The Origins of Interdisciplinary Studies

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At the heart of The Origins of the English Novel lies this question: how can we conceive the constitution of categories in the full historicity of their emergence—as they amount neither to their prior determinations nor to their eventual self-fulfillment? In confronting this question I found myself pursuing a method at once dialectical and interdisciplinary: attentive to the modes of negative definition by which "the novel" slowly coalesced in terms of what contemporaries could with some assurance say it was not, and (therefore) inclined to conceive putatively "literary" matters by variously "extra-literary" lights. The crucial question I asked of the novel may of course be posed of any category. And if we put this question to "interdisciplinary study" itself, the dialectical force of our response must be presumed because the negative definition of interdisciplinary study—that which overcomes and denies disciplinary division—is an explicit and operational aspect of its character. Accounting for the emergence of interdisciplinary thinking must also entail accounting for the emergence of its antithetical and indispensable constituents, the modern disciplines.

We are rightly accustomed to thinking of the Enlightenment as the period in which the foundations were laid for the modern disciplinary divisions. In an analogous way, but at a more general level, it is also the time when the division of knowledge began to be established in its recognizably modern form. By this I mean no more than the obvious: the secularization of the relationship between the divine and the human that sought to put religion in its place by conceiving it as a discrete mode of knowledge; the ambition to historicize knowledge as a distinctively modern inher-


ittance of ancient practice and to map it as a simultaneously logical and genealogical system; the empirical project that would separate the subjective act of knowledge from its objects and discriminate modes and degrees of knowledge by their comparative proximity to experience; the effort to delimit a sphere of aesthetic judgment distinct from the contingencies of social, political, and economic interest; not to mention the material and institutional conditions—curricular reform, state bureaucratization, professionalization, class conflict—that have given the modern division of knowledge a socio-political foundation.

However, it seems to me important to acknowledge, more than we tend to do, the historicity of Enlightenment division. It has become customary in modern and postmodern contexts to associate the eighteenth century with an absolute commitment to the sort of disciplinary and epistemological division that it bequeathed to modernity. But the naturalization of modern categories was achieved only when their experimental and contingent constitution in the early modern period was sufficiently distanced as a historical phenomenon to be detachable from the categories “themselves.” This was not an eighteenth-, but a nineteenth- and twentieth-century achievement. Enlightenment division in its vulgar acceptation is therefore a post-Enlightenment product; and I will want to reflect at the end of this essay on the interests that are served by modernity’s retrospective construction of the Enlightenment.

When we read the documents of Enlightenment division, we can see its historicity in the tendency of division to appear intertwined with a synthesizing counter-movement. This frequently takes the form of an involuntary reversal whereby the impulse toward division unexpectedly turns toward re-collection, or vice versa: the logic of objectivity is pushed to the point of acknowledging the subjective bases of cognition; the criterion of individual merit is found to conceal injustice comparable to that of its supposed antithesis, aristocratic honor; on the other hand, the use of empirical truth to substantiate religious faith ends in their more definitive alienation. But this conceptual phenomenon can also be a matter of intentional design: the famous Enlightenment projects in the division of knowledge often aimed, with greater or lesser explicitness, to provide thereby a new foundation for a unified scheme of knowledge. Although I will not be concerned in this essay with these most celebrated schemes of Enlightenment knowledge, I do want to focus here on the more intentional versions of this phenomenon, in which the ambition to divide knowledge is accompanied by the will to set the distinct realms of knowledge into significant relation; to argue their analogous, contiguous, or causal interconnection; and to use one such realm in order to disclose or contextualize some unexpected feature of another.

Of course, motives vary. What in one project may take the form of a relatively exclusive division may appear in another as an articulation preparatory to recombination. Moreover, like the projects in epistemological and disciplinary division on which they depend, these diverse exercises in “interdisciplinary” thinking are by our modern standards rudimentary. Indeed, it could not be otherwise; for in the early modern period, the several bodies of knowledge are not yet sufficiently detached from one another to permit the expertise of one to be methodologically brought to bear upon the matter of another. Nevertheless, the basic structure of the interdiscipli-
nary operation is already visible at this time, and it is in this respect that I want to locate the origins of interdisciplinary studies in the eighteenth century, as an inseparable implication of disciplinary thought itself.

If the Enlightenment is the birthplace of the modern disciplines, it is also the birthplace of modern interdisciplinary studies—a particular instance of the general truth that the Enlightenment gave to modernity both "itself" and the grounds of "its own" negation. To approach this from a different angle, not only the epistemological foundation but also the conceptual power of interdisciplinary studies lie in the historical conditions of disciplinary division. In this essay I will discuss several instances of eighteenth-century discourse that exemplify interdisciplinary inquiry as a discrimination of knowledges laying the ground for their problem-solving confrontation. My choice of particular examples will be guided by the aim to show that Enlightenment culture has been instrumental in elaborating categories—sublimation, ideology, the aesthetic, and free enterprise—that have in different ways proved central to interdisciplinary thought in the modern period. Having suggested in this fashion the historicity of interdisciplinary studies, I will conclude by considering the implications of this perspective for current work: for eighteenth-century scholars in particular, but also for a generation of critics invested—through "interdisciplinarity," cultural studies, and the like—in a methodological challenge to the claims of disciplinary difference.

I

Jonathan Swift conceived *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) as a satire on the "numerous and gross Corruptions in Religion and Learning" that would achieve its end through a structural alternation between chapters on religion and digressions on learning. This structural division is reinforced by a stylistic difference—the satire on religion is achieved through an allegorical narration, whereas the satire on learning proceeds discursively—and before the allegory has even begun, Swift suggests that the division of knowledge in which it participates might be enlarged to a typology of three modern discourses—roughly, dissenting religion, dissident politics, and (for lack of a current term) popular culture (56–63). Yet it is already clear that Swift's concern here lies as much in what unites these discourses as in what distinguishes them: namely, their corrupt modernity, their self-important "Ambition to be heard in a Crowd" (55). Because he impersonates a modern writer in the *Tale*, Swift there is constantly in the position of parodically exemplifying what he attacks. And in the *Tale's* climactic digression on madness, he elaborates a powerful theory that is both a symptom of modern corruption and a means of explaining its consistency across disparate realms of knowledge.

This is a theory of sublimation. Swift's aim in the digression on madness is to argue that innovative achievements in the realms of "empire," "philosophy," and "religion" are all reducible to the mental state we call madness, and that the circumstances occasioning this mental state, although various, are all reducible to bodily discharge of one sort or another. To both reductions may therefore be applied Swift's observation that "the Materials are formed from Causes of the widest
Difference, yet produce at last the same Substance and Effect” (163). First, he is bemused that minute physiological variations “can produce Effects of so vast a Difference from the same Vapour, as to be the sole Point of Individuation between Alexander the Great, Jack of Leyden, and Monsieur Des Cartes” (170). But second, he is also preoccupied by the materialist mechanism that underlies this oddity, a mechanism concisely expressed by the maxim that adorns Swift’s companion tract: “the Corrup:
tion of the Senses is the Generation of the Spirit.”® Political, intellectual, and religious behavior all may be reconceived and conflated under the heading of spirit, and this in turn is explicable as a sublimation, as an effect of the body.

Swift’s attitude toward his interdisciplinary assimilations has a well-known ambivalence. On the one hand, the implacable materialism of his interdisciplinary maneuvers is a powerfully demystifying strategy that subjects the variegated idealisms of the surface in all spheres—not only politics, religion, and philosophy but poetic convention, female beauty, and human pride—to the radical expedients of major surgery: “and then comes Reason officiously, with Tools for cutting, and opening, and mangling, and piercing, offering to demonstrate, that [things] are not of the same consistence quite thro’” (173). Swift’s tone here impersonates that of an aggrieved and complacent modern content with the comforts of the surface. Yet, on the other hand, this posture is complicated throughout by Swift’s implication that modernism consists precisely in overingenious rationality, in the rigorously surgical reduction of what common sense would dilate and expand: “I have been prevailed on . . . to travel in a compleat and laborious Dissertation upon the prime Productions of our Society, which . . . have darkly and deeply couched under them, the most finished and refined Systems of all Sciences and Arts; as I do not doubt to lay open by Untwisting or Unwinding, and either to draw up by Exantlation, or display by Incision” (66–67). At the conclusion of the digression on madness, the reader is puzzled to find that the careful structural division between “religion” and “learning” has evaporated. Learned digression is followed by learned digression, and when the religious allegory resumes, we have lost our confidence that someone capable of distinguishing between the two discourses is in charge. The “interdisciplinary” effect is not unlike that achieved in Swift’s parodic efforts to justify religious observance on pragmatic grounds,® which end by dissolving faith in the solvent of a deform ing secularization.

On the face of it, Alexander Pope’s treatise Peri Bathous (1728) would appear to render Swift’s experiment with the interdisciplinary theory of sublimation more literal and precise. Taking off from the ancient treatise On the Sublime (Peri Hypsous), Pope undertakes, in an enthusiastic impersonation of the modernist scholar Martinus Scriblerus, to supply modernity with its equivalent text. “Longinus” had analyzed the ways in which elevated language produces in its audience the effect of emotional transport. Implicit in the category of the sublime is the notion that it is a liminal or threshold effect, the result of a sublimation. Pope’s most vital point is not that moderns are able to cross only the inferior threshold into bathos—to fall rather than to rise—but that the bathos consists in so deranged a sense of threshold that our capacity to differentiate between high and low is lost. Thus Scriblerus ironically advises modern poets not to be satisfied either with the “cumbrous” or with the “buskin” style, but rather to mix them: “For as the first is the proper Engine to depress
what is High, so is the second to raise what is Base and Low to a ridiculous Visibility: When both these can be done at once, then is the Bathos in Perfection; as when a Man is set with his Head downward, and his Breech upright, his Degradation is compleat: one End of him is as high as ever, only that End is the wrong one.""9 The implication of this analysis is that moderns are most bathetic at those moments when they believe themselves to be most sublime, and Pope’s treatise is filled with exemplary quotations. The effect differs from that of the Longinian sublime in that it entails what might be called a frustrated sublimation. In pursuing the question of why this mechanism fails, Scriblerus opens out the cursory expressivism of his ancient source into a materialist reading of modern poetry. And although he briefly flirts with the individualist materialism of Swift’s emphasis on the effects of the body—“Poetry is a natural or morbid Secretion from the Brain” (12)—Pope throws far greater energy into developing what must be seen as a theory of ideology, an interdisciplinary argument that explains the characteristic style of modern poetry by situating it in its socioeconomic context.

Pope’s thesis is that the bathos thrives in modern poetry because of the conditions under which it is produced and consumed. Concluding his recipe “to make an Epic Poem” with the question of how to choose appropriate similes and metaphors, Scriblerus cheerfully remarks, “For this advise with your Bookseller [i.e., publisher]” (85). Of modern poets he says, “Their true Design is Profit or Gain; in order to acquire which, ’tis necessary to procure Applause, by administering Pleasure to the Reader: From whence it follows demonstrably, that their Productions must be suited to the present Taste”; “I have observ’d how fast the general Taste is returning to [the bathos]; and if the Intent of all Poetry be to divert and instruct, certainly that Kind which diverts and instructs the greatest Number, is to be preferr’d” (11, 10). Elsewhere Pope speculates on the roots of this modern quantification of value, this exclusive regard for the number and profitability of readers as the criterion of artistic success. In his analysis, the modern literary marketplace only completed a process begun by the invention of print, soon after which paper “became so cheap, and printers so numerous, that a deluge of authors cover’d the land: Whereby not only the peace of the honest unwriting subject was daily molested, but unmerciful demands were made of his applause, yea, of his money.”"10 The quantitative proliferation of authors and readers facilitated the establishment of an exchange system whose function was to homogenize and equalize standards of taste according to a quantitative standard of profit.

The force of Pope’s interdisciplinary insight into the commodity status of poetry depends on the premise that economy and poetry are divergent spheres of discourse—hence the drollery of Scriblerus’ suggestion that poetry “ought to be put upon the same foot with other Arts of this Age. The vast Improvement of modern Manufactures ariseth from their being divided into several Branches, and parcel’d out to several Trades. . . . To this Economy we owe the Perfection of our modern Watches; and doubtless we also might that of our modern Poetry and Rhetoric, were the several Parts branched out in the like manner” (72). Yet the force of his insight also argues the truth of this conflation of economy and poetry. Modern poetry is a “sublimation” not of the body but of modern economy, which is to say that it is an ideological
expression of that economy. The mystery of the commodity form, which transforms use-value into exchange-value, encapsulates the confusion of the bathos, which confounds the elevation of commercial value with the degradation of artistic value.

In the coordination of aesthetic value and exchange-value, Pope seems to allude to some features of the modern category of the aesthetic. Yet the idea of the aesthetic is only emergent at this time, and although its interdisciplinary mechanism is less visible to modern eyes than that of ideology theory, it, too, entails the convergence of categories that have been divided against each other. These are the categories of empirical and spiritual knowledge. It is a commonplace that one end of art in the modern world is to secularize religion, to replace its traditional functions and responsibilities by a thoroughly humanized mode of spirituality. I would like to amplify this well-known insight by suggesting that the modern aestheticization of the spirit be seen in part as a response to the demystifying skepticism of the empiricist critique of religious faith. The aesthetic substitutes for the powers of divinity and spirituality an internalized and humanized replacement that evades the strictures of empirical epistemology by avoiding the metaphysical claims of religious spirituality. Celebrating the imaginative author as a "divinely-inspired Enthusiast," Edward Young shows how far this replacement has advanced by the middle of the eighteenth century: "How independent of the world is he, who can daily find new Acquaintance, that at once entertain, and improve him, in the little World, the minute but fruitful Creation, of his own mind?" In "An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as the Subject of Poetry," William Collins argues the value for poetry of what he frankly calls the "false themes" of archaic Scottish culture—"the fairy people," "the gifted wizard sees," "old Runic bards . . . with uncouth lyres," and the like (ll. 20, 41–42, 54, 172). The value of these "false themes" lies precisely in the fact that they are articles not of belief but of "superstition." No longer commanding religious faith, such themes are yet resonant with the secularized spirituality of the poetic passions.

In scenes like these, which, daring to depart
From sober Truth, are still to Nature true,
And call forth fresh delights to Fancy's view,
The heroic Muse employed her Tasso's art!

... Prevailing poet, whose undoubting mind
Believed the magic wonders which he sung!
Hence at each sound imagination glows.
(ll. 188–91, 198–200)

So, the aesthetic attitude retrieves the passion of religious awe by rendering it invulnerable to empirical demystification. But I also want to go beyond the singular thesis of the aestheticizing of the spirit by suggesting that at its Enlightenment inception, the aesthetic is engaged in a utopian project of double replacement, undertaking to mediate the division between the empirical and the spiritual by exploiting the powers of each while avoiding their respective liabilities. How does this work for the discourse of empiricism?
Joseph Addison says,

The Pleasures of the Imagination are not so gross as those of Sense. . . . A Man of a Polite Imagination . . . meets with a secret Refreshment in a Description, and often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures. . . . A Man should endeavour . . . to make the Sphere of his innocent Pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with Safety, and find in them such a Satisfaction as a wise Man would not blush to take.\(^13\)

According to Addison, the pleasures of the imagination are “innocent” of the corruptions to which merely physical pleasures are vulnerable. They are also innocent of the dangers of empirical reality: so much so that aesthetic pleasure requires—even consists in—the consciousness that it is not empirical. “How comes it to pass,” Addison asks,

that we should take delight in being terrified or dejected by a Description, when we find so much Uneasiness in the Fear or Grief which we receive from any other Occasion? . . . The Nature of this Pleasure . . . does not arise so properly from the Description of what is Terrible, as from the Reflection we make on our Selves at the time of reading it. When we look on such hideous Objects, we are not a little pleased to think we are in no Danger of them. We consider them at the same time as Dreadful and Harmless; so that the more frightful Appearance they make, the greater is the Pleasure we receive from the Sense of our own Safety. . . . This is, however, such a kind of Pleasure as we are not capable of receiving, when we see a Person actually lying under the Tortures that we meet with in a Description; because, in this Case, the Object presses too close upon our Senses, and bears so hard upon us, that it does not give us time or leisure to reflect on our selves.\(^14\)

Addison’s pleasures of the imagination avoid by their very immateriality the prudential critique of physical pain and corruption. And herein lies a recognizable germ of the modern idea of the aesthetic: a particular sort of “pleasure” akin to that of sense experience yet detached from the material implications of empirical cognition and activity. The pleasures of the imagination mimetically capitalize on the empirical powers of sense perception while avoiding their physical consequences. They replace physical and sensible activity with a representation or imaginative enactment, escaping both the crude literalism of empirical epistemology and the risks attendant upon physical experience. But this replacement process echoes the aesthetic attitude toward religious spirituality, the status of the pleasures of the imagination as strictly psychological states that evoke the aura of the religious without laying claim to its metaphysics. Seen from this perspective, the category of the aesthetic is an interdisciplinary project, rooted in the division of knowledge and animated by an ambition to exploit that division’s antagonists to establish its own autonomy of them.
My final example of Enlightenment interdisciplinary thought, the doctrine of economic free enterprise, was obliged to wait for its elaboration until the pursuit of economic self-interest had been legitimated. Of the many intellectual developments that contributed to this outcome, I will focus here on one associated with Bernard Mandeville’s famous paradox that private vices make for public benefits. According to Mandeville, “the main Design” of the *Fable of the Bees* (1705, 1714) “is to shew the Impossibility of enjoying all the most elegant Comforts of Life that are to be met with in an industrious, wealthy and powerful Nation, and at the same time be bless’d with all the Virtue and Innocence that can be wish’d for in a Golden Age.” Mandeville reminds us here of the familiar view in a Christian commonwealth that morality superintends the norms of both private and public behavior. Private ethics and the public welfare are coordinate: selflessness—individual goodness—promotes the collective good. By this way of thinking, ethics and economics are correlative spheres of knowledge. Mandeville’s aim, however, is to divide these spheres of knowledge against each other by showing the incompatibility of their respective norms—by showing that the pursuit of those private passions commonly deemed vicious is essential to the enjoyment of those public pleasures we agree are social goods. Only by counterposing the discourse of ethics to that of economics can we understand how the pursuit of vicious self-interest subserves the collective good. And yet, for many readers, the implication of Mandeville’s argument was a renovated correlation of the discourses according to which not morality but pragmatics superintend normative behavior. If you would enjoy social goods, then you must abjure the ethical good.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith takes Mandeville’s argument to task: “It is the great fallacy of Dr. Mandeville’s book to represent every passion as wholly vicious, which is so in any degree and in any direction.” In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), however, Smith undertakes a celebrated argument that many have seen as a sophistication of Mandeville’s, despite its scrupulous avoidance of the absolutizing tendencies of ethical language. Smith says,

> It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. . . . Every individual is continually exerting himself to find out the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command. It is his own advantage, indeed, and not that of the society, which he has in view. But the study of his own advantage naturally, or rather necessarily leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to the society. . . . He intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.

Like Mandeville, Smith is diverted by the paradox that society thrives not through cooperative but through self-interested behavior. The paradox is a utopian solution to a venerable problem, the conflict between individual desires and social necessities. Self-restraint, so far from being the touchstone of economic welfare, is now, like protectionist legislation, positively injurious to it. Smith’s quasi-providential metaphor bespeaks his sensitivity to the sort of accusation leveled against
Mandeville for similar views; yet in that very gesture it also alerts us to the justice of the charge. For by speaking of the marketplace as though it were a superintending divinity, Smith goes far toward authorizing the modern notion that ethics is a subcategory of economics. In its developed form, the doctrine of free enterprise is not a license to greed: it is the transvaluation of greed by virtue of its economic value. Economic individualism is not divided against the collective welfare; it presupposes it. The division between ethics and economics is thus reconciled by the interdisciplinary intervention of free enterprise.

II

What can be learned from the foregoing instances of Enlightenment interdisciplinary studies? We are inclined to see the idea of the aesthetic and the doctrine of free enterprise as central exhibits of Enlightenment division. Artistic experience and economic behavior, formerly embedded in a dense network of social, political, and ethical concerns, are separated out in modern culture as autonomous and self-justifying categories. Over the long term, the truth of this view cannot be questioned. Yet the implication of my argument is that the categories for which the claim to autonomy is made most vigorously in the modern world emerge first as utopian and synthetic solutions to the problem of division.

As deployed by Swift and Pope, the interdisciplinary theories of sublimation and ideology are instruments of simultaneous “Enlightenment” and “anti-Enlightenment.” Their proponents are both fatuous moderns and intensely skeptical critics of modernity. Their efficacy is to confound difference through the force of a relentless materialism whose ethical charge is both negative and positive, both an aggravation of and a remedy for the modern disease of biological and capitalist corruption. Rightly seen as uncompromising antagonists of modern innovation, Swift and Pope are also rightly seen as our most brilliant and prescient exemplars of modernity.

Interdisciplinary studies—the juxtaposition and interpenetration of seemingly autonomous and free-standing fields of inquiry—have been justified most persuasively as essential to the full historicization of what we know and how we know it. Evidence like the foregoing, however, suggests that what we commonly call interdisciplinary studies do only half the work that is required. They approach the problem of disciplinary autonomy, as it were, from the outside; and in neglecting a reciprocal, internal approach, they risk aggravating the very condition they are meant to alleviate.

For what the foregoing evidence suggests is that the modern disciplinary categories of knowledge are ostensibly integral entities that conceal a heterogeneous historicity. Our familiar disciplines have secret histories, their apparently monolithic integrity sometimes obscuring a radically disparate and interdisciplinary core. Indeed, within the history of a discipline may lurk precisely the interdisciplinary trajectory that modern studies seek by laboriously engineering its conjunction with another discipline. To acknowledge this is to endorse a modicum of scholarly humil-
ity. At their best, our interdisciplinary studies of the Enlightenment may only return us to the epistemological fluidity that was customary for its contemporaries. To “historicize” eighteenth-century “literature,” to subject eighteenth-century “history” to the antipositivist skepticism of a literary “textuality,” might even be seen as acts of multilayered anachronism by which we project onto the past the terminology of a modern disjunction, and presume to relieve the past of its disjunctive burden by methods of its own invention.

We can see in the sort of Enlightenment usage exemplified above a model of disciplinary and interdisciplinary activity at its most illuminating: heuristic, operational, informed by a sense of the utility of the epistemological project. At its center is the empirical premise that knowledge requires the constitution of the object of knowledge apart from the knowing subject. In the fifty years spanned by Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) and Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature (1739), the restless interplay between the subject and the object was elaborated with a suppleness and subtlety that bespeak a view of conceptual divisions not as dichotomies, but as tools to think with. In modernity this understanding persists most visibly in dialectical rationality, for which division is erroneous only if unconditional. By these terms, all division is historical, hence both provisional and inescapable, a prerequisite for knowledge because knowledge requires the dialectical negotiation of parts and wholes. And by this way of thinking, the critique of disciplinary boundaries implicit in interdisciplinary studies—particularly those of the Enlightenment period—would incorporate and capitalize on a recognition of the historical contingency, hence “necessity,” of those boundaries.

Cultural studies has the auspicious ambition to extend interdisciplinary studies in innovative ways, and the achievements of scholarship that proceeds under its aegis are already considerable. But cultural studies also risks a descent into unhistorical thinking insofar as it acts on the belief that disciplinary divisions are an impediment to knowledge, consignable to the trashbin of history through recourse to the unconditional syntheses of a transdisciplinary “textuality.” Such recourse has the effect not only of shutting down the dialectical engine of knowledge, the strategic interplay of parts and wholes; it also denies access to a vital element of historical knowledge, the terms in which the past conceives itself. Especially for those of us who do interdisciplinary work in eighteenth-century studies, it is crucial that our work acknowledge, as part of its work, the volatility of the early modern disciplines—their proto-existence in states of suspended emergence—as well as the volatility of early modern interdisciplinary studies itself, a utopian experiment inseparable from the contemporaneous utopian experiment of disciplinary thinking. Only in this way can our interdisciplinary work be called historical.

In recent approaches to Enlightenment interdisciplinary studies there has been a tendency to forget the dialectical legacy of Enlightenment thought, to reduce it to a strict exercise in absolutist epistemology. This amnesia provides us with a false enlightenment against which our own may be seen to shine with a more innovative and revolutionary illumination. But in simplifying the past we also condemn ourselves to recapitulating what we would supersede, the ahistorical reifications of
dichotomous opposition: Their disciplinary divisions, Our "interdisciplinarity." But why "interdisciplinarity?"

The puzzling preference of this term to "interdisciplinary studies" in much contemporary theoretical discourse suggests the thickening of epistemology into ontology, methodological procedure into condition of being, something that people do into something that subsists as an autonomous entity. Perhaps this turn toward the ontic in recent theory (compare "intertextuality," "intentionality," "canonicity") aims to bring certain cultural phenomena out into the open, to disclose as objectively systematic what previous generations are thought to have viewed only obscurely, disparately, and with a casual impressionism. Yet the suffix has a reifying resonance, dehistoricizing (in the present case) an integrative method whose very purpose is to breathe history back into categories naturalized by division. And it therefore may be appropriate, if dispiriting, if the forces of "interdisciplinarity" are mobilized in comprehension of an Enlightenment that has been stabilized into submission. To embrace a more authentically Enlightenment version of interdisciplinary studies would also facilitate a more authentic understanding of the Enlightenment.

NOTES


2. See, for example, John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690); Giambattista Vico, De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia (1710); Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, Discours preliminaire de l'Encyclopédie (1751); Immanuel Kant, Critik der Urtheilskraft (1790).

3. Although the national origin of these categories is no doubt multiple, I will confine my examples to English texts.


6. For a closely parallel version of this argument, see "A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit" in the same volume.


8. See, for example, An argument To prove, That the Abolishing of Christianity in England, May, as Things now Stand, be attended with some Inconveniences, and perhaps, not produce those many good Effects proposed thereby (1711).


11. Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison (1759), 54, 6.


18. This may be said, I think, while also acknowledging Smith's acute awareness of the dangers of capitalist ideology.