Interdisciplinarity for MOVES: "Changes of Interpretive Frames" and Their Impact on the Results of Our Research

Martin Procházka

Berlin Wall (1977)

Trump (2019): "The 30 foot border wall will be harder to scale than Mount Everest."

1. Boundaries between Disciplines and Their Crossing

The problems of interdisciplinarity may be seen as **analogous** to an important cluster of problems in migration studies:

borders/frontiers and their crossing/breaking.

An important recent treatment of borders in view of migration is
Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border*, OUP 2016.

Analogies

Limitation

- borders as limits of rulers' / nations' ambitions, aspirations, military or economic power; also limits of "imagined spaces"
- disciplinary boundaries are limits of researchers' ambitions, theoretical and methodological power, social prestige, political and financial support; also of the consensual, collectively imagined "fields of research"

Jurisdiction

- both borders and disciplinary boundaries are products of certain **norms** and ensuing **procedures:**
  laws / treaties vs. laws / methods.

Institutionalization, bureaucracy

- government authorities, offices, checkpoints
- academic institutions, disciplines, programmes, degrees, councils, examination committees:
- both authenticating identity, checking eligibility, authorizing presence…

Differences: Borders

- **Borders: materialized as "border regimes"**: "a set of relations that organize empirical border technologies" – "borders [are] regimes of concrete techniques" developed in order to regulate their crossing and prevent their breaking (Nail, *Theory of the Border*, p. 12).

- **Disciplinary boundaries**: primarily products of "ideas or knowledges that **emerged independently from social and material conditions**" (Nail, ibid.), that is, **from the dynamics of epistemological process and its social, technological, etc., circumstances**.

Differences: Crossing Borders / Disciplinary Boundaries

- **Crossing borders** is **socially constitutive**: "All borders, […], and every border crossing are constitutive of social relations" (Chris Rumford, "Theorizing Borders," *European Journal of Social Theory* 9.2 (2006): 155–169; p. 167), **and regulative**: borders regulate "social flows: flows across borders, flows into detention centres, counterflows (strikes), and so on" (Nail, *Theory of the Border*, p. 12).
- **Crossing disciplinary boundaries** is caused by the **development of highly compartmentalized knowledge**: "Today, there are a few scholars who call themselves mathematicians, physicists or biologists without restriction. A man may be a topologist or acoustician or coleopterist." (Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 2nd edn. [MIT 1961], p. 2).

Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: Causes and Effects

- The areas and notions of disciplinary knowledge are "being **constantly restructured by interpretive paradigms that were never designed to make sense of them**" (Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, eds., *Redrawing the Boundaries* [MLA 1992], p. 4). See the use of deconstruction by new historicists, systems theory in globalization studies, and most recently the pragmatic "ontology of motion" in migration studies (Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion* [OUP 2019], p. 8).
- Therefore also, **not** "**every time borders are crossed** at the level of disciplines **one** automatically **enters the domain of the interdisciplinary**. […] The disciplinary gives the way to the interdisciplinary only when **changes in the interpretive frames actually manage to produce changes in what can be seen with their assistance** (Greenblatt and Gunn, *Redrawing the Boundaries*, pp. 4-5).
- Interdisciplinarity consists in the **efficient use** of theories and methods from other disciplines.

The Problem of Efficiency: 1. Team Work

- **Response to the compartmentalization** of disciplines:
- "There are fields of scientific work explored from the different sides of pure mathematics, statistics, electrical engineering and neurophysiology; […] in which **important work has been triplicated or quadruplicated, while still another work is delayed** by the unavailability in one field of results that may have already become classical in the next field" (Wiener, *Cybernetics*, p. 3).
- Team **researcher's qualification**: "a specialist in his own field but each possessing **a sound and trained acquaintance with the field of his neighbours**" (Ibid., p. 3).
- C**ommon understanding across disciplines** among team members (more than mere "synergies"): team is like "**an institution of independent scientists** […] joined […] by the **spiritual necessity**, to **understand the boundary region** […] **as a whole**" (Ibid., p. 3).

Team Work: “Spiritual Necessity”

- **The most fragile aspect** of team work is **“spiritual necessity”**:

In Wiener’s case, it was prompted by the “national emergency” during WWII, which brought about the necessity to develop special equipment for anti-aircraft guns called “predictors.” These were used to aim cannons at the fast moving enemy aircraft, zigzagging in the fire of an anti-aircraft battery. The prediction of probable future movement of the aircraft, derived from the statistically processed scan of its previous movement, became a point of departure for the development of computer technologies, and later for the comparison of computers with the workings of human brain and society.

- **“Spiritual necessity” – often prompted by responses to social emergency**: this is also the case of the drafting of the MOVES project in 2015.

2. Uses of Interpretive Frames / Frameworks

- **"Frame/Framing"** – very widely used terms, since Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Northeastern UP 1974). For a list of definitions see

  James N. Druckman, "The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence," *Political Behavior*, 23.3 (September 2001): 225-255.
- **"Frame of reference"** - a model situation (e.g., "war") vs. **"Framework of understanding"** - the way we read, or misread, current events, as a situation (Goffman: "making sense of events" - *Frame Analysis*, p. 10) + the way we use that model situation ("the war against the corona virus").
- **"Frames in thought"** (mental representations: interpretations, formalizations – mathematical formulas, schemata) vs.

  "Frames in communication" – "words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a speaker uses when relaying information to another" (Druckman, "Framing Effects," p. 227).
- **Frames in communication** often **shape frames in thought**: "**framing effect**" (Druckman, "Framing Effects," p. 228).

Framing Effects

The study of framing effects requires **interdisciplinary approach** using:

- **discourse analysis**,
- **cultural semiotics** (Yuri Lotman),
- **cultural anthropology** (Clifford Geertz, Marshal Sahlins),
- **rhetoric** (Carlo Ginzburg, Paul de Man),
- **archetypal criticism** (Northrop Frye),
- **literary analysis of historiographic style** (Hayden White) and many other approaches based on the **humanities**.

Two elementary examples:

Equivalency framing effect: the same information presented either in a positive or in a negative way:

“Less than one in ten thousand Czechs has been infected with corona virus” – “9,500 Czechs have been infected”.

Emphasis framing effect: emphasizing theme or a set of themes in a specific information:

“We are in the war against the corona virus: this is the state of emergency, and therefore any breach of government orders will be severely punished.”

Interpretive Frames/Frameworks: Common Features

- Composite referential structures: "Interpretive frameworks are **a composite of beliefs, feelings, expectations, goals, and knowledge**."
  Paul D. Mueller, "The Theory of Interpretive Frameworks: *Caeteris Non Paribus*," *The Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics*, 16.3 (Fall 2013): 331-352, p. 336.

- "Vision" vs. "Flattening of Knowledge":

  - interpretive framework is based on a "**Vision**" as "**a pre-analytic cognitive act**"

  Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (1954; Routledge 1997), p. 41.

  - "**visions are the foundations on which theories are built**"

  Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (1980; Basic Books 1996), p. 4.

  - interpretive frameworks that are not based on vision but, e.g., on calculation/computation (comparative statistics in economics) may lead to **"flattening of knowledge down to information"** – absence of: "pre-analytic cognitive act" (Schumpeter, p. 41),

  "epiphany and serendipity"

  Daniel B. Klein, *Knowledge and Coordination: A Liberal Interpretation* (OUP 2012), p. 22.

Change of Intepretive Frames

Three examples of interpretive frames:

- **text**
- **stage-play / game**
- **ritual**

An important distinction:

- **“play-minded”**
- **“strategy-minded”**

interpretive frames

Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (Basic Books 1983), pp. 23-33.

Three Examples of Interpretive Frames: 1. Text

The kiss of the Soviet Communist Party Secretary General , Leonid Brezhnev, and the East Germany Socialist Party Secretary, Erich Honecker (1979) on the East Side Gallery (a section of the Berlin wall preserved in Berlin–Friedrichshain). Russian text: “Amidst this deadly love”. German text: “Lord, help me survive this deadly love.” The graffiti created by a Moscow artist Dimitri Vrubel’ in 1990.

Three Examples of Interpretive Frames:
2. Stage-play /Game

The Wall, Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, produced and directed by Julie Taymor at the Theater for a New Audience in Brooklyn (2013).

Three Examples of Interpretive Frames: 3. Ritual

Tisha B'Av at the Western Wall in Jerusalem (1970s)- remembering the destruction of the First and Second Temple by the Babylonians and Romans, respectively.

In Most Cases Not Retrogressively Applied

- In most cases, **interpretive frames are not retrogressively applied to events and situations**.
- Rather, "observers [or, generally, everyone involved in a certain situation] actively project [or habitually apply] their frames of reference into the world" (Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p. 39).
- As a result, **our understanding of these interpretive frames, as well as the understanding of the events related to them, is conditioned by their change**, either caused by some event, or brought about by our decision.

Interpretive Frames from the Humanities Transform the Discourses in Social Sciences

- **The recourse to the humanities for explanatory analogies in the social sciences** – "**the rise of 'the interpretive turn**,' and [...] a revised style of discourse in social studies. The instruments of reasoning are changing, and society is less and less represented as an elaborate machine or a quasi-organism and more as a serious game, a sidewalk drama, or a behavioural text." (Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, p. 23).
- Example: use of "game analogy" and "stage language" in Goffman's work (Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, pp. 26, 24). "Symbolic action" – ritual (Victor Turner; ibid., p. 29) – "**performed meaning"** (ibid, p.30).
- **Who can judge their uses? Humanists:** "some of those fit to judge work of this kind ought to be humanists who **reputedly know something about what theatre and mimesis and rhetoric** are [...]" (Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, p. 30).

"The Refiguration of Social Theory" and the Role of (Cultural) Translation

- "A sea change in our notion not so much of what knowledge is but of **what it is we want to know**". The refiguration "lies less through postulating forces and measuring them than **through noting expressions and inspecting them** " (Geertz, *Local Knowledge,* p. 34).

- "Translation, […] is not a simple recasting of others' ways of putting things in terms of our own ways of putting them (that is the kind in which things get lost), but **displaying the logic of their ways of putting them in the locutions of ours**; a conception which again brings it rather closer to what a critic does to illumine a poem than what an astronomer does to account for a star. "

Geertz, "Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination," *Local Knowledge*, pp. 36-54.