various disciplinary practitioners, it is probably more appropriately described as multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary.

Also noteworthy is the virtual absence of “process” from Wilson's formulation. Disciplines are tacitly presented as static and impermeable; there is no sense, barring the occasional “ad hoc specialty,” that disciplinary boundaries become redrawn to reflect (and reinforce) always shifting subject matters. The moving perimeters of disciplines is a matter that Mattei Dogan (1997) takes up explicitly, if problematically. Dogan's (1997:429) contribution begins with the promising recognition that “the old disciplines do not reflect anymore the complexity, the ramifications, the great diversity of the work achieved today,” noting that disciplinary borders are becoming “artificial and arbitrary.” Leaving aside the question of whether disciplines ever reflected the diversity and complexity of knowledge or were anything but arbitrary and artificial, Dogan (1997:442) argues that much of the truly innovative work being undertaken in the academy today is occurring outside of the traditional disciplinary boundaries in what he calls their “hybrid grandchildren.” Drawing on the botanical usage of the term, he describes hybrids as genetic combinations of, and improvements upon, different forms of knowledge. With respect to the implications for interdisciplinarity, this focus creates potential space for an approach that goes beyond the simple pick-and-choose application of insights from different disciplines to a single problem. This distinction, albeit in a different context, is pointed out by Dogan (1997:435) himself:

Different disciplines may proceed from different foci to examine the same phenomenon. This implies a division of territories between disciplines. On the contrary, hybridization implies an overlapping of segments of disciplines, a recombination of knowledge in new specialized fields.

Unfortunately, the promise offered by Dogan's notion of hybrids not as cross- or multidisciplinary creatures, but rather as ones that seem to transcend their disciplinary origins, is undermined by the fact that they are seen to have a spatial relationship with disciplines—that is, they exist outside of, or in the interstices between, disciplines. And, insofar as hybrids are un-disciplines, both hybrids and the disciplines which they are not become ontologized.

This attribution of “thingness” to disciplines is underscored by Dogan’s account of how hybrids are formed. Such occurs, he says, by a process of increasing specialization or differentiation along epistemological, methodological, theoretical, or ideological lines, leading ultimately to a fragmentation of the discipline. “Scissiparity,” Dogan (1997:430) observes, “the amoeba-like division of a discipline into two, is a common process of fragmentation.” This process leaves “gaps” or “unexploited lands” across which specialized fragments from different disciplines may potentially interact, resulting in the emergence of hybrids. Interestingly, these hybrids are seen as forming not in the “core” of the discipline but “in the outer rings” where specialists from different disciplines might have the opportunity to interact (Dogan 1997:442).

Here, we are confronted with images of disciplines as clearly delineated things with physical or spatial attributes. These things, under the pressure of increasing knowledge or internal fissures, crack into discrete pieces that are nevertheless related to their disciplinary “parent.” Moreover, these fragments do not manage to escape the gravitational influence of their disciplinary source, although that influence tends to weaken at the “outer limit.” And it is the fact that such an outer limit exists—as it must if there can be empty spaces between disciplines—that is significant, for it underscores the fact that the referent object, notwithstanding internal heterogeneity or fragmentation, remains a *discipline* clearly differentiated from other disciplines. Hybrids, insofar as they occupy this interstitial space, bridging fragments from different disciplines, are not, therefore, far removed from Wilson’s interdisciplinary projects (or perhaps his ad hoc specialties) and represent instances of highly specialized borrowings and lendings. Thus, the allegation that Wilson’s interdisciplinary projects might more appropriately be described as multidisciplinary may equally be applied to Dogan’s hybrids. The latter is implied by Dogan’s suggestion that “multispeciality” more than interdisciplinarity best describes the current trend.

Whereas Wilson’s contribution leaves uninterrogated the historicity or genesis of disciplines (to say nothing of disciplinarity itself), Dogan’s attention to hybrids creates some limited space to inquire into the origins of new disciplines. The latter’s is not an historical overview of the origins of modern disciplinary divisions, but Dogan does illustrate their instability, at least at their outer limits, where dynamism and innovation take place. However, insofar as this dynamism and innovation is directed only toward the creation of new disciplinary subfields or informal cross-disciplinary topics, it remains locked within the disciplining logic—something that itself remains unproblematic.

Not all approaches to interdisciplinarity are insensitive to this latter issue. Indeed, some are quite concerned with the constitution of disciplines, or of the borders that mark them off from each other, and appreciate the fact that not only are disciplines created and recreated (as opposed to merely fragmented), but also that this process occurs within, and is dialectically related to, a contextual specificity. In this sense, we might see the promise of an approach to disciplinarity capable of perceiving disciplines as *practices* rather than as *things*. But here, too, the underlying ontology unavoidably delimits the ability of these approaches to escape the reification of disciplines and their endowment with “thingness.” The processes to which these approaches refer are, in other words, necessarily embedded within a more static view of disciplinarity. Herein, therefore, the debate turns on the process whereby these “things” we call disciplines became “things” in the first place. The sociology of historically shifting subject matters and the role of boundaries in the constitution of discrete fields of inquiry needs to be investigated.

Andrew Abbott’s (1995) “Things of Boundaries” takes up the question of how boundaries are formed and is premised on an important insight: that boundaries call into existence or create the “things” that they bound. Thus, his analysis reverses the seemingly commonsensical notion that boundaries are “of” things.

Abbott shares with the reader his erstwhile presuppositions about boundaries: that they can be specified, that they separate disciplines, and that they are spatialized. He reveals, too, that he is at the same time presupposing the existence of disciplines themselves. However, in the course of his larger research project, he came to question the relationship between boundaries and entities and the ways in which social entities come into existence. Appreciating that the identification of boundaries is tantamount to saying that there exists some entity to be bounded, while also not providing any access to a temporal account of how that entity came into being, Abbott (1995:861) reverses the familiar causal relationship and starts with an inquiry into how it is that boundaries themselves emerge:

I am here suggesting that we reverse the whole flow of metaphor. Rather than taking the individual human being as metaphor for the social actor, let us take the social actor as metaphor for the individual human being. Not only is there much biological evidence for this—the world is full of organisms like slime molds and jellyfish that appear to be individuals but are actually societies—but also, under such an assumption, the fruitful belief that there might be social boundaries without social entities becomes possible.

Abbott's challenge, in this context, becomes defining boundaries in such a way as to make sense even when there is nothing to bound—as he must if he accords temporal priority to boundaries. In so doing, and with reference to the emergence of social work as an entity to illustrate his argument, Abbott begins with social interaction and with the localized emergence of relatively stable properties, or “locations of difference,” the emergence of which, he is careful to stress, must be explained rather than assumed. These sites become proto-boundaries when they begin to be lined up “along some single axis of difference.” Entities, Abbott (1995:870) explains, emerge as a result of “the connecting up of these local oppositions and differences into a single whole that has a quality which I shall call ‘thingness.’” The most essential quality of “things” is endurance or recurrence. But more than this, “things” must be able to “originate social causation, to do social action” in their own right as opposed to the mere transmission of effects created by others (Abbott 1995:873).

Abbott stresses that there is nothing necessary about the process or about the ways in which sites of difference are linked up to form proto-boundaries. How this happens is a matter of historical inquiry; indeed, it is the particular way in which this did happen in the case of the field of social work that is illustrated by his discussion of that field's emergence rather than the way it had to happen. The important contribution made by Abbott, then, is that the *process* whereby entities take form is contingent upon historical and social contexts—there is nothing natural about the ways in which boundaries are constructed. In other words, Abbott illustrates the process whereby meaning is attached to difference, in effect creating the cleavage that becomes marked by a boundary. However, despite the significance of the insight that boundaries are contextually rooted and socially constructed, Abbott's project ultimately remains concerned with the process whereby “things” are formed. Although, for example, his discussion of the constitution of social work as a bounded field suggests the role of human agency and contingency in that process, he is nevertheless concerned with the process of its achievement of “thingness,” endurance, and causation.

Regarding the prospects for interdisciplinarity, Abbott offers no direct guidance. One of the strengths of his contribution, though, is the laying bare of the history of a discipline as something that became disciplined. His account of the emergence of social work as a discernable field of study, for example, illustrates the diversity of professional, social, religious, educational, and political interests, each with particular sets of motives and methods (sites of difference), that were somehow

constructed as belonging on the same side of an emerging boundary. Although by Abbott's reading of the history of the discipline it would be anachronistic to suggest that this points to the essentially interdisciplinary origins of social work in particular and disciplines more generally, we can nevertheless highlight the possibility that disciplines in their formation draw on, blend, or otherwise fit together a heterogeneous gathering of specialized bodies of knowledge. Despite the insights into the formation of disciplines, however, there is little in Abbott's framework capable of addressing ongoing processes of change within these "things" that he describes, ruling out even the fragmentation or hybridization envisioned by others. The dynamism of the formative process turns to stasis, it seems, once the boundaries are finally drawn. Thus, Abbott's contribution remains inherently tied to a disciplinary ontology, notwithstanding his implicit attempt to historicize that ontology.

Even though Abbott's concern with boundaries focuses primarily on the field of social work (even as it generates insights applicable to the emergence of specific disciplines), Immanuel Wallerstein (1995) offers a more generalized account of the ways in which boundaries are drawn, focusing on the impact of three "metaboundaries" that have informed, and organized, much of modern Western thought. Wallerstein shares Abbott's basic insight that boundaries are not self-evident or natural, that the construction of boundaries is a social act. However, he amplifies a point to which Abbott only alludes: the creation of boundaries, according to Wallerstein (1995:839-840), is "fraught with both short-run and long-run consequences for the allocation of power and resources and the maintenance of the legitimacy of social institutions." In this way, Wallerstein explicitly links the creation of boundaries to the distribution of power and points to the value-ladenness of ontologizing practices. He further contextualizes the practice of bounding social inquiry by pointing to its relatively recent origins, observing that prior to 1850 there were no meaningful boundaries; it was only after that date, and particularly during the interwar period, that the boundaries familiar to us emerged.

Given his attention to the contextuality of bounding, it is not surprising that Wallerstein sees a connection between the social and political realities of the post-1850 period and the di- and trichotomies that he says have influenced the ways we have drawn disciplinary boundaries. The first of these "metaboundaries" is that between past and present. According to Wallerstein, there is no intellectual justification for the division of social inquiry along a temporal line; he locates the impetus for this cleavage in the fact that most social researchers during this period were from Western European countries and the United States. These states, he says, were confronted with the increasing material expectations and political demands of their populations; the liberal national state emerged as a result. At the same time,

[t]he orientation to the past, history based on idiographic prejudices, was admirably suited to the creation of national identity. . . . Of course, the detailed history of the disciplines is more complicated than this division. But, in broad brush strokes, the cleavage past/present had a strong social base. It was supported and rewarded by public authorities. It was useful. (Wallerstein 1995:844)

The contextuality of the second major cleavage, between West and non-West, is equally clear. Although most social research was being conducted in the West or by Westerners, it is not surprising that, in the context of imperialism and colonialism, "the West" became the discursive construct against which the "non-West" was defined. Here, the past/present dichotomy does not apply, says Wallerstein, because these peoples were seen to be without, or outside, history. He points, however, to the pragmatic need to "study" non-Western peoples in order to facilitate the social control of colonized peoples and to convert them to Christianity. In this context, Wallerstein (1995:848) observes that it "seems hardly necessary to demonstrate the

social function of the West/non-West antimony. . . . There was a social science for the civilized world . . . and there was a social science for the rest of the world.”

Regarding the final cleavage, that of state/market/civil society, Wallerstein traces its emergence over the first decades of the twentieth century as “social science” became divided into the disciplines of politics, economics, and sociology. This division occurred, he argues, as scholars sought to “professionalize” their activities and began to define boundaries in order to justify the distinctiveness of each area of study. Again linking the emergence of boundaries to specific social contexts, Wallerstein (1995:851) locates the impetus for the move from a single, undifferentiated “social science” to its division into three discrete realms of inquiry in “the liberal ideology of the times.” As he points out, state, market, and civil society were seen as the pillars upon which a modern society is built; their differentiation was understood to be the feature distinguishing modern from premodern societies.

Wallerstein does not engage, in his 1995 paper, in discussion of the process whereby these three “metaboundaries” began to blur and their justificatory logics began to unravel. He takes as a given that there is enormous “intellectual confusion” in the wake of the breaking down of the lines along which we used to organize knowledge and social inquiry. The question, he says, is what to do about it. Wallerstein (1995:853) considers, as one possible solution, the encouragement of multidisciplinary, cooperation, and exchange between disciplines, but notes:

[m]ultidisciplinarity, by definition, assumes the meaningfulness of the existing boundaries and builds on them. But the changing real world and the changing intellectual world have both undermined seriously the legitimacy of these boundaries. Multidisciplinarity is, therefore, building on sand.

It is here, in his appreciation that a multidisciplinary approach preserves a problematic ontology, that Wallerstein’s argument creates space for an undisciplined approach to knowledge; but this potential is not explored. Rather than locating the difficulty in the disciplined approach in general (that is, in the practice of creating boundaries to compartmentalize knowledge), Wallerstein understands the problem to lie in the fact that the particular way in which the boundaries have been drawn no longer “fits.” In other words, he takes issue with the boundaries we currently have but not with the act of bounding itself. Wallerstein’s solution to the current intellectual confusion is, therefore, to redraw the boundaries in keeping with some cleavage that might “make more sense,” perhaps that between “local” and “global.” Thus, despite the value of Wallerstein’s contextualization not only of the disciplinary boundaries with which we are familiar but also of the “metaboundaries” that informed them, his contribution does not escape disciplinarity and, indeed, seeks to reinforce it by identifying new ways to discipline knowledge that are more in keeping with our present context.

Approaching the matter of disciplinarity and boundaries differently, Arabella Lyon (1992) picks up on and problematizes the implication that disciplines are possessed of clearly delimited spatial or territorial qualities deriving from the metaphoric reference to disciplinary boundaries. Such territorial metaphors, she argues, lead to a view of disciplines as static structures that are incapable of capturing changing aims and actions, the role of language, the extradisciplinary implications of a particular disciplinary knowledge, and, importantly, the nature of interdisciplinarity itself. Lyon (1992:692) observes that

whatever the varying factors in any single case of interdisciplinarity, disciplines are not nation-states with inviolate borders. The border conceit which we have too long respected has limited explanatory value. Certainly it is not helping us to understand the complex nature of interdisciplinarity. Our perceptions of interdisciplinarity are better served by metaphors of “river,” “current,” “flow,” and

“confluence,” metaphors that emphasize the process of coming to knowledge and the distant outflows of a discipline’s decisions and agendas.

Thus, Lyon suggests that the metaphor of the river or current is better able to capture the fluidity that she ascribes to disciplines, the potential that they can overflow their banks, so to speak, and the intermingling of tributaries and streams.

Certainly, Lyon’s approach represents an advance over those that maintain a territorial view of disciplines. The ability of “streams” of knowledge to “flow” into one another and presumably blend imperceptibly is intriguing in that it seems to escape a view of interdisciplinarity that must ultimately be multidisciplinary. To extend Lyon’s metaphor, a scholar swimming in these interdisciplinary waters would be buoyed by this relatively indiscriminate blend of knowledge, methodology, and aims. Despite this promise, however, Lyon’s project continues to invoke borders, however fluid and porous they may be, and ultimately both presupposes and reaffirms disciplinarity. Her rejection of the territorial metaphor with its implications of stasis and impermeability is well-founded, to be sure. But the river metaphor she offers in its stead, although appealing on one level, is problematic in its implications. Much as Dogan’s hybrids, formed from fragments of multiple disciplines, carry with them the disciplined/disciplining logic, so too does the image of Lyon’s tributaries and rivulets. The fact that the contents of the metaphoric river can overflow, seep, and merge does little to move us away from the view that knowledge, for the most part, is properly contained within disciplinary channels, notwithstanding the occasional overflow of the banks. What Lyon offers us, in other words, is an account of moments of disciplinary overlap and points of convergence that are conceived of as occurring outside essentially self-contained bodies of knowledge. Instead of fragments, we have tributaries, but to the same effect. It is also an account that obviates an appreciation of practice in deference to an emphasis on structure as determinant.

Lyon, much like Wallerstein, then, does not seem to be taking issue with disciplinary borders themselves but rather with the ways in which these borders are conceived. She would create space for a more fluid exchange of ideas and more navigable paths for “nomadic discourses,” but ultimately she retains the idea of discrete disciplines. Consider, for example, her defense of interdisciplinarity against the argument made by Stanley Fish (1989) that it is impossible to escape a particular disciplinary frame of reference in order to make use of insights from other disciplines. In developing her defense, Lyon considers how Wittgenstein’s (1953) *Philosophical Investigations* is viewed from the perspective of several literary studies scholars, concluding that even though the potential for interdisciplinarity is limited by the extent to which the disciplines involved share common aims and methodologies, there is nothing to prevent the interdisciplinary scholar from making use of alternative disciplinary discourses. Thus, Lyon (1992:691) points out that even if individuals are capable of operating within only one discourse at a time (a point which Lyon does not fully concede), “if one is trained in more than one discipline, then one should be able to critique sequentially one’s texts from differing perspectives.” This ability to “shift between multiple systems of discourse” is linked to the purpose of a given inquiry, so that “[a] disciple’s choice of discourse consequently appears to occur at a microlevel of aims” (Lyon 1992:688). This statement reveals quite clearly the underlying assumption in Lyon’s work that disciplinarity is not at issue. Rather, she is concerned to show that it is possible for scholars to conduct interdisciplinary work. This notion that scholars choose between and shift among different disciplinary discourses ultimately shares much in common with the multidisciplinary approaches discussed above; Lyon’s interdisciplinary scholars bring a range of different, and ultimately discrete, disciplinary perspectives to bear on a single problem.

Eviatar Zerubavel (1995:1096) shares with Lyon a basic concern with the overly rigid approach to scholarship and disciplines, problematizing the tendency to think about academic work in spatial terms; and he attributes to this mindset the vision of “actual geological fault lines separating the various academic disciplines.” And, in addition to promoting parochialism, stifling creativity, and privileging stasis, there is the more fundamental issue of whether this vision actually reflects reality. Zerubavel (1995:1096) wonders if this “urge to compartmentalize . . . belies some deep awareness that the wide divides we envision separating mental entities from one another are actually figments of our own minds.” This point is not insignificant, for he stresses that the “ontologizing” of reality is not a passive process of identification but an active process of creation. Thus, his insight that we are *creating* the very divisions or borders we may presume to be describing represents a break from the literature surveyed thus far in that it presents an opportunity to begin thinking about disciplinarity itself, to question how we might engage in the pursuit of knowledge in a way that does not presuppose the disciplinary ontology.

This discussion is not to suggest, however, that Zerubavel (1995:1099) would have us dispense with a structured approach in favor of an entirely free-floating “fuzziness.” He stresses that some “mental horizons” are necessary in order to organize a research agenda. This process requires, Zerubavel (1995:1099) argues, the fostering of “an intellectual environment that would allow for both order and creativity, structure and open-mindedness, focus and change”—in other words, the cultivation of “the flexible mind.” According to Zerubavel (1995:1100, emphasis added),

the flexible mind certainly does not share the fundamental fuzzy-minded objection to any attempt to ground identity in some specific bounded collectivity . . . nor does it share the fundamental rigid-minded opposite obsession with tying individuals’ identity to a single, exclusive focus of group identification. . . . *The flexible mind sculpts complex, intricate identities that are based on a “both/and” logic. In other words, it allows for the possibility, and even promotes the idea, of maintaining multiple identities simultaneously.*

Importantly, he sees in the flexible approach the possibility for scholars to claim multiple identities—to be political scientists *and* anthropologists, for example. Moreover, a flexible approach maintains a disciplined view of knowledge insofar as certain “mental horizons” provide some structure; but Zerubavel is careful to stress that these are nebulous, constantly shifting, and without definite parameters. Like Lyon, he conceives of these mental horizons as fluids: structured, but always changing.

As Zerubavel (1995) notes, this approach allows us to see the various disciplines as distinct, although not insular, and reminds us of the benefits of cross-fertilization and borrowings from one discipline to another. However, it is in these very observations that his contribution becomes problematic, for clearly we remain within a disciplinary ontology even though disciplines are conceived as permeable and dynamic. This focus becomes clear as well in his rejection of the “either/or” logic in favor of one that permits “both/and” possibilities. Even though highly attractive on one level, the “both/and” logic remains dichotomous in that its very formulation presupposes the bringing together of different ontological referents—to say that someone is “both” a political scientist “and” an anthropologist continues to conceive of and validate the distinctiveness of those disciplines, notwithstanding the ability of a scholar to operate productively in each discipline.

Nevertheless, Zerubavel’s contribution raises several important issues that speak directly to the problem of thinking in an undisciplined way. Of particular significance is his recognition that structures are both necessary and problematic: we need some way to organize our inquiries, but that very act of organizing imposes a

structured ontology that makes an undisciplined inquiry impossible. Zerubavel attempts to mediate this difficulty by advocating “flexibility” and tries to navigate the dichotomy he perceives by rejecting “either/or” in favor of “both/and” logics. As argued above, however, he does not ultimately manage to escape the disciplining logic.

Allan Pred (1995) appreciates many of the same problems and contradictions, but his strategy of embracing paradox rather than trying to avoid it offers a way to begin thinking in an undisciplined way. In a series of rhetorical questions and free-form text that underscores by its very transgression of the generally accepted structures and practices of academic writing the promise of an approach, as he suggests in the title of his piece, that is “Out of Bounds and Undisciplined,” Pred (1995) emphasizes the embeddedness of meanings and practices in contextual specificities. Moreover, he points to the interconnectedness, situatedness, and essential *inseparability* of power relations, social and economic practices, cultural meanings, and spatiality, both visible and invisible, such that there can be no practical way in which social phenomena can be discretely compartmentalized. And yet, Pred (1995:1068) continues, the imposition of ontological boundaries on social phenomena that are “in a relentless state of becoming—never motionless or at completed rest, but relentlessly reconstituted and reconfigured” is the only way that social inquiry is possible. Pred, like Zerubavel, appreciates this paradox: we simultaneously need and need to escape from ontological categories. Zerubavel attempts to resolve this difficulty by proposing the cultivation of flexibility, of structures that are not *too* structured—a tactic that maintains and masks the essential problem. Pred (1995:1068), however, adopts a different perspective, one of transparency and reflexivity, by asking:

How then are we to interrogate the world . . . other than by adopting self-demolishing ontological categories, other than by employing social(-cultural) ontological categories which say that what is here frozen into position is in actuality melting-merging into something(s)-somerelation(s) else at the same time that something(s)-somerelation(s) else are melting-merging into it?

In other words, rather than trying to construct flexible ontological categories marked by porous and shifting boundaries (an approach that reproduces and reifies those categories), Pred seems to favor an approach that constructs ontology on an ad hoc basis and in response to the contingencies of the particular subject matter at hand. It is worth noting that Pred’s ad hoc *ontology* bears only a superficial similarity to, and represents a significant departure from, Wilson’s (1996) ad hoc *specialties* described earlier. Pred’s categories are inherently impermanent and seem, therefore, not to assume any lasting “thingness” or corporeality beyond the instant of inquiry, and even then only to the extent necessary to engage the questions that motivated the study in the first place. This notion of impermanence seems, finally, to have transformative potential vis-à-vis the problems and limitations of disciplinarity inasmuch as we are able to create, in effect, “custom” structures as needed that are not hybrids, specialties, or fragments of extant disciplines. Moreover, their temporary nature means that we need not find ourselves beholden to these pragmatic constructions of ours. In short, they will not endure to discipline our thinking another day.

Pred’s notion of an ontology with what amounts to a built-in obsolescence is certainly intriguing. It is not, however, unproblematic. To get at the problems, let us consider the position that he adopts in response to a second paradox. Pred (1995:1068) notes that although social inquiry simultaneously demands and must escape ontological bounding, social phenomena themselves “involve the boundaryless interfusion of power relations, meanings, and embodied-situated practices.” Thus, we ultimately need to impose boundaries where there are none in order to

conduct social research. In keeping with his appreciation of the essential inseparability of power relations, meanings, and practices, he stresses that the boundaries we construct as part of our self-destructing ontology must be “broad blurred zones,” rather than clearly demarcated limits. Pred (1995:1069) asks, “how then are we to inquire into the world and represent it without utilizing unconventional ontological categories whose boundaries are so extensive that they encompass the entire territory of significance in question?” We might seem here to have returned to the issue of “fuzzy borders.” As previously discussed, this conception is problematic in that it remains trapped within the logic of a disciplinary approach to knowledge and preserves an ontology that privileges fragmentation and separation. The temporary nature of Pred’s boundaries represents one departure from this formulation. More fundamental is the degree of inclusiveness of his categories. Everything that is “of significance” to the study of a particular social phenomenon is enclosed within the limits of his ontological category. In a sense, Pred’s ontology tends toward holism. Everything “of significance” is properly included within a single category, which is quite a different thing from blending or borrowing ideas and insights from different categories. The great advantage of Pred’s analysis inheres in this very point.

Of course, including all that is relevant within a single category that is bounded, however broadly, implies that irrelevancies are excluded or kept outside of that category. As far as subject matters are concerned, this idea poses no enduring problems inasmuch as the category and boundary themselves are not enduring. However, Pred’s (1995:1067) important point regarding our own embeddedness in the very same structures, relationships, and practices as our subject matters and ontologies is underinterrogated when it comes to the question of determining what properly belongs “within the entire territory of significance” in question. If, for example, we want to understand the transition from feudalism to capitalism, we might, in the process of constructing the category and boundary necessary to that inquiry, decide that quantum mechanics, Islamic philosophy, and archaeology can be excluded. Indeed, such exclusion seems commonsensical, but only because our understanding of these fields—and, therefore, of their potential to have some bearing on the question at hand—has been influenced, even determined, a priori by a disciplining logic. Moreover, our very assertion of what constitutes a question or phenomenon in need of explication in the first place is also rooted in disciplinarity. In other words, Pred’s self-destructing ontology and boundaries, although offering the means to liberate the *object* of inquiry from the disciplining logic, do not similarly liberate the *subject* of inquiry. The researcher, trained in one or more disciplines, resident in a faculty and department, concerned about promotion and publication is, ultimately, determinant of both research questions and the range of knowledge that “belongs” within the “territory of significance.”

From Condition to Practice

A particularly telling characteristic of interdisciplinarity is the considerable degree to which it is expressed through spatial metaphors that unproblematically accept the ontologization of disciplines into static conditions. Consider, for example, the following passage in which Dogan (1994:39) recounts the consequences that the preservation of disciplinary purity has had on economics:

It is thus clear that self-sufficiency, to use a word familiar to economists, leads sooner or later to a shrinking of borders. But this does not mean general impoverishment, since the lands abandoned by the economists were soon cultivated by others. Those abandoned lands now have their own flags: management, political economy, development science, comparative study of Third World countries, economic and social history. The position of economics in the constellation of the social sciences today might have been more enviable if it had not withdrawn into itself.

This descriptive/conceptual imagery is far from unique. Elsewhere, Dogan (1997:429-430) sees “unexploited lands” lying between the formal disciplines that make up the “archipelago of the social sciences.” Various, we find the disciplines themselves described as “islands” or “atolls” (Nissani 1997:202, 211); they are imbued with corporeal presence, as expressed by the “borders” (Dogan 1997:433) between them. Disciplines having been thus ontologized, the project of interdisciplinarity is represented as “building bridges between disciplines” (Dogan 1997:433). Interdisciplinary, for their part, are “immigrants” (Nissani 1997:201, 205) who, not being content to tend “their own garden[s]” (Sherif 1979:218), choose instead to tread “the less-traveled paths” (Nissani 1997:214) between theirs and the plots of others; these movements along the “trade routes” that reach across “disciplinary frontiers” give rise to an “import-export trade balance” (Dogan 1997:433) that is at least faintly discernible despite the “gatekeeping” (Nissani 1997:213) of committed disciplinarians.

Discussion of interdisciplinarity calls forth all sorts of metaphors precisely because we lack a language independent of the disciplinary structure of intellectual inquiry. But the project quickly becomes hostage to the attempt to describe it, even where there is a sensitivity to this very problem. Zerubavel (1995:1094), for instance, is unable to avoid references to “islands of scholarship” and “intellectual enclaves” despite observing that, “as evident from our use of such terms as ‘field,’ ‘branch,’ and specialty ‘area,’ the imagery we commonly use to ‘map’ the world of academic scholarship is overwhelmingly spatial.” Similarly, Lyon (1992:682), decrying the stasis of territorial metaphors and their emphasis on boundaries as inappropriate to articulations of interdisciplinarity, makes recourse instead to the “river or current.” Although her notion does break with the rigid fixity of most discourse and imagery regarding interdisciplinarity, it does not dispense with spatiality altogether any more than it avoids once again ontologizing disciplines and interdisciplinarity alike. Moreover, even in her self-conscious resolve to eschew territoriality, Lyon (1992:681, 682) unwittingly asserts it anew, as implied by references to “nomadic discourses” and “imported texts.”

What this discussion indicates is the tremendous difficulty we encounter in trying to emancipate ourselves from prevailing conceptions of disciplinarity. We might be tempted to explain this apparent discursive impasse by conceiving of the problem as due entirely to our lack of a language appropriate to the articulation and discussion of interdisciplinarity. But such an explanation seems a less than satisfying answer inasmuch as the proliferation of spatial metaphors is nothing if not a reflection of the sum of sincere efforts to create just such a language—to invoke terminologies that enable us to problematize disciplinarity and initiate discussion from beyond the limits of a disciplinary standpoint. But herein lies the source of the problem. We cannot hope to accomplish what we have set out to do if we frame the problem from a disciplinary standpoint given that such framing accepts the ontologized discipline as given; it accepts disciplinarity as a condition. In short, the problem with interdisciplinarity is that it is *inter disciplinary*. That is, it promises crossovers between disciplines, not an approach that transcends them. If interdisciplinarity is to be accomplished through collaborative work, then it does not take exception with the parcelization of knowledge and intellectual activity so much as it works to draw the parcels into closer proximity to one another. If interdisciplinarity bespeaks the soloist’s forays “across” disciplinary “boundaries,” this activity is not especially destabilizing to disciplinarity either. Ultimately, then, the project of interdisciplinarity is frustrated by the contradiction between its epistemological stance and its own ontological commitments.

A fitting expression of the fundamentally conservative (in disciplinary terms) nature of cross-disciplinary borrowing is found in the perhaps surprisingly interdisciplinary origins of the field of international relations. Here is a field with roots that span, among others, economics, history, international law, comparative politics,

and sociology (see Olson and Onuf 1985). And yet, despite its heterogeneous beginnings, international relations has evinced highly developed disciplinary inclinations—so much so that Dogan (1997:432) is moved to comment that it “has become, in research if not in teaching, a quasi-independent domain.” What was once a field of study reaching across a number of disciplines now expresses decidedly disciplinary pretensions of its own. In short, the field of international relations has become the discipline of international relations. This apparent disjuncture between the disciplinary disposition of international relations and its origins underscores that there is no necessary connection between cross-disciplinary borrowing and the destabilization of disciplines themselves. Much to the contrary, there is apparently nothing to prevent the latter being born of the former. Indeed, as Michael McKeon (1994:25) points out, despite all appearances to the contrary, “the modern disciplinary categories of knowledge are ostensibly integral entities that conceal a heterogeneous historicity.”

Equally revealing, disciplines suffer no automatic diminution in the face of continuing cross-disciplinary appropriations. All calls for disciplinary purity notwithstanding, a field as relatively new as security studies cannot help but accept conceptual infusions from elsewhere in the academy. Often these appropriations are warmly welcomed and, from time to time, even become quite influential; the borrowings from social psychology evident in the perception–misperception literature of security studies are a case in point (among the most famous is Jervis 1976). International relations scholars, at least, have never been altogether sanguine about its parochialism. Martin Wight’s (1966) now canonical lament that there is no international theory is perhaps the best-known expression of such a concern. For Benedict Kingsbury and Adam Roberts (1990), the Grotian tradition in international theory highlights the problematic separation of the fields of international relations and international law. And Stanley Hoffmann (1987:14) seems inclined toward the view that the most important work is often carried out at the disciplinary interstices, finding that even discipline-defining works often involve infusions of extra-disciplinary insights and approaches:

[I]f I were asked to assign three books from the discipline to a recluse on a desert island, I would have to confess a double embarrassment: for I would select one that is more than two thousand years old—Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War*, and as for the two contemporary ones, Kenneth Waltz’s *Man, the State and War* is a work in the tradition of political philosophy, and Aron’s *Peace and War* is a work in the grand tradition of historical sociology, which dismisses many of the scientific pretenses of the postwar American scholars, and emanates from the genius of a French disciple of Montesquieu, Clausewitz, and Weber.

Even so, the disciplinarity of international relations is not at all unsettled either by these extradisciplinary borrowings or by Hoffmann’s having drawn our attention to them. Instead, in the enduring spirit of Wight’s (1966) complaint, these sorts of observations speak more immediately to a generally held sense that international relations remains a nascent discipline. Its disciplinary pretensions, however, remain well intact. Indeed, given that Wight’s essay has become a discipline-defining work in its own right, the acknowledgement of international relations’ reliance on other academic discourses might paradoxically be read as a testament to the endurance of its most distinguishing disciplinary characteristic (apart from a particular subject matter).

Still, any such evidence of cross-disciplinary borrowing might at least be taken as a promising sign. But lest our hopes be misplaced, we should take note that here, too, disciplines are rendered as the starting condition. The immediate consequence of ontologizing into a condition what is rightly understood as a practice is that calls for interdisciplinarity, reifying the disciplines themselves, become fundamentally self-defeating. Ole Holsti (1989:40), for example, makes the following observations

in an article that he intends as a disciplinary primer for diplomatic historians whom he hopes to entice toward greater interaction and exchange with scholars working in international relations:

The study of international relations and foreign policy has always been a somewhat eclectic undertaking, with extensive borrowing from disciplines other than political science and history. At the most general level, the primary differences today tend to be between two broad approaches. Analysts of the first school focus on the structure of the international system, often borrowing on economics for models, analogies, insights, and metaphors, with an emphasis on *rational preferences and strategy* and how these tend to be shaped and constrained by the structure of the international system. Decision-making analysts, meanwhile, display a concern for domestic political processes and tend to borrow from social psychology in order to understand better the *limits and barriers* to information processing and rational choice.

Although here, too, the past and ongoing heterogeneity of the study of international relations is explicitly acknowledged, the disciplines themselves are once more taken as given. Holsti's overture to diplomatic historians, then, reflects a distinctly interdisciplinary orientation: it presupposes the disciplines and, indeed, reconfirms them in its acceptance of them as the given frame of reference. Interdisciplinarity, by miscasting disciplinarity as an objective condition rather than the sum of particular practices, thus mystifies the processes of disciplinary reproduction. In this way it contributes to the persistence of the very same disciplinary divisions that are its starting problematic.

Interdisciplinarity means "between disciplines." Taking them as ontologically given, it necessarily—indeed, by definition—reifies the disciplines. But even more problematic than this, it becomes a reified thing itself: the idea of interdisciplinarity carries in tow the project of constructing a new interdiscipline. And this imbues the project with its own corporeality. Michael McKeon (1994:27) challenges the very idea of interdisciplinarity, arguing that it "suggests the thickening of epistemology into ontology, methodological procedure into condition of being, something that people do into something that subsists as an autonomous entity." Just as the "inter" ontologizes the disciplines, so too the "arity" confers thingness upon that which would displace them—and it remains a matter of displacement inasmuch as the discourse of interdisciplinarity calls forth the same sorts of spatial metaphors suggested by disciplinarity. The project is thus logically more an objection to existing disciplinary structures than to disciplinarity itself; or, at least, it is not well tooled to transcend these limits. In this respect, it is entirely consistent with the international relations creation story—that is, a laboriously constructed homogeneity arising out of more heterogeneous origins—and with the history of the disciplinary division of knowledge more generally. Therefore, although interdisciplinarity is first a struggle to break free of the limits of existing disciplines, it is bound to devolve into a reconfiguring of disciplinary boundaries. Thus, interdisciplinarity is a vehicle for reformative change, but one that lacks transformative potential.

The idea of a supradisciplinary strategy, in contrast, bespeaks an approach *beyond* disciplines. In particular, it must be conceived as a reaction to these limitations of interdisciplinarity. More fundamentally, it requires dispensing with the "inter" so as not to repeat the mistake of collapsing the practice of discipline into a reified condition. But we must also take care not to fall prey to the easy temptation of a supradisciplinarity. In order to avoid misconstruing as a noun what is rightly an adverb, we need to remain self-consciously aware that, like disciplines themselves, a supradisciplinary approach must be understood as a practice. Indeed, this sense is the indispensable first move toward destabilizing disciplinarity. Further, we must strive to dispense with the metaphorical territoriality of disciplinarity. Among the more thorny implications of persisting in mapping knowledge across "territories" is

the differential authority of voice that accompanies the inevitable construction of privileged and marginal sites: as Michel Foucault (1995:146) puts it, “[d]iscipline is an art of rank.” The problems of disciplinary “gatekeeping” to which such behavior frequently gives rise cry out for the liberation of knowledge marginalized in the process and require that the disciplinary restraint of dissidence be met with an alternative approach to the authorization of knowledge. Simultaneously, though, such problems are a formidable challenge that supradisciplinary studies will themselves have to overcome—such studies might not always fare well when, for example, they are judged according to prevailing disciplinary standards in publication review processes.

Toward the Supradisciplinary Study of Security

Security studies, with the field’s current heightened introspection, might be uniquely positioned to destabilize this territoriality. As a cautionary tale, of sorts, it could usefully highlight the imperative of transcending the underlying stasis that infects interdisciplinarity. More proactively, critiques from within and without security studies (see, for example, Gusterson 1999; Dalby 2002) of its own static territoriality lend well to thinking about new ways of liberating ourselves from the limiting practices of disciplinarity. Ironically, this call to action seems to bespeak a disciplinary standpoint. However, inasmuch as disciplinary discourses account for the sum of current practices, we can scarcely hope to proceed exogenously. Indeed, this very hope would return us once more to spatial conceptualizations of the project to the extent that the idea of an “outside” necessitates the prior assumption of an “inside.” But if we have truly come to grips with the notion of disciplinarity as practice, then there is less contradiction in seizing upon particular discourses so long as we have freed ourselves from the cognitively restrictive expectation that this procedure necessarily entails an assignment of place. Moreover, supradisciplinary thinking promises to undermine the disciplinary practices through which knowledge is (de)legitimized by way of reference to privileged sites.

Importantly, the study of security itself also stands to gain something here. Dogan (1994:40) notes that whenever really big questions about social phenomena are raised “one finds oneself at the intersection of numerous disciplines and specialties.” And questions, such as for what and for whom is security, have defined the introspective turn in security studies. So long as the nature and content of security were unproblematically assumed, the field of security studies could function monodisciplinarily—and to the extent that these assumptions remain, it still can. As a discipline, security studies was well equipped (indeed, was designed) to function effectively in exclusive connection to a very limited conception of security and its referent—that is, national security and the state, respectively. Here is the essential point in need of more thoroughgoing and sustained attention: the orthodox realist-inspired assumptions about security and its referent *preceded* the field of security studies and the discipline tooled accordingly, configured to take little notice of developments elsewhere in the academy, which, as it turns out, might help in addressing new questions about security itself. We are thus reminded that, in every moment, security studies is a practice, rearticulating anew the sites of margin and privilege whence answers to the emergent big questions about security are proposed. Like all disciplines, it is productive as much as delimiting.

Herein lies the problem. Following on a discussion of policing as a manifestation of productive power, John Mowitt (1999:357) observes that the “crisis of interdisciplinarity” calls forth not only the overt forms of policing expressed, for example, in the sorts of calls for disciplinary purity noted at the beginning of this essay; it also “invites precisely the sort of policing that typically remains obscured by accounts of security that constitute it as essentially an aspect of the national question.” That is, being inseparable—indeed, one with—the practices by which the

state itself is (re)produced, the particular disciplinary practices that have attended the study of security render intelligible (or unintelligible) not only the knowledge we produce but also, crucially, the questions from which inquiry proceeds in the first place. How, then, can we hope to pose new questions about security unfettered by the straightjacket of the discipline of security studies? Put another way, how can we begin to emancipate the production of knowledge about security from “the national question” if security studies is congenitally predisposed to favor the national security ambit? Mowitt (1999:360) suggests that one answer might be to “displace the debate over security.” (And, indeed, this possibility was explored by the presenters at a conference titled “(Dis)Placing Security,” which we organized and hosted at York University’s Centre for International and Security Studies in the autumn of 1999.) As Mowitt (1999:357) sees it:

This would mean intensifying the crisis of interdisciplinarity, that is, extending and deepening the questioning that defines [security] so as to credentialize the speculations of those who may know less about foreign policy than they do about policing. . . . The questions these “experts” might pose are irrelevant to broad matters of security only if security belongs to those whose reflections about it have actually influenced national policy formation.

Even though Mowitt nicely captures the problem concerning the sorts of questions we can pose regarding security, our own flirtations with the idea of displacing security have highlighted for us the perils of accepting the spatial terms of disciplinarity—indeed, we are suggesting that this, more than anything else, is what mystifies the unity of disciplining practices with their broader social contexts. Thus, we do not make it our project to “credentialize” voices denied authority by the discipline of security studies—their credentials will undoubtedly have been conferred already in some other disciplinary context. If we advocate for the portability of credentials among ontologized disciplinary spaces, we simultaneously reconfirm the legitimacy of disciplinary standards as ultimate arbiters of the validity of knowledge. In such advocacy lies the source of the interdisciplinarian’s vulnerability to the easy temptation of constructing a new interdiscipline with all of the old disciplinary pathologies intact.

The idea of a supradisciplinary study of security requires that the matter of credentials itself be treated as an important determinant of whatever knowledge is involved (whether as inputs or outputs) in our endeavor—that is, the practices that authorize knowledge and, more fundamentally, work to delimit or produce the questions we pose must themselves become objects of inquiry. To be sure, what is increasingly clear is that security studies cannot advance within the current confines of security studies. But we must do more than simply forsake the discipline; we must strive to become undisciplined. Above all else, a supradisciplinary study of security must in every instance treat disciplinarity as ubiquitous, as a practice in sundry incarnations that is everywhere shaping the production of knowledge even as the echoes of its past interventions can be heard in what we already “know.”

If, as suggested above, orthodox assumptions about things like security and its referent preceded the field of security studies, critically engaging these assumptions begins the move toward a supradisciplinary study of security. To the extent that the indeterminacy of orthodox assumptions can be demonstrated, it disturbs the apparent fixity and corporeal solidity of “the discipline” by revealing “it” to be no more than the sum of disciplining practices and, therefore, wholly contingent. Practices must be sustained in order to be, so any interruption of disciplining practices simultaneously unsettles disciplinarity. As important as such a critique may be, however, it can be no more than an opening move and were it to go no further would itself threaten to subvert hopes for a supradisciplinary study of security. To contest a discipline’s founding assumptions is not necessarily to unsettle

disciplinarity writ large—indeed, it may serve to reconfirm disciplinary practice if, like Wallerstein’s intervention, it amounts to a call for reform rather than transcendence.

How, then, do we move beyond this trap and further toward the supradisciplinary study of security? Simply put, the disciplining disciplines themselves must scrupulously be made visible and treated as variables in our work. Like it or not, the disciplines have always been there (in our teaching as much as in our research), exercising considerable influence over the extent of subject matters thought apposite to any given discipline and, no less, how those subject matters are engaged. Indigenous peoples, to take one example, have attracted so little interest from security studies scholars that a case for their inclusion must be advanced and defended by those wishing to consider the unique diplomacies or conceptions of security of these peoples; articulations of these same things need no such justification when they involve states. And yet, when critical scrutiny is explicitly brought to bear upon the disciplining practices of security studies and anthropology (the latter typically thought, by dint of disciplinary convention, to be appropriate to the study of indigeneity), it comes to light that some of security studies’ most orthodox claims and assumptions about its subject matters have their origins in ethnographic narratives about indigenous peoples of the Americas and elsewhere (Beier 2002). More fundamentally, this observation signals that knowledge (re)produced by and through these disciplines has never truly been as separate and self-contained as the disciplinary practices marshaling this knowledge might have made it seem. In this important sense, claims about indigenous peoples have not been absent from security studies. What we have missed hearing are the indigenous people’s *own* knowledge about themselves and the world—knowledge that opens new possibilities for thinking about security, sovereignty, and selves. Moreover, inasmuch as the work of critical anthropologists in these and other areas turns out to have profound implications for the ways in which students of security studies have understood things like security or the good life, we are impoverished for having missed seeing what disciplinary practice tells us we need not consider. Such are the revelations that follow from asking why security studies has neglected indigenous peoples.

From the above example, it becomes clearer how the disciplining of knowledge is a fundamental part of all scholarly work—one that calls out for critical engagement and interrogation. What this discussion suggests is that the supradisciplinary study of security, like disciplinarity, is not properly understood as a place at which we can hope to arrive, but is rather an orientation that we must take care to sustain. Here again, it must be remembered that what we are accustomed to calling “disciplines” are actually practices, not things. Likewise, a supradisciplinary approach is something that must be *practiced* in every instance; to imagine that we can “arrive” at what would then have to be supradisciplinary is to ontologize it into thingness and, therefore, to defeat it. Moreover, any view that, like the varied interdisciplinary approaches surveyed, limits itself to treating the compartmentalization of knowledge runs the risk of missing the important senses in which not only the objects but the subjects of inquiry are caught up in disciplining practices, variously disciplining and disciplined. A supradisciplinary approach thus enjoins us to find and foreground ourselves in our work. We must identify and account for the choices we make about what we think is and is not worth including in our work and, equally, our choices about how best to approach that which we include. This process, too, is something that must be practiced in a sustained way, such that the supradisciplinary study of security is less an end than a means—it is something we can aim only to move *toward*.

The challenge we face, then, is to proceed not from the debates that have characterized introspection in the field of security studies in recent years, nor even from the mildly heretical idea that security studies is inadequate to theorize security. Instead, we must begin with the assumption that security cannot be adequately and

unproblematically theorized within the confines of disciplinary boundaries—*any* disciplinary boundaries. The call is thus to proceed toward the supradisciplinary study of security that, again, should be understood as neither an interdisciplinary hybrid nor a *sui generis* discipline in its own right. Rather, the idea of supradisciplinary studies connotes an approach derived from a range of discourses but which belongs to none; one which is always self-conscious about the disciplinary limitations on scholarly inquiry and, foregrounding them, treats these limitations as matters of central methodological concern and analytical curiosity. It encourages us to bear in mind that our subject matters and the questions we ask are not simply given, but are as much affected by disciplining practices as how we set about answering them.

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