

# **UCLA**

## **Paroles gelées**

### **Title**

Bodies of Enlightenment in Diderot's Encyclopédie

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/75z5r782>

### **Journal**

Paroles gelées, 16(1)

### **ISSN**

1094-7264

### **Author**

Jackson, Dianah Leigh

### **Publication Date**

1998

### **DOI**

10.5070/PG7161003079

Peer reviewed

## Bodies of Enlightenment in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*

---

*Dianah Leigh Jackson*

The following study is representative of a larger project whose central inquiry might be summarized as, How to see the Enlightenment? By making this inquiry I hope to echo the language in which one raised questions about the Enlightenment at the dawn of the so-called *siècle des lumières*. This language of inquiry forms a poetics of vision whose metaphors and figures are woven throughout the texts of Denis Diderot. Yet even in taking up these metaphors and figures, Diderot also criticized and offered an alternative to that poetics as well as to the privileged status it afforded to vision.

"Bodies of Enlightenment in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*" takes as its focus several of Diderot's articles: "Homme," "Anatomie," "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle" and "Irrégularité," written for the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* published between 1750 and 1765. These articles are the sites of representations of the anatomical body that exceed the metaphors and figures of vision by integrating a full range of sense perceptions into the general poetics of the Enlightenment, thereby disrupting the rhetorical and philosophical logic of Enlightenment vision. By examining the ways in which Diderot worked with the language of vision in his *Encyclopédie*, I would like to address how the Enlightenment saw itself as, for instance, the reasonable practice of knowledge and science, but also how the Enlightenment continues its legacies in our own reflection—in our own thinking about what it means to be reasonable, human, and humane as we go about our study of literature.

Diderot considered his *Prospectus*, which set forth the philosophical project of the *Encyclopédie*, the Enlightenment project *par excellence*. As such, the *Encyclopédie* was supposed to follow the natural order which determined the order of know-

ledge or disciplines making up the *Encyclopédie* as well as the order of subject matter within its individual articles. The medium of that determination was the body's senses, and specifically, the sense of vision. Philosophy in general and the *Encyclopédie* in particular were matters of the senses: objects of philosophical inquiry were also objects of perception and reflection—objects perceived by the body's various senses and, in an exemplary fashion, by the body's sense of vision. Because they are first objects of sense experience, objects in the natural world present themselves to philosophy as objects to be classified.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the order of the *Encyclopédie* as it was described in the *Prospectus* was supposed to correspond not simply to the diversity and order of the natural world but also to the body's clear and even clear-sighted presentation of that diversity and order.

In the articles that Diderot and his collaborators contributed to the *Encyclopédie*, *les lumières* or Enlightenment was figured as the end result of human reflection. Vast and omnipresent in its attention and focus, the Enlightenment illuminated at its very inception both the centuries that had preceded and those that were to follow. Throughout the methodological texts that introduce the *Encyclopédie*, metaphors of light, vision and insight recur, making the sense of sight an exemplary figure for the representation of Enlightenment reason and science. Extending from the general perspective of nature (the outside world) to the particular point of view of the individual, reason is figured in its most paradigmatic terms as light and reflection. The order of the senses, with vision occupying the first and privileged rank, would seem to be, as it was in Diderot's *Prospectus*, the order of general Enlightenment—"les lumières générales:"

On ne peut disconvenir que depuis le renouvellement des lettres parmi nous, on ne doive en partie aux dictionnaires *les lumières générales* qui se sont répandues dans la société, & ce germe de science qui dispose insensiblement les esprits à des connaissances plus profondes. (86, my emphasis)<sup>2</sup>

The overall effect of Diderot's *Prospectus* is the initiation of a poetics of an enlightened *body* which was to permeate the *Encyclopédie* as a whole—a distinct and differentiated body for

which sight and insight were proper and which led to the rational understanding of the world and of the enlightened body's place within the natural order.

Operating according to natural order, the body's organs, faculties and sense of vision are categorized at the pinnacle of a taxonomy of senses made up of relatively fixed and stable categories and rubrics not unlike those belonging to natural history, for instance, the rubrics of man, animal, plant, and mineral in Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere is the *Encyclopédie's* general poetics of vision more impressively and immediately represented than in the frontispiece by Charles Nicolas Cochin *fils* (1715-1790) portraying the allegory of the *Encyclopédie* published in the opening pages of the 1751 edition [FIGURE 1]. The central figure of the allegory is that of Truth, a female figure radiating with beams of light that part the clouds framing the central scene. Truth is surrounded by the two other female figures: Reason, who is lifting the veil covering Truth, and Philosophy, who is pulling the veil away. Theology kneels at the feet of Reason, looking towards the illuminating light, while Imagination is extending a garland of flowers into the bright halo surrounding Truth in order to adorn and crown her. Cochin's allegory of Enlightenment epitomized in hyperbolic form (the form of the pictorial or visual arts) the general understanding and thematization of light and vision that guided the overall project of the *Encyclopédie*.

Diderot differed, however, from his collaborators in the encyclopedic project in one important respect that concerns his approach to the ordering of knowledge in the *Encyclopédie*. Diderot's particular conception of sight and insight exemplifies a poetics of vision that is proper to the Enlightenment, while at the same time offering a critique of that poetics and of the privileged status of vision. So while the group of *philosophes* in general envisioned the project of the *Encyclopédie* as one that would advance the practice of reason, Diderot also foresaw that practice as one that shifted between collapsing the fixed and static taxonomies of the encyclopedic tradition on the one hand, and restoring those taxonomies on the other.

Diderot saw an *Encyclopédie* predicated upon order and disorder, upon progress that was punctuated by periodic chaotic re-



Figure 1

(Used by Permission of the Ecole Française de Rome)

lapses into the past and abrupt advances into the future. In his article "Encyclopédie," written in 1755, we read: "Tel est l'effet des progrès de la raison; *un progrès qui renversera tant de statues, & qui en relèvera quelques-unes qui sont renversées*. Ce sont celles des hommes rares, qui ont devancé leur siècle" (184, my emphasis). Toppling the epistemological monuments of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (as well as his *Advancement of Learning*) and Chamber's *Cyclopaedia* in order to pick them up again selectively meant for Diderot that the practice of reason could only be realized through the interplay and the vacillations between reason and sense experience.

In Diderot's meditation upon the task of ordering the *Encyclopédie*, the work of taxonomy or what he calls "l'art de bien

définir" (176), the practice of reason is at once more and less than what, for instance, d'Alembert envisioned in his *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie*: "un arbre généalogique ou encyclopédique qui rassemble [nos connaissances] sous un même point de vue" (58). The encyclopedic project was, on the one hand, an uncommon art, one that, as Diderot will go on to conclude, requires the cooperation of a group of specialists:

Concluons donc qu'on n'exécutera jamais un bon vocabulaire sans le concours d'un grand nombre de talents, parce que les définitions de noms ne diffèrent point des définitions de choses. (177)

On the other hand, the task of taxonomy is the work of individual reason. Collaboration between diverse thinkers in the encyclopedic task demanded the judicious balance between knowledge derived from ancient and modern thinkers as well as from individual genius.<sup>4</sup>

The *philosophe* offers an example of individual reason at work on the taxonomical task by illustrating or illuminating the difficulty of the principles ("les notions générales") behind the *Encyclopédie's* organization. Again, from the article "Encyclopédie:"

J'éclaircis ces principes par un exemple: nous disons, sans qu'il arrive à aucun de nous de se tromper, d'une infinité d'objets de toute espèce, qu'ils sont de luxe; mais qu'est-ce que ce luxe que nous attribuons si infailliblement à tant d'objets? Voilà la question à laquelle on ne satisfait avec quelque exactitude, qu'après une discussion que les personnes qui montrent le plus de justesse dans l'application du mot *luxe*, n'ont point faite, ne sont peut-être pas même en état de faire. (176)

Here in the article "Encyclopédie," Diderot points to the complexity of general ideas that describe the myriad of objects in the world by calling into question the use of the expression "de luxe" (deluxe), meaning luxurious from the Latin word for excess, *luxus*. Diderot's reference to the use of the expression "de luxe" is itself an excessive one. It exceeds the usual use of the expression, making a foray into a lexicon having to do with light and vision, and, finally, Enlightenment itself, by exposing the

ways in which *de luxe* hides not so much the sensory notion of sight as sight itself.<sup>5</sup>

Diderot's line of questioning concerning *deluxe* or luxury objects momentarily slows and detains the processes of reflection, reason and figurative language. Importantly, his questioning is formulated in terms that themselves evoke Enlightenment, that is, the poetics or allegory of an Enlightenment which privileges sight, vision and insight as the method and procedure of reason in general and of encyclopedic reason in particular. Moreover, the expository or narrative voice that Diderot adopts here is figured as a sort of beacon, a source of light, illuminating not just the pursuit of knowledge, but the ongoing, not-yet-accomplished process of presenting knowledge in a precise and accurate manner.

A brief return to Cochin's frontispiece illustrates the sort of process Diderot describes in his article "Encyclopédie." The stability of the rubrics of encyclopedic knowledge (personnified in the figures of Reason, Philosophy, and Imagination) turns out to be mitigated by the movement that Cochin represents in each of these. The action of Reason, Philosophy and Imagination is a highly dynamic one: each figure is in the process of doing something without that action being completed. Reason's hands are poised on the edges of Truth's veil, lifting the veil away, and one of Philosophy's arms is extended, pulling that garment away, while the other arm is moving towards Theology in what could be an incomplete embrace. Truth itself, while less dynamic than these other figures, is nonetheless illuminated beneath her gossamer veil in a progressive state of unveiling or undress. Anticipating the outcome of this progressive state, we might read in the iconography of the figure of Truth the progression from the classic muse to the Revolutionary *Marianne*.

In contrast, the figures beneath Imagination and Reason, for instance, are in positions of relative repose and stasis. These figures fall into place at their respective distances from the source of light: on the right side, geometry, astronomy, and physics, and beneath them, optics, botany, chemistry, and agriculture; on the left side, the different genres of poet (epic, dramatic, satiric, and pastoral), and beneath these, the other arts of imitation (music, painting, sculpture, and architecture). The two sets of figures —

those in movement and those in repose—allegorize the important tension that exists within the Enlightenment as it was conceived by its proponents including Diderot.

This tension might best be explained according to the divergent views concerning the sense of vision, and finally, the role of the sentient body in Enlightenment. The allusion to the possible shades of meaning that might play upon the expression "deluxe" in the article "Encyclopédie" situates the Diderotian reflection on vision and Enlightenment in opposition to the general poetics of *le siècle des lumières*.

In his book *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Martin Jay helps us to see this opposition in an illustration of the classical notion of *lux* along with its counterpart, *lumen*:

Light could be understood according to the model of geometric rays that Greek optics had privileged, those straight lines studied in catoptrics (the science of reflection) or dioptrics (the science of refraction). Here perfect linear form was seen as the essence of illumination and it existed whether perceived by the human eye or not. Light in this sense became known as *lumen*. An alternative version of light, known as *lux*, emphasized instead the actual experience of human sight. Here color, shadow, and movement was accounted as important as form and outlines, if not more so. (29)

Jay's presentation of the difference between *lumen* and *lux* lends definition and clarity to the poetics of Enlightenment that D'Alembert and Diderot used in their introductions to the *Encyclopédie*.

What D'Alembert expressed with the general term of "réflexion" in the *Discours préliminaire* can be understood according to the idea of *lumen*, the visual phenomena that exist independently of human perception. D'Alembert's *lumen* reflects the antiocularcentric tendency that the Enlightenment inherited from René Descartes. The Cartesian tearing away of the senses (the very foundation of the *tabula rasa*) is, in Descartes's *Méditations*, a necessary and integral part of pursuit of truth and of the establishment of the *res cogitans*. Antioocularcentric science is based upon the privileging of the disembodied eye which 'sees' in only an abstract sense: the eye sees independently of the



body's experience of sight, but with the intervention of divine illumination. In contrast, and still following Jay's illustration, Diderot's *luxé* would be the infinite, luxurious variety of natural objects ("les objets *de luxé*"). Moreover, *luxé* would correspond to sight itself—to the material and specifically bodily process of seeing. In this way, *luxé* belongs to both the vast array of objects in the natural world, and to the bodily, sensorial experiences belonging to vision.

The sensationalism of Locke, Condillac, and Diderot himself placed emphasis instead upon how the body and the information that its senses provide were integral to cognition and in doing so interrupted and suspended the tearing away of the senses so important to the philosophic tradition of idealism. The thinking thing became the sensing thing. No longer to be *erased* so that the philosophical subject might inscribe its meditations upon a sense-less *tabula rasa*, the sentient body gained legitimacy as the vehicle and the object of philosophical inquiry, thus dispelling its status as mere illusion in the otherwise 'true' work of philosophy.

So while the Enlightenment might be understood as the continuation of an antiocular legacy, such an understanding is only part of how we might in the end *see* the Enlightenment. As Jay has eloquently explained: "What must be emphasized is the tacit communication of an oculocentric bias during the *siècle des lumières*" (85).<sup>6</sup> Yet the difference between seeing the *siècle des lumières* within an antiocular or an ocular tradition reveals more about our own post-Enlightenment inclination than it does about the bias of Diderot or of his contemporaries. To see the Enlightenment from the perspective of that difference alone is to overlook the sensory amplitude if not the luxuriousness of Enlightenment bodies.

Rather than characterizing Diderot as that subtle messenger of the Enlightenment's ocular bias to which Jay refers us, I would argue that this particular *philosophe* shifts our perspective away from the Enlightenment's either ocular or its antiocular predilections and towards its preoccupations with a body—a problematically enlightened body—imbued with the full range of senses and with the full range of functional and dysfunctional sense experience.<sup>7</sup> I would argue, then, that Diderot's inquiry

into *luxe* in the article "Encyclopédie" actually anticipates what was to become his exposition of the wealth of the natural world within the *Encyclopédie* as a whole. And, what is more, that inquiry provides a first critique of the range and experience of human reason as it was represented and figured in the Enlightenment's poetics of vision.

In the articles "Homme," "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle," and "Irrégularité," Diderot represents his bodies of Enlightenment as a consortium of senses—some functional and others impaired. These corporeal representations disrupt the poetics of vision and (in)sight from which *Enlightenment* and, in particular, the science of *Enlightenment* would otherwise issue unimpaired. In Diderot's *Encyclopédie* the body becomes an object of inquiry while at the same time it gives form and definition to what lies outside of or, more accurately, to what lies in between the categories and taxonomies the Enlightenment used in order to have knowledge about the natural world.

The bodies that Diderot represents throughout the *Encyclopédie* provide a means of assessing what was unique about Enlightenment epistemology in general. Robert Darnton, the foremost historian of the cultural and economic production of the *Encyclopédie*, has described that uniqueness in terms of "the new lines between the known and the unknown" (193).<sup>8</sup> These lines define not just different kinds of knowledge, but the sketches of disciplines that were not yet fully formed (for instance, the eighteenth-century disciplines of anatomy, chemistry and botany). The disciplines of the *Encyclopédie* contained within their outlines imperfect and even monstrous flowerings, proliferating in between the various branches of the Tree of Knowledge. As Darnton explains in his study of the *Encyclopédie*, "Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge: The Epistemological Strategy of the *Encyclopédie*:"

It is the in-between animals, the neither fish-nor-fowl, that have special powers and critical value. . . . Hair, fingernail parings, feces . . . go into magic potions because they represent the ambiguous border areas of the body, where the organism spills over into the surrounding material world. (193)

Darnton's attention to the bodies that fall in between the taxonomies of what is known and what is unknown is helpful for our own sustained attention to what he calls the "violation of conceptual boundaries" that takes place throughout the *Encyclopédie* and, I would argue, in Diderot's contributions to the *Encyclopédie*. His focus is helpful for understanding just how the logic of taxonomy proves insufficient for Enlightenment science and how Diderot's representations of the body—his poetics of the body—presents an alternative logic, one that was necessary in order for Enlightenment science to be science. The epistemological productivity of Diderot's alternative logic, however, remains at best peripheral within Darnton's focus.

In his description of in-between bodies, Darnton's attention is biased towards the objects classified in the encyclopedic "world of knowledge" that are violent, magical and abhorrent. He characterizes those bodies as the ones that "horrify and fascinate us," the ones that "make our skin crawl because they slip in between categories" (193). It is not surprising, then, that for Darnton the knowledge that results from what lies in between categories of knowledge is incommensurate with order itself. It is knowledge that requires policing, a knowledge whose boundaries are governed by epistemological prohibitions:

All borders are dangerous. If left unguarded, they could break down, our categories could collapse, and our world dissolve in chaos. Setting up categories and policing them is therefore serious business. A philosopher who attempted to redraw the boundaries of the world of knowledge would be tampering with the taboo. Even if he steered clear of sacred objects, he could not avoid danger; for knowledge is inherently ambiguous. Like reptiles and rats, it can slip from one category to another. It has bite. (ibid)

The inclination of Darnton's gaze is a readily available instance of how the contemporary thinker might look upon the Enlightenment. By taking up a point of view which focuses exclusively on the abhorrent nature of the bodies that did not fit neatly into the Enlightenment's categories of the known and the unknown, Darnton helps us to see how we might formulate our own definitions of extraordinary or different bodies. And how we might, as Darnton's peers in the postmodern age, seek alternative van-





tage points with regards to such bodies in order to remain critical of our definitions of them.

The 'slippage' between categories of knowledge, or categories of animals in Darnton's view of the *Encyclopédie* elides an essential feature within its corpus—within those articles authored by Diderot. Again and again, in article after article, Diderot represents in-between bodies, ambiguous animal, plant, mineral and human bodies, and body parts as ordinary, natural, and even categorical elements in the natural order. They are the naturally occurring yet monstrous progenies of the sublime disorder of the natural world.

Slippage or movement from one category to the next, from one realm to the next, from one developmental stage to the next, is indeed the natural course—indeed the natural history—of man for Diderot. That slippage eventually shifts what is natural about natural history away from a strictly scientific exposition towards one that incorporates elements of the poetics—towards elements of fiction. What is in between the categories of science and what is in between science and fiction become in the end more important than the stable categories of the known and of the unknown in the organization of the *Encyclopédie* as a whole.

Early in the article entitled "Homme," Diderot represents the human body in between two natural elements (water and air) and in so doing counters Darnton's bias towards what is strictly dangerous, abhorrent and in need of regulation and even restriction about the in-between bodies of the *Encyclopédie*. "L'homme naissant passe d'un élément dans un autre. Au sortir de l'eau qui l'environnait, il se trouve exposé à l'air; il respire. Il vivait avant cette action; il meurt si elle cesse" (410). Man's passage from embryonic fluid ("l'eau qui l'environnait") to air is the beginning of the life course, or natural history, of the human species. The trickiness of the translation of the expression "l'homme naissant" is indicative here. While we have expressions in English for the process and progress of a man's death ("a dying man") and for the process and progress of giving birth ("a birthing woman"), there is no adequate expression for what is going on here: 'man in birth' or 'birthing man.'<sup>9</sup> What is crucial in this particular passage—the birth passage of Diderot's man—is the *philosophe's* emphasis on the slippery process and pro-

gress of man's birth, an emphasis signaled by Diderot's use of the gerund, *naissant*. That emphasis is important since it presents man's becoming, rather than his essence or being. His birth is an active process that takes place in between the inside and the outside of the woman's body. Man is neither *in vitro* nor *ex vitro* in this passage.

It is useful at this point in my discussion of Diderot's "Homme" to return momentarily to the frontispiece we saw earlier in which the female figures are in the process of incompleting action. The central figure of the allegory, Truth, is in between dress and undress as Reason and Philosophy progressively pull away her veil. Importantly, the gradual unveiling of Truth in which Reason and Philosophy take part will be, if we follow the visual itinerary of unveiling, only a partial one since Truth wears yet another veil discretely wrapped around her hips. Progressive rather than completed action, bodies that are becoming rather than bodies which simply *are*—these are, according to feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray,<sup>10</sup> the traditional and usual bodies of the feminine—the woman's body that figures, for example, immanence, the pre-symbolic or the nonessential. What is unique, then, about Diderot's "Man," at least to the modern eye, is the masculine gendering of a body that is associated with what is in progress, what is slippery, watery and finally disruptive. Diderot's discussion of *birthing man* disrupts the ways in which traditional Enlightenment science gendered bodies by making them incommensurate with one another.

The effects of this disruption become apparent by comparing the central female figure of the *Encyclopédie's* frontispiece with a male figure in another frontispiece by Cochin [FIGURE 2], the one accompanying the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, also a contributor to the *Encyclopédie*. A comparison of the two frontispieces allows us to situate Diderot's *birthing man* in the context of what would seem to be the paradigmatic instance of an alternative to the Enlightenment—the work, if not the man, of Rousseau—within the *Encyclopédie* itself. Mark Hulliung has argued in *Autocritique of the Enlightenment* for the possibility of a self-reflexive and self-critical Enlightenment in the figure of the *philosophe* and in the project of the *Encyclopédie*. Hulliung



Figure 2

makes these claims in the interest of 'readmitting' Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who contributed the article "Economie Politique" to the *Encyclopédie* in 1755) into "his cultural habitat, that is, the world of the encyclopedists" (ix). It is important to note, however, that Hulliung's case for a Jean-Jacques *philosophe* is frequently made in terms of Rousseau's similarities to and differences from his "enemy-brother," Diderot.

While it is not possible within the scope of this study to determine whether Rousseau or Diderot is the most critical of the Enlightenment, whatever "autocritique" Rousseau might offer



the Enlightenment from *outside* its cultural habit or from a new position *inside* it, any critique or critical stance with regards to the Enlightenment must be related to Diderot's departures from Enlightenment thought, and specifically his alternative to the general discourse poetics of Enlightenment. My comparison between the frontispiece of the *Encyclopédie* and the one accompanying *Confessions* [FIGURE 2] is of use here for examining the radical alternative at work in Diderot's article "Homme" and in his *Encyclopédie* in general.

In Cochin's frontispiece to the *Confessions* the *mise en scène* of the central male figure, allegorizing Rousseau's natural man, parallels the female figure of Truth in several ways. Natural man is surrounded by beams of light that part the clouds framing the scene. The surrounding secondary figures, peasants (as signaled by their attire and by the bridle in the hands of the seated female figure on the right), are all in a state of repose, not unlike the second tier of figures surrounding Truth. Like Cochin's frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie*, the central figure is also progressively unveiled by two female figures. One of these stands behind the male figure, pulling the veil from his shoulders (just as Reason does so as she stands behind Truth) and the other, dressed in peasant's garb and holding a small dog, stands at his right, pulling the veil away from his arms (just as Philosophy does for Truth). A garlanded and more classically-represented male figure holds a torch and turns his gaze and his stride away from the scene at hand. Like Imagination in the earlier frontispiece, this figure guides the central figure of the engraving.

The opening lines of Rousseau's *Confessions* supplement the frontispiece by guiding the spectator along a visual itinerary portraying the origin or the birth of Rousseau's natural man, his life, and his culmination in a superlative and definitive moment of uniqueness. Of course, that portrait of human life is painted with the broad strokes of allegory and fiction as Rousseau's hyperbolic allusion to his mythological uniqueness indicates:

Voici le seul portrait d'homme, peint exactement d'après la nature et dans toute sa vérité, qui existe et qui probablement existera jamais. Qui que vous soyez que ma destinée ou ma confiance ont fait l'arbitre du sort de ce cahier, je vous conjure par malheurs, par vos entrailles, et au nom de toute l'espèce

humaine de ne pas anéantir un ouvrage unique et utile, lequel peut servir de première pièce de comparaison pour l'étude des hommes. (4)

Moreover, Rousseau's portrait—both here and in Cochin's frontispiece—represents natural man in a poise whose body and whose accoutrements signal two moments in the life of “homme, peint exactement d'après la nature.”

The central figure can be read simultaneously along two pictorial registers, one of birth and the other of death. Reading along the first register, the unveiling appears as the birth of natural man into a life lived out away from society, and in particular, the Parisian society of *philosophes* that Rousseau abandoned in 1765. In this reading, the closed eyes of the central figure correspond to those of the newborn described in Diderot's “Homme:” eyes not yet open, eyes still without life and without form. The veil becomes in this view the swaddling clothes of man newborn to natural life, while the figure to his right lights a path that leads him away from the scene of Enlightenment and towards natural life, even towards the new natural history of man.

Reading along the second pictorial register, the unveiling reveals the death of earthly man and his heavenly rebirth. In this second reading, the closed eyes of the central figure correspond to those of man at his Final Judgement. His are eyes soon to be opened to the after-life—the life which follows death and is characterized by bodily transcendence and resurrection. From this perspective, the veil becomes the shroud of man born again through the divine intervention of his Maker. The relatively stable group of figures to the left of natural man correspond to other, newly resurrected bodies of the dead at the occasion of the Rapture. Between each of these registers mediates the event and the idea of birth—the representation of Rousseau's natural man as unique in either the natural or the supernatural order: “Voici le seul portrait d'homme, peint exactement d'après la nature et dans toute sa vérité, qui existe et qui probablement existera jamais.” In this respect, birth would seem to operate as a sort of hinge upon which one or the other reading might be made. However, the play of that hinge becomes limited if not arrested

upon closer examination and comparison with Cochin's frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie*.

The two moments and two visual registers in what we might call Rousseau's "newborn man" organize an exposition of natural man that is teleological—it moves towards a clear and definitive end (whether we read that end as life in nature or the after-life) that stabilizes what would otherwise be the suspended animation of the allegory. In contrast, the frontispiece to the 1751 edition of the *Encyclopédie* portrays Enlightenment in the process of becoming Enlightenment with no reference to its final conclusion or stability. Truth, not unlike Diderot's *homme naissant*, is, so to speak, *veritas veritans*.

Cochin's two frontispieces differ, then, not just in their genderings of the central figures of 'Enlightenment,' but in the outcome of Enlightenment itself.<sup>11</sup> In the *Encyclopédie's* allegory or fiction of Enlightenment, knowledge is in between a state of original illumination and ongoing reflection, the sort of liminal state that Diderot reiterates throughout his article "Homme," as my continued analysis of that article will soon show. To read Cochin's frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie* in light of Diderot's unique approach to the ordering of knowledge—specifically the knowledge about man—is to read about knowledge and bodies that lie in between the usual categories of Enlightenment science, and Enlightenment fiction. It is to read an alternative Enlightenment—an alternative or paradoxical Enlightenment present to the most paradigmatic Enlightenment projects of all, the *Encyclopédie*.

The Enlightenment and its paradoxical alternative are elaborated by the events of birth, life, and finally death which would seem to organize the overall exposition and internal logic of Diderot's "Man." In the introduction of the article, Diderot sets up the chronological order and logic for a natural history of man that precedes not in a strictly taxonomical order but in the order of a narration or a fiction—even a science fiction: "On a suivi l'*homme* depuis le moment de sa formation ou de sa vie, jusqu'à l'instant de sa mort. C'est ce qui forme l'histoire naturelle de l'*homme*" (409). This is a genesis or beginning that, not unlike the opening pages of *La Religieuse*, *Le Neveu de Rameau* or *Jacques le fataliste*, is arbitrarily designated.<sup>12</sup> And the termina-

tion or conclusion of man's life is an artificially precise moment, again not unlike the inconclusive denouements of Diderot's novels.<sup>13</sup>

Next, Diderot follows through with an account of man beginning with infancy, passing through puberty or adolescence, and ending with old age.<sup>14</sup> However, Diderot alternates this chronology with passages that disrupt the (overall) consecutive account of events in the history of man's natural history, thereby suspending natural time. He suspends the usual chronology of natural history, interrupting it with what would have to be a fictional account of man's linguistic origins.

It is *before* his account of prenatal life and of infant development that Diderot places a description of original language. The *philosophe* therefore predicates man's passage from life inside the womb to life outside the womb with man's specifically rational and linguistic difference from animals. Language, as Diderot explains, is indicative of that particular characteristic distinguishing man from animals: thought, and specifically, *consecutive* thought: "L'homme communique sa pensée par la parole, & ce signe est commun à tout l'espèce. Si les animaux ne parlent point, ce n'est pas en eux la faute de l'organe de la parole, mais l'impossibilité de *lier des idées*" (410). In the lines that follow, Diderot moves on to describe man, now imbued with language and thought, at his infancy. The *infant*—the one who does not yet speak<sup>15</sup>—as well as the infant's fluid passage from one element to another signal the indistinct and ambivalent state(s) of *l'homme naissant* and of his general development—his body's paradoxical natural history. "Birthing man" is in between fluid and air, in between original language and the language of science, in between blindness and enlightenment.

*L'homme naissant* is at best an ambiguous life form, a slippery body that is neither here nor there in its own history. In this respect *l'homme naissant* is a body best at home not in the natural history exhibit, where, as Diderot tells us in his article "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle," rareties are gathered together independently of nature:

Pour former un *cabinet d'histoire naturelle*, il ne suffit pas de rassembler sans choix, & d'entasser sans ordre & goût, tous les

objets d'histoire naturelle que l'on rencontre; il faut savoir distinguer de ce qu'il faut rejeter, & donner à chaque chose un arrangement convenable. L'ordre d'un *cabinet* ne peut être celui de la nature; la nature affecte partout un désordre sublime. (240)

*L'homme naissant* is indeed most at home in nature, that is, in the sublime disorder of the natural world.

The fluidity of man's movement from one element to another in Diderot's "Man," along with the heterogeneous nature of his body make for the impossibility of the philosopher's simple articulation of the difference between man and animals—his simple rearticulation of the categories contributing to good Enlightenment science, such as natural history. Instead, nature in all its sublime and luxurious disorder gives form to the structure of Diderot's exposition of the history—and the story—he tells in the article "Man." The narrative or allegorical logic of man's history, as equivocal as it is at the moment of his birth, momentarily interjects itself in the logic of taxonomy. Classification and difference, therefore, are supplemented by events that are part and parcel to Diderot's particular account of man's *histoire naturelle*.

Yet as Diderot's account of man's natural history continues, the logic of taxonomy returns. That account, which might otherwise be a narrative exposition of the development of the human body, is punctuated by a return to taxonomical logic. A hierarchy of the senses defers the story of their development, substituting that story with a sense-by-sense account of man's entry into sensory existence, beginning with vision.

The logic of taxonomy intervenes in Diderot's account of the senses but just long enough to point to the still diffident and rudimentary nature of specifically human senses, and of the human body's sense of sight.

La plupart des animaux restent les yeux fermés pendant quelques jours après leur naissance. *L'homme* les ouvre aussitôt qu'il est né; mais ils sont fixes et ternes. Sa prunelle qui a déjà jusqu'à une ligne & demie ou deux de diamètre, s'étrécit ou s'élargit à une lumière plus forte ou plus faible; mais s'il en a le sentiment, il est fort obtus. Sa cornée est ridée; sa rétine

trop molle pour recevoir les images des objets. Il paraît en être de même pour des autres sens. (410)

Born with his eyes open, man, in contrast to animals, begins his life with his most distinguished and distinguishing sense organ—his eyes—in a state of lifelessness. Still, man's eyes, as Diderot goes on to explain, would seem to be the model for the other senses. Vision, and its corresponding body parts, are therefore paradigmatic only in so far as they exemplify the pueril development of man's senses in particular and of his body in general.

Diderot's exposition of "Homme" turns out to be the perpetuation of a back-and-forth movement, a constant tension between, on the one hand, the articulation of categories (the category of rational, speaking man and non-rational, non-speaking animals and infants) and, on the other hand, the narration of man's story—his *histoire naturelle*. The order of man's body, the development of the body's senses, according to the history of man in the article "Homme," is incommensurate with the natural order—incommensurate with life itself. Man, whose first defining characteristic is his sense perception and who is first among the animals, enters the natural order ill-equipped to be man, ill-equipped to be alive. What turns out to be *natural* about man's natural history as Diderot gives an account of that history in "Homme," are its deviations, tangents and digressions within its fiction. The category of man is, at best, an unstable category, one that must be expanded in order to hold within it that slippery, blind and mute body that belongs to him.

Ambiguous bodies, which is to say bodies that fit neatly into neither one category nor another, make up an alternative order drawn out in, and in between, the articles of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. These bodies are not the exceptions or aberrations of this order but the paradigmatic instances and enactments of the laws and paradoxical variety of nature itself: the story of natural man tells of a naturally irregular history. Irregular body forms and body parts are just as necessary and natural in the natural order of things as regular bodies and functional sense organs or body parts. Just as the logic of taxonomy and the logic of natural history enhance one another in "Homme," so irregular and mon-

strous bodies bring one another about, make discernible or sensible, or *sensible*, ordinary and ordered functional bodies.

As Diderot's article "Irrégularité" demonstrates, irregular bodies (those that exceed the rules of taxonomical order) create the lines of demarcation and difference between various types of bodies *in their very departure from natural laws*:

Défaut contre les règles; partout où il y a un système de règles qu'il importe de suivre, il peut y avoir écart de ces règles, & par conséquent *irrégularité*. Il n'y a aucune production humaine qui ne soit susceptible d'*irrégularité*. On peut même quelquefois en accuser les ouvrages de la nature; mais alors il y a deux motifs qui doivent nous rendre très circonspects: la nécessité absolue de ses lois, & la peu de connaissance de sa variété & de son opération. (581)

Departures from the norm (the "système de règles") turn out to be regular events within human production. Irregular bodies are in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* the negative spaces — *les écarts* — that in their contiguous relationship to positive spaces form an image. They lend substance and material to the regular bodies within its taxonomical order, making them perceptible or *sensible*, while generating an entire *genre* or species of their own within those intervals.<sup>16</sup>

The body inhabiting Diderot's article "Anatomie" is positioned in just such a gap or interval between two opposing fields: that of anatomy and that of poetics. The scientific and, specifically, medical nature of the title would seem to announce and anticipate a description and an explanation of a science which, although not a new science, gained over the course of the early and mid-eighteenth century unprecedented status within the medical community and within the institutions of that community.<sup>17</sup> Its title, an oxymoronic tiding of a text in which anatomy per se is discussed seemingly only in passing, announces a highly ambivalent body.

Moreover, "Anatomie" would seem to be at odds not only with the article's content, but with the general project of the *Encyclopédie*. This particular encyclopedic entry hosts a fierce and, we might say, decidedly unenlightened apology on the part of Diderot: his apology for the dissection of the living bodies of criminals.

The content of "Anatomie" is at odds with the science of anatomy as it had come to be practiced by a new generation of *chirurgiens-mâtres*, or master-surgeons, such as Verdier, who taught dissection and anatomy in Paris for twenty-five years, beginning in 1724. Verdier's ingenious and hugely popular innovations in the teaching of anatomy required not living but dead bodies and not one but many bodies for his demonstrations (even bodies of different species).<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to Verdier's practice of comparative anatomy demonstrations, and in contrast to the article "Homme," Diderot seems unusually preoccupied with stabilizing the nature of the human species in the article "Anatomie." He begins with a definition of humanity that is supposed to be obvious since that definition is based upon syllogistic logic.

Qu'est-ce que l'humanité? sinon une disposition habituelle de cœur à employer nos facultés à l'avantage du genre humain. Cela supposé, qu'a d'inhumain la dissection d'un méchant? Puisque vous donnez le nom d'*inhumain* au méchant qu'on dissèque, parce qu'il a tourné contre ses semblables des facultés qu'il devait employer à leur avantage. (363)

As it turns out, Diderot's definition of humanity serves the express purpose of justifying the use of criminals as living subjects in medical experimentation and demonstration. Since criminals are not human because through their crimes they do harm to the human race, and, moreover, since criminals become human only when their bodies are dissected, anatomy is, according to Diderot's logic, a science which makes the inhuman human. It is a *humanizing* science. Diderot gives what is supposed to be the syllogistic definition of humanity only after he asks what will turn out to be not a rhetorical question, but one that eventually upsets the rhetoric and rhetorical logic of his apology: What is inhuman about the dissection of a criminal?

To answer this question Diderot goes on to make a series of analogies between the terms of crime and corporeal punishment on the one hand and the terms of medicine and anatomical demonstration on the other:

De quelque manière qu'on considère la mort d'un méchant, elle serait bien plus utile à la société au milieu d'un am-



phithéâtre que sur une échafaud; & ce supplice serait tout au moins redoutable qu'un autre. Mais il y aurait un moyen de ménager le spectateur, l'anatomiste & le patient: le spectateur & l'anatomiste, en n'essayant sur le patient que des opérations utiles, & dont les suites ne seraient pas évidemment funestes: le patient, en ne le confiant qu'aux hommes les plus éclairés, & en lui accordant la vie s'il réchappait de l'opération particulière qu'on aurait tentée sur lui. (363)

Here the onlooker of the scene of execution is analogous to the spectator ("le spectateur") of the anatomy lesson; the executioner to the anatomy teacher ("l'anatomiste"); the criminal to the patient ("le patient"); and, finally, the execution is analogous to anatomical operations ("des opérations utiles").

Within the now at once disciplinary and anatomical theater, Enlightenment is gained not in the operation itself but in its outcome: "n'y aurait-il pas des occasions où l'on aurait plus de lumières à attendre des suites d'une opération, que de l'opération même?" (ibid). However, what follows is not a description of the time or the observations that might follow the performance in the medical theater. Instead, Diderot lists a total of eleven experiments and surgical procedures which the criminal might prefer to execution: the injection of various fluids into the blood stream, the amputation of a thigh at its joint, the removal of the spleen or of part of the brain, the connection of the mammary and the epigastric arteries, the fracturing of a portion of one or two ribs, the dissection of the intestine, the opening of the œsophagus, and the connection of the vasdeferens (or, spermatic vessels, in Diderot's words) without cutting off its central nerve (363-4).

In making his list of surgical procedures, a strange thing happens in Diderot's "Anatomie." Amidst a myriad of technical and scientific terms, the living body is dehumanized through Diderot's destabilization of the categories of man in "Anatomie," the criminal and the patient.<sup>19</sup> After Diderot mentions the pain involved in any given surgery ("une opération douloureuse") no further reference to the body as the potential site of a feeling, suffering subject is made. It is momentarily overlooked, forgotten in a flourish of medical techniques. In "Anatomie," there is finally no criminal body per se but, instead, a body that is turned inside

out in a textual performance of an anatomical demonstration. The body is put back together but in view of anatomy and in view of what is supposed to be enlightened science.

To state the obvious, but to do so with vigilance towards our potential indifference to the obvious, the science of anatomy needs bodies in order to be good, solid science. Anatomy, that science which confers humanity, and one of the first among those that were to become *les sciences humaines*, is and has been from its first practice, a science conferred its status as science by the human body.

To state what is less obvious, what we might not see if we regard the criminal's body with indifference, Diderot's "Anatomie" is an instance of Enlightenment science whose methodology, procedure and techniques of observation—and whose very order—is predicated upon a poetics of the body that turns that science inside out. The rhetoric of logic and solid argumentation (for instance, Diderot's opening syllogism) loses ground to a rhetoric which figures jurisprudence and medicine, crime and anatomy, in a corporeal site whose insides become its outsides. Yet in turning science inside out, in turning the medical amphitheater into public spectacle, anatomy is made to stand not so much on its own or as its own discipline and practice. Rather the science of anatomy—the science of bodies—in "Anatomie" is made to stand as the paradigmatic instance of Enlightenment science.

Irregular or aberrant bodies within the human species provide a way for the science of anatomy to account for what falls outside its usual scope, even the scope of Verdier's innovative demonstrations. They transform the visual apparatus of the eighteenth-century anatomist from one of taxonomical comparison (for instance the comparison of diverse body parts) to one of taxonomical speculation. In this way anatomy could envision or see its objects of inquiry (however strange or deviant) within the very order of nature, thereby making it possible for anatomical science to be science.<sup>20</sup>

The bodies Diderot represents in the articles, "Homme," "Ir-régularité," "Cabinet d'Histoire Naturelle," and "Anatomie" complicated the taxonomical and epistemological task facing the contributors and, of course, the chief-editor of the *Encyclopédie*.

the task of classifying, cataloguing and otherwise accounting for both regular and irregular bodies. Yet that task demanded not so much abridging or “trimming,” as Darnton has suggested, in order to accomodate those irregular bodies. Instead, it demanded that the disciplinary lines separating natural history from poetics be elaborated in order for the science of Enlightenment to correspond to natural knowledge in all its sublime disorder. What was required was indeed paradoxical: a supplement to the understanding of the known with an epistemological enactment, a learned exposition of the unknown—the *almost* unfathomable—variety of nature. It is perhaps for this reason that Diderot states early in his article, “Encyclopédie:”

Une encyclopédie ne s’ordonne pas. C’est un travail qui veut plutôt être suivi avec opiniâtreté que commencé avec chaleur. Les entreprises de cette nature se proposent dans les cours, accidentellement, & par forme d’entretien; mais elles n’y intéressent jamais assez pour être point oubliées à travers le tumulte & dans la confusion d’une infinité d’autres affaires plus ou moins importantes. (181)

The requisite understanding for creating the *Encyclopédie* was, therefore, an expanded definition of understanding itself. And, indeed it is hard to imagine a philosophical endeavor that would require more obstinance or perserverence or one that would find its inception in other ways—other than the accidental and sometimes blind course of critical and intellectual conversations (“dans les cours, accidentellement, & par forme d’entretien”), or in the artificial and sometimes denaturalizing course of narrative or fiction.

Diderot’s plan to topple and re-erect the epistemological structures both of the past and of the present is discernible in his *Prospectus* and in the sampling of articles I have discussed. In each instance, the *philosophe* reflects upon and enacts a new definition of epistemology that is elaborated and carried on outside the rubrics and categories belonging to science per se. By representing bodies that fall outside the taxonomies of science, the bodies that we might locate on the borders but not neatly within the *doxia* of Enlightenment science, Diderot calls our attention to our own ways of accounting for human and non-hu-

man bodies. Diderot's *Encyclopédie* presents us with the Enlightenment but also the distinctly post-Enlightenment challenge of *seeing* how the bodies we write about, the bodies we teach and study, and even those bodies we deem harmful to human society present an organizing and ordering force that enters into our own history—in all its luxurious and sublime disorder.

Dianah Leigh Jackson is an Acting Assistant Professor of French and Italian Studies at the University of Washington.

### Works Cited

- Académie Royale de Chirurgie. *Mémoires*. Paris: Didot, 1761.
- D'Alembert, Jean le Rond. *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*. Paris: Édition F. Piavet, 1763.
- Brewer, Daniel. *The Discourse of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York and Toronto: Vintage Books, 1985.
- Diderot, Denis. "Anatomie," "Animal," "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle," "Encyclopédie," "Irrégularité." *Œuvres complètes*. Vols VII, VIII, IX. Paris: Hermann, 1975.
- — —. *Les Bijoux indiscrets, Jacques le fataliste, Le Neveu de Rameau, La Religieuse*. *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. II. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1994.
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Michel, Christian. *Charles-Nicolas Cochin et l'art des lumières*. Paris: Diffusion de Bocard, 1993.
- Proust, Jacques. *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1962.
- Rocheblave, S. *Charles-Nicolas Cochin: Graveur et dessinateur*. Paris and Bruxelles: Librairie nationale d'art et d'histoire, 1927.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 1. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Philosophy is, in both Diderot's *Prospectus* and in d'Alembert's *Discours Préliminaire*, synonymous with science. Moreover, it is the overarching rubric that comprises the various sciences in the *système détaillé des connaissances*. So when in my study I refer to Enlightenment "philosophy" I am also referring to Enlightenment "science."

<sup>2</sup> D'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie* reiterates the general poetics of light and enlightenment, while placing emphasis upon the figure of *réflexion*:

La philosophie, ou la portion de la connaissance humaine qu'il faut rapporter à la raison, est très étendue. Il n'est presque aucun objet aperçu par les sens, dont la réflexion n'ait fait science." (166, my emphasis)

According to D'Alembert, reason/reflection is both the process by which the mind fixes on objects (apperception or the basic process of cognition) and the phenomenon of light falling upon and bouncing off surfaces. In much the same way that Reason in Cochin's drawing extends itself in order to reveal Truth, reason in the *Discours* extends itself in nature in a vast and comprehensive way in order to provide enlightenment to philosophy—in order to make science. For D'Alembert of the *Discours* and Cochin of the *Encyclopédie's* frontispiece, reason (Reason) functions therefore as a reflective medium: the medium or means by which objects become the objects of Enlightenment philosophy or science. Reason is the surface which reflects light (once exposed to Truth) and in doing so produces Enlightenment.

<sup>3</sup> The natural order, as it is first defined by Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon in his *Histoire naturelle* and then elaborated by Diderot, is a taxonomic order. Importantly, Buffon is second only to Johann Jakob Brucker, a historian of philosophy, as the most quoted author in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Buffon's taxonomies function as the general outline for several of Diderot's articles, such as "Homme" and, especially, "Animal." In "Homme," for instance, Diderot adopts a style of pastiche in which he paraphrases Buffon's reflections on man in his "Histoire naturelle de l'homme." However, in "Animal," he alternates lengthy, direct quotations from Buffon's *Histoire* with Diderot's interventions. Both means of citation, whether indirect or direct, indicate the importance of the taxonomical order belonging to natural history as an organizing tool, but also as a point of departure for Diderot's critical approach to Enlightenment science and philosophy. The taxonomical order of the *Encyclopédie*, and of Buffon's *Histoire*





*naturelle* originated contemporaneously with the reordering of the discipline of the history of philosophy. Represented by Bayle, Fontenelle, Bruckner, Formey, and Meslier, the history of philosophy of the mid-eighteenth century was based upon the comparison of systems of thought and systems of belief. In a more general sense the discipline of eighteenth-century comparative philosophy provided two important models for ordering the articles of the *Encyclopédie* and its accompanying branches of the Trees of Understanding: first, the refusal to assign any given system of thought or any given belief system a privileged position or 'trunk' in the history of philosophy, and, second, the insistence upon the teleology or progress of that history (and the coincident history of the human spirit) towards "the light." The *telos* towards enlightenment that marks the organization and procedure of the *Encyclopédie* is derived from the general orientation of Johann-Jacob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducia*. As Jacques Proust explains in his discussion of "L'Histoire de la philosophie de Pierre Bayle à Jacob Bruckner" in *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*: "Cette histoire est pourtant orientée, car elle est l'histoire même de l'esprit humain; arraché aux ténèbres, il s'est peu à peu élevé vers la lumière et vers la vérité; la connaissance de ses progrès, de ses reculs, voire de ses erreurs doit lui permettre d'aller plus loin encore, aussi loin qu'il peut aller" (245).

<sup>4</sup> Diderot makes clear the encyclopedic demand for this equilibrium in the *Prospectus*:

In order to stand up beneath the weight of our project, it was necessary to share it between us; and right away we looked toward a sufficient number of scholars and artists; able artists well-known for their talents; scholars of particular specializations to whom we conferred their particular tasks. We distributed to each of these the part that befitted him....in this way each one, having only to take charge of what he knew, was able to judge sanely what the Ancients and the Moderns have written, and to add knowledge drawn from his own resources to the help that they provide. (92-3)

<sup>5</sup> My reading of the excessive expression of "luxe" in Diderot's "Encyclopédie" borrows from Derrida's discussion of the word "usure" in the opening paragraphs of the chapter, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).



<sup>6</sup> "Although all elements of Cartesian attitude toward vision were not abandoned in eighteenth-century France—residues are evident in figures as diverse as Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu and Denis Diderot—they were fighting a losing battle with the more uncompromising sensationalism that gained ascendancy in the late Enlightenment. Still, what must be emphasized is the tacit communication of an oculcentric bias during the *siècle des lumières*." (*Downcast Eyes*, 85)

<sup>7</sup> Diderot's clearest articulation of his theory of sight is in his *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient*. In the *Lettre* (which predates his work as editor of the *Encyclopédie* by two years) Diderot is in large part an apology on the role of the body and all of its senses in the practice and methodologies of philosophy and science. The very title of Diderot's *Lettre* initiates that critique by pairing blind bodies with sighted bodies in useful correspondence, in a letter. Moreover the title indicates what will become Diderot's general departure from an Enlightenment propensity to articulate the methods and procedures of rational thought through the tropics of vision and towards a science whose primary and privileged figure is a body imbued with all senses, including impaired senses or the vestiges of senses organs.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Darnton's *The Business of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> In medical terms, the available expressions are equally inadequate: the baby 'is delivered' (a strange turn of events since the mother does the delivering), or 'traverses the birth canal' (just one moment in the myriad of events making up birth that is in fact impossible to isolate).

<sup>10</sup> My references here are to Simone de Beauvoir's monumental discussion of immanence and transcendence in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Julia Kristeva's definition and thematization of "chora" in both her "Sabat Mater" in *Histoires d'amour* and her article "Chora," and to Luce Irigaray's meditation upon an evolution towards "une féminité" in *Speculum de l'autre femme*.

<sup>11</sup> That outcome must be read, nonetheless, in terms of the larger context of gendered, encyclopedic and enlightened bodies, a reading that I take up in my study of Diderot's *La Religieuse*.

<sup>12</sup> The opening lines of each of these novels merits citation given the remarkably incomplete nature of Diderot's beginnings. Each one announces the narrative to follow in the middle of an action whose

origin, cause or genesis remains unaccounted. (All citations are from Denis Diderot's *Oeuvres Complètes* [Paris: Hermann, 1987.]

"Zima, profitez du moment. L'aga Narkis entretient votre mère, et votre gouvernement guette sur un balcon le retour de votre père: prenez, lisez, ne craignez rien." (*Les Bijoux indiscrets* 32)

"La réponse de M. le marquis de Croismare, s'il m'en fait une, fournira les premières lignes de ce récit." (*La Religieuse* 81)

"Qu'il fasse beau, qu'il fasse laid, c'est mon habitude d'aller sur les cinq heures du soir me promener au Palais Royal." (*Le Neveu de Rameau* 69)

"Comment s'étaient-ils rencontrés? Par hasard, comme tout le monde. Comment s'appelaient-ils? Que vous importe? D'où venaient-ils? Du lieu le plus prochain. Où allaient-ils? Est-ce que l'on sait où on va?" (*Jacques le fataliste* 23)

<sup>13</sup> Again, the conclusions which remain inclusive in Diderot's novels call for citation:

"N'est-il pas vrai que nous ne sommes que des marionnettes? -- Oui. quelquefois." (*Les Bijoux indiscrets* 281)

Ici les mémoires de la sœur Suzanne sont interrompus; ce qui suit ne sont plus que les réclames de ce qu'elle se promettait apparemment d'employer dans le reste de son récit. (*La Religieuse* 275)

LUI : Rira bien qui rira le dernier. (*Le Neveu de Rameau* 196)

"S'il est écrit là-haut que tu seras cocu, Jacques, tu auras beau faire, tu le seras; s'il est écrit au contraire que tu ne le seras pas, ils auront beau faire, tu ne le seras pas; dors donc, mon ami... et qu'il s'endormait. (*Jacques le fataliste* 291)

<sup>14</sup> As it happens, Diderot's story beginning with infancy ("Nous ne commençons son histoire qu'après le moment de sa naissance" 410), passing through puberty ("La puberté accompagne l'adolescence & précède la jeunesse" 413) and ending with old age ("le corps s'incline vers la terre à laquelle il doit retourner. Les premières nuances de cet état se font apercevoir avant quarante ans" 421) finds its illustration in a set of engravings by Cochin: "L'Enfance," "L'Adolescence," "L'Âge Viril," and "La Vieillesse." It is significant that Cochin's inscriptions of man's body throughout his history actually includes one chapter in that (his)tory left out by Diderot, "L'Âge Viril."

<sup>15</sup> The word "infant" comes from the Latin: *in*, "not" and *fans*, the present participle of *fari*, to speak.

<sup>16</sup> In "Encyclopédie" Diderot meditates at length upon the potential omissions in the *Dictionnaire's* taxonomy. These omissions correspond not so much to an absence or lack as to the in-between genre of irregular bodies. What is interesting in Diderot's meditation in "Encyclopédie" is that such omissions demonstrate the epistemological and metaphysical limitation of productive absence:

Il n'y a rien d'existant dans la nature ou dans l'entendement...qui ne tienne par un grand nombre de fils au système général de la connaissance humaine. Si au contraire la chose omise était importante, pour que l'omission n'en fût ni aperçue ni réparée, il faudrait supposer au moins une seconde omission, qui en entraînerait au moins une troisième, & ainsi de suite, jusqu'à un être solitaire, isolé et placé sur les dernières limites du système. Il y aurait un ordre entier d'êtres ou de notions supprimé, ce qui est métaphysiquement impossible. (229)

In order to account therefore for the irregular bodies of the "Cabinet d'histoire naturelle," an alternative to metaphysics and not just to Enlightenment is required.

<sup>17</sup> The teaching of anatomy and its status of a legitimate science within the medical community must be understood within the context of the opposition, on the part of doctors (*les médecins*), to the liberal education of surgeons, throughout the early part of the eighteenth century. The first anatomical amphitheater was constructed in 1699 at Saint-Côme, under the auspices of the medical community. The 1724 royal letter patents created five surgical professorships at Saint-Côme. Then in 1731 the *Académie royale de la chirurgie* was formed, creating a de facto separation of doctors and surgeons (the latter called, "chirurgiens and perruquiers"), a separation rendered de jure in 1743 with Louis XV's royal decree. At the beginning of Turgot's ministry, in 1776, physical facilities and staff were provided for the first teaching college of surgery, *l'Hôspice*. The *Hôspice* along with the *Académie royale de la chirurgie* were dissolved in 1792, and a new surgical amphitheater was constructed at the *Observatoire* in 1788. Diderot writes his article, "Anatomie," during the on-going disputes between doctors and surgeons, during what came to be known as "*les contestations*" which lasted from 1750 to 1760.

<sup>18</sup> Antoine Louis' 1759 eulogy of Verdier before the *Académie Royale de Chirurgie* and published in the *Académie's Mémoires* (Paris: Didot, 1761) provides a detailed description of his demonstration technique:

La dissection exacte des parties laissées avec leurs attaches principales dans la vraie situation, pour faire connaître leurs rapports; les mêmes parties tirées d'un autre sujet, afin d'en faire voir les différentes faces et contours; des préparations fraîches et sèches, avec les vaisseaux injectés ou sans injection, pour en dévoiler la structure intime; des pièces d'anatomie comparée; des planches multipliées pour chaque objet, parmi lesquelles il y en avait ou les parties les plus fines étaient représentées en grand, d'après les observations microscopiques; enfin, tout ce qui pouvait donner les notions les plus précises et les plus sûres était présentés aux yeux de ses auditeurs. (46)

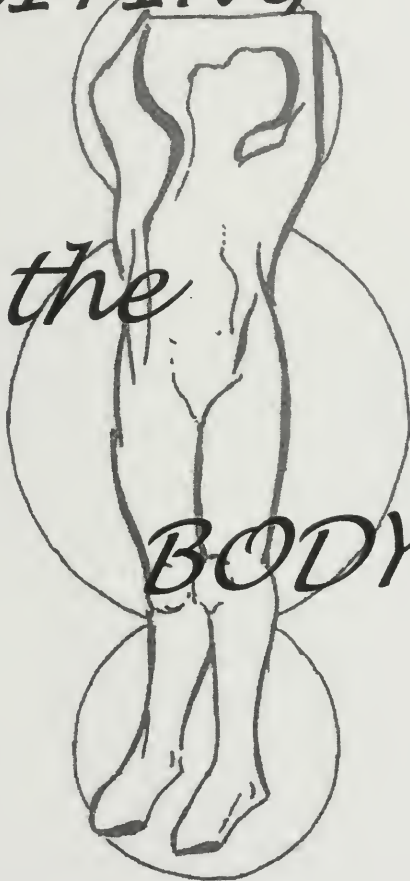
<sup>19</sup> Diderot's destabilizing of the nature of the human species in "Homme" is indicative of the antimimetic character of the *Encyclopédie's* plates. Daniel Brewer's eloquent study of the plates in *The Discourse of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) stresses their importance as representative and indeed performative of an Enlightenment technology that effectively "screened" or "filtered out" what was invisible or superlative within the production process. In this way the plates take on a decidedly antimimetic and antireferential character as they display, in the words of Brewer, "a process of production (of objects and knowledge) rather than some exterior reality" (29).

<sup>20</sup> Verdier subscribed to the view held by the *Académie des sciences* that surgery had attained its intellectual fulfillment. Again, as Louis tells us in his eulogy of Verdier: "L'anatomie paraissait à M. Verdier un champ beaucoup plus vaste par la multitude des choses qu'il faut connaître que par les nouvelles lumières que l'on y peut porter" (48).

*WRITING*

*the*

*BODY*



**PAROLES GELÉES**

UCLA French Studies

Volume 16.1 1998



# PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de  
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici  
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*





## CONTENTS

---

Interview with Terence Cave .....	5
<i>Helen Chu and Steve Stella</i>	
<i>with an Introduction by Jean-Claude Carron</i>	
Virtual Bodies: Anatomy, Technology, and the Inhuman in Descartes .....	21
<i>Dalia Judovitz</i>	
Bodies of Enlightenment in Diderot's <i>Encyclopédie</i> .....	42
<i>Dianah Leigh Jackson</i>	
"XX+XX=XX": Monique Wittig's Reproduction of the Monstrous Lesbian.....	73
<i>Julie Scarlon</i>	
The Ghetto Novels of Guillaume Dustan .....	97
<i>Daniel Hendrickson and Marc Siegel</i>	





