

Post-modern Interdisciplinarity: Kant, Diderot and the Encyclopedic Project¹



David S. Ferris

In the second part of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant offers the following definition of how a science or discipline is established: “The principles of a science are either internal to it, and are then called indigenous (*principia domestica*), or they are based on principles that can only find their place outside of it, and are foreign principles (*peregrina*). Sciences that contain the latter base their doctrines on auxiliary propositions (*lemmata*), i.e., they borrow some concept, and along with it a basis for order, from another science” (Kant, *Judgment* 252). The second of these two cases, the borrowing of a concept from another science or discipline, is a practice that is easily discernible in recent critical history. One need only think of the borrowing from Saussurean linguistics that enabled the development of structuralism. Yet, as the history and the intentions of structuralism already show, such borrowing does not lead to the formation of a science or even a discipline we could call interdisciplinarity but rather, remains firmly within the practice of either a critical method or the idiosyncrasy of a particular critical interpretation.² Indeed, in such cases, the claim to interdisciplinarity has more to do with affirming the ability to borrow from one discipline or another as a central principle of modern humanistic study if not the history of the humanities in general.

This principle is also central to the passage just cited from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. However, for Kant, the principle of one science, once borrowed, may be easily forgotten as another science or

discipline emerges, a new science that quickly takes on all the trappings of a science in its own right. Clearly, modern interdisciplinary study would resist, both strategically and ideologically, the transformation Kant describes: the reproduction of itself as a discipline. Yet, to the extent that modern interdisciplinarity defines itself through a critical relation to the ideology of disciplines (to do otherwise is to define itself according to the limitations it sets out to avoid), it poses the question of its own existence—not in the sense that such a question denies existence to interdisciplinarity but in the sense that it questions how interdisciplinarity currently exists as a recognizable form of inquiry. In other words, interdisciplinarity raises the question of the place it now occupies as a guiding concept for the production of knowledge within the modern university. Having taken up this role, has interdisciplinarity become, in effect, indistinguishable from the science whose principle remains internal to it? Does its borrowing lead back to what has long been the preserve of individual disciplines: the production of guiding concepts?

There lies a more fundamental question embedded within these questions: whether anything such as interdisciplinarity is conceivable as a form of knowledge—or, indeed, whether it is only as a form that it is conceivable. The answers to this question already seem predictably unavoidable whether it be an empirically driven declaration that “you can’t *do* interdisciplinarity” or, on the other hand, a defense that emphasizes a kind of hybridity, an in-betweenness that always asserts its difference to the way in which a discipline guarantees its knowledge by focusing on the questions that authenticate its guiding concept.³ By pursuing this question and the kinds of answers it so regularly elicits, the question of interdisciplinarity and its role within our modernity—not to mention the evolution of the university in the late 20th century—cannot be posed, and precisely because, these answers are not answers. Rather, they are the two opposed terms of a dialectically determined history in which interdisciplinarity and disciplinarity engage in what Kant could have called a play of representations, each one agreeably assuring the survival of the other. For, without the disciplines, there is no hope of designating, however vaguely or figuratively, a space between that would be the space of interdisciplinarity. Within such a history, discipline always remains a point of reference and especially so in its critical negation.

Despite the force of this negation, Kant’s subsequent remarks to the passage cited at the beginning of this essay would already imply

that this history takes place within a systematic tendency. Whether the principles are internal or borrowed, Kant states, “every science is of itself a system” (Kant, *Judgment* 252). The act of borrowing or even the act of displacing the principle of one science or discipline does not impede the development of systematicity in another area of study. Within this Kantian paradigm, it is as if no knowledge is conceivable without, at some level, revealing a relation to systematic thought. Yet, this tendency is not wholly Kantian, it also appears in contexts that reject the limitations of Kant’s critical project. Thus, Novalis will speak of “systemlessness brought into a system” and Deleuze will proclaim “an organization of the many . . . which has no need whatsoever for unity to form a system” (Novalis 2: 289; Deleuze 182). This allure of the systematic remains strong even within those contexts that have rejected unequivocally the impulse towards epistemological foundations characteristic of the history of systematic thought.⁴ Yet, it can be argued that the sense of system implied by both Novalis and Deleuze is itself merely a borrowing or even, in the latter, a performance in the post-modern sense. Such a borrowing would then allow this use of system to recognize the systematic impulse of German Idealism but without subscribing to its totalizing tendencies—a performance that would not and cannot assume the same for German Idealism.

Kant does not exclude the possibility of a “system” without a realized totality or unity when he states, “it is not enough that in it [every science] we build in accordance with principles” (Kant, *Judgment* 252). Borrowing the principle of one discipline and applying it to another area of study does not guarantee the presence of a system, perhaps only the appearance of what looks like a system. For every science to become “of itself a system” Kant asserts that, “in [every science], we must also work architectonically and treat it not like an addition and as part of another building, but as a whole by itself, although afterwards we can construct a transition from this building to the other or vice versa” (Kant, *Judgment* 252–53). Once the principle of a science has been borrowed, the area of study into which it has been transplanted is treated as a separate subject so that what started out looking like an addition or as part of another building is treated *as if* it were a building in its own right. This analogy is the first step, it sanctions the borrowing from one discipline to another but once the borrowing has taken place, the possibility of another logic is opened up for Kant. The new house becomes the

basis for forming a relation to the science or discipline from which it borrowed its principle, in effect, it returns the analogy from which it originated in the form of a system.

What allows this systematic relation to emerge is given by Kant when he defines architectonic work in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as “making a system out of a mere aggregate of knowledge,” a definition he subsequently glosses as bringing “manifold modes of knowledge under one idea” (Kant, *Pure Reason* 653; A832/B860). The work of the architectonic is to bring each science into relation with this idea. Such an idea is no less than Reason which, as Kant states in the same context, provides the end in which “all the parts relate and in the idea of which they all stand in relation to one another” (Kant, *Pure Reason* 653; A832/B860). In this role, Kant’s Reason is the possibility of not just systematically relating the different sciences to one another but also, it underwrites the possibility of borrowing the principle of one science or discipline and applying it elsewhere. The transfer between sciences or disciplines, a transfer that can also be recognized as the enabling basis of interdisciplinary study not only occurs as a result of completing the individual buildings of the disciplines but it also enables their building in the first place. To what extent then is post-modern interdisciplinarity restricted or even defined by this systematic account even as such interdisciplinarity discounts any notion of a unity, an idea, or reason as its justification? Is interdisciplinarity, as the guiding method of contemporary study in the humanities, only conceivable from within this systematic tendency?

As Kant indicates in the Preface to the *Critique of Judgment*, his critical project is an attempt to think the ground for a general systematic account of knowledge based upon the legislative power of Reason. However, if Reason is to fulfill this role, what needs to be accounted for is the means by which a discipline may be brought under its laws of Reason, that is, how a discipline becomes a discipline in the first place. What this means is that the architectonic task itself has to be accounted for as a systematic activity through which all sciences or disciplines can be related as part of a system. Only after an adequate understanding of how such an account takes place, can the question of systematicity within contemporary interdisciplinarity be adequately posed. In the end, what is crucially at stake for our ability to pose this question is not Kant’s Reason but the character of the architectonic work that labors under its name.

This architectonic task is inseparable from the critical project Kant began with the *Critique of Pure Reason*. As a setting of the limits of

knowledge, this project seeks to account for these limits as a necessary result of Reason's law. In this respect, such a limit can be understood as the necessary boundary establishing the relation of Reason to the systematic organization of knowledge. To the extent that it is only through Reason that this systematic interrelation of knowledge is conceivable for Kant, the principle of interrelation that enables interdisciplinarity would only be thinkable as an affirmation of the disciplines or sciences it would claim to replace.⁵ Such an interdisciplinarity cannot help but affirm, continually, the principle of a discipline. In this regard, Kant's statement that "it is not enough that we build in accordance to principles" (Kant, *Judgment* 252) differentiates between the unity or system of a discipline and the architectonic of philosophy in a way that will always cede the establishment of a science or discipline to this architectonic. This difference, which is based upon the limitation of discipline through its critique, subsequently opens the possibility of always defining a discipline according to a system since it is only this systematicity that possesses the power to define an individual discipline in its concept.

What is meant by system here does, however, need careful elaboration. It does not necessarily mean that our organization of knowledge is thoroughly Kantian. This would be no more than a misreading of Kant that displaces the question of systematicity into an account of how disciplines are organized at a given historical moment.⁶ Where modern interdisciplinarity would deviate from Kant is in its attempt to refuse the principle according to which the knowledge of a discipline is guaranteed. Why this remains systematic is because such an interdisciplinarity is enabled by the principle it turns away from. In fact, after borrowing the principles of one or more disciplines, modern interdisciplinarity rationalizes its existence by insisting upon the arrest or suspension of the movement that makes a discipline possible. Such interdisciplinarity is a continual negation of the disciplinarity it borrows from. To reiterate this in strictly Kantian terms, such interdisciplinarity would suspend the work of the architectonic but without negating the principle of a science or discipline. As the preceding paragraph indicated, it is Kant who first insists upon this difference, the difference that permits interdisciplinarity to protect itself from the consequences of its own principles. As a result, it can be said that is Kant who, despite the metaphysical and foundational tendency of his thought, confirms for our modernity, the possibility of interdisciplinarity as the system of our sciences, our disciplines, our university.

Yet, even in this suspension of discipline, there is the sense that what remains is never a mere aggregate of knowledge. Even the modern work that most resembles such an aggregate, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, is no mere aggregate but would already be understood, not the least by Benjamin, as marked by the work of a dialectical history. The aggregated ruins of the past are never simply that, they tend to reappear as someone or something else's building as an architectonic goes relentlessly to work. Interdisciplinarity is, in this context, hardly the ruin or even the overcoming of disciplinarity, in fact, it may be no more than the means of preserving the disciplines even as it keeps a skeptical distance from both their history and the systematic tendency that provided their rationale. Here, a skepticism about the value or even the possibility of disciplinary knowledge becomes a powerful means of continually sustaining a practice while suspending the need to account for that practice and its knowledge in a systematic way, that is, in a way that would allow its development as a discipline. But, if the distance such skepticism would put between modern interdisciplinary study and Kant's account of the systematic character of disciplines and their relation to one another, is only made possible by Kant's separation of principle from architectonic, then, the task of the skepticism directed at the disciplines by modern interdisciplinarity is to preserve this separation as the permanent condition of knowledge today. This is its foundation or, to give this a more "post-modern" cast, this is its foundation without foundation—a formula already perilously close to Kant's own "purposiveness without purpose." While Kant adopts this formula in order to keep aesthetic judgments that have no distinct concept separate from determinate judgments and, in so doing, maintain the possibility of a universal principle for aesthetic judgment, modern interdisciplinarity would see the idea of a foundation without foundation as immediately undermining any hope for such a universal principle. But, again, here, the question returns: to what extent does this understanding of a foundation without foundation still retain a founding effect even as it refuses all foundation? Is it valid to ask if the interdisciplinarity we are so familiar with today can be thought as anything other than an effect of Kant's critical project? If this is the case, the relation between the skepticism (of interdisciplinarity) and the disciplines is much closer than the more easily discerned and more easily repeated critical relation. Indeed, this closeness would then pose a question about why interdisciplinarity is invoked as the both the outcome and as the means to face the problems and issues

post-modernity has raised with respect to knowledge and its production—problems and issues that have given a precise historical character to the post-modern.

To begin to trace the consequences of these questions—consequences of the fact that they can be posed—requires that we first recall a history: the history against which Kant's critical project and the place of the sciences or disciplines of knowledge within that project are developed, a history in which skepticism plays a crucial role leading to the close association of systematic thought and the question of how different modes or knowledge, or disciplines, are related to one another.

Prior to Kant, skepticism about philosophy's ability to account for knowledge on rational grounds had already been voiced strongly, most notably by David Hume for whom—and he is responsible for this generalization—"all knowledge descended into probability" (Hume 180). Such skepticism was directed towards the systematic project of a general philosophy envisaged by Christian Wolff, a project taken up by Wolff in the effort to complete what Leibniz had first described in 1666 as an "*ars combinatoria*" (combinatory art).⁷ Central to Leibniz's pursuit of this project was an encyclopedia that would embody what he called a general science or as Leibniz states in one of his many characterizations of this project: "a science in which are treated the forms or formulas of things in general" (Leibniz 233).⁸ Wolff's development of this call for a general science leads to what he elaborated as a "general philosophy" (*philosophia generalis*).⁹ In Leibniz's emphasis on combination, Kant's account of a science as well as his account of the means by which other sciences can be formed is discernible. But, it is from Wolff that the task of accounting for philosophy as the principle of every conceivable science emerges—to the extent that neither Leibniz nor Wolff were able to account for philosophy's ability to achieve this task or were even able to perceive the necessity of such an account. Here, the important difference between Kant's critical project and Wolff's development of Leibniz occurs.

Kant points out this difference in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* when he asserts that Wolff's failure to achieve the Leibnizian project resides in "the dogmatic way of thinking prevalent in his day" (Kant, *Pure Reason* 33). What Kant means by "dogmatic way of thinking" is a thinking that makes do with concepts alone and does not "investigate in what way and by what right reason has come into possession of these concepts" (*Pure Reason*

33). In these sentences, Kant rehearses the criticism that informs much of 18th century skepticism and underlies the empiricism of Locke and Hume, namely, that no rational account had been or could be given of the role of Reason within knowledge. Hence, Hume's limitation of knowledge to probability. Within this history, Kant's critical philosophy emerges as a response to problems that not only remained unthought in Wolff but were ignored by the skeptical attack on Enlightenment reason. The consequences of this attack (which argues that no knowledge is conceivable beyond probability) deny all possibility of a knowable principle for systematic thought. Consequently, a project such as Leibniz's encyclopedia of the sciences would be restricted to a mere aggregation of knowledge. For Kant to rescue knowledge and reinstitute the possibility of a systematic account of knowledge then requires a positive account of skeptical thought, in effect, an account that enables knowledge and system while incorporating the boundaries mapped out by that skepticism. In this respect, Kant's work is rightly seen as both a response to and a transformation of skeptical thought; as such, and Kant admits as much in the Second Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, it is a work that aims to preserve the rational, systematic project of the Enlightenment against which skepticism aimed its attack and it achieves this by systematizing the unknowability of Enlightenment Reason—the same unknowability from which skepticism had drawn its critical power and empiricism its authority.

The importance of this history to the question of interdisciplinarity as it unfolds in the modern period lies in the constitutive role played by skeptical thought. If modern interdisciplinarity is unthinkable without presuming at some level a skepticism about the knowledge associated with disciplines, if modern interdisciplinarity cannot rationalize its existence apart from a recourse to this skepticism, then, the question to be addressed within such interdisciplinarity is the following: to what extent has it inverted the history that leads to Kant? Instead of mounting a criticism of Kant (or even the Enlightenment), does it rehearse and radicalize the problem that not only led to Kant's attempt to provide a systematic account of knowledge according to the law of an unknowable reason but also underwrote the encyclopedic project from Leibniz onwards? Here, it is essential to clarify, as a first step to answering this question, the precise way in which Kant configures this problem.

Kant's objection to Wolff's attempt at a systematic philosophy is given in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure*

Reason. Kant writes: “[Wolff] was the first to show by example . . . how the secure progress of a science is to be attained only through orderly establishment of principles, clear determination of concepts, insistence on strictness of proof, and avoidance of venturesome, non-consecutive steps in our inferences. He was thus peculiarly well fitted to raise metaphysics to the dignity of a science, if only it had occurred to him to prepare the ground beforehand by a critique of the organ, that is, of pure reason itself” (Kant, *Pure Reason* 33). Kant would remember what Wolff did not know he had forgotten and the chosen method for this remembering is critique. Within the standard history of the Enlightenment and its transformation—a history which remarks such as these from Kant’s Preface helped establish—this critique can be read as a response to a difficulty residing at the very origin of the Enlightenment: the difficulty of conceiving Reason as the interrelatedness of all knowledge. But here, another question can also be discerned: does Kant resolve a difficulty that arises as a result of and within the Enlightenment project or does he merely repeat, however more systematically, the Enlightenment’s own recourse to this difficulty, that is, its pursuit of interrelatedness—the principle that underwrites the future possibility of interdisciplinarity—as the rationale for a knowledge whose rationality remains unproven? The former explains why the Enlightenment should have become the critical object of a post-modernity that has sought to separate itself from the foundational character of Enlightenment thought since the “resolution” of Kant would realize and confirm this foundational tendency. However, the latter suggests that post-modernity, in its pursuit of interdisciplinarity, and despite its overt anti-foundational claims, may still function as an effect of the project against which it has consistently positioned itself. This would indicate that the possibility of interdisciplinarity is already a necessary component of an Enlightenment reason unable to secure its own foundation. To repeat this gesture as a performance of Reason can only make sense if its former occurrence is understood as unproblematically located within a rational foundation. But, this is the one thing that the Enlightenment may never have possessed despite its thematic claims to rationality. To separate these thematic claims from an actual achieved foundation would have the effect of producing a far more radical enlightenment than the one modernity and post-modernity might prefer—not to mention rewriting the history of the Enlightenment.¹⁰

The question of the Enlightenment’s relation to its rationality can be taken up by returning to the *ars characteristic* of Leibniz, specifically,

to its promise of an encyclopedia in which a universal science will be exemplified. However, even the preliminary work of realizing such a promise remains fragmentary in Leibniz despite his frequent return to the formidable difficulties it posed. Despite his indebtedness to Leibniz, no such work is envisaged by Wolff who displaces the realization of such an idea away from an actual book and into the project of a systematic account of philosophy. Instead, it is the project with which the names of Diderot and D'Alembert are so closely identified in the eighteenth century, the *Encyclopédie*, that offers the occasion to take up the question of the encyclopedia as a response to or embodiment of the rational claims so often invoked in order to confine the Enlightenment to its own promise.

According to D'Alembert's introductory remarks to the *Encyclopédie* indicate, this work would be more than an example but a philosophical account of knowledge in its own right. Not only would it "expose the order and linkage [*enchaînement*] of human knowledge" but it would also "go back to the origin and generation of our ideas" (D'Alembert 72). The project of the *Encyclopédie* not only aims at affirming the interrelation of knowledge but, as it does so, it would also account for its origin. But, after detailing the origin of knowledge in sense experience—an account that largely follows the work of Locke—D'Alembert introduces a significant problem into the presentation of the "order and linkage of human knowledge." The real problem arises with the need to establish knowledge under "the same point of view." D'Alembert states: "After the detail whereby we entered into the different parts of our knowledge and the characteristics which distinguish them, it only remains for us to form a genealogical and encyclopedic tree which gathers them under the same point of view (*sous un même point de vûe*) and which serves to mark their origin and the liaisons they have amongst themselves. . . . But its execution is not without difficulty" (D'Alembert 99). The difficulty D'Alembert gives voice to concerns the relation between, on the one hand, a genealogical and encyclopedic tree (which in effect amounts to the architectonic of this project), and, on the other, the historical account of the origin of ideas as a movement from direct sense experience to reflection. D'Alembert is adamant on this point: "the encyclopedic tree must not and cannot be servilely subjected to this history" (D'Alembert 99). Having stated this, D'Alembert immediately launches into an incongruous description of the "general system of the Arts and Sciences" as "a kind of labyrinth, a kind of tortuous path where the mind is engaged without knowing too well

the road it must adhere to" (D'Alembert 99–100). Such an engagement is subsequently summarized as producing "a necessary discontinuity." The disorder produced by this discontinuity, D'Alembert continues, despite being philosophic, "would disfigure, or rather annihilate entirely the encyclopedic tree in which one would wish to represent it" (D'Alembert 100). It is doubtful that this is the encyclopedia Leibniz had in mind, particularly since this discontinuity is recognized as the result of the mind engaging directly with the very material that forms the content of the encyclopedia. In short, the experience of the encyclopedia ends up annihilating the image in which its principle of organization is presented. The Enlightenment already appears more problematic the more it reflects on its own promise.

To counter this situation, D'Alembert offers a famous and much cited metaphor, the encyclopedia as map of the world. The remarks that precede this metaphor not only explain why it is invoked but also insist upon the primacy of sight as the source of encyclopedic order. D'Alembert writes: "The encyclopedic order consists in gathering together our knowledge in the smallest place possible, and, to place, so to speak, the Philosopher above this vast labyrinth at a greatly elevated point of view from where he may be able to perceive the principal arts and sciences at the same time; to see with a glance of the eye the objects of his speculations, and the operations he can perform on these objects; distinguish the general branches of human knowledge, the points that separate them and the points that unite them; and even sometimes catch a glimpse [*entrevoir*] of the secret paths that unite them. It is a kind of map of the world" D'Alembert then finishes this paragraph by naming this map as the "tree or figured system" (D'Alembert 101), presumably replacing the one he had just annihilated.

After having registered the "necessary discontinuity" which causes this annihilation, it is indeed a curious step to assert so quickly and so confidently the creation of a "tree or figured system." What intervenes to enable this turn is the invention of a point view that allows, in D'Alembert's words, the "figuring" of a system, a figuring that consistently invokes the ability to see what cannot be seen. After describing the position of the philosopher as a "point of *view*" (the very thing whose execution was previously described as "not without difficulty"), D'Alembert then goes on to populate the activity of such a philosopher with verbs and phrases which insist upon the use of sight, for example, "voir d'un coup d'oeil," and "entrevoir." The

subsequent paragraph repeats this emphasis, referring on each occurrence to the placement of the “eye.” On this occasion, however, D’Alembert indicates that the necessary placing of an eye brings an arbitrariness to the figuration of the system: “just as in general maps of the globe we live on, objects are more or less in proximity to each other and present a different view (*coup d’oeil*) according to the point of view (*point de vûe*) where the eye (*oeil*) is placed according to the Geographer, likewise the form of the encyclopedic tree will depend on the point of view (*point de vûe*) where one places oneself in order to view (*envisager*) the literary universe” (D’Alembert 101). This account of the relativism of the philosopher’s position relies on an inability to overcome its guiding metaphor, a *point de vûe*. But, D’Alembert then goes on to add that a consequence of this inability is that what is seen in general (that is, from “a greatly elevated point of view”) cannot contain the tendency of one subject or object of study to claim affiliation with another: “often a given object which by one or more of its properties has been placed in a class, belongs to another class through other properties and would be just as justified taking its place there. The arbitrary thus remains, necessarily, in the general division” (D’Alembert 102). This arbitrary aspect is attributed to the inability of a general division—here understood in terms of sight, from a specific “point of view”—to comprehend fully the object it contemplates even as it lays claim to such comprehension. Faced with this arbitrariness, D’Alembert proposes an arrangement he characterizes as the “most natural.” He describes this arrangement as one in which “objects would succeed one another according to insensible nuances that serve, at the same time, to separate and unite them” (D’Alembert 102).¹¹ Now, both the possibility of a “figured system” or “encyclopedic tree” and the response to the arbitrariness produced by that possibility are articulated according to a thematics of sight. It is, in fact, this sense that gives access to the “insensible nuances” that provide a basis for the rationalization of knowledge. But, in order to avoid the annihilating consequences of this arbitrariness, such a sense must now fail to see even as it exercises its power to see; it is the sense of insensibility.

This failing of sight becomes decisive as D’Alembert raises the philosopher’s point of view to an even more greatly elevated height by figuring the map of the world as if it were a map of the universe. Here, D’Alembert explicitly underlines the inability of sight to see the relation that underlies the concept of the Enlightenment encyclopedia: “The Universe is only a vast Ocean, on the surface of which we

perceive (*apercevoir*) some islands, more or less large, whose relation with the continent is hidden from us" (D'Alembert 102). Yet, this inability to see is not quite what it appears to be. What is still seen is the place for a relation between these islands and the continent, such relation just happens to be hidden from sight. In this respect, the failure of sight is merely apparent; it offers the opportunity to figure a relation in the place where none can be seen and then substantiate it by reference to what is related.¹² It is here that the systematic imperative of the encyclopedia reveals itself most forcefully. And, along with this revelation, there arises the question of just how arbitrary the structuring of knowledge really is within D'Alembert's description of how the Encyclopedia is to secure its architectonic point of view. This question concerns the role of an arbitrariness in founding and safeguarding the encyclopedic project. Specifically, in D'Alembert's example, the question concerns the role of arbitrariness as the productive force of something hidden, as the possibility of a "figured system." In other words, it concerns the role played by the encyclopedia in preserving the promise of knowledge rather than the systematic (that is, rational) completion of knowledge.¹³ Configured in this way, the encyclopedic project and its pursuit of the principle that organizes (through differentiation and relation) the different disciplines would become the pursuit of the means to preserve itself in the face of the unthinkability of a reason without content, merely extrinsic. Thus, its interdisciplinarity would emerge as a strategic response, as the visible albeit temporary and therefore arbitrary practice in which the promise of systematicity is continually preserved for future repetition. The foundation of modernity known as the Enlightenment would then already be without foundation—as its most visible project witnesses.

The promise of such a systematicity is also the promise of Kant. Not only does he understand the *Critique of Judgment* as completing the critical project begun with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but the former is also considered a necessary, preliminary step preceding a system of pure philosophy. That Kant anticipates such a system is clear in the Preface to the *Critique of Judgment*. However, the promise is only realizable on condition of a critique that has "probed the ground for this structure down to the depth of the first foundations of the faculty of principles independent of experience, so that it should not sink (*sinke*) in any part, which would inevitably lead to the collapse of the whole" (Kant, *Judgment* 56). In distinction to D'Alembert, Kant does not offer anything as overt as a map of the systematic relation that

may lie hidden under an ocean (in the sense that a figure stands for the system in the same way that a web now stands for an incommensurable relation to information). Indeed, for Kant what regulates the system dare not sink into the ocean like a ship whose existence can only be sustained by its absence or non-arrival. Consequently, D'Alembert's tendency to emphasize a sense, sight, in terms of a point of view ought to have no place in Kant's treatment of this question since the position from which Kant's system ought to be elaborated cannot be informed by or otherwise made dependent on the senses. Yet, despite this sharp difference—a difference already articulated from the perspective of systematic thought—the difficulty D'Alembert gives voice to cannot be ignored by Kant and nor can Kant's recourse to the same thematics as D'Alembert: sight.

Kant takes up this difficulty in the First Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*. To avert the situation D'Alembert describes—the necessary discontinuity against which any general account of a system of knowledge contends—Kant, however, will embrace the “encyclopedic” in the form of an introduction (therefore in the form of a promise), a gesture that affirms the terms if not the relation by which Leibniz conceives the universalization of knowledge in an *ars characteristica*. Kant's recourse to the encyclopedic promise also affirms the extent to which the Enlightenment bequeaths the pursuit of interdisciplinarity to modernity as the only reasonable response to the failure of dogmatic reason or, as post-modernity would put it, Enlightenment foundationalism. Kant states: “An encyclopedic introduction presupposes not some related doctrine which prepares the way for the newly announced one, but the idea of a system which will first become complete through the latter” (Kant, *Judgment* 42). The idea of the system is not a doctrine that precedes and controls the system it introduces (this is Wolff and dogmatic), rather it is what can only achieve completion—and for the first time—through the newly announced doctrine. It is this relation that Kant describes as encyclopedic. Thus, what is encyclopedic is what introduces the idea of the system. Since the introduction can never be the place where the system is present in its systematicity, the encyclopedic can only name the possibility of the presentation of systematicity. This awareness of presentation in any account of systematicity is the single most decisive factor Kant contributes to the encyclopedic; it marks the difficulty the Enlightenment produced for itself in the form of a foundation, a difference that demanded in the early years of the Enlightenment the

return of a mythical universal language.¹⁴ Kant rightly recognizes that the difficulty prompting such a demand is the problem of presentation.

Here, both Kant and D'Alembert, despite their different points of departure, bear witness to the fact that the encyclopedic is the place where this reflection on presentation must first occur. If the encyclopedic names the possibility of the encyclopedia but does in the form of an introduction, then, because the encyclopedia exists in the anticipation that it is already there, its most pressing question is to account for a mode of presentation that affirms its existence without ever facing the need of its demonstration.¹⁵ The encyclopedia and its interrelation of knowledge is thus the promise of its introduction—in D'Alembert's case, it is the promise of the Preliminary Discourse, the place of a heightened expectation if not a universe. Yet, despite the extensive even totalizing gestures of such figures in D'Alembert's introduction, their mere presence indicates the centrality of presentation once the point of representation, the point of view cannot be sustained beyond its arbitrariness.

For such promises to be sustained, it is imperative, as Kant recognized, that the presentation undertaken in any such introduction be presented only in terms of its promise. In this respect, what is required is an account of presentation in which such a promise can be made but never broken. In the penultimate paragraph of the first part of the *Critique of Judgment*—the part that deals with aesthetic judgments—Kant faces the necessity of such an account. On this occasion, presentation goes by the name of *hypotyposis*, a rhetorical term which, according to both Cicero (Kant's immediate source) and Quintilian, designates a vivid presentation, specifically, a presentation that is addressed to the eye rather than the ear.¹⁶ Kant writes: "All *hypotyposis* (presentation, *subiectio sub adspectum*), as making something sensible, is one of two kinds: either *schematic*, where to a concept, which the understanding grasps, the corresponding intuition is given a priori; or *symbolic*, where to a concept which only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, an intuition is attributed with which the power of Judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to what it observes in schematization, i.e., it is merely the rule of this procedure, not of the intuition itself, thus, it is merely the form of reflection, not the content which corresponds to the concept" (Kant, *Judgment* 225). Kant's adoption of this *hypotyposis*, this figure that addresses itself to the eye, acts in an analogous manner, it would provide no content of its own, it is merely a copy of

the form through which schematic understanding operates. But, as a copy it still retains the referential capacity of the schematic example of *hypotyposis*: by this means, the symbolic refers to its inability to give an adequate account of Reason. Even in this description of a form of presentation that negates its power to present something other than itself, the relation between a sensible figure or image and what it represents is retained as a point of reference. Only by dividing this power of presentation according to form and content and then retaining the form alone, can Kant produce a mode of presentation that reflects the understanding's inability to represent Reason. The symbolic hypotyposis thus becomes, for Kant, "an indirect presentation of the concept" (*Judgment* 226), that is, it presents as a concept what it cannot in any direct way know.

Subsequently, in this same section of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant indicates that the means by which this indirect presentation occurs is through "the transfer [*Übertragung*] of the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps an intuition can never directly correspond" (Kant, *Judgment* 226–27; trans. modified). The necessity of this transfer indicates the insistent presence and need to account for the kind of borrowing that operates in Kant's description of how one discipline can be formed from another. Here, Kant is compelled to borrow from one reflection (the schematic) in order to assure that the other (the symbolic) can operate as a form of presentation. Despite Kant's own need to keep these two rigorously apart, it curious to note the insertion of "perhaps"—an insertion that incongruously suggests the possibility of just such an intuition. Leaving aside the question posed by this "perhaps," there remains the crucial role played by this aborted transfer in the creation of an indirect presentation, that is, of a presentation that fails to fulfill its own most basic requirement: to give a sensible form to a concept. Yet, this failure only arises from the misapplication of a schematic presentation, a misapplication that occurs because of its transfer to an object (Kant's word) it could never adequately represent. As if to support this failure, Kant states that language is "full [*voll*]" of such indirect presentations," a statement that suggests through its use of the word "full" that language is nothing more than a means of indirect presentation, that it is, in its fullness or totality, nothing other than symbolic *hypotyposis*. In this case, Kant's understanding of language, not to mention Reason, is enabled by the deliberate misuse of that kind of *hypotyposis* that most clearly answers to its rhetorical definition as a description that appeals

to the eye. In regard to this object, the *hypotyposis* is, in effect, made blind so that no distinct knowledge of the object or concept it is said to present can be seen.¹⁷ Beyond this blindness, Reason is to be located, specifically the Reason that gives systematicity, thereby guaranteeing the interrelation of our sciences and disciplines in a system. The transfer at work in this section of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* thus retains the form of a rhetorical example in order to represent what can have no presentation. This transfer assures that where Reason stands there is something rather than nothing, a something whose legislative power and systematic organization of knowledge cannot be represented in any guise. Kant's need to guarantee that Reason as something rather than nothing is understandable from within the perspective of the system his critical project aims at. But, within the *Critique of Judgment*, one might also say, within the architectonic of this work, this need has also a more pressing reason to guarantee that Reason is something rather than nothing, a reason that lies within Kant's division of the arts—not to mention the sciences.

The section of the *Critique of Judgment* immediately preceding Kant's discussion of *hypotyposis* ends with remarks comparing the aesthetic value of beautiful arts with one another. Within these remarks, Kant offers the following definition of laughter: "laughter is an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing" (Kant, *Judgment* 209). What greater danger could there be than discovering that the expectation produced through *hypotyposis* is nothing, that, in the place of Reason, there is only something to hear but not understand: laughter.¹⁸ To avoid any such occurrence it is not surprising that Kant should restrict laughter to a mere play of representations, to what he terms an agreeable rather than beautiful art.

In Kant, the agreeable arts aim at mere enjoyment. By this definition they exclude reflection because they do not offer any purposiveness, that is, unlike aesthetic judgments of taste, they have no claim to universal communicability.¹⁹ Yet, in the *Critique of Judgment*, this conceptual difference is precisely the difference that *hypotyposis* is called upon to maintain. In other words, the success of Kant's systematic treatment of the aesthetic in its relation to Reason requires that no laughter be heard. Yet, when Kant describes the transformation that produces laughter, there appear terms similar to those used to distinguish symbolic from schematic *hypotyposis*: "This very transformation (*Verwandlung*), which is certainly nothing enjoyable for the understanding, is nevertheless indirectly (*indirekt*)

enjoyable for the understanding and, for a moment, very lively (*lebhaft*)” (Kant, *Judgment* 209). Despite the fact that no reflection occurs in the case of the joke that produces laughter, the means by which the Kantian joke unfolds can only communicate its pleasure indirectly and this indirect communication takes place in the moment when it is most like life (*lebhaft*). This life-likeness accords with how Kant understands *hypotyposis* (*subiectio sub adspectum*) since the vividness present in this form of presentation is attributed to its ability to bring something before our eyes. The joke, as an agreeable aesthetic art, also communicates pleasure but this pleasure, which gives the joke its meaning in Kant’s eyes, is only experienced indirectly by the understanding.²⁰ Indirectly, because the sudden transformation of an expectation into nothing is the meaning of the joke. What the joke leads to is not a meaning that the understanding can anticipate, rather, it is a meaning that works against and thwarts the understanding. Since this meaning is not an effect of the understanding, the pleasure understanding derives from the joke can only be indirect. It is not a pleasure taken in the exercise of its powers.

Laughter is then the sign of the understanding’s recognition of the failure of its understanding; it understands that it did not understand. Here, within the joke, which Kant restricts to the agreeable arts because it only involves a play of representations, there occurs a transformation that prefigures Kant’s description of the origin of symbolic *hypotyposis* already cited, namely, “the transfer of the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond.”²¹ Despite the similarity of structure, Kant would insist on a difference, a philosophical difference that keeps laughter apart from Reason: on the one hand, a sensible conclusion, laughter, on the other, the understanding’s recognition of its own limitation in the face of Reason.

Even as Kant strives to maintain this difference and therefore a significance for symbolic presentation, the means by which this is achieved moves perilously close to the conditions of laughter. Just as we feel compelled to laugh upon hearing a successful joke, there is also a compulsion at work in this restriction of sight. The final sentence of the paragraph in which Kant offers his resolution of the antinomy of taste invokes this seeing which does not see and does so as a compulsion. Kant writes: “the antinomies compel (*nötigen*) us, against our will, to see beyond the sensible (*über das Sinnliche hinaus zu*

sehen) and to seek the unifying point of all our faculties a priori in the supersensible (*im Übersinnlichen*): because no other way remains to make Reason one-voiced with itself (*mit sich selbst einstimmig*)” (Kant, *Judgment* 217; trans. modified).

The requirement that reason be one-voiced stands in stark contrast to the possibility of a reason that might break out into what can never occur in the lonely unity of Reason: laughter. For Kant to give a single voice to Reason and avoid any possibility of laughter, it is necessary that the realm of the sensual (where laughter is relegated to a “mere play of representations”) is rigorously maintained as a separate realm). The means of maintaining this separation comes to a head in symbolic *hypotyposis* when Kant is compelled to resort to a seeing that sees that it cannot see. A similar recourse occurs in the passage just cited. Kant tells us that we are compelled to see beyond the senses, to see what cannot be named a sense and is therefore not answerable to the sense of sight, yet, still, Kant says, we see. But what would we see if we could still see anything there? According to what Kant says, this would no longer be a matter of seeing but a question of listening to the one voice of Reason. We are invited to see so that we may listen and we are compelled to listen because we cannot see what we were invited to see. Effectively, we are blinded not by the sight of Reason or by a failing the vividness of the *hypotyposis*, but by the single voice of Reason. According to Kant’s own terms, we are then blinded by the inability of the senses to communicate with one another.

To state that there is no other way for this to occur is to state a systematic imperative that Reason should speak with one voice and that this self-same voice should speak through all sciences and disciplines. The alternative is perhaps what never speaks alone in one voice but always occurs with something: laughter. To suggest this as an alternative is to cut across the philosophical distinctions with which Kant assures the systematic potential of his thought. In effect, it is to locate the experience of the senses where no sensual experience has the right to exist for Kant. Here, it is instructive to recall what D’Alembert’s description of attempts to locate the systematic nature of encyclopedic thought within the experience of sight reveal: the empirical, sensual understanding offered by sight fails because of its inability to see what remains beyond the realm of sensory experience. But, is this failure an effect of reason, does sense fail because of reason? Or, is the limitation of sensual experience an effect of these same senses and their arrangement by Kant (only the visual can approach the single voice of reason)? Either way, the result would

lead to the same syllogism: sense fails because of reason, therefore, reason exists because of the failure of sense. The possibility of thinking Reason, of thinking what guarantees the possibility of encyclopedic thought (or what Leibniz and Wolff conceived as general science or general philosophy) insists that Reason is thinkable only on condition of a presentation that fails. The thought that arises from a presentation is understood as what falls under the eyes. Kant is explicit on this point, he borrows a definition from Cicero: *subiectio sub adspectum*. But, there is also a word Kant does not borrow as he attempts to discipline the understanding to and the omission is symptomatic.

The full phrase Kant cites from Cicero reads: *sub aspectum paene subiectio* (Cicero 3.53.202).²² The difference made by the omission of “*paene*” is indicative of a necessity generated by Kant’s own argument. This word can be translated in the following ways, “almost” “all but,” or “practically.” The complete quotation would then read, “under sight all but placed below” or “under sight, almost placed below.” The full phrase indicates that what is placed below (*subiectio*) does not in fact belong to the modality of sight: it is as if it could be seen, not that it is actually seen. What then occurs at the origin of this figure in which sight is so privileged is a seeing that does not see. Yet, Kant will retain this inability to see as the result of transferring or, literally, carrying over (*Übertragung*) one form of presentation, the schematic, to another object that refuses all visual existence. For this carrying over to be productive, the visual nature of schematic presentation must be retained because it will provide the form on which symbolic understanding depends. Hence, even before the visualization of schematic understanding is refused by transferring the schematic to a concept “to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond,” another refusal has taken place: the refusal to recognize that schematic presentation is not, as Kant asserts, “demonstrative” (*demonstrativ*: what can be shown, that is, seen) rather, it is already the result of the analogy Cicero introduces with this word, *paene*, the word Kant would forget in order to remember Reason. It is only by playing off the symbolic against the schematic and determining a relation of analogy between them that Kant can assure that the symbolic still retains the form of reference ascribed unquestioningly to the schematic. But, for this to occur, it is absolutely necessary that Kant can refer to a presentation that is literally *sub aspectum*, “under the gaze” and not *paene*, “almost.” But, what happens when what is described as

being “under the gaze” cannot be seen at all, when there is no thing to see?

For an answer to this question it is necessary to turn away from Kant and return to a different account of vision, an account that deals with actual blindness and a subsequent restoration of sight in Diderot’s “Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who see.” This letter written in 1749, like its companion piece, the “Essay on Deaf-Mutes” of 1751, not only confronts the relation of the senses to knowledge but it does so at the very point when the project of the *Encyclopédie* is being conceived—the prospectus to this undertaking is published in 1750. The concurrence of these dates underscores the contrast between, on the one hand, the systematic intention of the *Encyclopédie* and D’Alembert’s problematization of its concept, and, on the other hand, the explicitly unsystematic, digressive character of these two texts whose only common thread is their exploration of the interrelation of the senses. By itself, this exploration signals an engagement with the *Encyclopédie*’s retracing of the origin and generation of ideas to the senses, in effect, an engagement with the question that fuels the empirical and skeptical inquiries whose objections to systematicity Kant sought to overcome. So considered, Diderot’s letters can be read as an inquiry into a first model for the interrelation of knowledge, the interrelation of the senses, in short, a proto-interdisciplinarity.

In the letter on the blind, Diderot recounts an operation performed on a 13 year old boy by the surgeon William Cheselden. The boy had been blind from birth but as a result of the operation, which is successful, he experiences sight for the first time. Diderot gives the following account of the boy’s experience which, simultaneously provides an account of how blindness sees:

Il avait tous les objets sur les yeux, et ils lui semblaient appliqués à cet organe, comme les objets du tact le sont à la peau. Il ne pouvait distinguer ce qu’il avait jugé rond, à l’aide de ses mains, d’avec ce qu’il avait jugé angulaire. . . . Il parvint, mais ce ne fut sans peine, à apercevoir que sa maison était plus grande que sa chambre, mais nullement à concevoir comment l’oeil pouvait donner cette idée. Il lui fallut un grand nombre d’expériences réitérées pour assurer que la peinture représentait des corps solides; et quand il se fut bien convaincu, à force de regarder les tableaux, que ce n’étaient point des surfaces seulement qu’il voyait, il y porta la main, et fut bien étonné de ne rencontrer qu’un plan uni et sans aucune saillie: il demanda alors quel était le trompeur du sens du toucher, ou du sens de la vue. (Diderot 4: 60–61)

Every object was on his eyes and to him they seemed stuck to this organ like sticky objects stick to the skin. He was unable to distinguish what he had judged to be round, with the aid of his hands, from what was angular. He succeeded, but not without difficulty, to perceive that his house was bigger than his room, but he did not succeed at all in conceiving how the eye could give this idea. It took a great number of repeated experiences to assure him that a painting represented solid bodies; and, when he was well convinced, as a result of looking at paintings, that he was not simply seeing surfaces, he reached out his hand to these surfaces and was very astonished to be met with a uniform surface without any projections: he then asked which had deceived him, the sense of touch or the sense of sight.

To the boy, the eye is not at all an eye upon first experience, it provides no awareness of what sight is. Instead it is understood in terms of touch; every object is, quite literally, on the boy's eyes as if they had been physically placed there. The boy, in effect, cannot see that he sees, he can only understand this seeing in terms of touch, that is, in terms of the sense he had already substituted for sight during the term of his blindness. While this suggests that one sense can interpret the experience of another (even, that through sight we can hear Reason speak in its one voice), in what follows, it becomes clear that these two senses cannot act in agreement with one another.

Diderot tells us that the boy's eyes were "unable to distinguish what he had judged to be round, with the aid of his hands, from what was angular." Despite this difficulty, the boy, in the next sentence possesses the ability to differentiate the smallness of his room from the largeness of his house. We are not told how this comes about but we are told that the boy is unable to confirm how "the eye could give this idea." This inability of the eye to provide knowledge continues in the boy's subsequent experience of sight. He is able to perceive solid bodies in a painting however, this knowledge is said to result from repeated experiences which, in this case, seems to mean the repeated examination of the painting (the subsequent phrase, suggests this: "he was well convinced, as a result of looking at paintings"). It is this perception that sets up the denouement of this little history as the eye judges that what is seen will be in agreement with another sense: touch. But, once convinced of this, once in possession of this knowledge that he was not just looking at a surface but was looking at a solid body, the boy reaches out his hand to touch what he sees. This is when the boy asks whether touch or sight is deceptive.

The moment of this question is also the moment when the interrelation of the senses—which act as specific ways of knowing, just

like sciences and disciplines—is revealed as being unable to present knowledge. The senses are unable to perform the play of representations—one substituting for another—that would make this moment, in Kant’s terms, an agreeable experience. Understanding fails when the senses attempt to realize its conclusions. For the understanding to arrive at the conclusion that what is seen is actually there (a person’s body) it acts, in the boy’s case, as if sight and touch were interchangeable (just like the boy’s first experience of sight when “every object was on his eyes”—as if the eye were a sense of touch). The boy’s question about which sense is deceptive arrests this interrelation of sight and touch, that is, it arrests the means through which he arrived at the erroneous knowledge that he “was not simply seeing surfaces” when looking at a painting. What is at stake in such a means is nothing less than the presumed interrelation and interchangeability of different ways of knowing the world: sight and touch. In effect, what is operative at this point is a proto-interdisciplinarity as the possibility of knowledge.

Diderot’s account of the knowledge possessed by the boy demonstrates how touch produces an anticipation that what is seen by sight is another version of the same, as if the knowledge derived from one sense could inform another. Here, the transmission of knowledge from one sense to another reiterates the transporting or carrying over (*Übertragung*) that characterizes the relation between schematic and symbolic presentation. But, since the arrest of what is carried over aims at distinguishing understanding and Reason (in order to avoid representing that “to which perhaps an intuition can never directly correspond” [Kant, *Judgment* 227]), the arrest itself must be directed at the relation between symbolic and schematic presentation, that is, it must be directed at their interrelation—without which the symbolic could never function in the way Kant claims. This arrest can therefore not affect in any way the success of schematic presentation. In Diderot, this arrest occurs as the arrest of interrelation itself as the boy asks a question that registers a deception that cannot be ascribed to touch or sight but to their interrelation. Here, the difference between Kant and Diderot cannot be explained away by the different character of what is presented in their texts: one philosophic and concerned with *a priori* knowledge, the other located in the senses. Both, crucially, work with analogy within their respective texts. And, in any case, a reflection on the senses does not necessarily belong to the sensual; that is merely its object. Rather, the difference at stake between Kant and Diderot centers on the efficacy of a principle of

relation. Where Kant insists upon the success of this relation in schematic presentation (this kind of presentation is understood as giving a “direct presentation of the concept” [Kant, *Judgment* 226]), Diderot insists upon its inconsistency as it crosses from touch to sight. As a result of this inconsistency, the demonstration performed by the boy—and also by Diderot’s text—interrupts any easy assumption that the principle guiding one sense (and its mode of knowledge) can be transferred to another. What Kant interrupts in the name of Reason becomes in this context the interruption of an interrelation that was already interrupted by the hand of Diderot’s boy. That this interrelation should be founded in such an interruption by Kant signals that the principle of interrelation through which the symbolic is set up as a failed schemata is itself the interruption of a principle existing in the name of Reason: Reason is found in the negation of the principle it cannot be seen to embody. For Kant, it must be both a means of transfer (*Übertragung*) and the arrest of its own transport but for this to work, there can be no doubt that the transfer, the interrelation implied by such a transport can occur.

In this interrelation the sense of modern interdisciplinarity can be found—in a relation that would cut itself off from the foundational practices of a past that had to call upon such an interrelation as the promise, however negative, of foundation itself. In such practices, the schemata or our modernity, that is, post-modernity, are clearly demonstrated. In interrelation, interdisciplinarity, and their most recent avatar, cultural studies, the persistent answer to the failure of a discipline, science, or other mode of knowledge to realize its own promise can be discerned. Yet, it would be a mistake to believe that this answer is peculiarly contemporary. Distinctive signs already indicated that interdisciplinarity cannot be divorced from an Enlightenment that had espoused this form of knowledge as a response to the skepticism it had also fostered. It is through this skepticism that the possibility of an interdisciplinarity continues to be sustained even if the thematics of the visual no longer articulate its difficulties. And, it is to this possibility that the hand of Diderot’s boy continues to reach.

University of Colorado, Boulder

NOTES

- 1 I would like to acknowledge the generous support of the American Council of Learned Societies during 2002–2003 for research into reconfigurations of

interdisciplinarity within and since the Enlightenment. This essay is the direct result of their support of this project.

- 2 In this essay, the words science (referring to a particular science) and discipline are used interchangeably.
- 3 See Stanley Fish, *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change*, for an account of the impossibility of interdisciplinarity, an account that relies on the assertion of empirical finitude in the face of a field of study magnified to an infinite conclusion (81). Given the relations between interdisciplinarity and the Enlightenment explored in this essay, it can be pointed out that Fish's magnification of modern interdisciplinarity already repeats post-modernity's desire to read the same in the Enlightenment.
- 4 The word system has a curious persistence. Rodolphe Gasché will also call upon it in *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986) when he speaks of a "system beyond being." Again, here, the retention of such a vocabulary would have a strategic value. The question resides in the difficulty of clarifying the difference between this value and the historical use that enables such an intervention, that is, it is a question of whether such a clarification can be sustained by the name of "system."
- 5 In this context, it is possible to ask whether the most conservative acts within the study of the humanities are now based on the crossing or undoing of boundaries. This has become particularly true within the field of comparative literature in recent years. This field, which has regularly experienced considerable uncertainty about its object of study should be never mind the methods proper to such uncertainty, now appears to be in the process of rationalizing itself as the discipline that crosses not only national literatures but also other disciplines. In this respect, the field edges closer and closer to what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy analyzed as an absolutization of literature that responded at least in part to the consequences of Kant's critical philosophy (see *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester [Albany: SUNY Press, 1988]).
- 6 This question is already an issue within encyclopedic thought before Kant. See Diderot's article "Encyclopedia" in the *Encyclopédie*, particularly his remarks on the relation of time and knowledge.
- 7 After 1678, Leibniz came to refer to this art as "ars characteristica." In a letter to Henry Oldenberg from 1675, Leibniz refers to this science by a transitional term, "combinatoria characteristica" (Leibniz, 166). This transitional name underlines the extent to which the subsequent term "universal characteristic" remains, essentially, combinatory. (Leibniz 166).
- 8 For a superb study of encyclopedism at this time but also in modernity, see Federico Luisetti, *Plus Ultra: Enciclopedia barocca e modernità* (Turin: Trauben, 2001).
- 9 See Wolff's *Preliminary Remarks on General Philosophy* [1728], trans. Richard J. Blackwell (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1963).
- 10 Needless to say, this enlightenment would be quite different from the one Jonathan Israel describes in his book *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) which attempts to demonstrate on the level of intellectual history that the Enlightenment actualizes itself in historical interrelation as if it were the *ars characteristica* of an era if not the historical secular synthesis to which modernity owes its existence—and against which post-modernity would cast its lot.
- 11 Leibniz also explicitly identifies his "combinatory art" as the science of separation and joining: "for me the art of combinations is . . . the science of forms or of

- similarity and dissimilarity” (Letter to Walter von Tschirnhaus, May 1678; Leibniz 192).
- 12 In this respect, D’Alembert’s figuration of relation remains in accordance to Leibniz’s assertion that “no purely extrinsic denominations are to be given which have no basis at all in the denominated thing itself” (“First Truths”; Leibniz 268; trans. modified [Leibniz’s Latin text is printed in *Opusculæ et fragmenta inedita de Leibniz*, ed. Louis Couturat [Paris: Alcan, 1903], 520). Leibniz’s remark also indicates how much his encyclopedic project is the attempt to found a theory of relation on the basis of what can be denominated so that relation can also be understood as a quality of something that exists. As will be discussed below, Kant, despite a critique that, like Leibniz on denomination and relation, is careful to limit knowledge to what can be known, is forced to negotiate this problem by recourse to a thematics of sight in order to sense what cannot belong to the order of senses.
 - 13 The most explicit contemporary version of such a promise is, of course, the Internet and its aggregation of knowledge—as well as its status as the image of our modernity.
 - 14 Such a language was not only a project of Leibniz but also, before him, in Jacob Böhme’s call for the recovery of an Adamic language. The interest in this language is already a sign that presentation is a crucial but as yet not completely articulated issue for Enlightenment thought.
 - 15 This emphasis on the encyclopedic rather than the realized encyclopedia also defines Novalis’s thought on the project of an encyclopedia. The material and notes Novalis collected in relation to this project, known as the *Allgemeine Brouillon*, consistently refers in its head-words to an “Encyclopedistic” rather than an encyclopedia whenever he takes up the question of how disciplines and knowledge are interrelated. See, Novalis 3:242–478.
 - 16 Quintilian defines this figure as follows: “As for what Cicero calls “putting something before our eyes” [*sub oculus subiectio*], this happens only when, instead of stating *that* an event took place, we show *how* it took place, and that not as a whole, but in detail. In the last book, I classified this under *evidentia*, but others prefer *hypotyposis*, that is, the expression in words of a given situation in such a way that it seems to be a matter of seeing rather than of hearing (*potius videantur quam audiri*)” and subsequently, “this figure has something particularly vivid about it; the facts seem not to be told us, but to be happening [*habet hæc figura manifestivus aliquid: non enim narrari res sed agi videtur*]” (Quintilian, 9.2.40–43). Cicero’s definition of this figure occurs in *De oratore*, however, what Kant writes is not exactly Cicero’s complete phrase. Cicero uses the phrase “sub aspectum paene subiectio” (3.53.202). Kant drops the word “paene,” follows the word order of Quintilian, and uses the unassimilated form of *aspectum*. The significance of this omission will be discussed subsequently. The most recent and most resourceful treatment of Kant’s use of hypotyposis as philosophy’s attempt to take over the *ars oratoria* in the form of rhetoric rather than marking it as the mere irruption of rhetoric in the text of philosophy can be found in Rodolphe Gasché’s “Hypotyposis” (Gasché, 202–218).
 - 17 Adorno makes the following remark on this blindness in terms of consciousness in Kant and its relation to the aesthetic: “Kant’s aesthetics attempts to bind together consciousness of what is necessary with consciousness that what is necessary is itself blocked from consciousness. It follows its course, in effect, blindly” (Adorno 343). As necessary as it is for Adorno to lead Kant into an aesthetic blind alley, the extent to which Adorno’s aesthetics remains within the limits of Kant’s despite Adorno’s insistence on a resolutely negative element as the characteristic (or even combinatory?) aspect of modern aesthetics remains to be developed.

- 18 For Kant, both music (sound without content?) and material for laughter “are two kinds of play with aesthetic ideas or even representations of the understanding by which in the end nothing is thought, and which can gratify merely through their change, and nevertheless do so in a lively (*lebhaft*) fashion” (Kant, *Judgment* 208).
- 19 On the judgment of beautiful art by aesthetic judgments of taste, Kant states: “Beautiful art . . . is a kind of representation that is purposive in itself, and, though without an end, nevertheless promotes the cultivation of mental powers for sociable communication. The universal communicability of a pleasure already includes in its concept that this must not be a pleasure of enjoyment, from mere sensation, but one of reflection” (Kant, *Judgment* 185).
- 20 Since the joke produces pleasure it is an aesthetic art according to Kant: as such it is an agreeable art because “its end is that pleasure accompany the representations as mere sensations” (Kant, *Judgment* 184).
- 21 In a remark that follows a reference to Kant’s definitions of a joke, Samuel Weber describes Freud’s understanding of the laughter produced by a joke as follows: “The constitutive condition of laughter is that one be ignorant of its object” (Weber 89).
- 22 These changes offer a literal example of what Gasché describes as Kant’s “taking over” of rhetoric—even if this taking over is enabled by omission.

WORKS CITED

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.
- Cicero. *De oratore*. Trans. E. W. Sutton. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1942–48.
- D’Alembert, Jean Le Rond. *Discours préliminaire des éditeurs de 1751*. Ed. Martine Groult. Paris: Champion, 1999.
- D’Alembert, Jean Le Rond, and Diderot, Denis. *Encyclopédie*. In Diderot, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vols. 5–8.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Diderot, Denis. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Ed. Herbert Dieckmann, Jean Fabre, Jacques Proust, et al. 33 vols. Paris: Hermann, 1975–.
- Fish, Stanley. *Professional Correctness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Gasché, Rodolphe. *The Idea of Form. Rethinking Kant’s Aesthetics*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.
- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. P.H. Nidditch. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- . *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. 2nd edition. Ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemker. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1970.
- Novalis. *Novalis Schriften*. 5 vols. Ed. Richard Samuels. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–1988.
- Quintillian. *Institutio Oratoria*. 4 vols. Trans. H. E. Butler. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001.
- Weber, Samuel. *The Legend of Freud*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982.