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Introduction: Interdisciplinarity and the International Relations event horizon

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Abstract

This Introduction contextualises this special anniversary issue of the journal. The Editors of a previous 2013 special issue of the EJIR (The End of International Relations Theory?) asked if the paradigmatic “theoretical cacophony” in IR was deep and irresolvable. We argue that there is still very much a conversation going on across ‘generalist’ and specialised IR journals, and that renewal and broadening is more important than boundaries per se. Meanwhile the field of International Relations has continued to broaden, absorbing much from other social science disciplines in the process. Yet IR has a problematic relationship with interdisciplinarity, often discovering as ‘new’ what other fields have long debated and in turn ‘domesticating’ these insights from other fields by fitting them into existing IR paradigms. This special issue is thus aimed above all at what ‘we’ in IR are not seeing from other disciplines, and we go on to argue how IR scholars might best employ ‘transdisciplinary’ insights to ensure the future dynamism and innovation of the field. We argue that in this context, a special effort of critical and open engagement with work that makes us uncomfortable is required and that the very notion of inter-disciplinarity takes on a new form.

Keywords

interdisciplinarity; IR theory

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The 25th anniversary of the *European Journal of International Relations* (EJIR) presented our editorial team with a challenge. The jubilee pushed us to come together and think more programmatically about the future of the journal. We decided that the best way of seizing this initiative would be to issue a call for a special issue that attempted, as other journals have on similar occasions, to explore ways of reflecting on and advancing the EJIR's broad intellectual agenda.

However, by casting serious doubt on the value of stock-taking exercises of this kind, a previous editorial team had set some booby traps for our endeavour. In their boldly titled and superbly compiled issue on 'The End of IR Theory', Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen and Colin Wight (2013) questioned whether it made sense any longer to speak about 'International Relations' (IR) as a coherent or cohesive intellectual enterprise. The main problem in their view was the ongoing proliferation of theories in the discipline which appeared to forestall the possibility of consolidation or even debate. They argued that some of the theoretical cacophony in IR could be muted by an 'integrative pluralism' 'which accepts and preserves the validity of a wide range of theoretical perspectives, and embraces theoretical diversity as a means of providing more comprehensive and multi-dimensional accounts of complex phenomena'. However, when they looked, with the help of their contributors, beyond theories themselves, they found deep and irresolvable debates about what theory is, what it is for (Reus-Smit, 2013) and whether better theory even remained IR's defining goal (Edkins and Zehfuss, 2009). Humpty Dumpty, or so it seemed, was off the wall, and it was altogether possible that IR scholars had already settled down to eat scrambled eggs.

This more desultory conclusion to the previous special issue laid down a gauntlet of sorts for us as the current editors, rendering uniquely challenging our plans to prepare a special issue that would seek to tie some apparently resistant threads together. What would be the purpose of a special issue on a discipline that now appeared to defy definition? What would be its animating narrative? Who amongst those identifying as IR scholars would it claim to represent?

The field of IR was once labelled *The Dividing Discipline* (Holsti, 1985). The argument was that paradigmatic debates have proven enduring and insurmountable and that the field has become organized around that irreconcilable antagonism of world views. It is certainly true that realists, liberals, radical approaches, constructivists and post-structuralists still battle it out amongst each other. But much has changed. Today, thankfully, we no longer need to begin every article with a well-worn discussion of the various 'isms' of the moment, some of which have proven almost perpetual. Disputes and confrontations continue across the field, but over time IR has emerged as more self-aware and more self-confident about its empirical richness and diversity, methodological pluralism and theoretical heterogeneity than was the case in the 1970s and 1980s. The proliferation of journals alongside the enduring relevance of general IR journals are testimony to this trend. It is worth noting the obvious at least once in this Introduction: that good science relies on lively debate and confrontation born of both scepticism and a commitment to engage despite disagreement.

The key journals in the field now include more specialized publications (e.g. *Review of International Political Economy* or *International Security*), general 'broad IR' journals (such as the *European Journal of International Relations*) and of course 'general'

political science periodicals (such as the *European Journal of Political Research*). The field also overlaps with journals that cover public policy and regional integration. Nonetheless, arguably and at least bibliometrically, IR remains very much a discipline (Kristensen, 2012). Kristensen's argument and the empirical analysis that supports it – that generalist IR journals at the core of the discipline 'integrate less cited sources and disciplines in the periphery, or, in other words, make sure specialty areas like security studies and IPE are part of the same disciplinary network (Kristensen, 2012: 46)' – provide a clear starting point for this special issue. There is a conversation going on even if some parts of this conversation cluster much more than others.

Historically speaking, IR has long been a broad and composite field, with origins in the study of international law and history, in the study of politics and the economy and in the philosophical traditions of the Enlightenment prior to the emergence of 20th-century disciplinary specialisation. IR is hence rooted in discourses that privilege Europe and the West. Decades ago, IR emerged from an essential state centrism to renew itself through contributions from across the social sciences and humanities. More recently, IR scholarship challenges the Eurocentrism and neglect of race and racism in the study and practice of IR (Krishna, 2001; Nisancioglu, this issue; Weber and Weber, this issue; Zvogbo and Loken, 2020). The discipline now spans an astoundingly wide range of issues. The perspectives through which these issues are conceptualized range from the micro-sociological and even 'individual in IR' to the macro picture in terms of global order and political economy.

This story is fine as far as it goes. Our response began as a key commitment to the future of the journal from the new editorial team, which began work on the journal in January of 2018.¹ This commitment was to ensure room for the 'new', while recognizing that one would not necessarily know what that might be. This has led us to once again probe our 'disciplinary network' (Kristensen, 2012). The need for more developed interdisciplinary toolkits is increasingly recognized across the social and other sciences. IR is clearly not the only field that generates insights into the nature and processes of global politics, and the future of our field depends not merely on what we already do well but on our ability to understand better the emerging challenges of a world undergoing a range of rapid transformations. At the same time, other work on world politics too often does not touch base with knowledge creation taking place 'inside IR', which limits openings for scholarship in other disciplines to speak directly to IR audiences and in our main forums. Even if we can accept that a more self-confidently diverse IR has also become more subtle and complex, this does not mean that it is also always sufficiently open to research and theory in adjacent fields or disciplines. It also does not mean that there remains, *pace* the 2013 special issue, an easily agreed 'core' of what constitutes the field. Much IR is easily identifiable, but the boundaries are much less so, and we see that as positive but also as a difficulty for a journal like ours.

The kernel of an idea about how to address the challenge of delineating and defining the future of IR came from our authors – both prospective and published. We note that 'IR' refers to an incredibly vast array of researchers, projects, teams, data sets, empirical inquiries and analyses, while only a small number of manuscripts arrive at our journal as the end point of this expansive research production process. We do receive a large sample, amounting to some 400+ manuscripts a year. Approximately 10% of these

manuscripts eventually appear in the pages of the journal. The task of whittling down 400 to 40 gives us a window on the field as a whole and the opportunity to observe its emerging trends and tidal shifts. At the same time, it engages us in an ongoing conversation with our authors about what constitutes valid and valuable knowledge as ‘contributions’ to IR.

The key moment in this process is perhaps the dreaded – for both our authors and ourselves – ‘desk reject’ – the point at which we decide whether a manuscript ought to be sent out for review. This is the point at which we look closely at the way authors identify their contribution to knowledge, both in their manuscripts and in their cover letters. To a certain extent, the editorial team simply asks itself, ‘is this manuscript of high quality?’ and, depending on the nature of the submission, we collectively use a range of evaluative principles – clear argument, appropriate methods, conceptual innovation, new empirics and so on – to answer this question. At the same time, we understand the need to balance this answer with a pair of questions that put the ‘discipline’ front and centre: ‘will this manuscript’s contribution be valued by a significant section of readers of a generalist IR journal?’ and ‘do we, as a generalist IR journal, have the suitable expertise – amongst our editors and reviewers – to maximize the strengths of this piece?’ In asking these three questions, and balancing their answers against one another, we are engaging in a ‘moment of disciplinary practice’ – a moment when scholars give the otherwise amorphous and vague boundaries of the discipline tangible form and important effects. However, this is not simply – as it is often described – a gatekeeping practice where editors impose their own ideas on what counts as valid and important. It is a process of dialogue in which our submitting authors consistently push us to question our assumptions about what ought to constitute an IR article and what sort of editorial and reviewer expertise *EJIR* ought to bring to the table. In short, armed with new approaches, theories and data, our authors regularly set about convincing us to shift or reimagine what we think IR is about.

After engaging in this dialogue during our first year as editors, *interdisciplinarity* emerged as a thriving form of knowledge production in IR. A lot of the best work being submitted to *EJIR* was not easily characterized as disciplinary along real or imagined ‘traditional’ lines. Authors were using some of the customary disciplinary knowledge bases that IR scholars find familiar, such as philosophy, history, law, economics and sociology. However, they were also increasingly becoming involved in debates originating in geography, psychology and anthropology or looking further afield to the humanities and even the natural sciences.

We found that a good deal of what we send out for review was among the best work engaging in this ‘interdisciplinary practice’. This was nothing out of the ordinary, nor particularly taxing for our reviewers. The promotion of interdisciplinary scholarship has been one of the hallmarks of the *EJIR*’s past 25 years, and we have built a broad reviewer base with expertise crossing multiple social science disciplines. At the same time, two observations gave us reason to pause and question whether more needed to be done to capitalize on this burgeoning and profitable set of literatures reaching across disciplinary aisles.

First, there was a significant proportion of interdisciplinary work that we decided to desk-reject. We were convinced that this work ought to be published in a high-quality

journal, but simultaneously we also knew that it would find better equipped editors, reviewers and audiences in a sub-disciplinary or interdisciplinary journal or in a journal affiliated with an altogether different discipline. Again, this is not because these articles were somehow ‘not IR’ – whatever that term might mean – but because there are necessarily eventual limits to the scholarly expertise and ‘interest-scope’ of any editorial community. Each editorial team will no doubt participate in shifting these boundaries, as we ourselves have done. Indeed, these were perhaps some of the hardest decisions that we had to make, when we received inspiring and boundary-crossing work that we would have each liked to curate but believed would benefit from another outlet’s more specialized treatment.

Second, we also noticed that there appeared to be a certain ‘disciplinary drag’ on the process of interdisciplinary knowledge formation occurring in our pages. More specifically, while the sorts of critiques that appeared in the ‘End of IR’ special issue regarding the discipline’s lack of coherence have now been made many times over, there remains a pervasive sense that, when writing for a journal like the *EJIR*, one has to frame a contribution in relation to a ‘core’ disciplinary debate. As a result, instead of simply explaining the merits of the innovation for the resolution of an important question, authors more often than not felt compelled to ‘domesticate’ insights from outside the field, repackaging ‘outside’ contributions to fit ‘internal’ IR conversations already taking place (James, 2011).

This is a more general theme across IR formats. ‘IR’ scholars are constantly off ‘discovering’ new things that far too often turn out to be rather old hat in other disciplines. As editors we frequently are confronted with a range of claims to novelty, often labelled as ‘turns’ or ‘bringing the “x” back in’, that our own cross-disciplinary experience tells us are less innovative than they might appear. This special issue presents the field with an opportunity to dispense with this rather tired pattern. The point is not that IR scholars need to discover or reel in knowledge from elsewhere. Instead, one might conceptualize the process as the insertion of conversations already taking place in other disciplines into ongoing IR debates about ‘world’ or ‘transnational’ politics.

We began to ask ourselves how we might better equip the journal to curate this interdisciplinary work and create a space within its pages to make this work a greater part of what we represent as ‘IR’. It was firstly necessary to know what role interdisciplinarity was playing in shaping scholarship in the field and whether we could somehow capture and give voice to this type of scholarship in the journal. The 2011 volume edited by Aalto et al., *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, did a lot of the hard, conceptual work on our behalf. These editors conceptualized ‘inter-disciplinarity’ in relation to IR and situated its place in relation to more conventional forms of disciplinary practice. They defined Interdisciplinary International Studies as ‘an effort to systematically expand IR research towards a large number of disciplines and fields of study while building on past inter-disciplinary approaches and accepting the coterminous presence of disciplinary IR’ (Alto et al., 2011, p. 22). As their definition suggests, ‘inter-disciplinarity’ does not refer to one particular sort of scholarship but rather to a set of related endeavours, which vary in terms of their relationship to, and degree to which they are vested in, the construction of a more historical, disciplinary core.

David Long's chapter in that volume (Long, 2011) offered a particularly helpful way of differentiating between these different types of interdisciplinarity. He asked us to distinguish between multidisciplinary, transdisciplinarity and neo-disciplinarity. Multidisciplinary assumes the existence and relative permanence of the established disciplines and their relatively unique capacity to address a specific range of questions about a defined subject matter. For this type of scholarship, interdisciplinarity is needed because subjects often overlap: 'more than one discipline is needed to understand some topics, research problems or subject matter' (Long, 2011, p.38). Herding ourselves into professionally defined silos has important costs, whatever the advertised benefits of specialization. *Transdisciplinarity* rejects the idea that disciplines have a unique hold on any core subject. Indeed, for 'some advocates of transdisciplinarity, disciplines reflect congealed practices of specialization generating knowledge that is uselessly narrow and baroque' (Long, 2011, p. 40). Hence, this type of scholarship 'calls instead for an alternative or novel approach at odds with one or more of the established disciplines' (Long, 2011, p. 44). *Neo-disciplinarity* shares with transdisciplinarity the scepticism of established disciplinary subject boundaries, paradigms and methods but adopts a more conventional approach to disciplinarity as a necessary but problematic feature of how scholarly knowledge is generated. Hence, neo-disciplinarity 'argues for new and differently conceived disciplinary demarcation because certain persistent and prevalent social practices do not fit within disciplinary fields' (Long, 2011, p. 38).

This typology recognizes that scholarship which we have lumped together as 'interdisciplinary IR' actually rests on at least two different understandings of the nature and purpose of 'disciplinarity' itself. Whereas multidisciplinary and neo-disciplinarity accept the goal of imperfect and mutable, but relatively intransigent disciplines, 'transdisciplinarity' rejects this goal and argues in favour of the practice of crossing between disciplinary barriers as the primary source of knowledge creation and improved understanding.

We concur with Long's argument that neo-disciplinarity is an unavoidable feature of IR scholarship. As Long notes (2011: 60), efforts to provide coherence to IR as a body of knowledge are particularly important for certain aspects of scholarly work: 'neodisciplinarity is especially a concern of those involved in teaching, and for whom there is an evident felt need to organize studies and present them as a coherent whole'. Yet, teaching is just one of the many 'disciplinary moments' that generate coherent portraits of academic disciplines. In addition to teaching, we would add the establishment of parameters for general IR conferences, the preparation of bids for journal editorships, the practice behind academic CVs and cover letters, the definition of the membership of academic departments and institutes and – as we have mentioned earlier – the desk reject decisions made by the editors of generalist journals. As we have already identified, the development of the expertise base of academic journals and the compulsive drive to contribute to the development of a coherent body of knowledge is ongoing, driving the evolving and shifting boundaries of IR.

While we accept the awkward reality of academic disciplines, our contributors to this special issue have made us more hesitant to see disciplinarity as an ideal or goal, whether in the conventional form or in the reimagined 'neo-disciplinary' guise. Rather, in this volume, our contributors engage in what we believe may be usefully described as

‘transdisciplinary practice’, an endeavour that harkens back to the question-oriented pragmatic eclecticism for which Sil and Katzenstein have argued in the past (2010). Transdisciplinary practice refers to scholarship occurring at the interstices between disciplines that is motivated more by the goal of resolving real-life questions and searching for missing links ‘outside the box’ than that of shaping the contours of an academic community or defined knowledge base. It rests on a recognition that, in addition to possessing the methodological and theoretical ‘toolkits’ required to answer ‘IR questions’, other disciplines have developed ways of asking questions about the international that may force reconsideration of the sorts of questions deemed to be important for IR.

Crucially, for us, transdisciplinary practice is characterized by a direct antagonism to the ordered disciplinarity that animates, with the best of motivations, a goodly number of our colleagues. This is not to say that it is ‘ill-disciplined’, as in lacking in rigour. The sheer amount of literature groundwork and careful contrasting of terms and principles across disciplines that is required to do this sort of scholarship in a way that does not attract the ire of multiple disciplinary voices is immense. Indeed, transdisciplinary practice calls for a sustained scepticism of the idea that individual disciplines constitute the most pertinent arbiter of a given form of knowledge production and calls for creative thinking about what constitutes a contribution to shared knowledge.

In order to pin down these issues, we draw a distinction between two ways of thinking about the discipline: as noun versus as verb. As a noun the discipline of IR refers to the set of ideas, institutions and people that may be meaningfully identified with the moniker. As a verb, the ‘disciplining’ of IR refers to the manifold practices of generating conformity to this identity, practices that may also shift boundaries over time. While we are relatively agnostic regarding the question of whether it makes sense to speak of a discipline of IR or not, we find it crucial that we think more critically about the way in which disciplinary practice both shapes and constrains interdisciplinary academic labour and output. Thinking of the discipline as a verb invites us to develop an understanding of what it is becoming but also teaches us that the trajectory should be determined not by an alleged core that is visible in retrofit but by the gaps in our understanding full stop. This puts innovation back at the core of the enterprise we all share.

This special issue is thus aimed above all at what ‘we’ in IR are not seeing. We sought contributions from IR and non-IR scholars alike that would cover a range of those crucial ideas and insights emerging from other fields of enquiry, on their own terms, that IR scholarship needs to take seriously to ensure the future dynamism and innovation of the discipline. We were looking for those innovations ‘out there’ that might lead to genuine renewal of the issues we cover across the subfields of IR and how we think about them. The aim of the special issue is to realize a genuine engagement across disciplinary ‘parapets’ that swings as free as can be of the ‘domestication dynamic’ – thus embracing discipline as a verb.

The call therefore sought submissions that would identify (a) the questions that we need to ask but have so far failed to raise or sufficiently address in IR; and/or (b) issues and problems that will increasingly shape the future of ‘world politics’ broadly defined; and/or (c) the ways of thinking and methods, conceived in interdisciplinary terms, that we might need to better understand and address these emerging questions and challenges. The resulting proposals and the experience of selection and editing have led us to think

more systematically about the challenge that the special issue call inevitably posed. We had to learn how to think about interdisciplinarity and IR in a way that would come as close as possible to realizing our ambition of a 'no-holds-barred' openness launched in celebration of the first 25 years of the *EJIR*.

A first step was, as per the discussion that opens this Introduction, to move outside the old 'dividing discipline' notion of a coherent if disputed field and to accept the argument (Kristensen, 2012) that it is not ontological or theoretical coherence but the network effects of diversity increasingly observable in the most important IR publication venues that constitute the glue that holds IR together. Debate and innovation around issues global or transnational have become more important than a notional core. There are multiple versions of this argument that can be told nostalgically, as a tale of empowerment or in a neutral vein. We present this as a move towards transdisciplinary IR as a verb. One may stress one, more or all of the following points in this regard: (a) the central meta-theoretical concerns of the 'old IR' have declined in importance, and in place of this has emerged a clear preference for mid-level theorizing; (b) a further consequence of this quelling of the inter-paradigmatic debates has been the move towards pluralism; and finally (c) this same pluralism and broadening of the field has led to the retreat of various theoretical and methodological schools into a series of autonomous, sub-disciplinary silos.

As a result of the openings thus created, this special issue also created considerable room for emerging scholars as opposed to just the 'great and the good' of the field. These emerging scholars have a reduced stake in either claiming or remaining within an imagined 'IR core'. Many of the 'old' subjects of debate, such as sovereignty, diplomacy and international order are revisited, but they are conceptualized along much more diversified lines. Nisancioglu shows how one of IR's core concepts, sovereignty, has been analytically and historically separated from the concept of race despite an observable relationship. Illustrating his argument with a history of the 17th-century struggle between 'settlers' and 'natives' over the colonization of Virginia, he develops the idea of 'racial sovereignty' as a mode of analysis which can overcome the historical abstractions in the orthodox account and disclose the ongoing significance of racism in international politics. Standfield aims to 'recover feminist practice theory for a diplomatic studies audience' and shows that while the roles of women in diplomacy have evolved, gendered patterns have also remained stable to a considerable extent, because diplomatic practices reproduce patriarchal social structures. Kahraman, Newman and Kalyanpur, in turn drawing on legal scholarship, demonstrate how international order is co created by national courts, which generate new rules, adjudicate transnational disputes and bound state sovereignty.

In this context, the very notion of interdisciplinarity takes on a new form. Chengxin Pan aims to bridge the gap between the as-yet 'vague and inadequate conceptualization of relations' in IR and theoretical work on quantum theory, which challenges 'the observed-observer dichotomy as well as the classical views about causality, determinacy and measurement'. This ontology is a genuinely different way of seeing and thinking about the process of change, such that 'the world is holographically (trans)formed: its parts are not only parts of the whole, but also enfold the whole, like in a hologram'.

Sazak and Winecoff each take interdisciplinary, or rather, transdisciplinary, relational approaches to empirical puzzles, employing different versions of network analysis. Sazak combines archival research and social network analysis in his study of the alliance between the Ottoman Empire and Germany before and during World War I. He elucidates the role of brokerage and personal networks in explaining this close alliance, which was unattractive for both sides and especially disastrous for the Ottomans. Drawing on a methodology developed in complex network science, Winecoff addresses the old issue of shifts in power and hegemony using a new lens. He emphasizes the density and complexity of linkages, as opposed to more traditional notions of capabilities, as a crucial source of dominance and concludes that ‘the United States retains core structural positions of power across domains in world politics’. He goes on to ‘articulate the mechanisms through which a structural transformation can take place’.

This first set of transdisciplinary contributions, then, adapt methods and ways of thinking from outside IR to cast new light on old issues. Scholars who loosely affiliate with IR – or more precisely, those who orbit in the vicinity of its core journals, conferences and academic departments – seldom frame their work in terms of this sort of self-conscious effort to bring knowledge from outside the discipline to bear on questions of core concern to the discipline as a whole. Importation and absorption are often less conscious activities, and if we accept that the inside-outside distinction in IR is less clear than it was, this division is now more easily overcome. Scholars find themselves regularly navigating a diverse array of transdisciplinary fields in which shared questions and issues of concern drive processes of synthesis, innovation and change. The successful adaptation of extra-IR concepts is, however, seldom straightforward. Ross Gildea, for instance, considers how the issue of aggregation has been hindering engagement with psychology in IR: while ‘the fundamental unit of interest in psychology is the individual, most IR models concern patterns of collective decision-making’. Demonstrating how ‘other social science disciplines, such as sociology and economics, have used psychological insights to develop macro-level theories’, he argues that the problem of aggregation has been overstated in IR and draws out the implications of this conclusion to offer a more optimistic portrait of interdisciplinary work.

This is a welcome opening, clearing the way for conceptual and theoretical formulations which focus less on claims for the centre of the field and more on how processes of synthetic knowledge formation might answer the real and pertinent questions – some of which IR will recognize as familiar and old, some of which have been framed by scholars with no clear linkage to, or stake in, the tradition or its intellectual milieu.

Finally, approaches less animated by who or what is part of or external to IR provide openings for a critical *ethical* engagement with ‘what IR does not see’. Through a historical case study of the early 20th-century genocide of Ovaherero and Nama and their struggles for redress in Namibia, Weber and Weber draw attention to what they call the ‘normative inversion’ at the foundation of IR that has become part of the daily menu of assumptions buried deep in our field of study. The ‘idealist’ or liberal-institutional reset of world order promulgated as the League of Nations after World War I not only perpetuated the late 19th-century colonial order but ‘provided a framework that disarticulated colonial violence, and served as justification for European colonial rule and its legacies in terms of an ongoing civilizing mission’. The claim is that this framework has

permeated IR ever since, despite a second attempt at a liberal reset after the disaster of World War II. Toros and Van Milder also aim to expose the epistemic violence that is at the heart of IR ways of thinking, but by means of an autoethnographic exploration. They take on 'a position of discomfort' that permits them to advocate 'a tentative path toward a less violent IR' that works through small alterations in the behaviour of its practitioners.

Having given these contributions a prominent hearing, there is no reason now for complacency. Residual absorption and domestication dynamics in the discipline remain important reflexes that require active resistance in our scholarly community – more verb, less noun. As we have mentioned earlier, claims to interdisciplinary innovation are often exaggerated by taking scholarship in other fields insufficiently seriously. Today, good examples would be a good deal of work announcing 'post-colonial' or 'post-Columbus' turns while ignoring pertinent literature in, for example, history or anthropology, just as decades ago integrating feminist insights into IR took place too often as a surprise discovery of something political theory and sociology, for example, had been working on for some time. Too many of these deep conversations have simply yet to find their way into the pages of important IR journals. It could be that the rather earthly bounds of professional survival act as a sort of force of gravity that turns far too many of us away from what we think the field might endorse as fit for purpose and enquiry. The editors and our authors think it is worth starting a trend and we hope it might take off.

This inevitable imperfection might be labelled the lingering 'Spectre of Disciplinarity'. Scholars will no doubt continue to fetishize the concept of the discipline in efforts to shape it as a whole and in reference to its past. The various 'turns' in IR theory still harken back to this notion of a unified body of thought or paradigm that ought to be 'shaped'/'turned' in a given direction. We will remain guilty of this indulgence as a matter of habit and professional standing (Long, 2011), and therefore must develop a strategy of resistance if new insights genuinely are to result. What was particularly gratifying about the process of assembling this special issue was the dedication among our authors to methodological pluralism and the high level of self-consciousness regarding the vacuity of many of the flag-waving exercises in IR today. This bodes well for the future of the field, despite the continuing importance and power in IR, as elsewhere, of periodic academic fads. The concept of power is not central to our field for nothing. Generating and propagating this sort of critical self-consciousness, rather than turning momentary fads into nascent industrial strategies, can only strengthen the contribution of IR scholarship to our understanding of a dynamic and changing world around us. If we think carefully, this is important to the future of the field and to our reception in the broader public arena. In the end, social science like other scholarly pursuits will prosper to the extent it can contribute beyond the Academy, thus attracting the support of a wider public. Relevance is not something any of us should shy away from, and the field of IR has a long and noble history in this regard. Yet moving forward, not gazing backwards, is crucial, for the times are always changing.

This future-oriented enterprise requires an interdisciplinarity and openness of enquiry that frees itself from the fateful disciplinary 'gravity' to which we have drawn attention earlier and which this special issue is designed to confront. The goal is to combine this impulse with the more general move towards mid-level theory, the emphasis on

empirical substantiation over theoretical formulation and the move against Euro-centrism and towards a truly global IR. Transdisciplinarity as verb may help produce the level of dissonance required to confront problematic forms of academic closure. Interdisciplinary engagements should then increasingly generate new, open sub-fields which need not continually refer back to strands of learning historically associated with 'IR'. This implies moving well beyond IR as an umbrella for a series of mutually unintelligible scholarly camps that occasionally and rather obliquely exchange insults above their respective parapets (Ashworth, 2009). A special effort of critical and open engagement with work that makes us uncomfortable is required. We should take care to ensure that each emerging and possibly self-congratulatory 'new turn' does not distract our scholarship from the task ahead.

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1. See "Editorial" from the editors, *European Journal of International Relations* 24/1: 3–7

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