

Practices of Interdisciplinarity: Ideology and Paradigms

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Abstract

Interdisciplinarity is a concept that has obtained considerable acceptance in the present academic contexts. It is however not free of ambiguous meanings and ways of usage: there is a significant lack of consensus apropos how to be interdisciplinary. Since the traditional disciplinary demarcations are adequately historicised as ideological and have reached points of insurmountable crises, in the manners much critical scholarship informs us today, the term does not denote certain renewed forms of academic enquiries that have survived ideologies. Instead, interdisciplinarity may be understood as contradictory responses to the crises of disciplines, and represents ideological appropriations and contestations at once, not as subjects of study but as formative principles of contemporary research. This paper broadly conceptualises the practices of interdisciplinarity by classifying them into two types: one that extends the prevailing epistemology and one that transcends it. It claims further that one of the essential modes of apprehending ideology shall be to trace the paradigmatic divergences between the two types of knowledge production.

Keywords: Disciplines; social sciences; humanities; cultural studies; literary studies; linguistics

INTRODUCTION

One of the unavoidable marks of the contemporary academic practice is the wide currency of the idea of “interdisciplinarity”. It is empirically evident in the emergence and spread of a number of academic fields such as international relations, development studies, south-Asian studies, cultural studies, women’s studies, and so on. It is also visible in the readiness demonstrated in contemporary research to bring together two or more traditional fields of enquiry (in disciplinary and departmental forms, this readiness has formally taken names like computational linguistics or bio-technology). The readiness to be “interdisciplinary” has also prompted many university centres to welcome students from what they address as “allied subjects”. However, an observation of the realities of the formal organisation of academic activity at higher levels of studies/research will reveal that there is indeed a lack of consensus around the idea of interdisciplinarity in the academia today.

The objective of this paper is to explain the structurally significant elements of the differences in the conceptions of interdisciplinarity, especially with reference to the contemporary contexts of India. It defines interdisciplinarity primarily as diverse kinds of developments, extensions, and the dismantling of the twentieth-century disciplines, a fresh stage marked in the history of academic practice, as we see them in India. There is a wide array of critical scholarship establishing that the disciplines that grew into prominence in the twentieth century were all ideologically founded. In the wake of this scholarship, this paper intends to locate the contemporary eminence of the

interdisciplinary and, by way of doing so, aims to say that interdisciplinarity is not autonomous of ideology and instead represents an ideological contest, notably in the humanities and social sciences today (not to claim that pure sciences are non-ideological). Needless to state, it is not possible to place primacy on the transformations of any single discipline in order to unravel the implications of interdisciplinarity, since it is something that affects the academic structure and practice in general.

Ideology of the Disciplines

One of the main difficulties for figuring out the ideological in the disciplinary structure is the lack of a conceptual consistency in the ways the term “ideology” itself is employed. The difficulty persists even within the Marxist thought on ideology. While Marx himself did not use the term in a single sense, the flexibility of the concept in his works – he used it as superstructure, ruling ideas, false consciousness – paved the way for radically different and competing theories of ideology.¹ The concomitant ambiguity is further accompanied by a difficulty that emerges from the false conception that ideology is an object of a theory. A survey of such theories of ideology, though brief, is thus not going to serve any purpose here.² Ideological analysis, in the words of Fredric Jameson, is not an analysis of ideology as an object nor is it a confirmation of one of the many theories of ideology but rather a condemnation of a theory of ideology; it generally represents a confrontation with “a problematic which it is difficult enough to formulate . . . but which has sometimes been described in terms of the relationship of a particular system of ideas . . . and that something else or other which is its outside or ground” (2009: 316). It is, in short, something whose elements begin to offer clarity only in an “interpretive operation” in which its limits (the ideological limits) are being pointed out and described. However, what distinguishes ideology as a concept from those of hegemony and power is its necessary but critical invocation of a central structure whose elements the ideological analysis seeks to contest.

In order to show how the disciplinary structure is ideological, in this sense, this paper shall only outline a few theoretical instances that historicise or confront the basic organisation of the academic, or of the knowledge production in general, as an expression of an overall structure itself, besides its internal and particular organisational practices. These instances have endeavoured to show that the legitimacy of an academic discipline is not evident in the discipline itself but rather it is shown to derive from a broad and formal recognition extended to them by the systemic structure. Since they manifest a common epistemological foundation and a systemic conformity, they also imply that the ideology of one discipline does not differ from the ideology of another discipline. In the critical analysis of capitalist production, of capitalism as a system, this is one reason why Marx had found classical economics as well as philosophy to have offered inadequate methodologies. In Marxism, historical materialism offered a unique and self-conscious intellectual method to describe the inadequacies of the existing fields of knowledge, mainly for the objectives in its classic idea of “class struggle”. It is not insignificant that historical materialism did not have any official recognition as a procedure of research under every state. Writings on historical materialism thus constitute perhaps the first important archive of scholarship that reveals the ideological basis of the existing forms of knowledge. Beginning with this, this paper shall discuss in what follows only three, but very diverse, sets of scholarship that have brought to critical light the borderlines, the extreme points of possibility, of the contemporary disciplinary form of knowledge. The first is about historical materialism; the second is drawn from world-system analysis; and third

from contemporary cultural theory in India.

The Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács offers us one representative writing on historical materialism in his famous but also controversial *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and explicates the ideological basis of the institutionalised disciplines in the classic Hegelian framework of totality. While outlining the specifics of historical materialism as fundamentally an intellectual *weapon* of the proletariat, or as a political project in itself, he says that the traditional disciplines were only carrying out “the elucidation of pure scientific knowledge” (1971: 224). He adds that disciplines like law, economics and philosophy produced only an appearance to be self-evident sciences; in actuality, however, “these apparently quite independent, hermetic and autonomous systems were really aspects of a comprehensive whole” (230). For Lukács, this comprehensive whole is the system of capitalism, and therefore, these sciences have to be understood as tools with which “the bourgeoisie had concealed the true situation” (224) and as “nothing other than the intellectual expression of the objective economic situation” (229). They are ideological in the sense that they do not allow an unmasking of capitalist society: “the driving forces of capitalism cannot be grasped or conceptualised by the crude, abstract, unhistorical and external categories of the science of the bourgeoisie” (229). The prominence of these sciences as ideological sciences becomes further clear in his observation, albeit an absolutist and a utopian one, that a transcendence of their autonomy implies a transcendence of the capitalist society itself.

While Lukács provided us a philosophical picture of the contemporary forms of knowledge, the world-system thinker Immanuel Wallerstein tells us about the political background of the basic disciplinarisation of knowledge. Wallerstein argues that the new disciplines had all fundamentally need-based origins in the nineteenth-century liberal Europe. He finds history essentially as a discipline that grows upon the acceptance of the idea of modern-nation (originally characterising five zones in the west), upon a consensus about the territorial boundaries of the present.³ History-writing has been in that sense quite an arbitrary practice “encouraged by the states themselves” for it serves the purpose of “reinforcing contemporary nationalist sentiments” (2005: 6). The need for describing the contemporary situations in the modern west led to the growth of three other disciplines namely economics, political science and sociology. This growth also depended on *modernity* by which the west distinguished itself from other parts of the world. Wallerstein adds that this demarcation was defined in terms of three social spheres called the market, the state and the civil society, and the three disciplines attended to these spheres respectively. For the west, however, there was a new and substantially large, but also different world under its political control by the nineteenth century and it required to study them also. The emergence of anthropology (for knowing the territories whose people were considered to be primitive) and orientalism (for knowing the high-civilizations), according to Wallerstein, is also thus a straightforward political outcome. In fact, the economic and political strength of the west relies on the strength and the apparent objectivity that has been commanded by these intellectual fields.

Towards our times, particularly with the emergence of projects such as subaltern historiography, scholarship on women’s studies and dalit writing in the last few decades of the twentieth century, there were attempts to demonstrate the ideological orientation of the disciplinary forms of knowledge. The point of departure for the subaltern studies project was pronounced by Ranajit Guha as the dissatisfaction with the traditional historiography which was underpinned either by colonialist elitism or by bourgeois nationalist elitism, both of which tried to demonstrate a considerable degree of idealism

along with an ideological adherence to the idea of the modern state. Various strands of women's studies in India simultaneously showed us how areas from literary canon to contemporary law have been structured by a dominant ideology of caste-patriarchy (Tharu and Lalita, 1993; Menon, 2006). Around the same time, dalit writings gathered a momentum of gaining visibility and publication and began to disillusion every basic assumption upheld in the institutional academics, besides interrogating the history of colonialism as well as developmental nationalism in India (Satyanarayana and Tharu, 2011, 2013). A consideration of caste and gender is essential today for a comprehensive discussion of, say unemployment, something that was a subject of debate exclusively as an economic issue (Mukhopadhyay and Sudarshan, 2003). Among other things, these critical projects have been enabled by a sense of the structural limits of the received disciplines as ideological limits, while they also represent efforts to transcend those limits.

Legitimacy of the Disciplines

Although the limits of the disciplinary structure are sufficiently demonstrated as ideological, such a structure itself continues to be inflexible. In the mainstream academic arena, the ideological limits of the disciplines have generated two kinds of responses: negation and appropriation. The first may be called as "conservative" while the second as "liberal". There are also two kinds of compulsions that can be cited for these here: one is ideological while the other is bureaucratic. While being themselves ideological, to a considerable extent, both the responses rely on the bureaucratic sense about academics. An important aspect of the term "interdisciplinarity" is that it has obtained its currency in such contradictory contexts. It is a key assumption in this paper that "interdisciplinarity" cannot be theorised without categorising and problematising its actual practices as observed in some of the universities in India.

The conservative perspective has been one of negation: it is characterised by a simple refusal to remould the academic practice. One remarkable sign of the refusal to acknowledge the ideological limits is the wide presence of departments in colleges and universities, especially in the subjects of humanities and social sciences, that continue to designate themselves with names such as English, linguistics, history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, and so on. A frequent practice in such centres of study is to identify and prescribe in the curriculum a certain number of canonised authors or textbooks that summarise their works. In addition, there is a certainty about the object, a clearly demarcated and defined one, that must be studied in each department – society in sociology, economy in economics, humans in anthropology, language in linguistics, the literary text in literature, and so on. All of them define themselves to be "scientific studies" of the given object and claim to assure sufficient objectivity and personal disinterestedness. All of them also define themselves in a patriarchal way, since they habitually designate one figure as the father of the discipline. The World-System thinker Immanuel Wallerstein called the disciplines as "cultures" in the sense that they have their "heroes" for the commemoration of whom and whose works there are regular "festivals" such as conferences and the like. There is also a wide assumption that the career prospects offered by these subjects are apparent and entail minimal anxiety. Besides these intellectual specificities, their legitimacy largely derives from what the administrative and funding bodies would enlist as academic subjects for the professional eligibility tests under systems like the national educational testing and doctoral fellowships.

There is the liberal response too; it may be called appropriation. In this context, appropriation means the practice of clubbing together, and renaming wherever required,

a couple of traditional departments. This practice aims to reflect a wider intellectual concern as well as a consciousness that the older disciplines would not be adequate enough to survive the test of changing requirements. The emergence of centres named like “social sciences” instead of sociology or anthropology, “development studies” instead of economics, “international relations” instead of political science, and so on, are handy instances for this appropriation. Sometimes appropriation also appears in the form of adapting newer technologies to a particular area of study such as linguistics: a new area like “computational linguistics” has come up by claiming that technology makes it feasible today to advance the studies of phonemic categories closer towards the sciences of speech therapy. Sometimes, areas are adapted in similar manners to respond to direct administrative requirements: the instance of statistical economics would correspond with the governmental need for data to determine policy making and fund allocations. Most of these innovations are regularly introduced as measures in consonance with the overall developmental framework – as an advancement that ensures for social sciences and humanities a relevance in contemporary times. This reflects in the uninterrupted patronage they receive from the administrative and funding agencies of the government which paradoxically continue to function in the terms of traditional disciplinary structure.

In the liberal response, “interdisciplinarity” implies an expansion and, strictly phrased, a developmental updating of the traditional disciplines themselves. This “updating” is not internally conditioned by the ideological challenges faced by the disciplines. The liberal response instead ensures that there is no epistemological crisis in the assumptions that are formative of a discipline; its understanding is only that a discipline with a traditional content is unsuitable for the developmental state. Since an epistemological crisis is assumed to be representative of the crisis of the liberal state itself, the legitimacy of the interdisciplinary area, as it emerges, will be the legitimacy of science and the developmental model themselves. It should be argued that the object of study in a discipline is different from the epistemology of the discipline, from the structuring principle of knowledge production – one that is founded on an ontological distinction between a subject and an object, or between the viewer and the viewed. What can be termed as the legitimacy of the discipline is closer to epistemology. Legitimacy derives from an assumption of what a discipline is supposed to contribute to by the pursuit of knowledge of a particular object – by a particular epistemology. A disruption of this principle often results in destabilising the established models of knowledge-pursuit and, by extension, the authority that grants recognition to such models in general. The objects of study might vary, but legitimacy does not depend on the variance of objects. Therefore, it is necessary to add here that the legitimacy of all disciplines derives from what they seek to fulfil – the values, the objectives, and the interests of the nation/state, as the case may be – though the individual objects they scrutinise may be significantly dissimilar.

We must point to the transformations that happened to the English literary study in the recent times in order to illustrate this. The traditional Anglo-Saxon literary canon continued to remain colonial and catered to only a small group of the indigenous elites.⁴ Its only justification was a rhetoric of humanism which began to appear irrelevant for the modernising India. The subsequent resolutions have aimed to shift the focus within English studies from literature to language. Scholars have critically pointed out that “English language” in such a schema is viewed as an advantage if acquired as a skill that fetches jobs in the emergent urban/private sectors. The liberalist argument has been that the “efficient” study of English literature might have been hampered by the students’ lack

of “cultural background”. As Susie Tharu writes on the politics of the shift from literature to language within English studies, the acquisition of English language skill is free of this problem since the English language “was represented as a culturally and politically neutral, international currency, access to which was potentially available to all Indians” (1998: 19). The argument was that English was no longer a “foreign” language to be acquired, but necessarily the only one which can facilitate science, technology, commerce and industry and access to the outside world. This shift of approach, according to Tharu, “involved, among other things, equipping different sections of the people with skills that would be necessary for the development of the ‘nation’” (18). What is never part of the curriculum are questions concerning “who constituted that nation or whose interests it was so confidently serving, still amounts, in many circles, to treason” (18). When English *language* is the advantageous discipline rather than English literature, the knowledge about that discipline also lies with the investigation of how caste, class, gender, and tribe relate with it as well as with what the discipline seeks to serve. It may be added that the contemporary discipline of “English language study” and the traditional discipline of “English literary study” alike do not and cannot reveal the subjectivities of their valorisation, and therefore carry on with the same ground of legitimacy. In the new updated format too, what can be observed is the prevalence of an enclosed system which merely redraws its boundaries. Such boundaries are often outcomes of compromises between diverse senses of intellectual changes and administrative priorities.

The Myth of Allied Subjects

The identification of subjects that are allied to a particular discipline depends on grouping the privileged objects of scrutiny in terms of conceptual proximity, the way “human beings” for anthropology is felt to be closely linked with “society”, “economy” and “politics”. This grouping lacks accuracy and instead leans on subjective senses of proximity. A significant part of research in departments of linguistics, which lie in constant touch with English/literature, has chosen the canonised English literary texts (or sometimes advertisements and their language) for analysis. In the same manner, the sociolinguistic research has considerably used the received ideas of traditional sociology for the study of language and its categories. This is not to discount the values of the substantial research in core linguistics, but such research is undertaken within the disciplinary framework of linguistics itself. A number of interdisciplinary dissertations at the masters and doctoral levels, however, show that their interdisciplinarity was an exercise of choosing a tool from among an available set of methodological tools in linguistics research and “applying” it to a canonical literary text (sometimes it is applied to advertisements that have appeared in mainstream English magazines). The study of literature fundamentally as a performance in the sphere of language is in this sense understood as an allied exercise of linguistics. The linguistic research here assumes that the literary text is a privileged object/archive that belongs to a “neighbourly discipline” which becomes an area for a scholarly excursion. One sense of “interdisciplinarity” certainly emerges from such an assumption of the neighbourliness of disciplines.

However, this approach to interdisciplinarity only strengthens and re-establishes the English canon; it is a new method of valorising a discipline when its own resources fail to achieve a self-valorisation. The problem of disaffection that has been largely felt within English literary study – a problem which is in fact an exposition and problematisation of the canon engendered by the entry of women, dalits and minorities into the discipline – has been a subject of passionate debates more than a decade ago. Such disaffections led to

arguments for moving beyond, and breaking the barriers of, the discipline and, in that process, doing something that the critically conscious scholars of these groups called “cultural studies”. The institutional authorities (in the forms of funded conferences, etc.) at the same time responded with resolutions to extend and broaden (English) literary study into “cultural studies”. The understanding that led to this resolution was paradoxically that literature is both a culturally signifying practice and a cultural treasure, an object that can be displayed, and whose “showcasing” is what cultural studies must aim to undertake. In many universities, the inclusion of cultural theory as part of literary theory/criticism, the addition of film as a new genre within literary study, and so on, have all been official attempts to introduce cultural studies. What belies these attempts is the reigning notion of “allied subjects”, and what drives the identification of an allied subject is a received understanding of culture as a sum of objects of display conjoined with an uncritical endorsement of the status of literature whose horizon is expanded now with the inclusion of film, so to say.

Perhaps traditional anthropology or sociology goes through similar trajectories in the context of the gaining currency of interdisciplinarity. In this too the formally suggested/practiced transformation is the extension of one of such areas (anthropology or sociology) into “social sciences”. The name, social sciences, used by a few centres and institutes conducting programmes in higher education and research has been in fact an outcome of the efforts to put together the traditional disciplines but only those that are based on a particular epistemological system. The empirical ground that had previously characterised each of the disciplines has undergone little change excepting in adapting to the incorporation of the techniques and packages that manage periodical up-gradation. The empirical ground nonetheless continues to rationalise disciplines that are “allied” within social sciences. They include anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, law and criminology. Field work continues to be one of the inevitable stages in the contemporary social-sciences research, and is claimed to be an important procedure that makes the study not only an empirical and therefore scientific one but also something that inscribes a mark of commitment in the study as it could be conveniently opposed to the theoretical/conceptual work commonly decried as arm-chair research. What is still expected from the social-sciences research would be accuracy and objectivity akin to a mathematical understanding of a sphere. It is still expected to cater to the needs of the state, generating the data as well as their analysis that would aid the policy-making processes. The allied subjects could only be, in this context, those disciplines that demand a basis in evidence and “objective” data; the attempt to understand an experience/phenomenon in empirical terms is what still characterises social sciences.

Although this sense of interdisciplinarity pervades social sciences and humanities, there are also attempts to interrogate the common ground of empiricism while considering the psychoanalytical spheres of the imaginary and the symbolic in undertaking studies of the social phenomena. The coming of the activity called “politics” and the study of this phenomenon in particular (as it is a highly fluctuating and contingent but an extraordinary basis of democracy in a vast postcolonial place like India), have pushed the empiricist social- science methods increasingly to their limits. The Subaltern Studies historian Partha Chatterjee (1998), for instance, points out the internal limitations of bureaucracy that identifies the developmental objectives and sets its targets on the basis of mathematical estimates. He also shows that the bureaucracy, since it cannot claim omniscience, depends on its own subjective assumptions of development, of who needs what, in finalising its targets. Since such targets and the identification of beneficiaries are

usually matters of disputes, Chatterjee adds that politics as a practice precisely fits in where the bureaucracy fails to reach in its developmental motive.

Critical historians, political thinkers and cultural theorists have quite notably used the Gramscian idea of “passive revolution” in characterising the developmental nation-state that was founded in the early decades of independent India.⁵ In arguing that in India, unlike in the west, the bourgeoisie did not enjoy the strength to fully control a sizeable part of the means of production, and that therefore the processes of capital accumulation relied mostly on the modern institution of state, these intellectuals placed a conceptual primacy on politics and culture. The political theorist Sudipta Kaviraj suggests that in the processes in which modernity came to India, “the causal powers of economic change were far more limited” (2010: 212) whereas the “imperatives of state control” and the “activity called politics” were of supreme importance. The proponents of the passive-revolution hypothesis have argued that in the process of accumulation the state could not really antagonise the feudal classes by rejecting their hegemonic cultural standpoints in the name of industrialisation and modernisation, since these classes continued to remain substantially influential. Since this resulted in an incremental programme of modernisation rather than in one attained by a violent confiscation and replacement of feudal properties, it had to heavily draw upon the cultural spheres. The concept of this process – that of passive revolution – thus brings forth an imperative, for us in the field of knowledge production, to move beyond a simple dependence on field-work and statistical data for understanding development in postcolonial India. Indeed, scholars have studied phenomena as varied as democracy, gender and cinema, using the conceptual model of passive revolution. It is hardly feasible in the context of these studies to address these concerns as those of “allied subjects”. There is also a new sense of interdisciplinarity in this kind of work – something that transcends the broader criterion that has come into force in the developmental updating of disciplines.

The idea of allied subjects can be interrogated, finally, by means of demonstrating how cultural studies is not an “ally” of (English) literary studies. Indeed the former needs to be understood as a break from the latter, resulting from the disaffection the edifice of the canon has created upon students hailing from disadvantaged groups. In a pathbreaking study of English literary study in British India, Gauri Viswanathan (1987) has shown us how the making of English literature as a subject of formal study is neither a humanist nor a “cultural” initiative undertaken by the British state here. She also endeavours to show how the history of the canon differs from the history of canonisation, by way of explaining that English literature is a unique political product of a resolution of the tension between the British missionary project to teach the Bible in India on the one hand, and the British Parliament’s own requirement to show that it functioned towards the moral betterment of the natives coupled with a political necessity to control the growing authority of the officials of the East India Company, on the other.⁶ While being conscious of the long-term benefits of the missionary activity in retaining authority over the colonial territory, the British Parliament also wanted to be religiously neutral. Viswanathan locates the beginnings of English literature as a subject of study in the political resolutions arising from this paradoxical requirement. English literature, as she points out, served the need of the nineteenth century British imperial state in India for a “secular discipline” imbued with the values of Christian morals. There was nothing associated either with the “literary” as a “cultural” object as such or with the singular genius or skill of an author in the processes that had brought this field of study to the centre stage of academics.

Viswanathan's work is often cited in critical theories and postcolonial studies; however, it is cited here in order to show that her work basically makes us understand that the aura ascribed to the literary authors is only a political phenomenon and that it is therefore not unassailable. Her work brings in the possibilities of marking a pronounced departure from the basic assumption that shaped the literary study – a literary text as a depository of aesthetic devices, humanist values, and as something great by virtue of its internal resources and genius. It brings in, for the students, the possibility of leaving behind a whole institutionalised area and of choosing to study more directly political forms such as gender, caste and cinema.⁷ It has also instilled in students a confidence to attempt a political consideration of the aesthetic which they can pursue in departments of sociology, history and political studies besides those of literature, language, arts and aesthetics. Much of this confidence rises not out of the identification of similarity of contents or concerns between disciplines but out of political necessities and, very emphatically, out of many a disenchantment with prevailing methodologies. Disciplines seem to merge here as well, and that may be rapidly labelled as “alliance” or “allied subjects”; it should be claimed, on the contrary, that this merger is not one of continuities and proximities but of discontinuities and breaks, of *ideological distancing*, towards a transparent *ideology* the consciousness of which is never subjugated. It is the argument of this paper here that the disaffection with the prevailing methodology, rather than a tested knowledge of “background”, is the legitimate route to interdisciplinary studies.

Two Works on Mumbai

In order to reflect on such discontinuities and departures, let us take a quick look at two comparatively recent and book-length works on the urban space, on how the urban space can be characterized – works that offer an exclusive focus on the city of Mumbai: Abdul Shaban's *Mumbai: Political Economy of Crime and Space* (2010) and Ranjani Mazumdar's *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (2007). Both the books came to us from a reputed national publisher in India, both claim to furnish something new as they find the urban society inadequately studied in the context of India, both engage with questions of rage and crime and their spatial existence, both also endeavour to tell us methodologies to understand the urban space. Above everything, both the works employ archives which must have inhabited, in a little older knowledge system, very different domains of study, such as statistics and allegory.

Written consciously with concerns of development studies/social sciences, Shaban's *Mumbai* calls itself one that offers a “new approach” which is differentiated from other studies of crimes in cities. This difference is broadly codified (i) as a locational shift, from the American and European contexts to Mumbai, (ii) as an analytical shift, into a comparative one of crimes in other Indian mega-cities, and (iii) as a methodological shift, from the method of traditional statistics to the advanced ones in criminology. Besides these, this study on crime also states its sound awareness of the difficulties of procuring an accurate and reliable data of crime since it classifies crimes and says that the data include many false cases while excluding many that are never reported. But despite such limitations, the book surprisingly relies on the data of crimes compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau and it supplements that data by using another one compiled by the Crime Branch of the Mumbai Police. As it does not problematise “crime” in terms of its inadequate reportage, “crime” itself remains as a problem understood in terms of officially known and empirical frequency of occurrences that needs to be brought down.⁸ For specifying “space”, it relies on the maps of Mumbai urban conglomeration and jurisdiction

of police stations. While undertaking the study of the concentration of crimes in certain areas of Mumbai, Shaban's study encounters, consciously, the problem of the mismatch between the areas allocated to each police station on the one hand and the demographic areas marked by the Census of India on the other. This problem is evidently one of methodological and practical difficulties of defining the spatiality of crime. In any case, both the key terms, crime and space, are left conceptually untouched in this study as they continue to remain technical, objective and measurable.

In theorising "the urban experience" with reference to Mumbai, Mazumdar tells us that the city "by virtue of their plasticity, can be molded into images" (xxix) produced by domains like cinema whose influence is not empirically measurable though not any less powerful. In contrast to the assumption made by Shaban's work, she holds the view that illusions, myths and aspirations associated by the images with the city is perhaps "more real" than the city that becomes available through maps and statistics, urban sociology, demography and architecture.⁹ One of the central contentions of her work on Mumbai/cinema is that modernity in India has an "uneven and complex articulation" which should also be debated in terms of cinema, among others. On the one hand, it considers the presence of a large migrant labour population that constantly moves into the city from the countryside (in what could be seemingly similar to a concern of an empirical work) and, on the other, it also attends to the processes in which this population gets inscribed into the very imagination that we have of the city. Her basic argument is that the urban experience is essentially something that is negotiated by cinema. The cinematic medium of allegory which represents Mumbai both as a "street" and as a "footpath" is central to the understanding of this urban experience – it represents it as "part village community, part cosmopolitan city street" (xx). The urban experience is an outcome of the allegorical acknowledgement, made in cinema, of its rural other in the image of the "street" – "footpath" in Bombay cinema – which is "a site of community and crime, dance and violence, madness and freedom, death and renewal" (xx). In this study, the city is what the images reflect: there is hardly a *pre*-image, a *pre*-reflection city. Due to reflection that is subjective, the city could be a compensatory experience for the unsettled and the migrant, whereas it could equally produce an experience of the promise of progress. Methodologically, what it contests is the possibility of conclusion guaranteed by a specific data regarding the direction in which the city decisively traverses today, asking if there are increasing rates of crimes, whether they need to be brought down, etc, within developmental anxieties. In short, it claims that the urban experience reflects through every small fragment of which none can be treated insignificant for want of formal valorisation. What can be observed in the example of this study is a reluctance to endorse an established procedure of enquiry. There is an approach here that makes it difficult to demarcate areas of study, the interrogation of whose methodologies make up the conceptual tools here. In the least, it becomes evident that these areas lack a common ground in empiricism.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the concept of "interdisciplinarity" by a contextualisation of disciplines with focus on their methodologies, organisation, and administration. Looking at the formal organisation of academics at the higher levels of studies, the administrative modalities and conditions of admission and recruitment (eligibility, basic degree, specialisation, etc.), and the methodological procedures of recent but diverse range of

works, we can identify two kinds of grouping of the disciplines. It is the argument of this paper, therefore, that these two kinds represent two divergent paradigms in which interdisciplinarity is apprehended and practiced: one that continues to perpetuate the legitimacy of the existing disciplinary structure as well as its exclusive intellectual methods and administrative approaches, and one that extends beyond such a structure by way of politicising such methods and interrogating such approaches.

In the wake of the scholarship that has variously unravelled the ideological foundations of the existing disciplinary structure of the academia as well as in the wake of the division that is demarcated here, we can understand that “interdisciplinarity”, in either of the two senses, cannot be explained without taking note of it as an ideological contest. Of the two paradigms of interdisciplinarity here, the first refers to something quite literal: the custom of “belonging to a discipline” while at the same time accepting and using objects and archives traditionally “allocated” to other disciplines as their privileged objects or archives of study. In humanities and social sciences, such an epistemological belief still legitimates the original frontiers of disciplines made in terms of a subject/object distinction that has always characterised the pure sciences. The second, on the contrary, may be conceptualised not only as a critique of the traditional demarcations between disciplines drawn in terms of privileged and exclusive objects of analysis, but a great deal also as a rejection of the newer proposition that nonetheless defends the theoretical models and methodologies of the older disciplines. The extensive practice of interdisciplinarity is unfortunately still the first of the two kinds and implies only an ideological regrouping and renaming of the categories of the disciplinary research which does not augur epistemological transformations.

If we extend what Jameson says in his once famous work *The Political Unconscious* (1981) about literary history into the history of the objects studied in other disciplines, we can also grasp the implications of interdisciplinarity. Just as literary history produces something like a narrative realism, a historical account of literary text/author as the designate object, every discipline produces narratives of their respective objects. In the first sense of interdisciplinarity, there are occasional or partial exchanges of such objects, and even of methods at times, but the culture of narrativity remains the same. Jameson’s impatience with this sense of the narrative leads us to grasp what the second sense of interdisciplinarity includes. It has enabled him to suggest something in addition, the task of not just history but historiography itself in general: he recommends narrative not merely “to elaborate some achieved and lifelike simulacrum of its supposed object, but rather to ‘produce’ the latter’s ‘concept’” (11 - 12). Further, for a clearer classification and ideological distancing, the formulation of the second should be stated as a move towards what Wallerstein later named as the “unidisciplinarity” of knowledge – a final, or even utopian, horizon whose concept has to constitute the basis of each interdisciplinary study. As a critical note, we can add that an apprehension of the tension between two meanings of interdisciplinarity is the essential mode of exploring ideology as well as the ideological foundations of research, particularly in humanities and social sciences today.

Notes

¹ Marx equated ideology with ruling ideas in *The German Ideology* (1845) whereas he defined it as superstructure in the “Preface” (1859). Later his concept of fetishism in *Capital* (1867) led to the idea of false consciousness. Marx had written in the “Preface” that the totality of the “forces of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms

of social consciousness (1989: 25). As a philosophical abstraction of his inquiry, Marx had also observed famously that the “mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life” and therefore that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (25). In his classic architectural metaphors of base and superstructure, Marx placed all forms of cultural life—the legal, political, religious, artistic and philosophic—in the superstructure. He called them “ideological forms”. For those who began to feel that capitalism was nowhere near an imminent crisis, the proposition that Marx had made in the “Preface” was to be modified, since they saw the ideological forms as ensuring a staying power for capitalism itself. Thus, in the works of quite a substantial number of thinkers, from Frederick Engels to the Georg Lukács and the intellectuals of the Frankfurt School such as Theodore Adorno, social consciousness arose upon the economic base but it was nevertheless a *false consciousness*.

² It is difficult to identify, in a positivist fashion, the constituents of ideology, since the theories of ideologies are extremely divergent. Representative of a sharp opposition is the one between the works of Louis Althusser and Slavoj Žižek on ideology. Writing in the late 1960s, the French philosopher Louis Althusser took a structuralist view of ideology, theorising it as the interpellation of abstract individuals into “subjects”, a process enabled by a set of “multiple, distinct, ‘relatively autonomous’” specialised institutions, or what he called apparatuses, and their practice(s). What was new in Althusser’s theory of ideology was the idea that ideology is something that has an institutional or “material existence”, something that enables the individuals recognise themselves as well as others as “subjects”, and, finally, something that earns the state the status of an ever-invoked authority, and that “presupposes the ‘existence’ of a Unique and central Other Subject in whose name” interpellation of individuals takes place (121). As an effective critique of the Althusserian model of ideology, there is Slavoj Žižek’s work that has tried to theorise the “subject” not as the outcome of a successful interpellation or representation but as something that results from an incomplete process of interpellation, adding that ideology in fact represents a conscious failure of the interpellation. See Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1969), and Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989).

³ The five zones that Wallerstein mentions are France, Great Britain, the United States, and most of the parts that later became Germany and Italy. See Wallerstein, *World-System Analysis: An Introduction* (2005).

⁴ In the 1990s, there were a number of conferences attempting critiques of the canon in English literary studies, considering their caste, class and gender biases. The publications that followed these conferences are edited collections/books like Svati Joshi’s *Rethinking English* (1991), Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s *Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* (1991), and Susie Tharu’s *Subject to Change: Teaching Literature in the Nineties* (1998).

⁵ The works of Partha Chatterjee such as *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (1986) are an adequate testimony to this. Other prominent works theorising passive revolution are by Sudipta Kaviraj, “Critique of Passive Revolution” (1998), Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History* (1989), M.S.S. Pandian, *The Image Trap: M.G. Ramachandran in Film and Politics* (1992), M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (1998), to cite a few.

⁶ This refers to the difference between the history of various periods of literature on the one hand and the history of the institutionalisation of the discipline of literature on the other, as Viswanathan’s essay prompts us to conceive of.

⁷ Susie Tharu and K. Lalita draw our attention to the problems of treating women's writing as a "lost" tradition and of recovering or restoring them to the standard literary history, in their critique of the project undertaken by Elaine Showalter earlier. For a detailed view of this debate, See Tharu and Lalita, "Introduction" to *Women Writing in India, Volume 1* (1991/1993).

⁸ Shaban undertakes his study of Mumbai and crime from the basic standpoint of what he terms as "the social stability and cultural harmony of the city" (xxi). He adds that his work "emphasises the need to improve environmental designs and socio-economic conditions to bring down crime rates, especially in the high delinquency areas of the city". He also adds a personal note that as "a student of Development Studies, the negative aspects of societal development have always been of concern to me. Linkages between crime, economic growth and urbanisation have led me to question the direction of development" (xxi). It appears to be a project that aims to point out the negative elements that contaminate development while it ratifies a uni-directional sense of "progress" that should ideally characterise the concept of development. He seems to take the urban space as the space of the advancement of modernity.

⁹ In making this difference, Mazumdar takes theoretical insights from the works of Jonathan Raban. She also counts on the works of Georg Simmel who "developed a slightly different approach to the study of modernity, outside of a well-defined 'method' in the strict social-science sense", who "interrogates the impulse for empirical phenomena", and who argued that "the fragmentary, fleeting, and contradictory reality in metropolitan life found its best expression in the aestheticization of social reality. The clue to the modern experience of the city lay in the superficial ensemble of 'styles' and fashion, in the movement of the crowd and the 'topography of space'" (xxx).

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