Over the years, I have been given many opportunities to present my research to audiences across the waters in a number of different institutional settings. Invariably, two responses have been forthcoming, in addition, that is, to whatever howls of disbelief greeted the arguments of the talks themselves. First, someone would express surprise at how much younger I was than they imagined; and second, someone else would profess bafflement at my being a historian. Of late, I have noticed, alas, for not very mysterious reasons, a palpable decline in the frequency of the first of these reactions; the second, however, remains stubbornly constant. In Europe, Asia, Latin America, or Australia, what I do, whatever that may be, is still not normally done by scholars housed in departments of History. As a result, I usually find myself classified as a social theorist or cultural critic or visual arts expert or even, dare I say it, a philosopher. I won’t deny that this kind of misidentification produces a certain frisson of pleasure, as if I have somehow broken free of my earthly ties and emerged as one of Mannheim’s free-floating intellectuals, able to soar over the walls of my disciplinary cage. But, at the same time, I can’t quite shake a nagging anxiety that my impersonation of a non-historian will be revealed...
for what it is, a fraudulent misrepresentation on the part of someone who has foolishly allowed himself to graze in someone else’s field.

I impose these confessional remarks on you to make three initial points. First, any discussion of the construction and demolition of interdisciplinary boundaries and identities has to take into account the radically distinct contexts in which they exist. Even in the age of travelling theory, turboprofs, and internet globalization, local variations are still very meaningful. No general pronouncements about the state of the humanities *tout court* can hope to do justice to the regional, national, and cultural anomalies that defeat homogenization. However powerful the Americanization of international culture may be, it is wrong to assume that our ways of mapping the intellectual and scholarly world are fully hegemonic. The expectations of audiences count as much as the self-labelling of those who stand in front of them.

The second point I want to make is that the metamorphosis in which I am obliged to engage when I stray into other contexts is not entirely successful. That is, no matter how I try to meet those audience expectations, I cannot entirely jettison the professional formation—or perhaps deformation—produced by my training and socialization as a historian and reinforced by more than three decades of squatting with members of the same tribe. Although my sub-field of intellectual history can often serve as an excuse for forays into interdisciplinary no man’s land or even alien disciplinary territory, I always feel the obligation to keep my papers in order in case my cover is blown. If challenged, in other words, I can always fall back on the identity of a professional historian, whose role is merely to chronicle the intellectual triumphs and follies of others rather than commit some of his own. Don’t expect me, I can defensively protest, to solve your philosophical or political dilemmas; I only need tell you where they came from and what may explain their curious evolution.

My third initial point is that contrary to the implication that might be drawn from this reticence, which may suggest to some an excessive modesty about the role intellectual historians can and should play in plunging into the discourses whose history they reconstruct, I think it is essentially a healthy reaction to the pressure to efface disciplinary boundaries that is coming at us from so many directions. In what follows, in fact, I want to mount a modest defence of the need to keep the walls up or at least
to dispel the idea that knocking them down is somehow a self-evidently good thing. Perhaps the most insistently recent voice arguing for this outcome is that of Edward O. Wilson, the Harvard sociobiologist whose bestselling plea for what he calls “consilience,” not only among the humanities but among the natural and social sciences as well, attracted considerable recent attention when it appeared more than a decade ago.¹ Borrowed from the nineteenth-century philosopher William Whewell, the term denotes a “jumping together” of facts and theories from different levels to form a single grand theory uniting them all. Although Wilson’s frankly reductionist and often naïve version of the unification argument, which is little more than a hostile takeover bid from the natural sciences, need not detain us in its details, it at least gives us a useful name for the most extreme expression of the hostility to disciplinary boundaries. By calling this essay “The Menace of Consilience,” I want to suggest that the weakening of disciplinarity, within the humanities let alone in a larger arena, may lead us down a slippery slope into intellectual incoherence—or perhaps what is worse, an extorted and sterile super-coherence.

The inclination to efface boundaries separating disciplines has come, of course, not only from attempts, such as Wilson’s, to find a master key to unlock the mysteries of human culture and society by reducing conscious mind to physiological brain, but also from some of the most reflexive work done by people resolutely still on the mind side of the dichotomy. The past few decades have seen the emergence of a kind of superdiscipline that we might call, following the lead of a recent collection of essays by many of its most notable practitioners, “historical and critical studies in disciplinarity.”² In a slew of books, special journals issues, and conferences—such as the one that gave rise to this volume—the formation, dissolution, collapse, and crossbreeding of disciplines has been put under the microscope. What Clifford Geertz, in a celebrated essay of 1980, called “blurred genres” has become as much a normative goal as descriptive statement.³ Since 1988, there has even been a successful journal called History of the Human Sciences explicitly devoted to the following aim: “To promote linkages between the different human sciences, encourage the exchange of ideas and the establishment of interdisciplinary projects.” The rise of what my colleague David Hollinger calls new “transdisciplinary journals,” such as Critical Inquiry, Salmagundi, October, Representations, Social Text,
Raritan, Daedalus, and Common Knowledge, further exemplifies this trend, which is evident as well in the late lamented Lingua Franca, whose purview was the professional academic world as a boundaried whole. And what was once a scattering of isolated Humanities Centres, serving as oases of interdisciplinarity in a desert of departmental sand dunes, has developed into a dense network of interlocking channels through which nimble scholars can navigate their careers with scarcely ever a need to retreat to dry land.

As a result, we have learned to be acutely aware of the ways in which dubious origin myths, reconstructed teleological narratives, rhetorical demarcation strategies, institutional consolidations, and professional credentialing mechanisms all conspire to lend the aura of naturalness to what has been in fact only historically constructed. To cite one representative formulation, that of the historian of science Timothy Lenoir, “disciplines are political institutions that demarcate areas of academic territory, allocate privileges and responsibilities of expertise, and structure claims on resources . . . . disciplines are embedded in market relationships regulating the flow of social and technical practices; they are creatures of history reflecting human habits and preferences rather than a fixed order of nature” (1993, 82).

No one can deny the advance produced by this kind of reflexivity about the enabling—or perhaps disabling—conditions of our work. A genealogical rather than teleological historical consciousness, one that disdains triumphalist narratives of disciplinary consolidation, usefully undermines any residual Whiggishness in the legitimating stories we tell ourselves (and use against our rivals in the struggle for the scarce resources of academic life). Vigilance against canonical accounts that culminate in a presentist celebration of the status quo is a valuable lesson for all historical reconstructions, especially when they are so blatantly in the service of maintaining existing hierarchies of power and influence. After the work of Pierre Bourdieu in particular, we cannot ignore the continuities and homologies between academic fields and their counterparts elsewhere in the social order or deny that struggles over cultural capital and the distinctions it subtends can be as fierce as those over its economic or social counterparts. The realization, moreover, that active research programs
are not necessarily congruent with given disciplinary boundaries, indeed may thrive when they cross them, can only be considered an advance.

But in all of this, one can also hear the echo of the connotational shift produced by Foucault’s fateful linking of discipline with punishment, undermining its earlier and more neutral implication of following rules. That is, the realization that knowledge is significantly determined by power and that disciplines are artificial constructs in the service of power maintenance lends an aura of heroic resistance to attempts to transgress boundaries, disrupt settled ideologies, and dereify what has concealed through the oblivion or mythical rewriting of origins. Our conventional wisdom, in fact, now routinely favours hybridity over purity, pollution over abjection, marginalization over centralization, and fragmentation over wholeness, so that it has been easy to infuse the blurring of genres with an almost moral value. The rhetoric of crisis, which once might have suggested pain and distress, now seems to imply the well-deserved toppling of brittle and antiquated residues of a benighted past. That frisson of naughty pleasure to which I confessed at the outset is the result, and we all seem to share some of it these days.

There is, however, an important distinction that has to be drawn between modes of blurring genres and effacing boundaries. The one I have identified with Wilson’s universalizing and objectivizing concept of consilience has its tacit counterpart in certain tendencies in the humanities and social sciences. The most boldly totalizing enterprises, such as the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research’s ambitious collaborative program of the 1930s, whose rise and decline I have discussed elsewhere (see Jay 1986), may no longer seem very compelling. But there are still at least tacitly holistic tendencies in certain contemporary trends. Perhaps the most obvious is the recent inflation of the idea of culture to encompass virtually everything that is traditionally compartmentalized in discrete sub-spheres. Raymond Williams’s celebrated plea to extend the concept from its elite usage to an anthropological “whole way of life” has been answered by the vigorous growth of “cultural studies” as an omnivorous leviathan that threatens to swallow up everything else. Understood in the light of this approach, academic disciplines themselves are conceptualized as cultural practices rather than epistemological categories that open up vistas on the real world outside. Although there have been rumblings
of discontent about the hypertrophy of the culture concept—see, for example, Geoffrey Hartman’s *The Fateful Question of Culture* (1997) and at least some of the essays collected by John Carlos Rowe as “Culture” and *the Problem of the Disciplines* (1998)—the homogenizing force of cultural studies, at least in certain of its guises, is not yet spent.

A similar effect has been produced by the succession of so-called “turns” that have made discrete disciplines seem more like fields of obedient flowers straining to face the same sun than settled scholarly traditions. The “linguistic turn” was only the first of many that have recently produced this contagious tropism; we now have interpretive, rhetorical, and pictorial or visual turns, and perhaps are on the cusp of performative and ethical ones as well. With so many suns to turn to, the homogenizing is by no means uniform, but the weakening of received disciplinary identities is abetted nonetheless. We may therefore be moving toward yet another “post” moment, that of postdisciplinarity.

Or so it might seem, if we neglect the second mode of blurring genres in the humanities, which cannot be analogized from Wilson’s imperial notion of consilience and disdains any hegemonizing concept like critical theory, culture, or the rhetoric of collective turns. Here we encounter what might be called the anti-foundationalist, anti-universalizing variant of blurring genres, which resists seeking any master key to subsume all of them. Instead, it rests content with the realization that disciplines themselves, for all of their homogenizing pressures, have often been tense and fragile agglomerations of competing methods, interests, and focal points with elusive essences, if there are essences at all. It knows as well that the demarcations separating them have always been porous and shifting with no impermeable walls keeping out intruders. But rather than bemoaning this condition, it celebrates it. It knows that no amount of policing has ever prevented subdisciplines from rising to challenge the hegemony of the mainstream definitions of what a discipline really is. And, perhaps most important of all, it recognizes that the pressures to dissolve, fragment, and hybridize what may seem solid at one moment are met by counterpressures to form affinity groups and new collective identities around nascent research programs or innovative methodologies or challenges from the world outside of the academy.
This version of postdisciplinarity turns out to be just as much predisciplinarity, insofar as new configurations and alliances are on the horizon. Unlike the consilience model of universal coordination, it embraces a pluralist welter of fresh agglomerations, which resist being synchronized and hierarchized in a grand system. Some of these may well supplant older models, although others may create palimpsests in which the older order is not so much effaced as partly covered over. Or, to employ yet another metaphor, the ruins of old disciplinary boundaries are not so much levelled in order to remap the world anew as recombined to form what begin as fragile and eclectic juxtapositions and soon congeal into pseudo-natural discursive edifices.

One way to account for, or at least conceptualize, the dynamism of disciplinary reinvention is, in fact, to rethink some of the metaphorical assumptions that often underlie our traditional ways of approaching the issue. Often we borrow our terminology from planar geometry, in which fields are taken to be boundaried spaces with explicit borders and homogeneous interiors. We talk, as indeed I have at various earlier points in this essay, about “walls” around disciplines or “turf wars” for control of contested territory. The implied perspective on such a field is that of a distant observer with a God’s eye view—or at least that of an omniscient dean—above the surveyed landscape. Disciplines become like so many nations on a two-dimensional map. If one gains, the implication is that others are diminished; if two merge, the resulting territory is assumed to be so much greater than before; if one retreats, others will fill the vacuum left behind.

But what if a different metaphoric were evoked, one in which fields are of force or energy and the dimensions at least three in number? What if, with Bourdieu and Wacquant, we acknowledged that “to think in terms of field is to think relationally?” (1992, 119). The force field model, which was advanced as well by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, is one I have often evoked in the past, and I do not want to rehearse all of the arguments in its favour now. But with reference to the question of disciplinarity, the following points are worth underlining. Like the familiar trope of “family resemblances” advanced by Wittgenstein, but with the added virtue of alerting us to the multiplicity of pushes and pulls that go beyond the duality of matrilineal and patrilineal descent, a force field
resists the logic of subsumption. That is, every discipline is a juxtaposed set of elements that cohere for at least a certain period of time because of the energies that tie them together rather than a smoothly homogeneous body of practices, methods, and subject matters subsumed under and governed by shared rules. Within constituted disciplines, there is thus no privileged location from which the whole can be seen and controlled. As Julie Thompson Klein has noted, “unidisciplinary competence is a myth, because the degree of specialization and the volume of information that fall within the boundaries of a named academic discipline are larger than any single individual can master” (1993, 188).

If we treat disciplines as relational networks of elements, tensely kept together by the discursive equivalent of gravitational or electromagnetic energy, rather than coherent, two-dimensional territories with explicit boundaries, we can, moreover, better understand the ways in which their internal workings and external environments may seem roughly continuous rather than radically divided. For disciplines themselves can, of course, be the elements in higher-order force fields, which allow us to place them in such categories as the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Because they are dynamic and relational rather than static and saturated fields, their elements are often simultaneously involved in other juxtapositions with elements from other disciplines. Because the forces that tie them together may be weaker, at least at certain moments, they can seem more firmly located in one disciplinary network than another. However, the constellation of forces can shift for a variety of reasons, so that identities may be transformed. The field of economic history, for example, may move from history to economics departments and back again, or new fields like visual culture or theory may set up shop on their own.

These are all pretty self-evident observations, but they may help us to understand that the so-called fracturing or dissolution of disciplines is not as unusual as it may seem and certainly need not be a cause for alarmist talk of disciplinary “crisis” or “collapse.” But how do they support the point I sought to make at the beginning of the talk: the need to mount a modest defence of the relative independence and coherence of disciplines? If, as I have just said, the internal and external dynamics of fields are roughly homologous, doesn’t this undermine the very solidity of
discrete disciplines I seem to be defending? Doesn’t it provide ammunition for a non-foundationalist variant of the universalization argument by positing a meta-network of energies and forces in which disciplines are merely fragile constellations of ephemeral juxtapositions? Aren’t I just advancing another version of the meta-discipline of disciplinarity, which seeks a vantage point above the fray?

Although I would concede the plausibility of these readings, let me suggest three reasons why I think they are not fully adequate. First, to make a familiar point that nonetheless bears rehearsing, the fact that a temporal constellation of elements can be seen as ultimately impermanent and open to future adjustment or even dissolution does not undermine the fact that for a certain, albeit finite period of time, the forces that keep it in order do prevail. Our solar system will not last forever, but I wouldn’t bet on it spinning out of control in the near future. Or, to put it in the terms of another discourse, which harkens back to the Western Marxism of a Lukács, to realize that fixed structures are reifications, sustained in part by the oblivion of their origins in human practice, is not sufficient to undo their effects. Successful dereification is a much more onerous and time-consuming effort, which goes beyond mere consciousness raising. We may, in other words, know that knowledge is an effect of power, that disciplines are in the service of hierarchy, that the world they depict can be described in very different ways, but we can’t then immediately reverse their power over us. Disciplines, in short, are institutions as well as discourses, and changing institutions is not as quick or easy as it may seem to radical constructivists.

Second, if we take seriously the three-dimensionality of the force field model, we can appreciate the inertial staying power of the constellations that have come to exist. Rather than assuming fields are flat, planar, two-dimensional spaces, we have to acknowledge the bisecting axes of the subjects who enter the disciplines and the objects that are assumed to be their external points of reference. Rather, that is, than seeing disciplinary discourses as self-sufficient and entirely immanent, constructing both their subjects and objects with no remainder, we need to be alert to the ways in which practitioners and worlds exceed their discursive interface. To take the former first, we have to recognize that even if we accept the discipline-as-cultural-practice model, we must leave some leeway for
the agency of those who engage in the practices. This helps us to account for the very reflexivity that allows us to see outside the discursive field in which we are situated, and thus perhaps challenge some of its characteristics. But conversely, we should also understand that included in that agency is the formation of the practitioner within specific historical constellations whose inertial power remains powerful over time, no matter how radical his or her attempt to leave it behind and remake the disciplinary world anew. That is, the sense of fraudulent interloping I mentioned at the outset of this talk when discussing my own forays beyond the boundaries of history is an almost inevitable result of the baggage I bring with me. The same might be said of unapologetic universalizers like Edward O. Wilson, whose allegedly neutral call for consilience turns out, to no one’s surprise, to be a plea for the power of evolutionary biology and cognitive science to explain everything. No one, in short, is socialized into a fully transcendental, transdisciplinary identity, at least not since Leibniz, who is frequently taken to be the last intellectual to claim universal mastery. Even the most versatile polymath has his or her limitations in a context in which the intellectual division of labor has become irreversible. For this reason, interdisciplinarity must be at best a collaborative project, but one which cannot fully overcome the individual prejudices of the participants in the game, who cannot fully leave behind their idiosyncratic formations. No collapse of disciplines is thus possible when we recognize the subjective role of the actual people, none of whom is beyond particularity, who engage in and sustain cultural practices.

A similar conclusion follows if we think closely about the objects of inquiry that are the substantive focus of disciplinary investigation. A realist epistemology will, of course, contend that the different areas of inquiry correspond to natural kinds, which are not merely the effects of discursive construction. We cut into nature at the joints, so the familiar metaphor goes, and need to make sense of its parts through different approaches that will best reveal its separate workings. There are, for example, individuals and there are societies which allow psychology and sociology to carve out their respective disciplinary domains. Both have their ontological, or at least historically congealed truths, which make any attempt to privilege one over the other by dogmatic adherents of methodological individualism or methodological holism an exercise in misplaced concreteness. As
Adorno once put it with reference to the project of a social psychology: “The separation of sociology and psychology is both correct and false. False because it encourages the specialists to relinquish the attempt to know the totality which even the separation of the two demands; and correct insofar as it registers more intransigently the split that has actually taken place in reality than does the premature unification at the level of theory” (1967, 78).

Such an argument may not convince many in these days of strong constructivist and culturalist critiques of naturalization, but even a historicist version of the objects of disciplinary inquiry must take into account the stubborn effects of disciplinary constellations in the past. Training in a discipline, after all, involves more than mastering its methods and knowing how to apply them; it also entails becoming fully conversant with what we call the “literature” in the field, that is, its canon. Although we may work to go beyond it, a struggle that ironically often involves acquiring knowledge of the canonical literature in another field, we cannot construct the objects of our inquiry ex nihilo. They come to us already filtered through their prior constitution, which more or less tenaciously determines their current and future status. Even if we can question the legitimating narratives of disciplinary identity and show that power and the scramble for cultural capital rather than disinterested knowledge subtends the hierarchical division of the pie, we cannot simply undo the effects of prior consolidations and demarcations. In short, a relational and three-dimensional notion of a force field will allow us to understand that both the subject of disciplinary inquiry and the object carry with them the residues of past configurations, which cannot be jettisoned at will in the name of universalizing consilience.

Perhaps these considerations make my plea for preserving distinctions a bit too defensively. Perhaps they suggest only why it will be unlikely that disciplines will collapse, not why it is a good thing that they won’t. One final thought will, I hope, help to provide a more positive answer. It will be evident in how I have been arguing that I think it imperative to foreground the metaphorical assumptions underlying any discussion of disciplinarity: consilience as a jumping together, disciplines as either boundaried, two-dimensional fields or relational networks of forces in three dimensions, even the word “discipline” itself as carrying connotational baggage.
from its placement in a Foucauldian universe of normalization and coercion. What, we might ask, is the more fundamental role of metaphor in the relations between or among disciplines? Here the efforts of the German philosopher and historian of ideas Hans Blumenberg to defend what he calls the value of “nonconceptuality” (see Blumenberg 1997) may give us some guidance.

According to Blumenberg’s “metaphorology,” metaphor is more than a mere ornament of speech, more than a mere linguistic expression that can be improved by the imposition of a precise, conceptually rigorous terminology, such as that often sought by science and analytic philosophy. It shows instead that often sedimented in seemingly univocal terms are the corpses of dead and forgotten metaphors, an argument famously made by Nietzsche. These metaphors arise out of a pre-scientific lifeworld in which attempts to master reality depended on analogizing from the known to the unknown, the familiar to the unfamiliar, what is present to what is not. “Analogy is the realism of metaphor,” Blumenberg writes (1997, 95). It even appears in modern natural science, where, for example, the macrosystem of the solar system was analogized to explain the workings of the microsystem of the molecule, at least for a while. What metaphors preserve, even when they seem to imply homologous relations and symbolic integration, is the inevitable heterogeneity of the two terms metaphorized. Napoleon may be like an eagle in his courage, nobility, and predatory guile, but one of them has feathers and the other does not. Even in non-aesthetic contexts, therefore, metaphors should not be seen as weak anticipations of carefully defined concepts, preliminary approximations of what a more rigorous linguistic univocality can more precisely provide. They are rather salutary checks to the homogenizing power of conceptual subsumption or, in the words of Husserl cited by Blumenberg, “resistances to harmony” (Blumenberg 1997, 83). As a form of nonconceptual knowledge—and Blumenberg wants to emphasize that they are legitimate forms of knowledge—they are akin to the ineffable understanding we derive from reading a face, something that is closer to an art than a science, but meaningful nonetheless.

Blumenberg does not, to be sure, extend his analysis to the relations among disciplines. In fact, at one point in his argument he says that “the homelessness of metaphor in a world determined by disciplined
experience can be seen in the uneasiness encountered by everything that does not meet the standard of language that tends toward objective univocity” (1997, 89). Here it seems that disciplining once again connotes a repressive Foucauldian world of normalization and control. But if we allow ourselves to think of disciplines in the ways I have suggested above, as relational force fields with internal heterogeneities and three-dimensional configurations, then their proximity to nonconceptuality in Blumenberg’s sense becomes clearer. That is, the analogical rather than subsumptive logic of moving from one discipline to another should be recalled in order to resist the homogenizing danger latent in dreams of universal consilience. When, for example, advocates of the linguistic turn suggest that we understand kinship structures, the syntagmatic structures of films, or the unconscious as if they followed the semiotic and grammatical protocols of a language, what needs to be remembered is that although something is gained by the simile “like a language,” something is inevitably lost. When we talk, to take another example, of reading images as if they were texts, we may be stimulated to ask questions of them that would be ignored otherwise, but we have to stop short before concluding that they are nothing but texts with no remainders that make them specifically visual. Likewise, borrowing the idea of capital from economics and applying it to culture is a healthy check to idealist illusions of cultural autonomy, but applied too literally and reductively, it can preclude in advance any acknowledgement of those aspects of culture that transcend all economic modes of behaviour. And when we enrich our understanding of historical narratives by placing them in the context of more general theories of narratology, we must also acknowledge that the differences between historical and fictional narration are sufficiently meaningful to prohibit our turning an analogy into an identity. If within what has temporarily congealed into a disciplinary force field the elements in the field are themselves not subsumable under a single conceptual logic, even if they form meaningful configurations, in an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary force field the prohibition against forcing such a subsumption should be even more powerfully in effect.

With these warnings in mind, one might be tempted to go the opposite extreme from the defenders of consilience and endorse the call of Bill Readings (1997) and J. Hillis Miller (1998, 64) for “a new university
of dissensus, of the copresence of irreconcilable and to some degree mutually opaque goods,” or what they both have termed “a university of respect, rather than knowledge.” Such a university, they tell us, would be so fearful of the coerced reconciliations and technological imperatives that motivate the project of consilience—or weaker versions of convergence that, according to Readings and Miller, hide behind the vapid slogan of “excellence”—that it would actively seek to short-circuit any dialogue between or among different fields. The old university model of integrated Bildung, the liberal arts dream of a humanist well-roundedness, is now only a dilapidated ruin, they argue, which cannot, indeed should not, be reconstructed.

I am not sure, however, that so radical a hostility to projects of reconciliation and even consensus need be the only implication that one can draw from a resistance to the menace of consilience. For although analogical and metaphorical relationality are not equivalent to identitarian homogenization, they do provide meaningful and suggestive ways to overcome, or at least work pragmatically within, the limits of human cognitive power. Dissensus as a normative goal does not seem to me any more self-evidently liberating than consensus or always jumping apart necessarily healthier than trying to jump together. Force fields, after all, work through attraction as well as repulsion, and disciplines can surely learn from their permeability to energies from without, which help create new productive constellations. The antidote to the implosion of collapse and the blurring of genres is not the explosion of incommensurability, even accompanied by respect for difference. For as Dominick LaCapra has noted with reference to Readings’s evocation of Lyotard’s notion of a radically incommensurable “differend,”

it suppresses an internal distinction within that very category: the differend as nonnegotiable difference that marks a total standoff or an aporia and the differend as a difference for which there is no metalanguage or higher order normative system but that still allows for translation between positions in a manner analogous to the process, involving both losses and gains, that takes place between natural languages like English and French (1998, 43).
There is, in fact, no sweeping formula that will capture the state of disciplinarity today, let alone one that will serve as a normative model for the disciplines or interdisciplinarity of the future. Prophets of consilience may come and go and devotees of radical dissensus will arise to put them in their place, but the drama of negotiating and renegotiating the sometimes fragile, sometimes resilient boundaries of those cultural practices we call disciplines will continue as long as finite, creaturely human beings struggle both to make and to make sense of their bewildering world. Even those of us who wander into no man’s land have to retire to the home front every so often to replenish our supplies. Even those of us who yearn to fly above the fray have every so often to land on familiar territory. And perhaps most pertinent of all at this moment, even those of us who dive into the sea of infinite metaphoricity have to put an end to their analogizing and allow the author of the next essay a chance to start his or her own chain.

NOTES

2 See Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan 1993. Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity was the first in a series devoted to “Disciplinarity and Beyond.”
3 Geertz’s essay, “Blurred Genres: The Reconfiguration of Social Thought,” focused primarily on the penetration of discursive analogies from the humanities into the social sciences.
5 See the introduction to Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique (Jay 1992) for my most sustained attempt to discuss this model.
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