

For Transdisciplinarity

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Ethnomusicology without Alibi

Reading Stephen Amico's provocation—a death knell for a discipline ensnared in colonialism and a call for a traversal from inter- to transdisciplinarity—I could not help but weave his words together with those of other texts I had been reading over the last year or so. What I want to do, then, by way of a response—if one can respond to such provocation—is to put Amico's rallying cry into constellation with three textual moments in French thought that differently trace the borders of and between disciplinarity, the colony, and their wished-for deaths: (1) Laurent Dubreuil's *L'Empire du langage*, which teases out the connections between a certain postcolonial impulse in theory and the drive toward interdisciplinarity;¹ (2) the essays on transdisciplinarity and philosophy gathered in a 2015 special double issue of *Theory, Culture & Society*;² and (3) Hélène Cixous's reflections on what she calls "mon Algérie," translated as "my Algeriance, in other words"—these *other* words, displacing one word *for* another, another *other for* the other being precisely the point.³

But first, the provocation. What does it mean to provoke? And what does this have to do with the question of the other that vexes Amico in his diagnosis of ethnomusicology and its entanglement with colonialism? In the foreword to *Without Alibi*, Derrida meditates on the meaning of provocation:

¹ Laurent Dubreuil, *L'Empire du langage: Colonies et francophonie* (Paris: Hermann, 2008); *Empire of Language: Toward a Critique of (Post)colonial Expression*, trans. David Fieni (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

² *Theory, Culture & Society* 32, nos. 5–6 (2015), "Transdisciplinary Problematics," ed. Peter Osborne, Stella Sandford, and Éric Alliez.

³ Hélène Cixous, "Mon Algérie," *Les Inrockuptibles* 115 (August 20–September 2, 1997): 71–74; "My Algeriance, in Other Words: To Depart Not to Arrive from Algeria," trans. Eric Prenowitz, *TriQuarterly* 100 (1997): 259–79, reprinted in Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 153–72; all citations from this edition.

Is to *provoke* not to let resonate a vocal appeal, a vocative, a “vocable,” as we say in French, in other words, a word? Is it not to turn the initiative over to the word, which, like a foreword and in a thousand ways, *goes out ahead, to the front of the stage*: to expose itself or to dare, to face up to, here and now, right away, without delay and *without alibi*? A *provocation* is always somewhat “vocal,” as one might say in English, resolved to make itself heard, sonorous and noisy. The most inventive provocations should not be vocal, but this is difficult to avoid.⁴

The emphasis on vocality and making oneself heard is striking (and indeed it has detained me elsewhere), but what stands out for me against the backdrop of Amico’s pro-vocation is not the noisiness of making heard (which, as Amico points out, has been an arguably misguided part of ethnomusicology’s vocation and which Derrida in any case challenges). Rather, I am drawn to the reference to the vocable “go[ing] out ahead, to the front of the stage . . . *without alibi*,” which promises to offer another relation to the other. It promises an other other or other others. To recognize this, one has to reckon with the distinctive slant that Derrida attributes to the notion of *alibi*. Beyond the pragmatic ex- or disculpationary sense of justifying or excusing from a place of blame or debt in the face of accusation or investigation (and we can surely imagine ethnomusicology’s more or less credible *alibis* in this trial), Derrida highlights the reference to an elsewhere, to another place, to another moment, to an other (it can’t have been ethnomusicology because it wasn’t at the scene at the time, it was elsewhere, even if it had been there earlier, which explains its fingerprints . . .).⁵ He wonders, moreover, whether it may be possible to conceive of a more “originary” sense of *alibi*, this reference and deferral to an other, before any juridico-ethico-political responsibility—an *alibi* that would not owe anything to or be owed anything by the other.

Derrida also argues, though, that “it is necessary” to affirm the “without *alibi*” without succumbing to an interconnected set of temptations: on the one hand, the phantasm of an absolutely sovereign, autonomous, and intentional responsibility (“I, (ethno)musicology, am absolutely present to myself and free to determine my own course”) and, on the other, an absolutization of referral such that it becomes “an invincibly transcendental or ontological structure.”⁶ Rather, according to the notion of autoimmunity developed in Derrida’s later writings, the “without *alibi*” is only a symptom of the fact that the *alibi*, with its

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), xv.

⁵ Derrida, *Without Alibi*, xxvi–xxvii.

⁶ Derrida, *Without Alibi*, xxvii–xxviii.

reference to an other, would always already differ from and defer itself, the alibi itself at another place, another moment from itself and thus an other other—never a pure (without) alibi. It is this dissemination of alibis, or vocal appeals to and from other others, that makes responsibility infinite and not sovereign freedom or debt or culpability. It is, moreover, this logic that explains why, as Amico suggests, ethnomusicology's sense of responsibility to give voice to the other unavoidably ends up reproducing the exclusionary logics it claims to question. We will see a similar conundrum in postcolonial theory. It is this horizon and its imbrication in an interdisciplinary turn that I now want to discuss.

(Post)coloniality and Interdisciplinarity

Amico's critique of ethnomusicology centers on its colonialist construction of the other. His appeal to a new area of inter-turning-trans-disciplinarity resonates with other work on the colony and disciplinarity. For this reason, I could not help but stage a dialogue in my head with another book I had recently read when I first received Amico's essay: Laurent Dubreuil's brilliant and often difficult analysis of the ways in which the colonial empire speaks and shapes modes of speaking. There is not space here to engage with the entirety of Dubreuil's wide-ranging and powerful argument, but the point of closest contact with Amico's concerns about moving music studies beyond the regime of empire comes in Dubreuil's finely nuanced yet devastating skirmish with postcolonial theory and its interdisciplinary impulse. After working patiently through rigorous critiques of the important contributions to the field by Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha,⁷ Dubreuil unmask the intimate link between postcolonialism and interdisciplinarity, arguing that "postcoloniality . . . is not the determining factor" for the interdisciplinarity with which Amico wants to replace the subdisciplinary silos of ethnomusicology, historical musicology, and theory.⁸ Even if postcolonial theory reappropriates the *inter-* for its own ends, it is not "commanded" by Bhabha's concept of hybridization; there is no necessity to this sequence, even if it is undeniable that the blurring of disciplinary boundaries emerges from a certain set of historical conditions, of which postcoloniality is a part.

⁷ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁸ Dubreuil, *L'Empire/Empire*, 232/181.

More to the point, Amico's "interdiscipline extraordinaire" (28) of musicology cannot be straightforwardly identified with the two rather different notions of interdisciplinarity advocated by Spivak and Bhabha; sieving out the differences is crucial here for understanding the possibilities and limitations of Amico's vision. Far from being a "safe space" or "mutual admiration society" (29), Amico's inter-discipline-come-trans-or-even-post-discipline is a site of (collegial) confrontation and rigorous critique, shock and friction—in short, the "Heat" of the eponymous film that illustrates his argument. If postcolonial discourse, like the beyond of ethnomusicology, aims to think an other beyond the subaltern other of imperialism and not to limit itself to representing the colonized and thereby denying their speech, it gives rise to multiple ways of thinking the *alter* with the *inter*. Resisting the capture of postcolonial studies within a "sub-disciplinary ghetto,"⁹ Spivak's ambition is to disseminate such thinking among a multiplicity of disciplines. This looks to Dubreuil like a reinvention of the ethnologist's native informant, who now visits a series of different preexisting disciplines (such as history, philosophy, and literature) to expose their shortcomings from within.¹⁰ "The *other other*," he argues, "remains a project of the subject"—a subject and a project such as they are constructed in the European philosophical and political traditions which, as such, leave the strangeness of the colonized intact.¹¹ Amico's attachment to critique, however well intended, suffers from the same difficulty.

Spivak likewise thinks of herself as a provocative saboteur, but her intellectual attachments—to literary criticism and hermeneutics and to comparativism—turn out to be less radical. For Dubreuil, her alter-academicism and its multidisciplinary scope represent a tacit recognition, even acceptance, of institutional hierarchies, normative controls of knowledge, and operational categories that traditional disciplines uphold. Such postcolonial critique is, in effect, already anticipated in advance and reappropriated as internal critique. What would stop Amico's postdisciplinarity from being captured in the same way, given that the frictions of which he speaks are to a significant extent already accounted for by rules of the game? After all, he readily admits, the heat between the film's two protagonists is a standard trope. Despite Amico's efforts to distance his notion of alterity from the stabilized, hierarchized differences of the colony, it is far from clear how to get to this other other, seeing as the model of cross-disciplinary encounter remains so

⁹ Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 1.

¹⁰ Dubreuil, *L'Empire/Empire*, 217/171.

¹¹ Dubreuil, *L'Empire/Empire*, 221/174.

dialectical and, like Spivak's vision, has yet to embrace a more radical deconstruction of the Kantian limit.

It is this logic of alteration that Bhabha's notion of hybridization is designed to overcome; it shows how the other is constructed as a fractured subject precisely in the process of crossing boundaries. Something like this is suggested by Amico's notion of the heat by which ethnomusicology and musicology grow as characters only through their interaction with one another. But Bhabha suspects dialectics more than Amico; Bhabha's notion of the hybrid is designed to foreclose the "synthetic reformation" (4) that Amico assumes as both possible and even desirable. Accordingly, Bhabha's interdisciplinarity is not to be confused with a plurality of pre-existing disciplines, for self and other are originally self-differentiated. By the end of Amico's essay, the passage toward postdisciplinarity sounds more and more like the dissemination of multiple voices to which Derrida refers (on a number of occasions) to indicate the self-division from the outset of any speaker. But Amico ultimately hesitates, it seems to me, in taking this step, instead limiting its imagination to a multiplicity of conflicting yet preexisting subject positions. *Inter*-disciplinarity, in short, remains at the level of *alter*-ation and *compar*-ison.

In each of these discourses, the difficulties of postcolonial speech morph into the theoretical problematic of interdisciplinarity. The stakes of each are bound together. Where Dubreuil challenges Bhabha is on the postcolonial impetus for such hybridity. Arguing, on the contrary, that the third mixed term that admits of no synthesis has a long genealogy going back to Plato's *khōra*, Dubreuil wonders whether the transformation of enunciation for which Bhabha strives is not postcolonial "because in fact, speech—even in Europe—never was the unanimous rational *logos*; nor was the other always mute, nor always an inhabitant of the islands."¹² On this reading—entirely consistent with a Derridean notion of the trace—the postcolonial does not mark an exit from empire, or rather only marks an exit to the extent that empire has always already been outside itself, traversed by reference to an exteriority, to an alibi such that it is in the process of ruining the oppositions of colonialism from the outset.

As a way out, Dubreuil proposes, in contradistinction to the logic of the *post*, an *indiscipline* at work in disciplinarity, one that comes about not through an external, preconceived negativity but in the process of its own formation such that disciplinarity brings about its own destruction. Dubreuil uses the word "inoperative" to describe this impact on discipline (then "incapacity" and "impotence"), a word that, to some ears, may have distinctly Agambenian overtones (although Dubreuil has at other times been strongly critical of Agamben and there is no

¹² Dubreuil, *L'Empire/Empire*, 228/180.

explicit mention here).¹³ My framing of this in terms of destruction may be interpreted as an attempt to shift this onto expressly Derridean territory; discipline itself is always already indisciplining itself, becoming unruly, on account of the autoimmunity of the trace. This would also mean moving away from the possibilization still present in notions of impotential or incapacity. The impossibility of Derrida's "without alibi" resists being hypostatized into something (re)appropriable.

Dubreuil's notion of indiscipline traffics in excess and exhaustion, recalling Derrida's reading in "White Mythology" of the way in which metaphor, in its passage from sensible to intelligible, is subject to an *usure* in the double sense of a wearing out and the proliferation of usury. Instead of settling for a third term, a hybrid between the two, or their indistinction at their limits, Derrida turns in that essay to the notion of catachresis, which indicates a violent or monstrous imposition of a sign without the relation to an originary, proper meaning that we find in metaphor. The catachresis is a middle of sorts, but not a hybrid or another form of mimicry. It is rather the ruin in advance of every imitation, alteration, and comparison. "When the middle of an opposition is not the passageway of a mediation," Derrida remarks, "there is every chance that the opposition is not pertinent. The consequences are boundless."¹⁴ If indisciplinaryity were this kind of monstrosity, it would disrupt the dialectic between norm and exception, between rule and transgression, that structures coloniality and disciplinaryity alike. From this standpoint, Dubreuil's choice of "literary criticism" as his privileged example of indiscipline—rather like Amico's paleonymic "musicology"—feels like a letdown and ignores the way in which English and Comparative Literature are names for an hegemonic re- or meta-disciplinaritization by which de-disciplinizing dynamics are subordinated to existing institutional norms and conceptual forms. Inter-, multi-, and even transdisciplinarity will need a more radical and constitutive indisciplinaryity (and not just Amico's "mutual critique") if they are not simply to leave unscathed the preformed disciplines that they pass between, proliferate, or traverse.

Traversing Neoliberal Transdisciplinaryity

From this perspective Amico's decision to focus on "theoretical and critical interventions" and to bracket off the neoliberalization of the

¹³ Dubreuil, *L'Empire/Empire*, 233/183.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, "La mythologie blanche," in *Marges—de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 306n41; "White Mythology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 256n60.

university is to my mind—and surely also those whose position is more precarious than that of tenured professors—highly problematic. “While I do not want to ignore the profound effects of fiscal exigencies upon the production of academic work” is how he frames his apologia (2), and with that word “exigencies” Amico has ceded the terrain to capital and given up the fight against austerity and commodification in advance. That someone with a comparatively secure academic position would choose to sideline the imbrication of capital and its effects upon labor in remaking disciplinary boundaries in the humanities is the essay’s most troubling shortcoming and not whatever theoretical sophistications one might find wanting. A new interdiscipline or postdiscipline will not break with colonialism if it does confront these issues head-on, recognizing how an injunction to transgress norms to a limited extent is part of the conformism of the academy’s self-reproduction. In other words, as Peter Osborne persuasively argues in the introductory essay to a double special issue of *Theory, Culture, & Society*, disciplinarity’s allowing for a measure of innovative (and hence co-optable) *indiscipline* is deeply embroiled in the system of professionalization by which scholars are trained, recruited, and achieve advancement.¹⁵

In the US especially, “theory” has been in danger of standing for little more than a libertarian anti-disciplinarianism with faith in the disruptive force of texts but with scant concern for understanding its relation to institutionally sanctioned forms of transdisciplinarity or for thinking how it might effectively interrupt. If it is to move beyond an appeal to the freedom of intellectual inquiry and to have any transformative efficacy, transdisciplinarity must be more than a recognition of the fuzziness of disciplinary boundaries, something which, as Peter Osborne argues, is merely the effect of overly rigid hierarchical boundary-setting to which the humanities oppose themselves collectively in their rejection of scientific modes of knowledge production. Osborne goes on to offer a damning indictment of what passes as transdisciplinarity in the humanities today: “The reduction of transdisciplinarity to ‘fuzziness’ of disciplinary boundaries is a serious intellectual collapse.”¹⁶ It is a way of suppressing the more politically engaged and conceptually radical import of the very theory in whose name such blurring is claimed.

As Osborne describes, one variant of this (re)appropriation of trans-disciplinary dynamics consists in subordinating them to practical reason

¹⁵ Peter Osborne, “Problematizing Disciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematics,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 32, nos. 5–6 (2015): 7–8.

¹⁶ Osborne, “Problematizing Disciplinarity,” 15.

in the service of problem-solving. This kind of work typically involves some real-world problem that can only be tackled effectively via a concatenation of multiple disciplinary perspectives and methods, and it tends to address itself outside the university in collaboration with social actors such as policy makers, corporations, and other stakeholders. For Osborne, this notion of transdisciplinarity thus becomes all too technocratic, instrumental, and organizational, irreparably tainted by state or state-like agency; even if such projects often have an explicitly social-democratic framing, they tend to mediate or elide the neoliberal statism at work and the control it exercises. More fatally still, they fail to reflect on how this concept of real-life “problem” is constructed and to what ends.

Any future interdisciplinary version of musicology, without or without its “cultural” epithet, would have to reckon with whether it sets itself the task of reckoning with problems of the kind that admit of practical solution or of critically carving out and repeatedly contesting the terms and modes of investigation that define the issue. If the beyond of ethnomusicology is to tackle colonialism, then it will be all the stronger for eschewing the idea that it is a problem that can be solved by dissolving disciplinary boundaries in favor of embracing a thorough redefinition and reproblematicization of the colony, its discourses, and its interdictions. And such a shift, I suggest, can only come about by engaging critically with the institutional structures and vested interests that determine how research and debate is conducted, recognizing how “innovation” is both a check on intellectual freedom and also a means of producing the entrepreneurial subject and thereby perpetuating alienation and inequality. In short, there is no purely theoretical intervention.

As central to the transdisciplinary question as it is to postcolonial discourse is the question of generality—an issue highlighted in different ways by several contributions to the special issue, especially the articles by Nina Power and David Cunningham.¹⁷ Specifically, the difficulty concerns a movement toward something so general and universal that it paradoxically reproduces the logic of exclusion and borders in order to circumscribe itself as supra-discipline. To avoid a model of transdisciplinarity that would perpetuate the transcendental disciplinary standpoint—one typically assigned to philosophy, which thus tends to assume responsibility for resolving such a dilemma—one might turn to

¹⁷ David Cunningham, “Logics of Generalization: Derrida, Grammatology and Transdisciplinarity,” *Theory, Culture, & Society* 32 (2015): 79–107; and Nina Power, “Reading Transdisciplinarity: Sartre and Althusser,” *Theory, Culture, & Society* 32 (2015): 109–24.

the Guattarian model of transversality, amply represented in the special issue, which seeks to break down the opposition between institutional analysis and unconscious formations of desire and to differentiate among degrees of openness to this desire.

Another direction is suggested by Cunningham, who follows Derrida in proposing a self-differentiation of generality into different modes or levels of generality and specificity. Cunningham discerns a difference *internal* to deconstruction between this transdisciplinary generalization and the logic of the quasi-transcendental, which would amount to a tragic or melancholic account of conceptualization or generalization's shortcoming. Without dwelling on this point as one of intra-philosophical debate, I want to rebut this suggestion at sufficient length to make the case that the two cannot be opposed and that, on the contrary, disciplinarity is always already to some extent inter-, multi-, trans-, precisely because it is compromised from the outset by an irreducible *indisciplinarity* for which the quasi-transcendental is another nonsynonymous substitution (again because generalization is always self-differentiation, hence there could be no immediate identity or equivalence between concepts no more than one would be a meta-concept of the others).

The fracturing of disciplinarity, its dispersal in the direction of multi-, inter-, etc. disciplinarity, is not some falling short of the goal of disciplinary synthesis (which would simply be to change the yardstick but keep the teleology intact). Nor is this splintering itself capable of being possessed as meta-transdisciplinarity. Rather, disciplinarity is always already in the process of fracturing itself, much as a glass resonating at a particular frequency can shatter into multiple tiny shards. The idea of disciplinary or meta-disciplinary synthesis is not an origin *before* this dissemination but an effect of this immanent spacing out, which thus divides itself and creates the fiction of something that is not it and, as such, lies beyond its borders. It is this auto-indisciplinarity that gives rise to the illusion of self-contained disciplines ripe for inter- or transdisciplinary disruption. Just as method (*meta-hodos*), which appears today as a unified set of procedures authorized by disciplinary norms, also meant for the Greeks a diverted or perverted path (a *via rupta*, as Derrida puts it), discipline originally diverts itself away for any journey's end. Quasi-transcendentality, insofar as it names the ruin in advance of any transcendental position, is always already a generalized transdisciplinarity, as I would suggest Derrida's writing demonstrates in its practice. The consequence for the future of musicology is that there can be no synthesis at origin or end, or at any level of generality. There is no stable position from which different currents within an enlarged (cultural) musicology could oppose one another in fervent debate.

The "F" Group

Amico's metaphor of heat implies the friction of something moving against another. I want to propose, by way of conclusion, that there is another model for the relations to and between (sub)disciplinary dynamics, taking inspiration from H el ene Cixous's reflections on her Algerian childhood. Cixous, who was born in Oran, was the daughter of a German-Jewish refugee mother from Osnabr uck and an Algerian father of Spanish-Moroccan inheritance whose medical license was rescinded by the anti-Semitic Vichy laws. In "Mon Alg eriance," speaking of a "quasi-original detachment," she reflects:

I did not lose Algeria, because I never had it, and I never was it. I suffered that it was lost for itself, separated from itself by colonialization. If ever I identified it was with its rage at being wounded, amputated, humiliated. I always lived Algeria with impatience, as being bound to return to its own. France? I did not know it and I knew no one there.¹⁸

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With an "unshakeable certainty that 'the Arabs' were the true offspring of this dust and perfumed soil," Cixous frequently finds her overtures of friendship rebuffed.¹⁹ From the perspective of the Arab inhabitants, she belongs to another "F" group: the French.²⁰ Later she describes her Algeriance as a state of being in passing, *passance*. She writes of her move to Paris as an experience of not arriving where one is:

Until the day I understood there is no harm, only difficulties, in living in the zone without belonging.

For a long time I thought it was my Algerian accident that had made me into a passerby. I do not know how and when all this began but it was by "arriving" in France without finding my way or my self that I discovered: the chance of my genealogy and history arranged things in such a way that I would *stay passing*; in an originary way for me I am always passing by, in *passance*. I like the progressive form and the words that end in *-ance*. So much so that if I went toward *France* without mistrust, it is perhaps because of this ending which gives the present participle its lucky chance.

To depart (so as) not to arrive from Algeria is also, incalculably, a way of not having broken with Algeria. I have always rejoiced at having been spared all "arrival." I want *arrivance*, movement, unfinished in my life. It is also out of departing that I write. I like the phrase:

¹⁸ Cixous, "My Algeriance," 168.

¹⁹ Cixous, "My Algeriance," 153.

²⁰ Cixous, "My Algeriance," 162.

J'arrive (I'm coming, I manage, I arrive...), its interminable and subtle and triumphant messianicity. The word *messianice* comes to me from Algeria.²¹

She coins a punning “passporosity” to characterize this taking flight and the ordinary disruption of the “I am.” In an interview from 2005, stressing that this *passance* is not a state of negation or lack but a site where one lives, she translates *passance* into the language of displacement: “I have always lived-written *in* displacements.”²² Into Amico’s rallying cry, “We are all musicologists (for) now,” I want to insert Cixous’s sense of nonbelonging, of passing, and of displacing. Or, rather, I want to displace the “are” in the direction of an ordinary displacement. Cixous does not describe her condition as one of hybridity or of one element rubbing up against another in contradictory fashion or friction. The metaphor she uses for this displacement is instead, as Derrida observes in *H. C. pour la vie*, speed: specifically, a telegraphic address passing at such high speed (*à grande vitesse*) down telephone wires that it “outspeeds the letter.”²³ This telephonic speed does not so much traverse space-time as it consists in a spatio-temporal—rhythmic even—displacement. “If it displaces so quickly, it is because it replaces.”²⁴

Let us put this “replacement” on hold for one moment while I return to Amico’s text. He borrows from Clifford Geertz a distinction between models “of” and “for” culture, which we might roughly map onto descriptive and prescriptive discourses. To his mind, ethnomusicology has focused almost exclusively on the “of” at the expense of the “for,” eschewing the discipline’s own messy mediations. Amico wants more self-reflexivity. This would be one path to an other other. If ethnomusicology’s sovereignty is to be challenged, Cixous’s “art of replacement” offers another way of understanding this “for”—less as projection than as prosthesis. Her telegraphic telescoping substitutes one *for* another at infinite speed “on the spot,” as Derrida has it.²⁵ In this way it disrupts any positionality immanently, not from outside or through a dialectical swapping of places. If Cixous can be said, as Derrida suggests, to take a position on life, to take its side, to be *for* life, it is only insofar as “this ‘for,’ this *pro* would become the prolegomenon of everything.”

²¹ Cixous, “My Algeriance,” 169–70.

²² Hélène Cixous and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *Encounters: Conversations on Life and Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 61.

²³ Jacques Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie, c'est-à-dire . . .* (Paris: Galilée, 2002); *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say . . .*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 58/62.

²⁴ Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie/H.C. for Life*, 67/73.

²⁵ Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie/H.C. for Life*, 85/95.

It would be said before any *logos*, it goes in all directions, that of finality or of destination, of the gift, donation and dativity, but also of substitution and replacement: this *for* that, this one *in the place* of the other. In the place of: the one for the other. The law of speed.²⁶

This “great poet of substitution” teaches us, Derrida argues, to surrender to this preposition “for” before any being or any being-for—that is, before any “we are” or “we are for.” And that perhaps is what it would mean to be *for* transdisciplinarity

ABSTRACT

This response situates Stephen Amico’s provocation within the context of an intimate connection between postcolonial thought and the drive towards interdisciplinarity. It examines via three critical moments the deeply intertwined desires to destroy the colony on the one hand and disciplinarity on the other. To this end it analyses the debates around interdisciplinarity between Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Laurent Dubreuil, before turning to the explicit thematization of transdisciplinarity as part of the neoliberalization of the university. Finally, the essay turns to Hélène Cixous’s reflections in “Mon Algérie” to develop another way of thinking about the irreducible dispersal and dissemination of disciplinarity and its imbrication in the (post)colonial.

Keywords: transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, postcolonial, deconstruction, Cixous

²⁶ Ibid., 78/87.