

Presentation

A PAUSE ALONG THE WAY

L'interdisciplinarité est un mode de relation entre des pratiques scientifiques spécialisées. Ces relations, leur nature, leur fonction, leur efficacité sont réglées par le rapport qui existe, à un moment donné, entre les disciplines en même temps que par leur évolution propre. Ce rapport, depuis le début du siècle, a changé. Durkheim et ses disciples avaient rêvé d'une science sociale unifiée autour d'une méthode qui serait commune à toutes les disciplines. Une génération plus tard, Marc Bloch et Lucien Febvre, puis après eux Fernand Braudel, donnèrent toute priorité à ce qu'ils nommaient heureusement le «décloisonnement» du travail intellectuel; l'emprunt souvent sauvage, porté par un formidable appétit de connaissance fut avec eux la règle. Mais l'expansion accélérée du territoire de l'historien, la multiplication des provinces inédites ont été acquises au prix d'un risque inattendu: celui d'un nouveau cloisonnement qui ne passerait plus cette fois, entre les sciences sociales, mais à l'intérieur de notre discipline elle-même sous couvert des nouvelles spécialisations. [...]. Nous savons bien qu'aucun paradigme majeur ne propose plus d'ordonner, encore moins d'unifier le champ des sciences sociales. L'histoire est engagée dans un travail de redéfinition de ses projets et de ses pratiques, mais nous pressentons qu'elle n'est pas seule dans ce cas. [...].

[...] On voudrait avancer ici qu'au lieu de penser, comme tout nous y invite, la relation entre disciplines en termes d'homologie ou de convergence,

il est utile aujourd'hui d'insister sur leur spécificité, voir leur irréductibilité les unes aux autres.¹

Les Annales, Economie, Sociétés, Civilisations, November-December 1989, "Editorial"

It is the task of geographers to recognize and deeply probe the implications of incorporating into their work the methodological developments achieved in the social sciences through their confrontation with positivism. But one insists that the best geography is that done by geographers, and that they must do it very well, especially when the problems they examine are of an interdisciplinary character, for it is there that geography and geographers must be clear as to precisely what their true and proper discursive contribution is.

Ovidio Delgado, "Geografía y ciencias sociales. Una relación reexaminada", in Martha Chávez Torres, Octavio M. González Santana, María del Carmen Ventura Patiño, eds., *Geografía humana y ciencias sociales. Una relación reexaminada*, Zamora, El Colegio de Michoacán, 2009, p. 102.

At this juncture of its –now thirty-year plus trajectory– and after long deliberation, *Relaciones* decides to stray –productively, but stray

¹ "Interdisciplinarity refers to specific kinds of relation among specialized scientific disciplines. Those relations, their nature, functions and efficiency are all regulated by the linkage that exists, at a given time, among the fields involved and by each one's individual evolution. But the nature of that linkage has changed since the early [20th] century. Durkheim and his disciples dreamed of a unified social science centered on a method shared by all disciplines, but a generation later Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, followed by Fernand Braudel, prioritized what they aptly called "the collapse of barriers" in intellectual work. With that, the rule followed by one and all became an –often savage– borrowing, propelled by an inexorable thirst for knowledge, but the accelerated expansion of the territory of the historian and the multiplication of unforeseen provinces have been achieved at a high and unexpected cost: a new edifice made of bricks that no longer circulate among the social sciences but, rather, within [each] discipline, through the emergence of new specializations. [...]. It is well known now that no single, broad paradigm can aspire to organize, much less unify, the field of the social sciences. Today history faces the challenge of redefining its projects and practices, and we presage that we are not alone in these circumstances [...].

[...] The idea proposed herein is that instead of pondering the relation among disciplines in terms of homology or convergence, as has been suggested, it is now useful to emphasize their specificities, even the irreducibility of some in relation to others".

nonetheless— from its editorial program and publish an exceptional fifth issue this year, the one the reader now holds. This offers a moment to reflect on the circumstances leading to this decision and on the crossroads where all academic journals find themselves in 2012. Multidisciplinary in nature, *Relaciones* embraces all the social sciences, though the compass seems to be pointing towards a resurgence of disciplinarity, as these —by no means naïve— epigraphs suggest.

But I get ahead of myself; first, why a second issue 132? This reflects a problematic that every indexed academic journal confronts today: there are so few on the market (with variations among the different disciplines), but so many scholars seeking well-deserved recognition, but time marches implacably forward: time for evaluating, time for refereeing, time for editing... plus deadlines for submitting requests for publication to the authorities of science, with the required justification. Ways to evade commitments abound and are applied more or less clearly: raising barriers of different kinds (scholarly quality, naturally, being the most advisable), but the truth is that manuscripts accumulate and waiting periods stretch... a year?... two...?

Today's ever-broadening access to information and increasing proximity of sources thanks largely to the Internet (here I am thinking as a historian), together with the multiplication of books on related topics and required readings, makes the dilemma for journal editors more complex still. Manuscripts are better informed, more original, and probe subject areas that 10 years ago were beyond the reach of social science researchers: think of all the issues in history, linguistics, even literature —and probably every other discipline— to which powerful search engines now permit access through primary sources that yesterday were so disperse and distant as to be unreachable. The result? Better quality articles that effortlessly vanquish the most demanding evaluation criteria, as long as they are not savagely narrow, which is not, after all, the goal. Hence, over the past five years the rejection rate at *Relaciones* has decreased by more than a few points. Parallel to this, the institutions that sponsor us now stipulate —rightly so— that we open our journals' pages to submissions by an

additional group of potential clients: advanced students whom we are asked to encourage, though without favoritism or condescendence.

But that's not all. We receive more informed articles, essays with more conclusive arguments, examples, cases, annexes and abundant bibliographies. Is the length of the average social science article increasing in the Internet Era? Though testing this hypothesis requires an analysis beyond the scope of this *Presentation*, turning to *Google* and its minions allows an attempt; one the reader is free to complete or criticize. The mention of the journal *Annales* in the epigraph piqued my curiosity, so I went back and looked at its first issue (1929) with its prestigious bylines that include Gustave Glotz, the grand specialist on Greece, and Henri Pirenne. The article by the former has but 10 pages, the second only 16!² Reality, of course, is more complex, as the chart below shows; a modest statistical game we offer readers, nothing sophisticated.

Mean extension of articles received by the journal *Relaciones* in three periods

<i>Period</i>	<i>Mean number of pages per article</i>	<i>Dimensions of the page layout</i>	<i>Mean pagination of the layout (in 2012 norms)</i>
1980-1981	38.7	1998	34.2
1992-1994	26.7	2142	26
2010-2012	34.5	2196	34.5

Upon comparing these results, I came to understand better certain complaints voiced by the founder of this journal back in 1982 concerning the extension of some texts. We are at a threshold. No clearly defined dividing line has yet emerged, and a few submissions (3 in the period examined) clearly “hopped the fence” for they contain as many as 82 pages! But setting those three aside, and converting the

² “Le prix du papyrus dans l’antiquité grecque”, “L’instruction des marchands au moyen âge”.

varied formats into a “constant layout” (that of 2012), we calculate an overall mean of 31.1 pages. More revealing is the comparison of the 1992-1994 period, when the journal had become firmly established, but long before the *internecine revolution*, with the years 2010-2012, where a difference of 8-to-9 pages appears. Of course, we must take into account the great variation that exists between products, disciplines or topics in terms of the size of their bibliographies and footnotes.³

Internet means globalization or, if you prefer, internationalization: *i.e.*, entry into a much broader, more open market of writers. Even when a journal has a clear regional focus it may harbor national, or global, ambitions. It would be enlightening to make more comparisons with the *pre-internecine* era, but we leave that task for another day.

Articles received by *Relaciones* according to authors' adscription:
2008-2012⁴

<i>Adscription</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Colegio de Michoacán</i>	23	12.9
National	125	70.2
International	30	16.8
Total	178	100

The reader will see that, proportionally speaking, there is ample room for more articles from both the *Colegio de Michoacán* and beyond Mexico's borders; indeed, this is precisely our hope and proposal, though it means increasing the ship's cargo even more, if that is possible. Thus we explain our exceptional solution—one we have no plans to repeat any time soon—of presenting issue #132 *bis*.

³ Beyond periodization: issue 130 (Spring 2012) has an average of 27 footnotes per article, issue 131 (Summer) has 61.

⁴ Accepted and rejected.

Assiduous readers of *Relaciones* (who, I trust, number more than a few) will have noted that something is awry with this issue: where is the trademark that reflects its multidisciplinary character... the *sacrosanta Thematic* section. It is time to return to the coexistence –perhaps something more– of our different disciplines, but first a note to explain the selection of the articles included in this issue. Due to various circumstances, these texts are the ones that in mid-2012 had suffered the longest delays before publication, though I hasten to assure readers that this has naught to do with their quality or thematic import. Rather, they constitute a modest sampling of the manuscripts that *Relaciones* receives and publishes. The random nature of these 8 essays impedes firm conclusions though, numerically speaking, history predominates, as it does in the heart of the social sciences and humanities. Half of the articles –those by Celina Becerra, Othón Baños, José Armando Hernández and José Bustamante– have clear links to this discipline, and their focuses reveal rich possibilities by interweaving piracy and historical ecology in a global framework, or analyzing institutions and society in a bounded, regional setting that presents an especially acute vision. The study of inns takes on a subject that while novel is by no means trivial; if you think I'm wrong, try to convince *Sectur* (Mexico's Tourism Department). Finally, the examination of taxes and schools seems to say all there is to say about the Leviathan that, for good or ill, governs us all.

Then there is Pedro Velázquez' study of the engineer Agustín M. Chávez, which falls amidst biography, the history of science, philosophy and psychology: a broad range of disciplines that accords well with a figure at once romantic and positivist... inventor, dreamer, moralist. Who says that “humanity is one”?

Multidisciplinary practice finds clearer expression in the other articles; though we would note –recalling, again, our epigraphs– that one disciplinary perspective always seems to prevail. Joaquín Rodríguez' essay on *Rusticatio mexicana*, a work published in Bologna in 1782, has a strong hue of literary criticism, even rhetoric perhaps, but with marked anthropological contributions, and one or two of a historical bent. The *Huichapan Codex* offers an occasion to practice linguistics, but a linguistics of a peculiar ilk associated with an ethno-

historical approach that probes systems of representation that the author, David Wright, holds are as valid for a 16th-century Otomí noble as for today's road signs.

This brings us, finally, to the neighborhood in Zamora studied by Isaac Riquelme, where life goes on like a roiled river that mirrors the disciplines: anthropology, sociology, politics, even economics and, why not, linguistics (see the transcriptions of popular *Zamoran* jargon). Nor can we leave history aside, for the essay presents life histories and, more interesting still, those of people that history has forgotten.

Some simple affirmations may help smooth out some of the wrinkles in these comments: the increasingly open –cosmopolitan– nature of topics and authors, both of which may transit between Spain and America, like the *alcaldes mayores* in Lagos, or the author of one essay or another, or traverse just one continent. Globalization can be examined from the beaches of Campeche or through the extension of concepts (identity, for example) and practices today almost universal (micro-credits, informality) but, regardless, one element remains virtually unchanged: the absence of a complete, definitive, dilution of the disciplines. Variations exist, as always: history, to cite one, ensconced in its temporal territory, tends to be more autonomous, while the rest are buttressed by multiple sources of support: some, like linguistics and literature in the studies presented herein, require chronological cushions of varying amplitude: in the case of the *Ejidal Sur* neighborhood in Zamora this is but a few decades, a time frame sufficient to perceive its emergence and trace how it has given rise to a popular culture.

Though the discussion mentioned in the epigraphs calls for a broader, more acute, probing of these questions than can be provided in this small space, we cannot simply brush it aside for ours is a multidisciplinary journal, unlike many (most?) of those that pertain to the guild of the social sciences and humanities and usually express the production of a single research center. Promoting multidisciplinary practice⁵ does not entail accepting the abolition of frontiers, renounc-

⁵ It is interesting to note that at this point of the debate that “pluridisciplinaridad”

ing centuries of experience (in some disciplines), or determining a set of rules for the good development of each science, because each one has its own instruments, methods and modes of operation, its faculties of control and criticism, its topic areas and objects of study (many of them interchangeable). Within this sphere of necessary interdependence it is equally indispensable that each discipline preserve its own space. How much? That is the hard part of the discussion because there are so many variables. In 1989, *Annales'* editors put their finger on the unifying nature of sociology: certainly its central character, which is at the heart of all human –hence, gregarious– devices, may mold it into a unifying force, perhaps sustained by anthropology; remember that Marcel Mauss –sociologist, ethnologist and promoter of the “total social fact”– was also Durkheim’s nephew.

According to the epigraphs, those who most fiercely defend the autonomy of their disciplines are historians and a geographer. Is this because their territories, time and space, are better delimited? Is it because, since ancient times, they have held seniority over other disciplines? Perhaps this is why history and human geography have remained allies for much of the 20th century (at least in France). But things are not so simple, and in the same book from which I quoted the geographer, another specialist recognizes the current fragmentation of all disciplinary⁶ knowledge and returns to an intricate multidisciplinary (apologies to the *Real Academia*): “the broad themes of human geography are torn in their totality from the entails of the social sciences”. Nor is all modesty (and he is right): without his discipline all other sciences would be left “floating in a space without dimensions”.⁷ I must admit that I feel the same way

no appears in the dictionary of the *Real Academia Española*, but only the adjective “multidisciplinary”; due to the conservatism of that venerable institution, or perhaps the reticence of all scientific bodies?

⁶ “What today we call human geography does not constitute one single discipline but, rather, a kind of label that embraces a broad variety of disciplines”, Gilberto Gimenez, “La geografía humana como ciencia social y las ciencias sociales como ciencias ‘geografiables’”, in Martha Chávez Torres, Octavio M. González Santana, María del Carmen Ventura Patiño, eds., *Geografía humana y ciencias sociales*, p. 78.

⁷ pp. 81, 83.

about history: without which other disciplines lack a clock that marks the hour. I believe that sociologists and anthropologists think along the same lines: without them there is no science, for we lose the social, human, dimension... But each one yearns to belong to a school, their own.

Disciplines exist, as do the times in which we live. Requests multiply, opportunities –good or bad– expand. Frontiers intersect more every day, and scholarly productions (not only journal articles) become veritable UFOs. While already perceivable in 1989, today this has become a pressing reality.

But there is another reality, also relatively recent. The reader can conduct this experiment (those who are old enough): compare your production of book chapters and articles from yore (15 years ago, for example) with that of the past 5-year period. You will likely note that back then there was a balance, while today there is a notable imbalance that favors chapters.⁸ Are these products equivalent... , do they share the same strict quality controls? No doubt this depends, but in general I would say “no”. This is a response to the aforementioned paucity of indexed journals: is this alternative a good solution? Again, prudence leads to caution, so I reserve my answer that, inevitably, would be fragmentary.

Having arrived at this juncture, the reader can easily count the number of times that we have vacillated or opened a protective umbrella: they are many, but we have a justification, for these are modern –that is, complicated– times....

Traducción al inglés de Paul C. Kersey Johnson

⁸ Though I have no precise figures, certain experience suggests that the ratio would be on the order of –at least– 3 chapters to 1 article.