

Annex

a note on the interdisciplinary approach

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ANNEX: A Note on the Interdisciplinary Approach

The author of this essay is conscious of both the need for and the limitations of an interdisciplinary approach which is, in a way, a kind of social science utopia. There is some consensus around the notion that the resources found in various disciplines must be mobilized in order to understand the complexity of social life, as each one is only able to reflect exclusively on a partial dimension of society. However, when the utopian interdisciplinary effort is actually carried out, the outcomes often fall short of the expectations. What occurs is a sort of *bricolage*, in which different disciplines are moved about in an *ad hoc* fashion to fill in the gaps left by the others. What is obtained, in the best case scenario, is a prime work that is impossible to replicate as it is the unique product of the author's intellect or capacity for synthesis. Therefore, while studies within a single discipline are, in large part, *redundant*, inasmuch as their lengthy arguments only serve to confirm the state of the arts, interdisciplinary works frequently are *entropic*, in other words, impossible to reproduce, as they lack theoretical consistency and offer no effective opportunities for comparison or intellectual accumulation.

The difficulty of the interdisciplinary approach is two-fold in that specialization is an expression of the reality of modern societies with highly differentiated social subsystems, and also reflects the variety of disciplines that study those subsystems and develop theories, concepts, and issues and—even more importantly—self-refered discourses that render the passage from one disciplinary framework to another a dubious proposition.

The main problem with the interdisciplinary approach is not that each social science discipline has a privileged focus, and relates to other disciplines in a many times invasive, disrespectful, or, as is often the case, insensitive posture toward their theoretical and practical specificities. However the main difficulty in advancing an interdisciplinary approach lies in the fact that in a democratic society the autonomy of social subsystems is the prerequisite for intellectual pluralism, individual and collective freedom and the basis for a justice system that is not subjected to the

tyranny of economic, political, cognitive, or religious power. In this sense, any explanatory system that seeks, for instance, to reduce the law (or any other social subsystem including scientific research) to exogenous causes such as, for example, economic interests or some other external factor, is party, consciously or not, to an effort to delegitimize democratic institutions.

If we decided to undertake an interdisciplinary analysis beginning with recognition of these difficulties, it is because we believe that the social dynamics of today compel a dialogue among disciplines. Furthermore, this dialogue must reflect and operate on a reality in which the boundaries between the legal system and other social subsystems are, if not evaporating, at least exhibiting clear signs of countless cracks and tensions. This doesn't mean that the erasing of borders between subsystems should be welcomed. In contemporary Latin America, the sense of urgency created by inequality and the immense social problems continues to lead many change-seeking social scientists to support transformations that bypass legal procedures and the inherent requirements of legal principles. Such approach fall into the same tendency, deeply rooted in the history of the continent, that fails to understand that democracy can only be built upon the recognition of, and respect for, the intrinsic rules of each social subsystem.