# Interdisciplinarity and Pacific Studies: Roots and Routes

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In his 1995 review of rationales for Pacific studies, Terence Wesley-Smith placed the need for interdisciplinary initiatives at the center of his proposal for "new directions." Noting that such an approach would be "challenging, to say the least," he nonetheless suggested that "the time is ripe for another concerted attempt to come to grips with the interdisciplinary aspects of Pacific Islands studies" (Wesley-Smith 1995, 123). In fact, there is little evidence that the challenge has been taken up. As recently as 2003, the editor of this journal, reviewing the papers from an earlier conference on the past and future of Pacific studies, noted the lack of clear guidelines and described the implementation of interdisciplinarity as "troubling." His question as to the existence of models for possible emulation appeared to go unanswered (Hereniko 2003, xiii–xiv). It is timely, therefore, to reexamine the nature and history of both disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, and to consider the possibilities and prospects of the latter for one specific program.

The theoretical foundation of the Pacific studies program at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand derives from its commitment to interdisciplinarity, comparativity, and indigeneity as its frame of reference (TKAM 2005, 7). Its prospectus defines it as "an interdisciplinary programme of study that is international and cross-cultural in scope" and declares that the postgraduate program will extend that orientation (Va'aomanū Pasifika 2007, 5). During the early weeks of undergraduate study, Wesley-Smith's 1995 paper and an accompanying lecture emphasize the centrality of interdisciplinarity, a focus to which return is made from time to time throughout the major. However, course outlines indicate that an interdisciplinary approach is still in the process of development.

The first-level course, "The Pacific Heritage," proposes to "explore both indigenous and foreign perspectives on the geography, histories, cultures, economies, politics, and arts" of the Pacific and offers assessment by performance or exhibition as well as more conventional forms (Vaʻaomanū Pasifika 2006a, 1). The title of the second level, "Comparative Histories of Polynesia," is self-explanatory (Vaʻaomanū Pasifika 2006b, 1). The third level, "Framing the Pacific: Theorising Culture and Society," examines "a number of critical issues in the contemporary Pacific through a detailed consideration of the work, ideas, and writings of Pacific writers, artists, filmmakers, activists and scholars" and proposes discussion of "established historical and narrative accounts of a range of Pacific societies" (Vaʻaomanū Pasifika 2006c, 1). The fourth-level core course, "Theory and Method in Pacific Studies," while exploring material framed outside the disciplines, also draws heavily on history, anthropology, cultural studies, and literary studies (Vaʻaomanū Pasifika 2006d, 1, 6–11).

My own experience in the program as well as the content of the above-mentioned course outlines indicate that, while interdisciplinarity remains an aspiration, great difficulties remain in the framework of the university for realizing that aspiration. At the same time, I experienced a strong sense that the program carried the promise of addressing my concerns about the origins and some of the associations of Pacific studies and of opening up possibilities for the fruitful pursuit of the accompanying aspirations to comparativity and indigenous location. With the recent introduction of postgraduate degrees, the program at Victoria University has a special interest in taking up Wesley-Smith's decade-old challenge and preparing students for interdisciplinary work at that level.

In this paper I draw on my undergraduate and early postgraduate experience in Victoria's program to identify some possibilities for the continuing development of a Pacific studies there (hence the reference to roots and routes in the subtitle). I must emphasize that it is not my intention to define Pacific studies universally. By way of preparing the ground, I particularly discuss the approaches generally grouped under the heading of "interdisciplinarity"; again, I intend not to arrive at a perfect, authoritative definition of interdisciplinarity, but rather to review the contribution those approaches might make. To this end, I begin by briefly covering some generalizations about Pacific knowledges and considering the European academic framework before and during the emergence of disciplines. I then outline that emergence, review a range of ideas about the nature of interdisciplinarity and related methodologies, and examine the relation-

ship between interdisciplinarity and area studies. Finally, I return to the aspirations of Victoria University's Pacific studies program, consider some possible obstacles and impediments to its development, and present some suggestions for possible program orientation and content that might assist in the process of transition from mere discussion of and unrealized commitment to interdisciplinarity, to the development of a cohort of young scholars who can actually implement interdisciplinary projects.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore deeply the epistemological underpinnings of a variety of knowledges and methodologies. Equally, it is not possible here to take account of knowledges other than those originating in Europe and the Pacific. Nor is it feasible to draw on the insights available from fields such as other area studies and subaltern studies. Although the constraints of space severely limit any investigation of the relationships among area studies, interdisciplinarity, and decolonization, all of these directions would be invaluable in taking this work further.

## Dynamism of Native Knowledges

It is in the nature of the colonial project that the history and nature of earlier Native knowledge systems are substantially obliterated (Smith 1999, 29). Particularly because Pacific cultures were, until recently, oral rather than written, David Welchman Gegeo has pointed out, "Up to now everything has been lumped together by outsiders under the general topics of 'worldview' or 'magic and sorcery,' or 'ethnoscience.' For us all of these may be related, but they are also separate and distinct bodies of knowledge" (2001, 503–504). In a Melanesian context, the difficulties may be indicated by the fact that the essay on preservation of knowledge in oral cultures in *Oral Tradition in Melanesia* draws almost entirely on the transmission of Micronesian navigational knowledge for its examples (Farrall 1981, 1–86). However, that the materials for a survey of earlier knowledges are at best fragmentarily available should not be taken to suggest that they can be generalized across the Pacific, or that those knowledge systems were unchanging and existed only in their present forms. Teresia Teaiwa has pointed to the need to "account for *changes* in indigenous ways of knowing and being" (2006, 75; italics in original), and this presents difficulties for the too-easy assumption that epistemological systems appearing in current studies such as those of Gegeo necessarily correspond with those of the past. Some aspects of recent and current manifestations of those systems are alluded to below in the context of historical knowl-

edge. In regard to what is thought of as scientific knowledge, there is ample evidence of complex classificatory systems, usually of an analogous nature rather than a formal and functional one (Pond 1994, 112–115).

That these and other systems may have involved significant specialization is indicated by Wendy Pond's assertion that a full understanding of Oceanic perspectives of the biota would require the involvement of Native "poets, fishermen, gardeners, biologists and experts in the sacred areas to decode the metaphors" (1994, 117). Further evidence of such specialization lies in the many varieties of *tohunga/tufuga/kahuna* (ie, specialist, expert) in Polynesian usage. Equally, there is evidence of accompanying bodies of esoteric knowledge, confined to particular groups, and the employment of allegory and metaphor to restrict such knowledge (Biggs 1994, 112–115; Pond 115), even in public performance, as in the Tongan concept *heliaki* (to speak one thing and mean another) and the Hawaiian concept *kaona* (hidden or double poetic meaning) (Māhina 1993, 113; Tatar 1982, 48–50). Linda Tuhiwai Smith observed that, in Māori society, "knowledge itself was never held to be universally available" (1999, 172).

## A Brief History of Disciplinarity

In the twentieth century, what has come to be called interdisciplinarity can be traced in the European tradition, in fact if not word, as far back as the philosophy of Plato, reemerging in a variety of forms until at least the middle of the nineteenth century (Hausman 1979, 1–10; Klein 1990, 19–39; Moran 2002, 1–18). Though Plato's academy distinguished individual subjects such as mathematics and music in the progression toward wisdom, it was the role of philosophy to unite and synthesize the knowledges they established. Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics,* further delineated subjects in such categories as poetics, ethics, politics, and physics, and established a hierarchy rising through the productive and the practical to the theoretical. Rejecting the Platonic concept of a universalizing philosophy, he nonetheless accorded metaphysics—"first philosophy"—the role of presiding over the necessary but regrettable division of knowledge (Aristotle 1984, 2:1587–1588, 1619–1620).

From the Middle Ages to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the modern form of the university centered on a core curriculum comprising the *trivium* (logic, grammar, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). While early forms of disciplines

emerged, particularly in theology, the law, and medicine, their emergence took place within the overall and, as the word implies, universal framework of the university itself. While the Enlightenment impulse to classification resulted in a massive expansion and specialization of knowledge, the eighteenth-century *L'Encyclopédie* project kept alive the concept of the unity and interrelatedness of the new knowledges. In *La Scienza Nuova* (first published in 1744), Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's challenge to the earliest appearances of positivism was based on a remarkably early expression of belief in the constructedness of knowledge, as opposed to its discovery. He asserted, consequently, the primacy of the human over the natural sciences and advocated a curriculum based on "the totality of sciences and arts" as a corrective to slavish discipleship (Vico 1965, 19, quoted in Moran 2002, 7).

At the same time, the Aristotelian concept of philosophy as the overarching monitor of disciplines continued its currency and, as Joe Moran pointed out, "This notion of philosophy as undisciplined knowledge is retained today in the name of the higher degree of Doctor of Philosophy (the Ph.D.), which is gained through the completion of a research dissertation in any subject" (2002, 8). The concept was perhaps most thoroughly developed by Immanuel Kant, whose reworking of the Aristotelian hierarchy insisted on the discrete nature of individual disciplines but also accorded philosophy, the vehicle of reason, the status of a transcendent discipline (1992, 27–29). Moving in the opposite direction, Auguste Comte's positivism displaced philosophy with science, and sought the unification of knowledges in modeling the human sciences on the methods of the natural (1974, 30, 39, 51–52).

> *Vicente Diaz told an anecdote from the time of US naval rule in Guam, when the administration was rounding up Chamorros with leprosy for deportation. The story involved two characters: a blind man and a crippled woman, whom Diaz took to represent history and anthropology respectively, on the grounds that historians move across time but are careless of location and anthropologists see their locations clearly but that vision is confined to those locations. One was left to wonder how the man became blind and the woman crippled (Diaz 2003).*

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the disciplines and disciplinarity were ascendant in the academy (Klein 1990, 21–22; Wolf 1982, 7–8). Originating in the Latin *disciplina,* the teaching of "disciples," the term has expanded in a number of directions, all interrelated and all throw-

ing some light on its essential nature. Its development, associations, and reach are succinctly captured in a concise dictionary definition: "training or conditions imposed for the improvement of physical powers, self-control, etc; systematic training in obedience; the state of improved behavior, etc, resulting from such training; punishment or chastisement; a system of rules for behavior, etc; a branch of learning or instruction; the laws governing members of a Church" (Gordon 1984, 318; repunctuated and numerals deleted).

In the latter context, the *Oxford English Dictionary* makes even clearer two of the fundamental elements of the concept from its beginnings to its present application. In reference to a post-Reformation theological controversy, the dictionary describes the late-seventeenth-century "Discipline of the Secret" as dealing with the "modes of procedure held to have been observed in the early Church in gradually teaching the mysteries of the Christian faith to the neophytes, and in concealing them from the uninitiated" (Simpson and Weiner 1989, 735; Moran 2002, 2). At least in its earliest English usage, *discipline* evoked the identification of insiders and outsiders, based on the connection of knowledge and power; Michel Foucault elaborated the resulting implication that "power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1991, 27).

The first application of the term *discipline* in a strictly academic context is also revealing. It appears to have emerged in the late Middle Ages in relation to theology and the arts in Paris, the law at Bologna, and medicine at Salerno. This suggests that the very concept of disciplinarity arose in response to pressures from outside the academy: the Church, the Law, and the professions (Klein 1990, 20). To this primary stimulus were eventually added the Enlightenment impulse to specialization, the reconstruction of the European (and later US) universities from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the development of vested disciplinary interests, the influence of the educational "market," and the impact of the scientific model. From all these emerged the disciplinary characteristics of isolation of a narrow field of "objective" inquiry and a tendency to continuing particularization, both of which intensified from the mid-nineteenth century (Klein 1990, 21–22; Moran 2002, 10–14; Wolf 1982, 7–11).

In the early 1980s, Eric Wolf analyzed that process of intensification in the social sciences as one of increasing focus on the individual as the

unit of inquiry, and the turning of such "ideological reasons for the split [into disciplines] into an intellectual justification for the specialties themselves" (1982, 7). He traced the emergence of sociology in the severance of social relations from political economy and their reappearance as relations among individuals at the expense of the former economic, political, and ideological context; and the arrival of economics and political science as a consequential concentration on the individual operating in one kind of marketplace or another. He followed the development of anthropology and its subdivisions and schools from a world focus to the study of the single case and "statistical cross-cultural comparisons of coded features drawn from large samples of ethnographically known cases" (Wolf 1982, 7–17). Regarding the latter, James Clifford has critiqued "exotic" anthropology's conflation of "the field" and "the culture" and its tendency to immobilize "the native" inside "the village" (1997, 17–30).

The discipline of history, as marked by a traditional reliance on documentary sources, invites particular attention. Though that reliance has more recently been modified by an openness to oral sources, landscape, and performance, a comparison with some aspects of its Pacific equivalent helps to illuminate the character of the Euro-American formations.[1] Academic historical knowledge privileges the existence of a single and verifiable truth, a separation of events and perceptions of them, linear time and sequence, narrativization, development, cause and effect, and the primacy of stable, written texts.[2] Pacific historical knowledge, as far as it can be generalized to any extent, may accept truth's taking a variety of forms according to circumstances, a variety of types of evidence and perspectives, the relationship of verity and locality, variable durations, cyclical time, connections other than those of causality, and the necessary flexibility of oral transmission.[3] In broad terms, it may be argued that the disciplinarity of academic history resides at least partly in its rigidity as to what is permitted to contribute to truth and what is excluded from being able to be "in the true" (Foucault 1981, 60–61).

Disciplinarity, then, is defined and impelled in part by its major internal contradiction; as Linda Tuhiwai Smith put it, "While disciplines are implicated in each other, particularly in their shared philosophical foundations, they are also insulated from each other through the maintenance of what are known as disciplinary boundaries" (1999, 67). To extend Eric Wolf's metaphor (1982, 6), they may also be seen as largely impermeable billiard balls, bouncing off each other, but doing so very much on the same table. The inherent impermeability is exacerbated in the modern university by

two further factors: the comparative immobility of the university's administrative structures and units (Hausman 1979, 2), and the fact that the disciplines, once constituted, tend to jealously guard their identity, borders, separation, discourse, and exclusions (Moran 2002, 13–14; Becher 1989, 19–27), and to establish "the requisites for the construction of new statements" (Foucault 1981, 59). The result, as summarized by Julie Thompson Klein, is that, "Over time they are shaped and reshaped by external contingencies and internal intellectual demands. In this manner a discipline comes to organize and concentrate experience into a particular 'world view.' Taken together, related claims within a specific material field put limits on the kinds of questions practitioners ask about their material, the methods and concepts they use, the answers they believe, and their criteria for truth and validity. There is, in short, a certain particularity about the images of reality in a given discipline" (1990, 104).

## The Emergence of Interdisciplinarity and Other -disciplinarities

*The blind man and the crippled woman, devoted to their families and their island, determined to escape. In a moment of inspiration, the crippled woman mounted the blind man's back, thus providing the sight that would guide his legs in effecting their flight (Diaz 2003).*

As I suggested in the introduction, I have no intention here of adding to the torrent of words already produced and arriving at the final and authoritative definition of interdisciplinarity. Rather, my intention is to consider that discussion to see what interdisciplinarity might contribute to the development of Pacific studies at Victoria University. This approach is motivated not least by the essential slipperiness of the term, a quality attributable in part to the several senses of the prefix *inter-:* between or among, as in interstitial; separating, as in interval; across, as in international; or reciprocal, as in interdependent. Equally ambiguous is the fact that any discussion of interdisciplinarity is always, to some degree, an engagement with disciplines themselves, with the type of engagement and the nature of the disciplines being highly variable. While Klein noted interdisciplinary's contrasting evocations of nostalgia for a past unity and promise of new directions (1990, 12), Roberta Frank best captured its quality in her felicitous image of "a disembodied smile, a floating demi-lune [crescent moon] coming to rest on whatever we already value" (1988, 98).

The term *interdisciplinarity* appears to have emerged in the mid-1920s

in the context of the social sciences, initially being problem oriented and virtually synonymous with its regular companion, *multidisciplinarity*. It would be fair to say that interdisciplinarity was regarded with some suspicion from the outset; for instance, a US Social Science Research Council report suggested that it "should not be allowed to hamper the first-rate mind" (SSRC 1929–1930, 18). By the mid-1930s the term had extended its reference to education; in the 1940s it was applied to such fields as "Negro" and area studies, and by the 1960s it had become rather "old hat" in the United States but highly fashionable in France (Frank 1988, 95–96; Klein 1990, 24–35). There followed, in the 1970s, what appears to have been the high point of interdisciplinarity to date. Noting a change "from a series of widely scattered occurrences into a kind of weather," Frank described the first of many 1970s guidebooks distinguishing the prefixes *inter-, meta-, extra-, multi-, pluri-, cross-, trans-, non-, a-,* and *poly-*. Additionally, the guidebook outlined the branches of interdisciplinarity: "teleological, normative, purposive, subject-oriented, problem-oriented, field-theory, and General Systems theory" (Frank 1988, 96).

At the 1970 "Seminar on Interdisciplinarity in Universities" sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Guy Berger coined the expression "the interdisciplinary archipelago" (1972, 23), which remains a telling metaphor for all consequent discussions. In his paper, Berger defined multidisciplinarity as juxtaposition of unconnected disciplines, pluridisciplinarity as juxtaposition of connected disciplines, interdisciplinarity as interaction among two or more disciplines, and transdisciplinarity as establishing "a common system of axioms across a set of disciplines" (1972, 25–26). Heinz Heckhausen's paper at the same seminar mapped a different chain of islands, distinguishing six types of interdisciplinarity: indiscriminate (encyclopedic); pseudo (using, for example, the same tools); auxiliary (based on dependence); composite (dealing with the big issues, such as hunger and war); supplementary (partially overlapping); and unifying (with consistency of subject and theoretical integration) (1972, 86–89). Jean Piaget handled the epistemological questions and distinguished low-level multidisciplinarity (drawing information from disciplines without change or enrichment to them); mid-level interdisciplinarity (involving interaction, reciprocity, and mutual enrichment); and a hoped-for highest stage, transdisciplinarity (placing disciplines within a total system with no borders between or among them) (1972, 136–139).

At the end of the 1970s, Joseph Kockelmans critiqued these and other formulations and suggested a revised terminology (1979, 123–160). He

argued that the *multi-* prefix could only be applied to education, not to work, and defined a multidisciplinary education as that "sought by a person who wished to acquaint himself [*sic*] with more than one discipline, although there may be no connection at all between the disciplines involved" (Kockelmans 1979, 127). In turn, he defined pluridisciplinary work as a juxtaposition or subordination of disciplines with at least some competence in both or all; interdisciplinary work as solving problems by integrating elements of existing disciplines into a new one; crossdisciplinary work as problem solving beyond the reach of any one discipline, but employing aspects of some related ones; and transdisciplinary work as that carried out by a group, each with competence in one or more disciplines (Kockelmans 1979, 127–128).

All of these lexical formulations, however productive in considering possible approaches, are fundamentally technical and do not go to the heart of interdisciplinarity. But beyond the lexicon, Kockelmans also dealt with the possible reasons for adopting an interdisciplinary approach. These he described as the desire to follow a project wherever it may lead without the constrictions of a disciplinary framework; a pedagogical corrective to a one-dimensional, Western framework; and a belief that actual phenomena cannot be fully explored within the perspective of any one discipline (Kockelmans 1979, 123). Moran took this a good deal further in declaring that "interdisciplinarity is always transformative in some way" (citing Roland Barthes to that effect), and adding, "It can form part of a more general critique of academic specialization as a whole, and of the nature of the university as an institution that cuts itself off from the outside world in small enclaves of expertise" (Moran 2002, 16).

In this position Moran had support, as suggested, from Barthes in his well-known assertion (1994, 1420)—cited approvingly by both Clifford (1986, 1) and, in a Pacific context, Wesley-Smith (1995, 123)—that interdisciplinarity involves the creation of a whole new object, owned by no one. Further support came from Diaz (2003), in his rejection of the juxtaposition of disciplines and advocacy of "doing work that pushes the boundaries and also formulates new criteria and standards for critically evaluating and assessing the new work." Even Stanley Fish, an opponent of interdisciplinarity as an expression of "leftist cultural theory," and a critic of its epistemological confusion, has recognized its inherently political nature and raised the prospect that, in at least one version, "interdisciplinary study leads not simply to a revolution in the structure of the

curriculum but to *'revolution tout court'* [revolution plain and simple]"
(Fish 1994, 231, 235, 236–238).

## Area Studies and Interdisciplinarity

> *The blind man and the crippled woman were assisted in their flight by their*
> *familiarity with the terrain into which they fled: the* halom tano, *the interior*
> *jungle, the locale and symbol of the survival of Chamorro culture.*

In an important sense, of course, the traditional disciplines are area
based, the area being Europe and the United States and providing the
basis—the billiard table referred to earlier—that constitutes their own
particular variety of "inter-ness," the way in which they "are implicated
in each other" (Smith 1999, 67). What are more commonly thought of
as area studies, by their very nature, raise questions of disciplinarity and
interdisciplinarity, a relationship demonstrated by the early engagement
of area and interdisciplinarity in the late 1940s (Klein 1990, 25, 98–99).
As Wesley-Smith has encapsulated it, "area studies programs are situated
beyond the conceptual and methodological reach of any one discipline,
providing exciting opportunities to develop creative, interdisciplinary
approaches to scholarship" (2004, 81). There remains the question of the
form or forms of interdisciplinarity appropriate or available to area stud-
ies and, in particular, Pacific studies.

In a survey of Pacific studies in the 1960s and early 1970s, geographer
Harold Brookfield described his inability, even as a committed disciplin-
ary worker, to remain confined within the boundaries of geography (1973,
70–93). As the geographical focus in the area expanded from a concen-
tration on land to include living people, there was increasing resort to
the contributions of anthropologists, historians, what were then labeled
prehistorians, and ethnobotanists. This process was aided substantially by
"the close-meshed interdisciplinary structure" of the Australian National
University's Research School of Pacific Studies, and a turn toward a vari-
ety of new, especially oral, sources, resulting in "a viable interdisciplin-
ary area specialism in the Pacific islands" (Brookfield 1973, 80, 81). The
excitement and innovation of this period has been conveyed, from another
perspective, by Greg Dening, who ascribed the ferment to the fact that
"we might make their meaning out of what we did rather than bow to
some claim of territoriality that others might make" (1988, 93–95).

For all the achievements of geography itself within the disciplinary

mélange, the status of the Pacific geographers in their own discipline eventually became so low as to compel them to turn to theoretical and methodological arguments to attempt to persuade their peers of the validity of their approach (Brookfield 1973, 85). At the same time, Brookfield declared that, for all its scholarly innovation and commitment, the Pacific group remained "a fundamentally colonial club" (1973, 89). His personal conclusion was that a shift of focus toward comparative study across a global canvas was the "way we might avoid the twin pitfalls of colonially conceived area studies, and of area and disciplinary blinkers which limit the power of understanding" (Brookfield 1973, 91).

Irrespective of the validity of Brookfield's personal conclusion, his survey maps both the prospects and pitfalls of an area focus and the problems of what was essentially a multidisciplinary approach. It also identifies the tendency of the participants in multidisciplinary projects to drop out of their original discipline or to default eventually to disciplinarity, a view supported by Klein (Brookfield 1973, 81–84; Klein 1990, 25–99). There is at least a suggestion that projects that are fundamentally multidisciplinary may be inherently unstable.

The history of area studies in the Pacific has been sketched from a different viewpoint by Wesley-Smith in the essay mentioned earlier (1995, 117–126). Tracing its trajectory across his categories of pragmatic, laboratory, and empowerment rationales, all of which make their appearance in Brookfield's analysis, and summarizing the attributes of each, Wesley-Smith made a case for new directions in the field. First, while accepting that the concept of the Pacific Islands has assumed its own reality over time, he rejected it as too slippery and unproductive for academic work and too vulnerable to "a non-existent regional integrity" (Wesley-Smith 1995, 127). Instead, he proposed an orientation around theme or discourse and, with a nod to Greg Dening (2000, 138–139), suggested the pursuit of topics *in* rather than *of* the Pacific (Wesley-Smith 1995, 127).

Second, Wesley-Smith advocated an interdisciplinarity characterized by "defining its objects of inquiry without reference to established disciplinary boundaries," and educating its students in interdisciplinarity in the same way as disciplinary students learn their disciplinarity (1995, 128–129). Third, linking decolonization and interdisciplinarity, he urged the incorporation of "indigenous voices, perspectives, and epistemologies . . . into the dominant discourses" in such a way as to scrutinize disciplinary frameworks and identify ethnocentrism (Wesley-Smith 1995, 129). Noting that earlier attempts to establish interdisciplinary programs had not

been sustainable, he expressed optimism about prospects in the 1990s, observing a new impetus derived, this time, from an intellectual rather than a geopolitical base (Wesley-Smith 1995, 123).

That optimism, in hindsight, seems either to have been exaggerated or to have been negated by developments over the last ten years. While Wesley-Smith himself has kept the faith (Wesley-Smith 2003, 119–122; 2004, 80–83), Edvard Hviding, the featured speaker on interdisciplinarity at the 2000 University of Hawai'i Center for Pacific Islands Studies conference "Honoring the Past, Creating the Future," observed in his paper that academic skepticism toward the approach appeared to be almost universal (2003, 62–63). And in the volume bringing together the papers from that conference, Vilsoni Hereniko, noting the absence of clear guidelines for such work, the lack of agreement on its nature, and the absence of "conviction and clarity" as to that nature, described interdisciplinarity as "the most troubling issue in Pacific studies" (2003, xiii–xiv).

In a note to his featured conference paper, Hviding drew attention to an earlier set of references he described as representing "the state-of-the-art in such creatively probing interdisciplinarity of today's Pacific studies" (2003, 66). An examination of that collection, however, indicates that the works cited individually display mainly disciplinary approaches, approaches built around a disciplinary spine, or, at most, multidisciplinary ones (Diaz and Kauanui 2001, 334–337). In the same note, Hviding referred to one work that is "ethnographically grounded yet transcending any number of conventional disciplinary boundaries as well as the insider/outsider dichotomy" (2003, 66). The specificity and singularity of that reference invite a closer examination of the work in question: Vilsoni Hereniko's *Woven Gods* (1995).

Interestingly, Hereniko commenced the prologue to his study of Rotuman clowning by quoting Barthes's earlier-cited definition of interdisciplinarity as the creation of a new and autonomous object (1995, 1). Also interestingly, he, like Clifford and Wesley-Smith, omitted Barthes's following sentence to the effect that the "Text" is one such object (Barthes 1994, 1420). In the PhD thesis that preceded the published version, however, Hereniko did deal with the idea of "text" and, drawing on Clifford Geertz, noted that taking up that concept in its broadest sense, as in the example of Balinese cockfighting, frees "text" from the restrictions of print (Hereniko 1990, 17; Geertz 1973, 448–449). In the course of the prologue, Hereniko further indicated the nature of his approach in rejecting the "western notion that knowledge should be split up into little

compartments called disciplines" and asserting that, "To limit myself to a single discipline is to limit my angle of vision" (1995, 7–8). He added, "A playful and experimental streak also pervades this work: the interplay between my many selves and the many kinds of discourses, the privileging of creativity, my own voice, and the indigenous voices of Rotumans in what is supposedly a western discourse models the playful and potentially destabilizing nature of a clown's performance" (Hereniko 1995, 10).

Further indications of the nature and development of this approach appear in the unpublished PhD thesis that preceded the later publication (Hereniko 1990). The elements that contributed to that approach include the unique lens provided by a "frivolous" topic; the adoption of the clown's perspective as a writing device; and the need for "multiple exposures" from a variety of angles rather than a narrow keyhole view (Hereniko 1990, xi, 10, 12). At the center of the work lies a commitment to the belief that the understanding of "how a society could choose a clown to reign for half a day, overturn the social hierarchy, reduce politically powerful chiefs to the level of little children to be ordered about" would, in turn, provide a better understanding of the nature of being Rotuman (Hereniko 1990, xii). Finally, again despite having omitted the reference to Text in the Barthes quotation as noted previously, Hereniko drew on Clifford Geertz's suggestion that Balinese cockfighting is best viewed as a "text" to support his integrated approach resulting from viewing the clown's performance as a "playscript" (Hereniko 1990, 17; Geertz 1973, 448–449). Without suggesting in any way that this constitutes a prescription for the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach, it does provide a rare exemplar of what such an approach might be.

## Lack of Interdisciplinary Models for Pacific Studies

*Diaz characterized the flight of the blind man and the crippled woman as "an historic act of native resistance." What made it so was not just the leap upon the back, providing the unique combination of sight and mobility, but their conception of the possibility of flight as a solution to their problem, outside the limitations of their disabilities. Diaz reported, however, that the blind man and the crippled woman were eventually captured and deported with the other Chamorros who had leprosy (2003).*

The international arena of Pacific studies from which the Victoria University program's aspirations might draw inspiration is somewhat barren

of examples of the pedagogical application of interdisciplinarity. There is no evidence of the existence of a working model of Pacific studies that substantially accommodates that orientation. A brief survey of some Pacific studies program Web sites indicates that, in general, beyond some introductory or survey papers provided by the programs themselves, the programs rely heavily on papers provided by a variety of disciplines and, at best, contribute to a *multidisciplinary* perspective.[4] The director of one program allowed me to cite her view that its "approach is a-disciplinary or beyond disciplines."[5] Nonetheless, in general the field resembles the pattern of the list of supposedly interdisciplinary Pacific work mentioned earlier.

Neither single-discipline study nor multidisciplinarity can meet the expressed aspiration to indigenous location of inquiry and research. The principal impediment to the former is the "certain particularity about the images of reality" (Klein 1990, 104), referred to earlier—images essentially formed from a standpoint and with a perspective other than a Pacific one. In the case of the latter, there is the institutional and academic difficulty of sustaining multidisciplinary teams, a development that of itself would, in any case, call into question the case for a Pacific studies program. Alternatively, there is the problem of implementing a thorough and coherent educational program for individual students across a range of disciplines, and of remaining in touch with developments in each of them (Hausman 1979, 3).

On the other hand, the appeal to interdisciplinarity has its own complexities, well beyond questions of definition and, in particular, involving the precise location of the interdisciplinary position and its relationship to the disciplines themselves, the very nature of its "inter-ness." This is undoubtedly a major source of the continuing failure to identify and develop truly interdisciplinary projects despite frequent exhortations to do so. Equally, there is no single, convenient Native Pacific identity into which scholars can slip, or with which they can collaborate. There is no single Native epistemology, and, even if such existed, no single Native language through which to gain some access to that epistemology (Wood 2003, 346, 354–356, 362–363). Victoria University's Pacific studies will be as inter-Native as it is inter-disciplinary, with as much slipperiness in the former term as there is in the latter. And, beyond that, there is the question of the program's relationship with the diasporic communities, migrant and indentured workers such as the Indo-Fijians, the descendants

of settler/invaders—whether Caldoche (in New Caledonia) or Pākehā (in Aotearoa/New Zealand)—and other "victims of colonial history," as Kanak leaders have generously recognized immigrants of long residence to be (Tjibaou 2005, 277).

The location of a Pacific studies at Victoria, then, would have to be found uniquely in the *vā,* the space between, the separation that connects, the expression and real meaning of its "inter-ness": the *vā* of the disciplines, the *vā* of the separate countries, lands, peoples, and cultures of the Pacific, the *vā* of those entities and the disciplines, the *vā* of the individual Native studies, and the *vā* of the Pacific and the rest of the world. To adapt the metaphor of Epeli Hauʻofa (1993, 2–16), the proper location of our Pacific studies is in *many* seas of *many* kinds of islands. A transformative Pacific studies would always operate in the "inter-," in the *vā,* and the essence of its interdisciplinarity would lie in the framing of its projects, from their very conception, in the *vā,* whatever varieties and combinations of partnerships may develop in the implementation of those projects. One programmatic approach to this work is outlined below in my suggestions for possible course applications.

There are, of course, apart from inherent difficulties, external impediments and obstacles, and there is always the possibility of capture. Perhaps the most insidious is the accommodation of a spurious interdisciplinarity on the grounds of economy or administrative convenience (Hausman 1979, 4; Klein 1990, 41, 45–46). From the opposite direction come simple boundary maintenance, a problem by no means confined to the disciplines themselves (Hausman 1979, 3; Naidu 1998, 201); failure to recognize the inherent limits of a particular discipline (Hausman 1979, 3); and the tendency to a disciplinary Eurocentrism (Kockelmans 1979, 133–134, 143). In a rather different vein, resistance to an interdisciplinary program may proceed from perceptions either of its somewhat messianic promotion or of a simple desire to be different (Hausman 1979, 3). From the perspective of students, there may come challenges to a perceived neocolonialism in Pacific studies, interdisciplinary or otherwise, or to a focus other than on some concerns of the students' own culture (Wesley-Smith 2004, 81–83).

Kockelmans classified the major obstacles as epistemological, in the seeming necessity of specialization in the face of fragmentation; institutional, in the departmentalization of the university; psychosociological, in the seeming naturalness of the existing framework; and cultural, in the impulse to "compete, excel, dominate, and control" that finds its realization in dis-

ciplinary specialization (1979, 146–147). Vijay Naidu's reflection on the obstacles to an interdisciplinary Pacific studies drew on his experience of its lack of development at the University of the South Pacific. He ascribed that to the influence of a particular professor, the illusory attractions of a multidisciplinary program across existing departments, institutional inertia, and marginalization. In particular, he concluded that while, on the one hand, provision across the disciplines led to dilution, the creation of an Institute of Pacific Studies led to marginalization, perhaps another sense in which Pacific studies finds itself "inter-" (1998, 200–202).

## Suggestions for Victoria

Having celebrated its eighth anniversary at Victoria, and with its elevation to one of the higher-priority initiatives in the university's 2006 to 2008 draft "Profile" (vuw 2006, 12), Pacific studies is well placed to review its already successful program and, in particular, to expand its courses in the direction of interdisciplinarity. I suggest that some future directions for its pursuit beyond the range of approaches already offered by this and other universities may be derived from the material of this survey. Of course, the practicality of such approaches would have to be assessed in the context of resource and staff constraints and the everyday pressures of the modern university.

The first possibility flows from Wesley-Smith's appeal for Pacific studies students "to be introduced to the interdisciplinary approach in the same way that students in other programs are introduced to their respective disciplines" (1995, 129). At least a partial means to that end would be the study, not just of the nature and history of disciplines (an element of which appears in the existing program particularly in regard to history and anthropology), but also of the nature and history of disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and the various other -disciplinarities. The brief Web site survey I referred to earlier suggests that this may be a unique contribution to the field internationally.

The second is a partial orientation, at higher undergraduate and postgraduate level, on project-based activities. Such an orientation would provide a framework for the development of knowledge and skill in the construction of interdisciplinary proposals, of working in the *vā*, as well as familiarity with the disciplinary and other resources available for the implementation of the project. Hereniko's interdisciplinary study of Rotu-

man clowning has already been identified as one exemplar of such an approach and others may be available from fields beyond the Pacific. At least at the undergraduate level, these projects would best be conducted as team activities. This would certainly create problems of course organization and individual assessment; at the same time, it would provide invaluable experience in drawing on other Pacific studies students with particular disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary interests, staff from within or without the program, and students from other programs. This approach would certainly accord with the university's increased emphasis on research-led learning and teaching and contribute significantly to the desired graduate attribute of critical and creative thinking (Harper 2005; Angelo and Asmar 2005). Only with the deliberate construction of such a pedagogical framework can we hope to see the general pattern of discussion of and appeals to interdisciplinarity superseded by the creation of a body of scholars capable of engagement in actual interdisciplinary research in Pacific studies.

Interdisciplinarity, in and of itself, is no more than a device for opening up new approaches to the issues of concern to the people of the Pacific: it is not the answer, it is one way of asking the questions. It does not occupy any moral high ground, it is not pure, and no scholarship is entirely interdisciplinary, any more than it is entirely disciplinary. Above all, it is not some latter-day Philosophy overarching and unifying the pedestrian disciplines; it will necessarily seek partnerships with other orientations, and its practitioners must learn to construct such partnerships. What it does offer is the prospect of new articulations of lives, lands, identities, voyages, genealogies, histories, societies, cultures, languages, knowledges, and epistemologies in and beyond the Pacific.

Equally, it should go without saying that a direction suitable for pursuit at Victoria University cannot and should not provide a prescription for all such programs everywhere. In other universities and programs, scholars will seek other combinations of elements from within and without the rationales described by Wesley-Smith, and from within and without interdisciplinarity itself. And different approaches may well provide opportunities for partnerships no less fruitful than those with disciplines. The requirement is not for the international, or even national, standardization of Pacific studies, but rather for programs that will formulate their own theories and practices in response to their own needs and conditions and thus contribute to the total richness of Pacific studies as a field. The challenge to Pacific studies, of course, is not a continuing discussion, compari-

son, and championing of competing approaches but the accomplishment of work that will increase the effectiveness and enhance the quality of its contributions.

*         *         *

## Notes

1  See Febvre 1973, 34; Braudel 1980, 12; Māhina 1993, 109–121.

2  See Iggers 1997, 2–4, 12, 142–143; Le Goff 1992, xvi–xxiii; Smith 1999, 30–31.

3  See Waiko 1986, 21–24, 28, 35; Gunson 1993, 145–148, 156–157; Mercer 1979, 139–140, 143, 151; Meleiseā 1980, 23–25; Gammage 1981, 116–117; Lātūkefu 1968, 135–136, 140; Māhina 1993, 109.

4  The Pacific studies program Web sites surveyed (on 21 December 2006) were the following:

University of Auckland:
http://www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/subjects/index.cfm?P=363

Victoria University of Wellington:
http://www.vuw.ac.nz/pacific/degrees/ba.aspx

University of Canterbury:
http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/courseinfo/GetCourses.aspx?type=course &value=PACS&source=courses

University of Otago:
http://www.otago.ac.nz/subjects/paci.html#qualifications

The Australian National University:
http://rspas.anu.edu.au

University of the South Pacific:
http://sols3.usp.ac.fj/cfinder/pcrsedb.pl?subj=DG&form=full

University of Hawai'i:
http://www.catalog.hawaii.edu/schoolscolleges/haps/pacs.htm

University of Michigan:
http://cms.lsa.umich.edu/UofM/Content/ac/document/Academic% 20Minor%20in%20APIA%20Studies.pdf

5 E-mail message from Elise Huffer, granting permission to cite reviewer comments, 17 April 2007.

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*Abstract*

This paper discusses the approaches generally grouped under the heading of "interdisciplinarity." There is no intention to arrive at a perfect, authoritative definition of interdisciplinarity, but rather to assess the contribution those approaches might make. The essay begins by briefly covering some generalizations about Pacific knowledges and considers the European academic framework before and during the emergence of disciplines. It then outlines that emergence, reviews a range of ideas about the nature of interdisciplinarity and related methodologies, and examines the relationship between interdisciplinarity and area studies. Finally the paper attempts to establish the specific identity of one Pacific studies program, that of Victoria University of Wellington, considering some possible obstacles and impediments to its development, and presenting some suggestions for possible program orientation and content.

KEYWORDS: area studies, academic disciplines, interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, Pacific studies