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Liu, Alan

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Author(s): Alan Liu

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Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail

Release 1.0

*I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still
With measured motion, like a living thing
Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the cavern of the willow-tree.*

.....
*after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
There was a darkness—call it solitude
Or blank desertion—no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind.*

—William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805)

A year here and he still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly. All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City, and still he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void. . . . The dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn't there. . . .

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation. . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding . . .

—William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)¹

TO IMAGINE WORDSWORTH with his hands on a personal computer is to glimpse a descent, as if of software, from the romantic release of imagination to its various postmodern releases. Cyberpunk, for example. Romantic imagination is the source code (by way of Edgar Allan Poe, the Beats, Thomas Pynchon, and others) of *Neuromancer*, the novel that marked the emergence of the “cyberpunk” or “mirrorshades” movement in postmodern science fiction.² The comparison is vulgar, but precisely so. Perhaps only our vulgate bards match the original banality, the transcendental everydayness, of the poet of Lyrical Ballads.

Transcendence is the issue. Romantic imagination was a mediation between the worldly and otherworldly whose definitive act was the simulation of transcendental release. In such spots of time in *The Prelude* as the Boat Stealing or Snowdon episodes, Mind was the visionary medium that coded the world as otherworldly. But the dark ricorso of such simulation was what Geoffrey Hartman (in his book on Wordsworth) called the “return to nature.”³ The thief in the boat turns back from transgressive transcendence to a Platonic cave of legitimacy. The poet on Snowdon views a cloud-video “perfect image of a mighty mind” but then corrects the simulation, turns it at last into an ode to duty: “hence religion, faith, / . . . Hence truth in moral judgements; and delight / That fails not, in the external universe.”⁴ Transcendence is recuperated within the banal—the denotative banal of commonplace experience, perhaps also the connotative and ideological banal: the trite, hackneyed, contained, bourgeois.⁵

Just so, neuromantic imagination simulates release. The visionary medium is now Mind in direct interface with silicon (and secondarily with a kaleidoscope of synthetic drugs updating romantic opium), and the function of the synthetic imagination is once more to allow the world—now corporate, multinational, informatic—to feign the otherworldly. Fashioned in much the same mold of existential theft as Wordsworth’s boat stealer, the hero of Gibson’s novel, *Case*, is an outlaw, a “cowboy” hacker riding “viruses” into bright corporate databases. Gliding in cool stealth along datapath tracteries of the corporate network, *Case* is Kerouac on the road, Slothrop in the Zone, the Street that jinks between corporation headquarters. But at last, this thief also ends in the double bind of transgression become legitimation. In the great legitimation crisis of the novel, he raids an evil corporate colossus that is the postindustrial imagination of Milton’s Pandemonium. The resulting subversion is transcendental, apocalyptically so—but also, we recognize, indistinguishable in outcome from what economic journalism calls a “minor correction” of the market: a corporate raid, a takeover, a taking care of what *Case*—in his street talk—has all along called “biz.” In this novel, too, transcendence is ultimately banal, which in postmodern science fiction often means that it is parasitic upon a mock-Japanese ideology of ordinariness: corporation consensus, performativity, zaibatsu rectitude. In Gibson’s drug-sharp image of his hero bunching his fingers in cold withdrawal from his keyboard (in the electric “Japanese night”), we recognize a consummate need for the corporate grid.

On one great screen, then: romantic “unknown modes of being.” On the other: “cyberspace” or, in other cyberpunk idiom, the “matrix,” “network,” “grid,” “Plateau.”⁶ The media

of dependency in both instances is the same: an ecstatic mind caught in an endless loop between transgressive transcendence and corrective legitimation. Transcendence is a goto routine of the imagination that goes nowhere.

But a detail: what about that insistent “willow-tree” in Wordsworth (thrice mentioned in the Boat Stealing episode)? Or the “temperfoam” in the passage from Gibson? What do these ultrabanal details embedded in the routine of transcendence—together with a whole manifold of arbitrary particulars elsewhere in these works—offer the romantic or neuro-mantic imagination? Haiku, after all, shows how little is needed to simulate a world. Why does the vision of *One Life* or *One Matrix* need such a level of detail in its simulation of release from the world? Why not be content with a more select repertory of motifs or images adequate for simulation: Wordsworth’s imagery of “darkness,” for example, or Gibson’s “bright lattices of logic . . . like city lights, receding”? Or is it the case that gray background—neutrality, static, the noise between channels—is the very possibility of romantic/postmodern simulation? The meanest flower that blows as well as such routine products of materials science as temperfoam: Is this the stuff of under-allegory, under-symbol, or, perhaps, the most hallucinatory of all simulations, “context”?

Overview: The Rhetoric of Detail

I wish in this essay to criticize cultural criticism in what may be called its high postmodernist forms: cultural anthropology, new cultural history, New Historicism, New Pragmatism, new and/or post-Marxism, and finally that side of French theory—overlapping with post-Marxism—that may be labeled French pragmatism (i.e., the “practice” philosophy and/or semiotic “pragmatics” of the later Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Jean-François Lyotard). These aggressively “new” forms of contextualism do not exhaust the field of postmodern cultural criticism, and a fuller study would need to include the different emphases of ethnic, gender, and area studies as well as of British cultural materialism.⁷ But for now we can stay high. “High” distinguishes neither the theoretical from the practical, the high cultural from the populist, nor the neoconservative from the leftist. Rather, it indicates a shared mode of cultural engagement that undercuts all such polemics dividing the field to project an increasingly generic discourse of contextualism.⁸ This mode of engagement may be called *detached immanence*. Detached immanence amid worlds of context is the distinctively postmodern, the “new,” in cultural criticism.

But we must descend to particulars. I refer to a tenet so elementary, pervasive, and insistent in all the high cultural criticisms that it appears foundational (despite the method’s avowed philosophical antifoundationalism). The basis of high cultural criticism is its belief that criticism can, and must, engage with context

in a manner so close, bit-mapped, or microbial (to use some of the method's paradigms) that the critic appears no farther from the cultural object than a cybernetic or biological virus from its host at the moment of code exchange. We live in an age of "detailism" characterized by the "pervasive valorization of the minute, the partial, and the marginal," Naomi Schor says in her intriguing *Reading in Detail*, a study of the genealogy of detailism leading up to modernist and post-structuralist aesthetics.⁹ High cultural criticism is an aesthetics—and much more—of specifically postmodern detailism.¹⁰ Or to name the method's related leading concepts: it is particularism, localism, regionalism, relative autonomism, incommensurabilism, accidentalism (or contingency), anecdotalism, historicism, and—to draw attention to a set of curiously prominent Greek prefixes in the method—"micro-," "hetero-," and "poly-"ism. "All these," we may say in words borrowed from Clifford Geertz's *Local Knowledge*, "are products of a certain cast of thought, one rather entranced with the diversity of things."¹¹ Or as Richard Rorty sums it up, "All that can be done to explicate 'truth,' 'knowledge,' 'morality,' 'virtue' is to refer us back to the concrete details of the culture in which these terms grew up."¹² And most succinctly, that unofficial motto repeated several times in Jerome McGann's *Social Values and Poetic Acts*: "I make for myself a picture of great detail."¹³

I will want to return to Schor's and McGann's books in particular because their emphases are eminently relevant for us here, but at present I borrow only McGann's recommendation of a non-narrative form suited to displaying detailism: the array or matrix.¹⁴ Here is a matrix of cultural-critical phrases rendered in all their (self-thematized) disconnection as if they were so many piles of Lyotardian phrases, snatches of Rortyan conversation, pastiches of New Historicist paradigms, or sound bites of Baudrillardian media. Media-oriented readers, indeed, may wish to view this matrix as if with remote control in hand—flitting from channel to channel and sentence fragment to fragment in a hallucinatory blur of strangely continuous discontinuity:¹⁵

THE MATRIX OF DETAIL

CHANNEL 1: CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Clifford Geertz: "local knowledge" "the massive fact of cultural and historical particularity" "the most local of local detail" "the road to the grand abstractions of science winds through a thicket of singular facts."

CHANNEL 2: NEW CULTURAL HISTORY

Roger Chartier: "multiple intellectual configurations by which reality is constructed in contradictory ways" "a specific way of being in the world" "history is turning to practices that give meaning to the world in plural and even contradictory ways." *Robert Darnton*: "a patchwork of regions" "a specific field for the exercise of cat power" "he wanted to capture his entire city, every bit of it, and so he wrote on and on—for 426 manuscript pages, covering every chapel, every wig maker, every stray dog." *Natalie Zemon Davis*: "consider the disor-

derly woman in more detail” “rather than thinking diffusely about ‘the people,’ I am trying wherever possible to ask how printing affected more carefully defined milieus” “local context” “a salty, particularistic, resourceful layer of culture.” *Carlo Ginzburg*: “reconstruct a fragment” “a narrow investigation on a solitary miller” “the anecdote” “a microcosm.” *Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie*: “analysis that is not only general . . . but also *detailed*” “particular detail” “*regional evidence*” “in its smallest detail.”

CHANNEL 3: NEW HISTORICISM¹⁶

(Renaissance studies) *Stephen Greenblatt*: “some fragment of a lost life” “my vision is necessarily more fragmentary” “particular and local pressures” “partial, fragmentary, conflictual.” *Richard Helgerson*: “the experience of particular communities” “individual autonomy . . . communal autonomy . . . national autonomy” “the land in all its most particular divisions.” *Leah S. Marcus*: “particular cultural situations” “‘local’ reading” “localization” “radical varieties of regionalism” “a patchwork of local differences.” *Louis Adrian Montrose*: “the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing” “the pressure and particularity of material interests” “*relative* autonomy of specific discourses.” *Steven Mullaney*: “a detailed *mise-en-scène* of Brazilian culture” “richly detailed” “preternatural detail.”

(Romantic studies) *Jon P. Klancher*: “a reader situated in a particular social space” “crowding of cultural fragments” “a rich array of socially individuated types.” *Marjorie Levinson*: “disturbing particular” “very concretely situated” “the particular and particularly constrained” “deeply specific” “epochal specificity” “*we are the effects* of particular pasts.” *Alan Liu*: “concrete, highly charged phenomena . . . phenomenal spots of history” “uncountable local variations” “the scandal of the particular and partisan.” *Jerome J. McGann*: “the concrete, the material, and the particular” “the local, the topical, the circumstantial” “the polymorphous and the heteroglot” “daily life in a particular community” “incommensurate detail” “elementary particulars” “heuristic isolates” “minute particulars” “grains of sand in which the world may be seen” “minute particulars of time, place, and circumstance.” *David Simpson*: “particular details—the details of disposition and empirical contingency” “small details of everyday life” “we are inevitably committed to a careful and detailed examination of particulars” “minute particulars.”

CHANNEL 4: NEW PRAGMATISM

Stanley Fish: “all aesthetics, then, are local and conventional” “context specific” “parochial perspective of some local or partisan point of view” “contingent practices of particular communities.” *Frank Lentricchia*: “specific, detailed, everyday functioning” “real local effects” “beliefs . . . are born locally in crisis and have local consequences only” “a heterogeneous space of dispersed histories” “the ‘eaches’” “the particular, the local, the secret self” “pragmatism is an epistemology for *isolatos* who experiment at the frontier.” *Richard Rorty*: “criticism of one’s culture can only be piecemeal and partial” “micro-processes” “ordinary, retail, detailed, concrete” “alternative, concrete, detailed cosmologies” “thousands of small mutations finding niches” “atoms in a DNA molecule” “local final vocabulary.”

CHANNEL 5: NEW MARXISM

Louis Althusser: “specific object of a specific discourse” “this particular unity” “a peculiar real system . . . a *specific* system” “no practice in general, but only *distinct practices*” “I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves . . . in the form of distinct and specialized institutions.” *Fredric Jameson*: “the specificity and radical difference of the social and cultural past” “the specificity of the political content of everyday life” “a purely local validity in cultural analysis” “the fragments, the incommen-

surable levels, the heterogeneous impulses” “isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers.” *Pierre Macherey*: “the specificity of the literary work” “product of a specific labour” “a specific but undisguised . . . relation with history.”

CHANNEL 6: FRENCH POST-MARXISM/PRAGMATISM

Jean Baudrillard: “bits” “little black boxes” “bodily cells, electronic cells, party cells, microbiological cells . . . the tiniest, indivisible element” “the play of molecules . . . the play of infinitesimal signifiers” “tiniest disjunctive unities” “the operationalism of the smallest detail.” *Pierre Bourdieu*: “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus” “the discontinuous, patchy space of practical paths” “polythesis.” *Michel de Certeau*: “a science of singularity” “microbe-like operations” “a ‘polytheism’ of scattered practices” “encysted in particularity” “microbe-like, singular and plural practices” “micro-stories.” *Jean-François Lyotard*: “a pragmatics of language particles . . . a heterogeneity of elements . . . institutions in patches—local determinism” “‘nodal points’ of specific communication circuits, however tiny” “*petit récit*” “*petites histoires*.” *Michel Foucault*: “a ‘new micro-physics’ of power” “a political economy of detail” “a multiple network of diverse forces” “particular, local, regional knowledge” “the ‘specific’ intellectual” “dispersed, heteromorphous, localised procedures of power” “a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case” “a specific type of discourse on sex . . . appearing historically and in specific places.”¹⁷

This, we recognize, is the rhetoric of a method, a sheer virtuosity of detail. Of course, this is not the whole picture of great detail. Indeed, it may be appropriate to interject a rhetorical gesture of our own imitating a topos we will see throughout the discourses of particularity: inexpressibility or incompleteness. A fuller study of detail would need to bolster its canon not only with more authors than I have been able to array here but with other disciplines (historicist film studies, for instance, where Philip Rosen’s work on cinematic detail and film studio production is provocative).¹⁸ It would also need to consider at length the applied side of cultural criticism: the grounding of its rhetoric on variously thorough or haphazard projects of recovering specific contexts of detail. Methodological vocabulary alone tells us relatively little, for example, about the assumptions embedded in the genre, style, tense, quotation strategy, and even type size of New Historicism’s paradigms, Geertz’s cockfights, or Bourdieu’s slices of anthropology. Finally, a fuller study would advert to the sometimes massive discourse of detailism in such modern or structuralist forebears of the postmodern scene as traditional American pragmatism, Fernand Braudel’s historiography, Georg Lukács on the “special,” Theodor Adorno’s “micrological” aesthetics, Mikhail Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia,” formalist “close reading,” or Roland Barthes on the “reality effect.”¹⁹

But all such gestures of incompleteness, we know, end by crossing their fingers: let us say, then, that the matrix I have presented is sufficient to simulate the whole. What we observe in the matrix is a revisionary idea of culture whose full sweep could be conveniently analyzed as a cultural *empirics*, *pragmatics*, and *dialogics*—in short, a whole methodology for thinking the cultural world. Or rather, “thinking”

should not put us too much in mind of an orderly discourse of knowledge based on a set of operations for transforming discrete perceptions into cognition. Detail is the very instrument of the antifoundational and anti-epistemological imperative in high cultural criticism: its contention is that there is no reason (other than fidelity to quaint notions of philosophy) why contexts of discretely perceived particulars should resolve into culture as a single, grounded, and knowable order. The empirics, pragmatics, and dialogics of high cultural criticism are finally methodologies as much *against* as of knowledge—a methodical antimethod.

But there is a danger in antimethod, of course. It is possible to discern in the all too often trenchant formulations of cultural criticism precisely an incipient method or meta-way (*meta/hodos*) of alternative knowledge. This is the criticism of hidden foundationalism that has long haunted Marxist criticism, for example. Or again, we can think of the polemical hard edges of other cultural criticisms: Geertz's antifunctionalism, New Historicism's antiformalism, or the anti-*Annales* movement in New Cultural History—all of which wear their dissent, perhaps, with too heightened a sense of the sanctity of their meta-way.²⁰ As when we read through the sequence of Rorty's works, which have essentially one thing to say but are adept at repeating the gospel again and again with wider relevance, the method of antimethod can at times seem too dogmatic, too much of a piece. It overdoes Rorty's prescription for pragmatist philosophy: to improvise upon one of his favorite phrases, the picture of detail not only shows "how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together" but perhaps hangs together all too much—like a history painting on a wall.²¹ The picture of great detail, as it were, threatens to become a *great picture* of detail.

How to discern in our matrix a "thought" or "idea" of culture, then, without being too knowing even in the way of antiknowing? The answer, I suggest, lies precisely under the sign of a very old antifoundationalism or sophistry: rhetoric. In reading our matrix and the methods it indexes, we should be aware that we are indeed *reading*—that we are dealing with rhetoric as the facsimile knowledge or pseudo-analytic whose distinctive method is its tendency to lose its way at decisive moments, to pose a logic of detail only then to thwart itself (in the essential de Manian reading) by interposing incommensurable logics.²² In particular, our matrix of phrases declares that the methodology of high cultural criticism is really an incoherence of three rhetorical "moments." For ease of reference, these may be called *immanence*, *commitment*, and *detachment*. It is immanence that speaks within cultural criticism's empirics of the Real; commitment within its pragmatics of variously oppositional or neoconservative "practice"; and detachment within its cool dialogics of improvised conversation or *petits récits* (the "culture rap," that is, thematized by authors as diverse as Rorty, Darnton, de Certeau, Lyotard). Each such rhetorical moment at the core of the method, I suggest, is not an integral discourse but the site of an instability or turning in rhetoric. After all, only inner

troping allows method to be perceived *as* rhetoricity in the first place—as a way of knowing prevented from hardening into dogma (*especially* when it is being most polemical or rhetorical) by the arbitrary intervention of its media.

Of course, our most recent avatar of rhetoricity certainly holds to its own meta-way. But deconstructive method will serve as a salutary corrective to cultural-critical method so long as we persist in seeing rhetoric as mediational to the end—that is, as perpetually a media or means rather than end. Rhetoric will be our means of referring cultural-critical method to the ultimate antifoundationalism or endless end: history. History, or “elsewhereness” as I have called it elsewhere, is alienated foundation.²³ It is what orders the thought and, within thought, rhetoric of cultural criticism into a characteristic sequence whose logical necessity is subordinated to the phantom necessity of contingency.

What I mean here may be educed from the detectable tug of diachrony in high cultural-critical argument, the tendency in the method to marshal reasons and discourses in a certain order unpredictable from within the system. As “thought,” to begin with, cultural criticism follows a logical order that is pseudo-syllogistic. Consider as evidence, for instance, the strong drift in Geertz’s cock-fight essay *from* counting bets *to* meditating on aesthetics; or, again, witness the glide in Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* toward a culminating discussion of literature.²⁴ Paralleling such linear movements of exposition are cultural-critical works that establish an axiology according to which art is the highest, most privileged, or otherwise most special form. (Thus one of the distinctive features of McGann’s *Social Values and Poetic Acts* is its strong advocacy of “poetry” as a unique discourse that “performs a critical function which is not found in other forms of discourse.”)²⁵ What such directional arguments indicate is that high cultural critics more often than not argue *from* the major premise of empirical reality, *through* minor premises of pragmatism (the idea of “specific” practice, indeed, is analogous in function to a minor premise in classical syllogism), *to* a conclusion in aesthetics, dialogics, or media studies. “In conclusion,” we hear them say, “it is as if specific practices enacted in plays, novels, stories, jokes, anecdotes, and other representations of culture were reality.”

The arbitrariness of such syllogism comes clear when we remember that cultural criticism (at least in theory) eschews any foundational major premise or conclusion and makes “reality,” “practice,” and “discourse” all equivalent minor premises. What is it that drives the system of thought in a particular direction? The answer is already whispered in the deflected logic of the figurative/aesthetic “as if” at the conclusion of the cultural-critical syllogism (as I ventriloquized it above: “It is *as if* specific practices enacted in plays, novels . . .”). Such deflection is the very signature of the fact that the arbitrary direction of the syllogism is controlled internally by an equally arbitrary sequence of rhetorical moments *from* immanence *through* commitment *to* aesthetic detachment. And controlling this discursive sequence in turn is the bottomless foundation that sponsors any arbitrary

trary sequence: a series of purely contingent, historical moments. Putting the case in overview: high cultural criticism is a system in which thought is subjected through the mediation of rhetoric to that ultimate disruption of thought, *history* of thought.²⁶

We will need to grow more specific in identifying the historical moments that regulate the system of high cultural criticism. In terms of a general history of thought, however (no doubt too neat to serve as more than a scaffolding for research into the history of cultural criticism), it may be suggested that the interior trajectory of high cultural criticism is along a succession of intellectual-historical moments from the premodern through the modern to the post-modern—from immanental empirics through an originally Deweyan, Marxist, or New Critical praxis to distantiated dialogics.²⁷ The historically given logics of the Real, the Practical, and the Simulated—with their underlying rhetorics of immanence, commitment, and detachment—blur in fast forward or filmic dissolve, and the overall result is the Baudrillardian sense of simulated reality, of remote or tele-engagement, that I have called detached immanence.

The Romanticism of Detail

The present essay focuses on the “first” or opening rhetoric of high cultural criticism: immanence.²⁸ Here we are closest to foundationalism. Like pitons driven by the climber into a mountain face, details in the rhetoric of immanence are points of attachment where we experience such hands-on knowledge of the gritty cultural mass that we seem to feel the very quiddity of culture, the Real.

We will have reason to climb mountains later, but perhaps first we should be empirical and look at atoms. The sense of immanental reality I indicate lies screened behind the scientific logic of high cultural criticism: the Whole Sick Crew (to allude to Pynchon’s technovisionary fiction) of “highly charged phenomena,” “atoms,” “molecules,” “micro-physics,” “micro-processes,” “DNA molecules,” “microbiological cells,” “microbe-like operations,” “small mutations,” “little black boxes,” and so forth (all phrases from our matrix). More generally, immanence is screened by a broadly empirical view of culture, and if scientific idiom will not serve, then equally technical-sounding terminology must be invented—“micro-stories,” for instance, or “multiple intellectual configurations,” “a specific field for the exercise of cat power,” “heuristic isolates.” And this is not even to mention the massive traces of scientism in the more anthropological, sociological, statistical, or structuralist cultural criticisms.

What such empirics projects is a view of cultural matter (economic, social, political, or ideological) so objective that materialism seems to obey the dynamics of literal matter. We can take as our explanatory paradigm the sometimes explicit

conceit in cultural criticism that details are “atoms.” Observe that our matrix of phrases repeatedly isolates “atoms,” “tiniest, indivisible elements,” “elementary particulars,” “highly charged phenomena,” and ultimately “molecules” akin to what Arthur O. Lovejoy’s history of ideas once called “unit-ideas.” Details, that is, are elementary particles engaged in an overall systemics of combination much like the molecularism for which Louis O. Mink once criticized Lovejoy.²⁹ But a discrimination is in order. As calibrated by such pervasive cultural-critical modifiers as “determinate” and “specific” (“deeply specific,” Marjorie Levinson says), elementary particularism is innocent of the fuzzy probabilities of current particle science. The Greek prefixes I earlier touched upon are emblematic: cultural criticism remembers in the detail something like Democritan atomism as well as the geopolitical insularity of Greek city-states. The atom of detail is a classically hard, discrete unit. Or put *neoclassically*: the unit-detail analytic indicates the residual hold of Newtonian physics and of the emergent philosophy of Newton’s age: Locke’s program of elementary “ideas” and/or social-contract individuals associating in compound aggregates. With associational mechanics in mind, indeed, we might reinforce that great pillar of materialism throughout cultural criticism: the “concrete.” Phrases in our matrix such as “concretely situated,” “the concrete, the material, and the particular,” or “ordinary, retail, detailed, concrete” build a world that is exactly concrete: a cement aggregate of specific and determinate particularity.

Such unit-detail atomism is ubiquitous, affecting even the most sophisticated interpreter whenever argument turns in the direction of empirical investigation. To come directly to the heart of the “matter,” we need only foreground what our matrix of phrases has already enacted: the strangely overdetermined role of matrix forms throughout cultural criticism.³⁰ Matrices are the method’s great aggregates of atomistic detail. To read at any length in cultural criticism, after all, is often precisely to read *at length*—an effect consisting not so much in the actual number of pages as in the wet-cement quality of the reading experience. Cultural criticism dilates discourse through interpolated arrays of particulars, a sort of *blason* of the mundane or what Rorty (inspired by a Philip Larkin poem) calls “lading lists” of the world.³¹ Indeed, it is precisely the list form (or simple matrix of one axis) that is most pervasive. Here is a short list of lists:

Darnton: The Italian motifs remained recognizable enough for one to be able to classify the tale in the Aarne-Thompson scheme (it is tale type 2032). But everything else about the story—its frame, figures of speech, allusions, style, and general feel—had become intensely Zuni.³²

Geertz: Actually, the typing of cocks, which is extremely elaborate (I have collected more than twenty classes, certainly not a complete list), is not based on color alone, but on a series of independent, interacting, dimensions, which include—besides color—size, bone thickness, plumage, and temperament.³³

Althusser: I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. I propose an empirical list of these which will obviously have to be examined in detail. . . . —the religious ISA . . . —the educational ISA . . . —the family ISA, —the legal ISA, —the political ISA.³⁴

Lyotard: To paragraph is to write *And, And moreover, And nevertheless* . . . The differend is reintroduced [the elision is Lyotard's]³⁵

The science of the list may be stated: wholes are knowable only as aggregates in which the detail *has no interior detail*. Cultural-critical detail, that is, is as much a resistance to, as enactment of, the more radical detailism of fractal and chaos theory in postmodern science proper. It is clear that the particulars gathered by Darnton and Geertz, for example, have no visible interior detail—no more so than the “*And, And moreover, And nevertheless*” in Lyotard’s great work of/about lists (what he terms phrases “linked” in disconnection by their “differends”). “Frame, figures of speech,” “size, bone thickness,” and, and, . . . exist at that lower event horizon known to all empirical investigators of culture where evidentiary authority must at last rest upon sketchy, borrowed, or otherwise uncooked “facts” collected without linkage in a notebook.³⁶ At that event horizon there is no substantive difference between traditional empiricists and such *outré* “scientists” of culture as structural anthropologists or structural Marxists. “Structure” itself reduces to lists. However much Althusser’s overall theory is structural, for example, it is evident that his “empirical list” cements rough-hewn institutions *en bloc* in an essentially aggregate social whole. Similarly, the few details he does offer about the internal practices of religious and educational institutions accrue in an essentially mechanistic manner. “Apparatus,” we may say, is the bureaucratization of the Lockean aggregate. “Thus Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc.,” Althusser says at one point, checking off the particulars of superstructure on a lading list of undetailed details punctuated by an *etc.*³⁷

And with this *etc.* we come to the heart of the matter: the strange interface where the science of the list reveals its rhetoricity and, indexed by rhetoricity, its historicity. Seen one way, after all, the science of lists depends on a convention of figuration rather than of induction: a syntagmatics or metonymics whose illusion is that wholes are polymers of parts. What makes such figuration visible is an interior instability where saying one thing—in this case, listing atoms—suddenly seems equivalent to saying something else. What else does high cultural criticism have to say in the very act of reciting lists as if syntagm were its only discourse?

It has a lot to say, namely “etc.” One of Althusser’s most characteristic devices, we recognize, is the *etc.* in alliance with such cognates as the elision (. . .). The very subtitle of the “Ideological State Apparatuses” essay is an implicit elision: “Notes Towards an Investigation.” So, too, review in our list of lists Geertz’s “certainly

not . . . complete list” or Lyotard’s “. . .” In every cultural critic, I hazard, there is an essential *et cetera* or similar stigma of incompleteness far in excess of the margin-of-error requirements of normal science. What is the thought behind the *et* or troubled Lyotardian *and* haunting cultural criticism? The antifoundational answer, of course, is that there is no thought: thought, logic, grounded Newtonian science ends. Once we walk off the plank of serial evidence into seas of *etc.*, there can be heard only cultural-critical topoi of inexpressibility, vain apologies, elegiac or whimsical plays upon incompleteness, and other such recognitions that the science of the atomistic list was all along rhetorical.³⁸

Etc., I suggest, is a *trope* of inexpressibility that introduces within atomism a rhetoric-within-rhetoric. Besides metonymy, after all, there is also that variant, more expansive play on particulars: synecdoche. It is synecdoche that redeems the *etc.* from the wasteland of endless syntagm (which some cultural criticisms also call consumerism) by transforming incompleteness into the figure of fulfillment: a symbolics or iconic metaphors putting the part *for* the cultural whole.³⁹ I refer to the implicit rhetorical turn heard in such phrases from our matrix as “some fragment of a lost life,” “my vision is necessarily more fragmentary,” or “the fragments, the incommensurable levels, the heterogeneous impulses.” Such rhetoric clearly confesses incompleteness, but, at last, also the unmistakable sign of synecdoche. Fragments, after all, are by definition not “particles” (which exist whether or not they join in a larger unit); they can only be parts-of-a-whole. A phrase such as *some fragment of a lost life* thus implies by its genitive construction that “lost life” is not really lost, that “some fragment” despite its discontinuity with the lost life-world can be discovered to be part “of” the lost world and thus to be big with wholeness. Not a scientific method in which limits of error bracket literal incompletenesses, then (or, more recently, in which incompletely known “butterfly effects” wander a local-chaos universe of patterned error), but the kind of *etc.* by which Everyman in his very partialness once figured the whole body politic or cosmos. The fragmentary atomism of cultural-critical detail harbors a huge error or trope: “microcosm” in the old sense.⁴⁰

Or rather, the detail is big with a slightly more recent, if still premodern, rhetoric of microcosm—with the rhetoric of parts-become-wholes, indeed, that originally arose to combat Lockean systemics. Here I advance the historical complement to rhetorical analysis. The moment of immanence is “first” in cultural criticism, as I have said, not because it is *a priori* but because it initiates an embedded historical sequence of rhetorics. It would be possible, for example, to refer postmodern cultural criticism at this point to modernist aesthetics. The “ontological particularity” or “iconics” that John Crowe Ransom argued in notably scientific style is *apropos*.⁴¹ Or to vary upon the other prescriptives of close reading: it is now culture that is ambiguous and paradoxical in its tense complexity of particularity, its texture of “local irrelevance.” It is culture that should not mean, but—with all the ontological zing of the Real—be. Thus arises

our new concrete universal: the *cultural* rather than verbal icon. But instead of bringing us back to the regime of Eliotic fragments shored against ruin, I will here drink deeply from the source. Let me refer postmodern cultural criticism to the movement that modernist aesthetics itself—together with such parallels as Deweyan philosophy—so aggressively sublated: romanticism. Cultural criticism is “first” of all an allusion to the moment when the rhetoric of empiricism confronted the early regime of the fragment: an emerging romantic rhetoric.

Witness, therefore, the broad, deep, and explicit remembrance of high romanticism—both literary and philosophical—in high postmodern cultural criticism. Without exaggeration, it may be said that romanticism is the most common ancestor of the various cultural criticisms: more basic, more shared than such polemically charged and relatively recent parent figures as Marx, Nietzsche, Dewey, Braudel, or Malinowski. Romanticism, as it were, is the grandparent or grandmuse: a grand-matrix of thought that, precisely because it is more distanced from current struggles for and against Marx, Nietzsche, Dewey, etc., indulges the most uncritical statements. A first evidence consists in such unabashed allusions in our matrix as “minute particulars,” “grains of sand in which the world may be seen,” “minute particulars of time, place, and circumstance,” and (in imitation of Wordsworth’s spots of time) “phenomenal spots of history.” But the evidence runs deeper than spot allusions. There is a whole subgenre in cultural criticism of sustained and egregiously adventitious uses of romanticism—gorgeous insets of romantic consciousness so well wrought, so self-sustaining, that we wonder whether cultural criticism is at last something like Keats’s Grecian Urn: a mere fretwork of culture (some “little town by river or sea shore . . . emptied of [its] folk”) silhouetted against an ideal ground.

A prime example is the New Historicism, whose frequent dependence on assumptions of romanticism and nineteenth-century historicism I have discussed elsewhere. In its many invocations of Hegelian “dialectic” together with its master-servant or “containment/subversion” analytic of power, for instance, Renaissance New Historicism is big with Spirit.⁴² Greenblatt’s massively antithetical notion of Renaissance self-fashioning (outlined in his introduction) could thus be mapped directly over a previous, celebrated work about self-fashioning: Hartman’s *Wordsworth’s Poetry*.⁴³ But it is in romantics New Historicism that romanticism redux is most brazen. McGann’s *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, for example, is an exhilaratingly polymorphous, heterocosmic, or—Americanizing the prefix—coon-curious work that chases the argument of cultural detailism through many fields of inquiry. Two fields, however, stand out: romantic literature and postmodernism. Whether these two are polymorphs or isomorphs is open to question: there is a strong presumption throughout the book that Blakean, Byronic, and other aspects of romanticism simply *are* postmodern. “Insofar as works like [Blake’s] *Songs* and *Marriage* are nonnarratives which do not involve themselves in forms of atonement,” McGann can thus say, “they resemble various kinds of

poststructural discourse, in particular the work now commonly known as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Writing.”⁴⁴ My own book on Wordsworth, I am compelled to add, is a sustained project of detailism that jumps implicitly (and at times explicitly) between the particulars of the French Revolution period and our post-modern sense of a “differential,” fractured, refugee culture. Or again, there is David Simpson’s *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination*, whose attack on totalizing theory in favor of minute “particularity” parallels Wordsworth’s own cultural-linguistic attack on “gaudiness and inane phraseology” in defense of the “language really used by men.”⁴⁵

Similarly, romanticism exerts an inordinate influence on the New Pragmatism. It is intriguing, for instance, to consider the infamous setpiece at the center of Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels’s “Against Theory.”⁴⁶ When that Lucy poem (“A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal”) washes up on the beach as if by natural process without “intention,” we are certainly being instructed in the manner of the philosophical traditions succeeding original pragmatism: analytical philosophy and its strong revision, “ordinary language” philosophy. Compensating for a bluntly denotative style with loony, pure thought-experiment examples (“The universe has expanded to twice its original size this night,” “Suppose that in a distant galaxy there is the twin of our earth,” “1227 is a rhombus,” “Caesar is a prime number,” “Should unusual, brilliant patterns suddenly appear in the sky—even if they took the form of letters which seemed to compose a sentence . . .”), analytical and ordinary language philosophy formed New Pragmatism in its image.⁴⁷ Plain, blunt, and trenchant to the point of exaggeration, New Pragmatist discourse also favors “pure” examples—paradigms so denotatively complex but connotatively insensitive that they resemble Rube Goldberg contraptions. “Suppose that you’re walking along a beach and you come upon a curious sequence of squiggles in the sand,” Knapp and Michaels begin, and then set up their contraption: “You step back a few paces and notice that they spell out the following words: ‘A slumber did my spirit seal. . . .’”⁴⁸

But if we attend to the undertow of allusion, we will recognize that the contraption washes up on a berm of romanticism. Surely, after all, we are in the wake of *Lyrical Ballads* with its original “ordinary language.”⁴⁹ Surely (to allude to *The Prelude*) we stand by some glimmering lake where a boy halts his owl songs to feel with shock the “voice” and “imagery” of the landscape sinking “unawares into his mind.”⁵⁰ Or again, to invoke “The Sensitive-Plant,” we pause by some Shelleyan ocean “whose waves never mark, though they ever impress / The light sand which paves it—Consciousness.” What hidden romantic current, after all, washes a *Lucy* poem onto Knapp and Michaels’s shifting sands of antifoundationalism?⁵¹ Further considerations: Knapp and Michaels’s full thesis is that the notion of an unauthored and intentionless Lucy poem is absurd. Intentionality is innately part of what we mean by texts because we would not otherwise perceive textuality in

the first place (only “squiggles” in the sand). Is innately intentional textuality therefore the same as romantic Nature, every part of which—whether a Lucy-poem landscape or squiggles of “little lines / Of sportive wood run wild”—is an inscription signing some fulfillment (or tragedy) of romantic intention (i.e., “mind,” “imagination”)? Or again: when Knapp and Michaels state that “the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning” such that “the project of *grounding* meaning in intention becomes incoherent,” what does “simple” mean?⁵² Does the standard New Pragmatist argument by dismissal (of the sort: “It simply *is* this way,” “Nothing interesting can be said; they just *are* that way”) mean that the premise of authorial intention is so natural that it could be an appendix to that romantic theory of simplicity: the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*? (Wordsworth on intention: rustic existence is paradigmatic because “in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity” and because rustics “convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.”) Is intention, in sum, as “simple” as Lucy, whatever Wordsworth intended by that name?⁵³

But perhaps I make too much of Wordsworth, the original against-theorist (or what James K. Chandler calls Burkean ideologue-against-ideology), in Knapp and Michaels’s essay.⁵⁴ The full significance of such romantic vignettes set within New Pragmatist discourse only comes to view when we peruse the broad wash effects of romanticism in an extended corpus of cultural criticism such as Richard Rorty’s (and, in the background, John Dewey’s and William James’s).⁵⁵ There are Rorty’s direct quotations and allusions, for example: “something far more deeply interfused,” “murder to dissect,” “negative capability,” “clerisy of the nation,” “create the taste by which he will be judged,” “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Man’s,” and so forth.⁵⁶ (Dewey: “The ‘magic’ of poetry—and pregnant experience has poetical quality—is precisely the revelation of meaning in the old effected by its presentation through the new. It radiates the light that never was on land and sea”; James: “As Wordsworth says, ‘thought is not; in enjoyment it expires.’”)⁵⁷ And there is Rorty’s consistent use of “romantic” as a period concept designed at once to instruct philosophy in the imaginative groundlessness of romantic world making and to criticize the too idealist goal of the original romantic world makers. Particularly dependent upon the romantic period concept are essays such as “Professionalized Philosophy,” “Idealism and Textualism,” and the “Contingency” series. To make a collage:

Let me call “romanticism” the thesis that what is most important for human life is not what propositions we believe but what vocabulary we use. . . . Not until the Romantics did books become so various as to create readers who see what has been written as having no containing framework. . . . Since the Romantics, we have been helped most of all by the poets, the novelists, and the ideologues. . . . The *Phenomenology of Spirit* taught us to see not only the history of philosophy, but that of Europe, as portions of a *Bildungsroman*. . . . What

survived from the disappearance of metaphysical idealism as a scientific, arguable thesis was, simply, romanticism. . . . Romanticism was *aufgehoben* in pragmatism. . . . The important philosophers of our own century are those who have tried to follow through on the Romantic poets.⁵⁸

It is not coincidental that one of Rorty's latest heroes of "postphilosophical" culture is Harold Bloom.⁵⁹ Romanticism is Rorty's archetype for a universe in which the ground is stable only between world-expunging and world-making swerves.

Finally, I invoke just one other side of high postmodern cultural criticism: French postmodern/pragmatist theory as represented, for example, by Lyotard's *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*.⁶⁰ *The Differend* is emphatically a work of cultural criticism not only because it draws its semiotics from the "pragmatics" tradition launched by C. S. Peirce, G. H. Mead, and Charles Morris⁶¹ but because it sets its finally *postsemiotic* world of splintered phrase universes on a primal scene of (post)culture: Auschwitz. Auschwitz—and, since this remains an ineluctably French work, secondarily the terror of the French Revolution—is where old philosophers come to dispute their final truth-solutions: epistemological, metaphysical, even syntactical "realities." Is there a speakable and verifiable truth communicable between phrase universes? How can there be such "linkage" if some final solutions silence an entire class of speakers, an entire testament of phrases? In truth, did the Final Solution, did Auschwitz really happen?⁶² Philosophers come to offer their judgments. And two of the philosophers who walk most largely are Kant and Hegel. Tutelary geniuses of some of Lyotard's most sustained "Notices," Kant and Hegel are the bookends of Enlightenment and romanticism between which the "differend" is the book burning. The differend is a "feeling" for the unspeakability of any Truth about final solutions, a noncognitive reaching after unspeakable words, a silent grasping for . . . As Lyotard says immediately after his third Kant Notice: "Is this the sense in which we are not modern? Incommensurability, heterogeneity, the differend, the persistence of proper names, the absence of a supreme tribunal? Or, on the other hand, is this the continuation of romanticism, the nostalgia that accompanies the retreat of . . . , etc.?" (Lyotard's elision).⁶³

More such fragments of romanticism could be gathered. Cultural criticism's pragmatics of "everyday" or "ordinary" "experience," for example, is in part certifiably romantic. So, too, there is romanticism in the dialogics of cultural criticism: the view that culture is no more than a series of conversational improvisations, stories, or *petits récits*. The ordinary and the storied, after all, is the heartland of *Lyrical Ballads*. But perhaps our fragments already limn the whole. To view cultural-critical atomism in historical perspective is to discover precisely what I earlier called an iconic metaphoric, or, to use the romantic rather than modernist concept, the symbol. As Coleridge might phrase it, cultural-critical "detail" is the part through which the whole shines translucently.⁶⁴ Thus listen again to the unmistakable allusions in our matrix: "minute particulars," "grains of sand in

which the world may be seen,” “minute particulars of time, place, and circumstance,” and “phenomenal spots of history.”

Or we might look from the grain of sand to the parallel Blakean symbolics of inverted space—of “vortexes,” “ordered spaces,” or visionary “Globules of Man’s blood” each of which expands into a whole cosmos when viewed from inside. Cultural criticism remembers the process of micro-world making by which children sporting upon the shore, the boy in the boat, the gibbet mast, and so on once created phenomenally entire universes *within* the local or regional. I underscore here an aspect of high cultural criticism so sustained and colorful that in all likelihood it will be the method’s most anthologized element, its “best” work. Cultural criticism’s best is its passion for constructing micro-worlds each as intricately detailed, yet also as expansive in mythic possibility, as a Wordsworthian Lakeland, Blakean ordered space, Keatsian Grecian Urn, or—to cite a modern but deeply romantic analogue—Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County. When we sift the richly worked anecdotes of the New Historicism (e.g., any of Greenblatt’s or Steven Mullaney’s inaugural paradigms); when we caress the even more lovingly reconstructed micro-worlds of the New Cultural History (the universes of heretic millers, false Martin Guerres, cat-killing apprentices, or Le Roy Ladurie’s Pays d’Oc); when we regard the intricately meditated Cashinahua “Notice” and other vignettes of philosophy-as-life in Lyotard’s *Differend*; and when we enjoy New Pragmatism’s comically inventive alternate universes done up in analytic-philosophy fashion (worlds in which poems wash up on beaches complete with submarines in the distance, Rorty’s neo-Swiftian society of Antipodeans)⁶⁵—in sum, when we read any of these miraculously sustained bubbles of recreated or created context, we are for a moment again a child shaking one of those globed, water-filled landscapes filled with miniature snowflakes. The flakes of detail fall into place, and we are charmed by both their slow suspense and the crystal clarity of the scene when all has settled into mock reality. Or to magnify the miniature: this is what Jean Baudrillard calls “our only architecture today: great screens on which are reflected atoms, particles, molecules in motion. Not a public scene or true public space but gigantic spaces of circulation, ventilation, and ephemeral connections.”⁶⁶

In the picture of great detail, in sum, the local threatens to go transcendental: detailism becomes what Baudrillard calls “molecular transcendence,” the “idealism of the molecule.”⁶⁷ Cultural critics, we note, recognize this witching moment of local transcendence in their works. In some of their most meditative passages, they pause on the threshold of transcendence aware that Keatsian magic case-ments of detail are about to open on a foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. In this moment (“Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll [them] back . . .”), they become critics of cultural criticism. Only so does their *critical* sense survive, in a self-reflexive rather than social gaze. Leah Marcus thus observes reflexively in the epilogue to her fine book on topical or local reading: “The

project for localization sets itself resolutely against the general and the universal, but has its own ways of creating generalities, leaping over difference in order to construct an alternative order of 'essences' out of the materials of history"; and again, "Generating a plenitude of particulars is not the same as appealing to a realm of ultimate truths, yet there may be important ways in which the two activities are functionally similar."⁶⁸ Stephen Greenblatt inquires,

But what if we refuse the lure of a totalizing vision? The alternative frequently proposed is a relativism that refuses to privilege one narrative over another, that celebrates the uniqueness of each cultural moment. But this stance—akin to congratulating both the real and the pretended Martin Guerre for their superb performances—is not, I think, either promising or realistic. For thorough-going relativism has a curious resemblance to the universalizing that it proposes to displace.⁶⁹

Foucault adds: "Is it not perhaps the case that these fragments of genealogies are no sooner brought to light . . . than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation [within unitary discourses]? . . . And if we want to protect these only lately liberated fragments are we not in danger of ourselves constructing, with our own hands, that unitary discourse . . . ?"⁷⁰ And I have accused myself in the epilogue to *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*: "There is the faintest unmistakable taint of transcendence about your whole project."⁷¹

Now we can take a page from Naomi Schor's *Reading in Detail*. The "threshold" of transcendence on which high cultural criticism pauses is the sublime. In a series of chapters tracing the tradition of detailism from Sir Joshua Reynolds through Hegel, Freud, Barthes (and others), Schor comes to the crucial insight that detailism overthrew neoclassical generalization to dominate in the age of romanticism and the realistic novel only because it was made subservient to the aesthetics of sublimity.⁷² The spot-of-time detail was a help (and, in Schor's gender argument, helpmeet) to transcendence. It is our own modernist and poststructuralist age, she argues, that at last "desublimates" the "detail ideal."⁷³ Addressed specifically to the postmodern, my own argument diverges in a direction suggested by Lyotard's "What Is Postmodernism?" Lyotard argues: "Modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. . . . The postmodern would be that which, in the modern . . . searches for new presentations . . . in order to impart a stronger sense of the [sublimely] unrepresentable."⁷⁴ Postmodernism, that is, re-presents modernism but is continuous with it and its romantic predecessor: the moment of sublimity is there at the root.

If Thomas Weiskel were writing now, perhaps, he would enroll cultural criticism alongside structuralism and psychoanalysis in *The Romantic Sublime*.⁷⁵ The *etc.* of cultural-critical detail is at base emphatically sublime. Cultural criticism looks out on perilous seas of detail, but—blocked from any overview by its case-study view or local perspectivism—experiences a crisis of incompleteness, of significance drowned in insignificance. The details are so many details. Only the

reactive phase of the romantic sublime (specifically, Kant's "mathematical sublime") can intervene: insignificance becomes the trope of transcendental meaning.⁷⁶ By this trope, the least detail points to total understanding; as we say, history is in the details. Culture, that is, can be understood in its totality only if we believe that our inability to understand totality *is* the total truth.

And with this copular *is* we at last come to the Real. The Real in cultural criticism is indistinguishable from figure. How else could we understand what *is* by what *is not* except by synecdoche, metaphor, or symbol so extreme that it is catachresis? To change our own figure from perilous seas to high sierras: when we face the massif of detail piled up by high cultural criticism, we at last truly climb mountains. We end on some cloud-wrapped Snowdon or nimbus-noumenon where any visible detail—say the way a rift in the clouds sublimates all the underlying voices of the world—marks the threshold of the visionary.⁷⁷ The visionary "is" the Real.

Or perhaps "visionary" and "transcendental" are too otherworldly to map cultural criticism, which, while it eschews foundational ground, makes its home not in the abyss of seas or the inverted abyss of mountains (the two sublime bounds of Braudel's precedent-setting work of detailism, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*) but on the firm terra cognita of the great coastal plains of civilization. Let us say instead, therefore, that the objectivist and scientific discourse of cultural criticism at last sublimates into immanence. Immanence is transcendence sunk in the mundane. It is what Dewey, in his modern anticipation, meant when he said:

Modern life involves the deification of the here and the now; of the specific, the particular, the unique, that which happens once and has no measure of value save such as it brings with itself. Such deification is monstrous fetishism, unless the deity be there; unless the universal lives, moves, and has its being in experience as individualized.⁷⁸

To complete this picture of great detail, we need now only rename the "atom" so as to restore the discourse of scientism and immanence to the sphere of culture proper. Other names in high cultural criticism for the atom are "individual" and "community"—the progressively enlarged horizons of local detail.

What is the "subject," that vexed unit of identity in cultural criticism? In one view, the subject is the immanent individual: the "individual" who fends off totalism in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* and that Lentricchia in his "The Return of William James" calls "the particular, the local, the secret self," the "*isolatos* . . . at the frontier."⁷⁹ In its reverence for detail, I suggest, cultural criticism reveals a hidden agenda of Western individualism not clearly distinguished from what Lentricchia recalls to us in his essay on James: an original-pragmatist nostalgia for the colonial or nineteenth-century frontiersman of can-do sufficiency. Such is true also of all the more-or-less Marxist authors in our matrix. It may be said about the materialist side of New Historicism, for example, that

detailism is in part a sustained allegory for individualism: when we subscribe to “the concrete, the material, and the particular” or “the particular and particularly constrained,” we are really rewriting the biography of what old-line Marxism made taboo: individualities behaving with all the relative autonomy of “real” people in the ideal Western democracy. People, as it were, are personified details.

The highest stakes involved in mapping the atomistic detail over the individual then appear if we enlarge our horizons to “community.” Here I refer to what may be the single most promising, if also problematic, front of cultural criticism: its exploration of the communally “parochial,” “local,” and “regional.” These latter terms, which criss-cross our matrix, herald worlds of research.⁸⁰ Leah Marcus’s and Richard Helgerson’s works about localism, for instance; Bourdieu’s project of *habitus*; or Geertz’s essays on local knowledge focus “localism” as the underexplored zone between the discretely individual and the massively collective. But localism is assuredly also problematic. We can witness such phrases from our matrix as “the experience of particular communities,” “individual autonomy . . . communal autonomy,” “a reader situated in a particular social space,” or “daily life in a particular community.” By defining hyperdiscrete communities that behave as if they were particular individuals, these phrases indicate what sometimes seems a too resistless mapping of the person-concept *over* localism.⁸¹ The regional community functions as if it were a solidarity of one, as if, in other words, it were immanent with identity.

Perhaps the boldest in this regard is the branch of high postmodern cultural criticism that has made the most of the local community concept for theoretical (or, rather, “anti”-theoretical) purposes: New Pragmatism. Whether we consider Rorty’s idolization of local context—especially his recent aggrandizement of the “liberal community”—or Fish’s “interpretive communities,” “we” (using the pronoun enactively here) sense what is perhaps an entirely too comfortable sense of solidarity signed by the heavy-handed pronouns of the method: characteristically, “we” and “us” versus “they” and “them” (sometimes “I” and “me” versus “you”). Witness the following statement by Rorty:

The point of these examples is that *our* sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as “one of us,” where “us” means something smaller and more local than the human race. That is why “because she is a human being” is a weak, unconvincing explanation of a generous action [emphasis mine].⁸²

What seemingly universal solidarity authorizes the *our* (outside quote marks) that, in a secondary operation, then thinks about the smaller and more local “us” or “she” (the latter inside quote marks)?⁸³ Or again, from Fish:

The only “proof” of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a

third party: “we know.” I say it to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me.⁸⁴

My question to you: Who is the generalizable *I* or *me* here in this solidaristic “we”-community of “I’s”? Is Fish (or anyone), after all, always the same? The problem of change aside, even the most instantiated context for a community of fellowship—to take my own case: a lecture hall in which a professor of romanticism answers questions about this paper before an audience of professors and graduate students—poses a problem of infinite regress in the determination of the “I.” For what is the protocol that confers membership upon the speaker-in-this-community such that the various competing aspects of his relevant identity (e.g., Teacher, Student, Specialist, Generalist, Administrator in charge of telling some graduate students they do not belong in the professional community) agree to speak as a proper “member,” a suitably consistent “I”? The heart of the problem, of course, is that there are very few contexts of interest in which the local community provides enough external signals (“nods” from the audience) to govern the relationship of a self’s “selves” without uncertainty or anxiety. It would thus seem that the “I” that gestures its membership in Fish’s interpretive community requires for its constitution the supplement of an internal interpretive community—a mental scene in which its “selves” nod to each other in a fellowship governed by an imagined or memorial context. Of course, to take the regress much further (what, after all, defines each of the self’s interior selves?) would stretch this kind of analysis—and perhaps any kind of analysis—beyond what it is designed to do. The main point is that a local-community concept that takes us back only *one* step of the regress to an elemental “I” void of internal distinction has the felt effect of being immanent, foundational. Tied notionally to an undifferentiated “I,” the interpretive community appears to act as if it were itself a person concept.⁸⁵

In the New Pragmatism, in sum, and to varying degrees in all the cultural criticisms, there resides a deeply troubled Us-versus-Them problem that is not resolved by the bare recognition that the interpretive community of *Us* *does* confront Them. The very denomination or pronomination of an *Us* (and “I”) by which to make statements about *Us* and *Them* is the blindness of cultural criticism’s insight. It leaves in darkness all that is truly of moment about the *Us-versus-Them*, *self-versus-other*, problem: the procedures of emigration/immigration, border inspection/recognition, confrontation/negotiation, and ultimately terror/desire creating an *Us* *from* *Them*. What assures “us,” after all, that the local, regional, or parochial community we study *is* a community—or collective “unity”—in the first place?⁸⁶ Nothing but a direct mapping of the *isolatos* concept over community (in a spirit directly contrary to Lentricchia’s intention in “The Return of William James” to challenge imperialist appropriations of world identity). And

the possibilities for then multiplying such implicitly imperialist mappings by creating even larger communities such as “nation” or “world” are fearsome.

The detail, we might say, is as small as Napoleon.

Release 2.0

The mistress gave the order, enjoining the boys above all to avoid frightening her grise. Gleefully Jerome and Léveillé set to work, aided by the journeymen. Armed with broom handles, bars of the press, and other tools of their trade, they went after every cat they could find, beginning with la grise. Léveillé smashed its spine with an iron bar and Jerome finished it off. Then they stashed it in a gutter while the journeymen drove the other cats across the rooftops, bludgeoning every one within reach and trapping those who tried to escape in strategically placed sacks. . . . Roused by gales of laughter, the mistress arrived. She let out a shriek as soon as she saw a bloody cat dangling from a noose. Then she realized it might be la grise. Certainly not, the men assured her: they had too much respect for the house to do such a thing.

—Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984)

Pain is nonlinguistic: It is what we human beings have that ties us to the non-language-using beasts. So victims of cruelty, people who are suffering, do not have much in the way of a language. That is why there is no such thing as the “voice of the oppressed” or the “language of the victims.” The language the victims once used is not working anymore, and they are suffering too much to put new words together. So the job of putting their situation into language is going to have to be done for them by somebody else. The liberal novelist, poet, or journalist is good at that.

—Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989)

You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it. Most of them disappeared then, and the survivors rarely speak about it. When they do speak about it, their testimony bears only upon a minute part of this situation. How can you know that the situation itself existed? . . . “I have analyzed thousands of documents. I have tirelessly pursued specialists and historians with my questions. I have tried in vain to find a single former deportee capable of proving to me that he had really seen, with his own eyes, a gas chamber.”

—Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend* (1983)⁸⁷

In Robert Darnton’s essay on “The Great Cat Massacre,” the most disturbing detail is the killing of the grise, the favorite cat of the master printer’s wife. We hear in our inner ear the brittle, wet breaking of the grey’s spine as the iron bar, wielded by a subversive apprentice, descends. We see in our inner eye the convulsions of the beast as an accomplice finishes the deed. But that is not what is finally disturbing—what stays with us in mind as well as in the viscera. What lingers is the facility with which a victim of violence becomes a “symbol.” Darnton comments: “Cats as symbols conjured up sex as well as violence, a com-

bination perfectly suited for an attack on the mistress. The narrative identified her with la grise, her chatte favorite. In killing it, the boys struck at her."⁸⁸

*Raised to the meta-level, such ease of symbolization is the hallmark of the New Cultural History itself. Darnton—among the best of New Cultural Historians specializing in “symbolic” analysis—deploys his bloody story to construct our most potent postmodern symbolism: cultural “representation.” Cultural representation or social drama is figuration interpreted according to the preferred metanarrative of high cultural criticism: neither the tale of liberation nor that of philosophic integration (the two metanarratives addressed in Lyotard’s Postmodern Condition) but instead the great, arrested story—its climax suspended in perpetual agon—of subversion/containment. From his opening historical anecdote on, in other words, Darnton on cats is akin to Greenblatt, Mullaney, Montrose, and other New Historicists whose “paradigms” dramatize the world as all a Representation of struggle between subversives and dominants.*⁸⁹

But what happened to the body of the grey? To the irreducible facticity and uniqueness of the beast? For the purposes of representing subversion versus containment, the grise must be disappeared. A particular cat’s agony, after all: insignificant compared to what we can make it stand for. Let such agony represent an entire agon of class strife, partisan battle, the differential struggle of local context versus local context. Never mind that a cat’s back must be broken to create the fulcrum point of the versus itself. The cat has no language. It is not a survivor. Let the liberal intellectual, writing past scenes of strife as a simulacrum of praxis, speak for it.

Toward a Practiced Detachment: A Prospective Conclusion

When high postmodern cultural critics sing the detail, I have argued, they rehearse a rhetoric of immanent reality descended most famously from romanticism. But that is not all there is to the romance of contextualism.

There is also the *rhetoric of commitment* to detail. Commitment is not neutral attachment to “reality” but partisan attachment to one side or the other in the existential combat, the essential *binarism*, of culture—of culture, that is, conceived as local Us versus Them and, within any Us, as less versus more powerful sub-cultures.⁹⁰ Or more fully, since not all cultural critics express political sympathy with one side or the other: high postmodern cultural criticism is committed to the antitotalistic vision of culture as the “or” or “versus” of struggle itself. For high cultural critics, that is, culture is a tragedy, an eternal agon. Details are the supporting cast. The bodies of detail—Darnton’s cats among them—pile up in the theater of catfights, cockfights, treason trials, executions, razings, plagues, rebellions, revolutions, Terrors, and so on. Yet however high the pile, such details evidencing the agony of the dominated-versus-the-dominating remain strangely faceless, anonymous. They are never more than throwaway markers, represen-

tations, “symbols” of a contest enacted in the *name* of detail but greater than any particular detail. While high cultural critics may commit themselves to an agonist in the contest, in sum, the very facility with which they process interchangeable details argues their greater commitment to “struggle,” “resistance,” “opposition,” “subversion,” “transgression” as abstract, perfect forms of contest.

The logic that issues from such commitment to the idea of contest is “practice.” Increasingly heard in high cultural criticism across all its denominations, practice is the analytic of culture as digital rather than atomic—as a field of zero versus one, dominated versus dominating. According to this logic, cultural contestants are essentially “bits,” and the function of bit-people is to enact through myriad “micro-tactics” and “-techniques” of resistance what de Certeau calls “the practice of everyday life” and what Foucault, gazing reciprocally upon repression, calls the practice of “power.”

A question for high cultural criticism: What is the common denominator of “practice” as spoken on both sides of the Atlantic and across the political spectrum that makes the details of practice at once so fulsome and faceless? Why does the very word *practice* at times seem so overdetermined—so overstrong, repetitive, and at last ritualistic that it threatens to become compulsory? And in our post- or against-theory ambience, is there such a thing as a “resistance to practice” akin to resistance to theory?

A further question that an extended version of this essay would need to ask: What *about* that moment of remove when the critic views the perfect form of cultural agony as if from across the proscenium? How is it that the detailed and practical battles of culture can finally seem as distantiated as little, regional wars glimpsed on the television screen or in a computer war game? If postmodern culture is agonic, in short, it is also ironic and aesthetic: commitment to a staged scene of resistance lasts until the show is over and the critic touches the control to bring up the next riveting *petit récit* on the cable. The rhetoric of commitment ends in the *rhetoric of detachment*. And the logic that this latter, ironic rhetoric makes possible is dialogism: the view that every set of cultural practices is finally just the outcome of a local “vocabulary,” “perspective,” or “simulation” whose conversational improvisations, little stories, “spatial stories,” styles, and so on make culture—from the view of the ironist rather than those trapped in the simulation—all a detachable facade.⁹¹ High cultural criticism, we may say vulgarly, is a culture-*spiel* as determinedly depthless in its play with representational surfaces, facades, screens, and media of all sorts as a vinyl LP hand spun by a rap artist, that master of culture-*spiel* able to fragment long-play metanarrative into *petits récits*.

Cybernetic, televisionary, rhapsodic: such models of mediated and detached cultural experience could be multiplied. The array of surfaces that is the cultural matrix grows thick all about us, and it comforts more than disturbs. Once we insulated ourselves from reality in universals and totalisms. Now we wrap our-

selves in detailed layers of context as thick and multiform as cotton or Gibson's temperfoam. If I had to put my criticism of high postmodern cultural criticism in brief, it would come to this: "context" is not the same as "culture." Context throws over the surface of culture an articulated grid, a way of speaking and thinking culture, that allows us to model the scenes of human experience with more felt significance—more reality, more practicality, more aesthetic impact—than appears anywhere but on the postmodern version of romantic "nature": a screen.

Notes

1. William Wordsworth, "The Prelude," 1799, 1805, 1850: *Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, Norton Critical Edition (New York, 1979), 1805 version, 1.408–25. William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York, 1984), 4–5, 51. (In the novel, the definition beginning "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination . . ." is presented as a "voice-over" in quotation marks.)
2. See also Gibson's later novels, *Count Zero* (New York, 1987) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (New York, 1988), as well as his collection of stories, *Burning Chrome* (New York, 1987). Other authors associated with the cyberpunk movement include Greg Bear, Rudy Rucker, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, and Bruce Sterling; see Bruce Sterling, ed., *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (New York, 1988). For a report on the attempts to define *cyberpunk* at the "Fiction 2000" conference at the University of Leeds in 1989, see *The J. Lloyd Eaton Collection Newsletter* (Special Collections Department, Tomas Rivera Library, University of California, Riverside) 1, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 1ff. (My thanks to Frank McConnell for directing me to this newsletter.)
3. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (New Haven, 1975).
4. Wordsworth, 1805 *Prelude*, 13.69, 111–19.
5. I have not been able to find a better word than *banal* for my purposes, though the term has been complicated by Baudrillard. See Meaghan Morris's critical discussion of Baudrillard, "Banality in Cultural Studies," *Discourse* 10, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 1988): 3–27. My use of the term *simulation* in this essay, of course, is Baudrillardian.
6. For examples of these terms, see Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, 247, 308, as well as *Neuromancer*; and John Shirley's *Eclipse Corona* (New York, 1990), 33–34, 279.
7. The larger project for which this essay prepares will consider some of these alternatives to high postmodern cultural criticism (I choose the term *high postmodern* by analogy with *high modernist* or *high romantic*). Gender, ethnic, area (including post-colonial), and cultural-materialist cultural criticisms, of course, can overlap with high postmodern sorts—thus, for example, the relation between cultural-materialist "conjuncturalism" and the contextualist "detailism" I will come to. But there is a palpable difference: the degree to which the alternative cultural criticisms speak from, to, for, or in the midst of discrete population bases. In this regard, Rorty's "liberal community" and other such high postmodern "interpretive communities" may be "specific," "local," and "parochial" in principle; but they are clearly "meta-" by comparison with the countercultural youth, biker, and other "subcultures," for example, that were the

early stomping ground of conjuncturalist research in the 1970s. It would be unwarranted, however, to exaggerate the divergence between high and alternative cultural critics. A fairer statement would be that each individual postmodern cultural critic, precisely to the extent of his or her postmodernity, moves *between* high and alternative, generalist and population-dedicated, modes.

8. I should emphasize that my priority in this essay is scope: I show the *similarity* of contextualist discourse among many authors who in other ways are strikingly disparate. The reason that close readings in difference must be secondary here is not only limitation of space but the complicity of any streaks-in-the-tulip approach with the rhetoric of detailism that is my topic. Focus on similarity, that is, is *critical* in function. The first task of any criticism of high cultural criticism must be to suspend the postmodern dogma of difference in order to see it from a new angle. I say “suspend,” of course, because difference—as deconstruction teaches—inevitably catches up with discourses of similarity. But there is something to be learned in not too quickly allowing our criticism to coalesce with its topic in a common discourse of difference, *différance*, and differends.
9. Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York, 1987), 3.
10. Though Schor sometimes invokes “postmodern,” her basic paradigm for current detailism is high modernist and poststructuralist (with Barthes serving as *terminus ad quem*). According to this paradigm, the detail emerged in the twentieth century from past aesthetic regimes—Hegelian and realist—that had subordinated it to transcendental sublimity or (what Schor considers its equivalent) brute immanence. Liberation from such aesthetics came through a “desublimation” of detail or Barthesian valorization of “truly inessential” particulars (79–80, 84–85, and *passim*). I use the designation *postmodern* rather than *high modern* or *poststructuralist* in order to address cultural criticisms that range widely beyond literature and the arts. But certain of my conclusions about cultural criticism are consonant with Schor’s about aesthetics. What I will call “detachment” in cultural criticism is analogous to what Schor calls aesthetic desublimation. Detachment or desublimation names the moment when the perceiver suddenly sees not reality but the simulation that Barthes calls the “reality effect.” And what I will call the “immanent” Schor names the “return” of the real, especially in her discussion of late Barthes and the *punctum* (88–97). The discrimination of a returned-real within the “reality effect” contributes to Schor’s critical questioning of high modernist and poststructuralist aesthetics (e.g., 86–95). Similarly, it is the discernment of a nostalgic, immanent sense of reality within cultural criticism’s detached or simulated visions that will enable my own critical interrogation. I would point even more emphatically than Schor to the haunt of older, specifically nineteenth-century regimes of detail within the postmodern—much in the manner that the celebration of modernity in Schor’s last paragraph finishes by remembering the precedent of the Balzacian detail. In my view, in contrast to Schor’s in her last paragraph, “our modernity” has *not* shaken “the hegemony of the sublime.” (My larger project will touch upon an important side of Schor’s argument elided here: the link between detail and gender.)
11. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York, 1983), 232.
12. Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972–1980* (Minneapolis, 1982), 173.
13. Jerome J. McGann, *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 7, 122, 124. McGann quotes the phrase from Milman Par-

ry's *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford, 1971), 411. On this quote, see also McGann's pseudonymous essay by "Anne Mack and J.J. Rome," "Marxism, Romanticism, and Postmodernism: An American Case History," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (1989): 615.

14. See McGann on criticism as "array," *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, 132–51. As already prefaced in my excursus upon cyberpunk science fiction, I will emphasize the concept of the "matrix" in this essay to foreground one of postmodernism's most common motifs: the image of a world structured at both infra- and superstructural levels as labyrinthine network or grid—a sort of deconstructive "structure" or what I have elsewhere called the Disturbed Array; Alan Liu, "The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism," *English Literary History* 56 (1989): 722, 730. I privilege the word *matrix* in particular because it is a fixation not just in science fiction but in virtually all the branches of high postmodern cultural criticism. *Matrix* is the most frequent of a whole brood of similar grid-words recited so often that they acquire a fetishistic quality. Indeed, an analysis of "grid fetish" from the perspective of feminism or of the history of sexuality would need to address the psychosocial dimensions of "matrix" worship. (Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* is itself replete with the vocabulary of "matrices," "grids," "networks," "arrays," and "manifolds.") Phrased ontologically rather than sexually, "matrix" is what postmodern cultural criticism now has instead of "matter" (both words, of course, born of the same "mother"). Though still instinctively empirical, as I go on to argue, cultural criticism has learned to merge materialism with the purely informatic (and/or "ideological") by detaching "matter" from any premise of absolute, physical ground. Matter is now a "structure" akin to transistor circuitry etched upon silicon—i.e., a *pattern* independent of the substratum that carries it. Rendered essenceless, the substratum becomes not a ground at all but—and this is a concept that complements "matrix" in postmodernism—the *medium*. The media is the universe of depthless, essenceless, pure surfaces (screens, displays, facades) upon which "matrices" play out their "representations" of matter.
15. This matrix is culled from a larger database that I will at times draw upon to supplement my discussion below. Two qualifications: first, the categories of the matrix are flexible. Some authors broadcast on two or more channels, and the channels themselves are intermixed or internally split in complex ways. (Thus, for example, Lentricchia is as much a critic as associate of New Pragmatism; and, in general, the neo-Marxist, -historicist, and -pragmatist elements participate nervously in each other.) Secondly, the matrix quotes what Lyotard calls "phrase universes" without context or full syntax. When clarity or fairness demands, I will in my discussion restore matrix quotations to their context.
16. My selection of New Historicist authors from Renaissance and romantics studies is not meant to be exclusionary of such fields as eighteenth-century, Victorian, or American literature. The stress on romanticism prepares for argument to follow (and, of course, reflects the limitations of my own past work).
17. Sources, in order of citation: Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 167 and passim, 48, 69; *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 363. Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 9, 14. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1985), 23, 94, 107. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif., 1975), 132, 193, 266, 225. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York, 1982), xiv, xx. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Love, Death, and Money*

- in the Pays d'Oc, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1984), 158, 509. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, 1988), 1, 4, 16, 19. Richard Helgerson, "The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England," *Representations* 16 (Fall 1986): 65, 68, 73. Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley, 1988), 31, 36, 165. Louis Adrian Montrose: "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore, 1986), 305, 306. Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago, 1988), 68, 69, 116. Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison, Wis., 1987), 11, 81, 82. Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge, 1986), 1–3, 12; *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 8; "Back to the Future: Wordsworth's New Historicism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (1989): 649. Alan Liu: *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford, Calif., 1989), 47, 245, 465. Jerome J. McGann, *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, 55, 33, 29, 63, 125, 126, 63, 127. David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York, 1987), 13, 16, 212. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 109, 318; "Consequences," in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1985), 110. Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change* (Chicago, 1983), 7; "The Return of William James," in *The Current in Criticism: Essays on the Present and Future of Literary Theory*, ed. Clayton Koelb and Virgil Lokke (West Lafayette, Ind., 1987), 176, 177, 180, 191, 193. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J., 1979), 179, 387; *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 165, 168; *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, 1989), 16, 17, 77. Louis Althusser (and Étienne Balibar), *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, 1979), 15, 42, 58; *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, 1971), 136. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), 18, 22, 25, 56; "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash., 1983), 119. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978), 51, 92. Jean Baudrillard, "The Structural Law of Value and the Order of Simulacra" (excerpts from *L'Échange symbolique et la mort*, 1976), trans. Charles Levin, in *The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought*, ed. John Fekete (Minneapolis, 1984), 65–66, 69; "Fatal Strategies" (excerpts from *Les Stratégies fatales*, 1983), trans. Jacques Mourrain, in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, Calif., 1988), 189. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (London, 1977), 95, 105, 110. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1984), ix, xiv, 48, 68, 96, 125. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1984), xxiv, 15, 60; *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis, 1988), 255. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979), 139, 307; *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Gordon et al. (New York, 1980), 82, 126, 142; *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1980), 96, 97.
18. Philip Rosen, "Taming the Detail: Film and Historical Spectacle," Paper delivered at the conference on "Revolution '89: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the French Rev-

olution,” University of California, Santa Barbara, 13 May 1989. My thanks to the author for the manuscript.

19. Of course, Roland Barthes’s 1968 structuralist analysis of detail in “The Reality Effect” (in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, trans. R. Carter [London, 1982]) is relatively early work. His poststructuralist discussions of detail could even more plausibly be said to be relevant to my argument below. But I have not foregrounded Barthes because his detailism is so fully explored by Schor.
20. For Geertz on functionalist sociology, see, for example, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 206, 448. For the effort of the New Historicism to distance itself from formalism (in some regards counterfactually), see for example Jean E. Howard, “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies,” *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 14–15. For the complex reaction of the New Cultural History against *Annales* historiography (particularly its sociological tendencies), see François Furet, “Beyond the *Annales*,” *Journal of Modern History* 55 (1983): 389–410; Lynn Hunt, “French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the *Annales* Paradigm,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986), esp. 213ff.; and “Introduction: History, Culture, and Text,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Hunt (Berkeley, 1989), 6–7; and Chartier, *Cultural History*, 19–52. (“Reaction” against the *Annales* movement could also be called revisionism, since Chartier and others descend with variation from the “mentalities” side of *Annales* method.)
21. The phrase is from a saying of Wilfrid Sellars that Rorty quotes and alludes to several times. See, for example, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, xiv.
22. The deep influences (or perhaps, confluences) upon my discussion of “rhetoric” of detail in this essay include de Man, Barthes on the reality effect, Baudrillard on hyperreality and simulation, and Lyotard on phrase universes. An interesting thought experiment, for example, would be to read de Man together with Barthes’s discussion in “The Reality Effect” of “rhetoric” and reality’s “resistance to meaning” (14). So, too, Baudrillard on “the rhetoric of the real,” “hyperreality,” and “simulations” could be read in proximity both to de Man and to Barthes (for the phrase “rhetoric of the real,” see “Structural Law of Value,” 70). The notion of simulation, for instance, resonates against that of “imposition” in Paul de Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al. (New York, 1979), esp. 63–64, as well as against the idea of imitating “what is already the simulation of an essence” in Barthes’s “Reality Effect” (13). Finally, Lyotard on “phrase universes,” on the contingent “linking” of phrases, and on the “name” that can link only because it is an “empty and constant designator” would make a fitting reprise of the themes of rhetoric, imposition, and simulation, respectively (on the name as empty and constant designator, see *The Differend*, 44). Lyotard’s vision of phrase universes, we may say, amplifies the “reality effect” into a “universe effect.”
23. On “elsewhereness,” see Liu, *Wordsworth*, 5, 467, 497, and passim.
24. I refer especially to the last two sections of Geertz’s essay and to the chapters on Vladimir Nabokov and George Orwell in the last part of Rorty’s book. A passage such as the following in the introduction to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* epitomizes the linear trajectory I indicate: “This process of coming to see other human beings as ‘one of us’ rather than as ‘them’ is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like. . . . This is a task not for theory but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist’s report, the comic book, the docudrama, and, especially, the novel” (xvi).
25. McGann, *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, 82; see also 9, 91–92, 114, 246. On this point, see

Michael Fischer's review of McGann's book, *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 23 (1989): 35–37.

26. It would be ideal to read in cultural criticism both history of thought and more primary historical determinants—economic, social, political, etc. But I have found it more important to restrict myself here to history of thought. Historicizing projects such as my book on Wordsworth plunge into domains of primary history partly because they wish to use such history to revise an established intellectual history (e.g., “romanticism” as conceived by historians of ideas from Lovejoy through M. H. Abrams). But a historicizing criticism of postmodern cultural criticism must first of all articulate the still largely amnesiac intellectual history of the method before it can set about revising the significance of that intellectual history by looking to political, social, and other contexts. High postmodern cultural criticism has so far tended either to repudiate or simply to elide the relevance of any history of thought older than modernism. New Historicism, for example, is thus aggressively oblivious of its many sediments of formalist, original-historicist, and romantic thought. (See my “Power of Formalism”; cf. Brook Thomas's linkage of the New Historicism to *Historicismus* and traditional American pragmatism in his “The New Historicism and Other Old-Fashioned Topics,” in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeseer [New York, 1989], 182–203. My thanks to Thomas as well for a look at the first chapter of his forthcoming book of the same title, which shares some of the concerns of my own present project.) Such amnesia is symptomatic of postmodernism at large, which characteristically attempts to find its identity by asking the claustrophobic, historically foreshortened question “Is postmodernism continuous or discontinuous with modernism?”
27. I am simplifying, obviously, on several fronts. Most basically, a sufficient mapping of the intellectual history of cultural criticism would need to be nonlinear. A particularly vexed instance is the complex, multilinear modernist moment. Take the case of early twentieth-century American pragmatism: not only would the relation of such pragmatism to the aesthetics, formalism, “history of ideas,” Marxism, and other aspects of the modern moment need further thought, but so too would the relation of such pragmatism to its own nineteenth-century or turn-of-the-century precedents and to nineteenth-century historicism. Or to enter the problem through the alternative gateway of New Criticism: one of the great underexplored connections in intellectual history is the link of similarity/difference between New Criticism and the American pragmatic tradition. With its worry over the “use” of poetry, its hands-on praxis of close reading, its “ambiguous” understanding of literature as fluid experience, and its very style of argumentative (and often polemical) discourse, classical New Criticism at times bears an uncanny resemblance to classical pragmatism. In short, each historical “moment” in my fiction of intellectual history is criss-crossed in synchronic and temporal directions by multiple links with other developments.
28. This essay is conceived as part of a larger work on postmodern cultural criticism. In presenting it here, I have tried to make it as self-sufficient as possible, but my thesis requires that I at times look beyond the moment of immanence in high cultural criticism to the further moments of “commitment” and “detachment” that complete the overall experience I have dubbed “detached immanence.”
29. Louis O. Mink, “Change and Causality in the History of Ideas,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 2 (1968): 7–25.
30. As I suggest in note 14 above, the matrix form is also finally a hollowing out of “matter.” Matrixes in cultural criticism (my overall project will show) are at last undecidable: at once full of matter and outside matter. They are a kind of hyperspace.

31. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 23–27. Cf. Roland Barthes on “The Blazon,” in *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), 113–14.
32. Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*, 20.
33. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 427, n. 13. In general, Geertz’s footnotes to the cock-fight essay are intriguing: they insert under the argument of cultural interpretation a semifoundational respect for scientific objectivity and completeness (coupled with consciousness of inability to fulfill such standards). Note 14 on p. 427 thus begins, “For purposes of ethnographic completeness, it should be noted . . .,” while note 15 on p. 428 ends, “But a detailed understanding of the whole process awaits what, alas, it is not very likely ever to get: a decision theorist armed with precise observations of individual behavior.”
34. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 136–37.
35. Lyotard, *Differend*, 67.
36. For economy, I have used lists of categories or concepts as my examples. The point would also be true if Darnton and Geertz (as they do elsewhere) were to itemize not categories but factual particulars ordered by number, dimension, location, or chronology. For a splendid thematization (but also enactment) of the problem of matrix making and listing, see Darnton’s chapter “A Police Inspector Sorts His Files” in his *Great Cat Massacre*.
37. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 138.
38. The *etc.*, we may say, is where cultural-critical “thought” becomes what Barthes calls mere “pensiveness,” a discourse that signals rhetorically that its “head is heavy with unspoken language.” Cultural criticism (in Barthes’s words about pensiveness), “having filled the text but obsessively fearing that it is not *incontestably* filled, [insists] on supplementing it with an *et cetera* of plenitudes” (*S/Z*, 217). Barthes’s improvisation on the rhetoric of the blazon is also apropos: “Striptease and blazon refer to the very destiny of the sentence. . . . The sentence can never constitute a *total*; meanings can be listed, not admixed: the total, the sum are for language the promised lands, glimpsed *at the end* of enumeration, but once this enumeration has been completed, no feature can reassemble it—or, if this feature is produced, it too can only be *added* to the others” (114).
39. Cf. Schor on synecdoche and detail, *Reading in Detail*, 28–29.
40. Cf. Schor on the relation between the detail and the microcosmic fragment (*ibid.*, 28); and Theodor Adorno on “fragmented transcendence” (*Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhardt [London, 1984], 184). Marjorie Levinson’s reading of romantic fragment poems as sites of collision, contradiction, and internal divisiveness points by contrast to what might be called a “digital,” “binary,” or “differential” understanding of the fragment that I will take up in another part of my project (e.g., see *Romantic Fragment Poem*, 13, 27, 85, 204). If in its immanent aspect cultural criticism speaks of the fragment as microcosmic, in its commitment to praxis and adversarialness it speaks of the fragment as faction.
41. See the chapter “Wanted: An Ontological Critic,” in John Crowe Ransom’s *The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Conn., 1941). In his review of McGann’s *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, 36, Fischer compares Ransom on “local details” to McGann on particularity.
42. Liu, “Power of Formalism,” 764, n. 35. See also Alan Liu, “Wordsworth and Subversion, 1793–1804,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 55–100.
43. On Greenblatt and Hartman, see my review of David Simpson’s *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination in The Wordsworth Circle* 19 (1988): 180. Some of my ideas on detailism were initially sketched out in this review essay.

44. McGann, *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, 207.
45. See my review essay on Simpson's book, 177–79. On my selective look just at Renaissance and romantics New Historicism, see note 16 above.
46. Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago, 1985). Knapp and Michaels's essay, of course, confines itself to literary theory. But I include it in my discussion of cultural criticism both as a *cause célèbre* of New Pragmatism and as a lead-in to Rorty's cultural criticism.

A fuller consideration of "Against Theory" could usefully set its "intention" or "squiggles in the sand versus meaning" issue side-by-side with analogous ghost-in-the-machine problems in Knapp's and Michaels's other work. Most germane is Michaels's own cultural-critical book: the New Pragmatist/New Historicist *Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley, 1987). Here, Michaels discusses much the same squiggles in sand versus meaning problem (more generally: "material and representation, hard money and soft, beast and soul"; 173) under the topics of commodity value, money, corporations, bodies versus persons, automatic writing, gambling, and photography. However, the historicist medium in which Michaels's book embeds the problem makes a qualitative difference in the felt outcome of the discussion. "Against Theory" reductively collapses together the binary terms of the ghost/machine controversy to leave us in pragmatism's characteristically flat, leveled world: in its view, to see a meaningful text in squiggles in the sand just is to see a ghost of authorial intention, otherwise we would not see a "text" in the first place. Or as Knapp and Michaels put it flatly, "We have argued that what a text means and what its author intends it to mean are identical and that their identity robs intention of any theoretical interest" (19). But *The Gold Standard* delays the collapse of the terms, allowing them to interfere, reverse, and complicate each other in an "antithetical" fashion (for "antithetical," see p. 173).

"Delay," indeed, could here be elevated into a critical concept. It might be said that the contribution of New Historicism to New Pragmatism, otherwise uncannily alike in their assumptions, is precisely to introduce a salutary *delay*. (Both methods, of course, have their homologue in deconstruction with its "deferral.") Delayed by the necessity of finding, reading, revising, and being fair to historical examples with all their messy imprecision (as opposed to the "pure" philosophical examples I mention below), the doctrine of antitranscendence and local belief encounters a resistance it is forced to internalize. In the process, it becomes more truly interesting.

Logical analysis in "Against Theory," we observe, habitually occurs along a hypothetical temporal axis: "In one moment he identifies meaning and intended meaning; in the next moment he splits them apart"; "Hirsch is imagining a moment of interpretation before intention is present"; "Intention . . . must be present from the start"; "The moment of imagining intentionless meaning constitutes the theoretical moment itself"; "One might ask whether the question of intention still seems as irrelevant as it did seconds before" (13–16). And the use of catching the essay's many antagonists in an inconsistency framed by the delay between one thought-"moment" (or even "second") and another, of course, is to prove a "mistake" (one of the essay's key words, e.g., pp. 12–14, 18, 22, 23). The general argument of "Against Theory" is that any temporal break interposed between always-already identical concepts is fallacious (the spatial version of this argument is the vaunted New Pragmatist distinction between being "in" one's context of belief and being transcendently "outside" it).

The Gold Standard, however, has to locate the delay of fallacy in more-or-less thickly

described contexts of historical controversy and fiction. The following, for example, is essentially a temporal analysis realized in a particular milieu: "The subject of naturalism . . . is typically unable to keep his beliefs lined up with his interests for more than two or three pages at a time." (177). As a result, the delay of fallacy is embedded in historical time, and finding a slip between one instant in an author's text and another leads not to the shrill "aha!" tone of "Against Theory" but to the bass chord of *historical understanding*. Witness, for example, the cherish with which Michaels treats the "mistakes" of naturalism:

But can economies be subjects? Can they have intentions, desires, beliefs? Can they have interests? . . . From [a certain] standpoint, the ascription of interests to a money economy . . . is only a figure of speech or a mistake. . . . At the same time, however, as literary critics—and as critics in particular of naturalism—we can hardly dismiss this mistake, this particular figure, as merely one among others. For according to the logic of naturalism it is only because we are fascinated by such mistakes—by natural objects that look as if they were made by humans—that we have any economy at all. The foundation of our economy, the primitive desire to own, is nothing but our response to these mistakes, our desire to own the mistakes themselves. (178–79; see also p. 171 for a complicated treatment of "mistakes")

Mistakes such as these are part of history (and of our participation in history), and history—given the pragmatist respect for contingency—is not as easily dismissed as "theory." According to the overall argumentative paradigm of *The Gold Standard*, therefore, the use of discovering "mistakes" in history is not to prove or disprove fallacy but to "exemplify" a historical "network of related contradictions and controversies" (174–75): the authors that Michaels discusses "exemplify" the logical tensions of naturalism in all its literary, intellectual, economic, and social complexity (see also p. 27 on exemplification).

(I do not discuss here Steven Knapp's book on *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* [Cambridge, Mass., 1985] because it has less obvious connections to New Pragmatism, New Historicism, or cultural criticism generally. But its central issue—the unstable interface between the literal and the figurative in extreme personifications—is deeply congruent with the ghost/machine problem in both "Against Theory" and *The Gold Standard*; cf. the mention of "personification" in *The Gold Standard*, 178–79.)

47. Friedrich Waismann, *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*, ed. R. Harré (New York, 1965), 326; John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, 1983), 62; J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, 1961), 186; Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language," trans. Arthur Pap, in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (New York, 1959), 67; Carnap, "Psychology in Physical Language," trans. George Schick, in *Logical Positivism*, 179. For the purpose of making my present, limited point, I have simply run together analytical and ordinary-language philosophy. A sharper focus on the philosophical precedents of the New Pragmatism would differentiate the two and concentrate on the latter (whether in the work of Austin and Searle or its parallels in the later Wittgenstein). It may be speculated that it was Austin's scrupulously *detailed* attention to language coupled with his basic enterprise of describing language as *usage* (as opposed to the Carnapian task of analyzing language as logical truth-statement) that provided the perfect filter through which original pragmatism could pass to the New Pragmatism.
48. Knapp and Michaels, "Against Theory," 15. The full example runs to p. 17.

49. A discussion of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in the light of twentieth-century British philosophy would be instructive. Wordsworth's "philosophy of language," if it may be so called, blends the compulsions of analytical and ordinary-language philosophies. Thus rural discourse is at once a "more permanent, and a far more philosophical language" and "a selection of language really used by men"; *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1974), 1:125, 123.
50. Wordsworth, 1805 *Prelude*, 5.389–413.
51. In this regard, Knapp and Michaels's footnote is misleading: "Wordsworth's lyric has been a standard example in theoretical arguments since its adoption by Hirsch; see *Validity in Interpretation*, pp. 227–30 and 238–40" ("Against Theory," 15n.). As specified in the pages cited here, Hirsch was himself improvising upon earlier theorists of the Lucy poem, including Cleanth Brooks (see note 52 below). And once we reach back to the New Criticism, we must attend to the strongly overdetermined presence in modernist aesthetics of romanticism. It is no accident, for example, that the first poems mentioned in Brooks's *Well Wrought Urn* are two Wordsworth sonnets, that Ransom spent so much time in his chapter "Wanted: An Ontological Critic" (*The New Criticism*) deriding the romantics, and, of course, that such high old modernists as T. E. Hulme and T. S. Eliot were so archly postromantic. Knapp and Michaels's claim that they are following a "standard" example does not register the overdetermination that made the example standard in the first place (nor, it must be said, the sheer bizarreness of their own improvisation on the example).

(Highly relevant to my comments on "Against Theory" in this essay is Peggy Kamuf's excellent discussion of Knapp and Michaels's use of "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal." See her *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1988], 177–200. Thanks to Cynthia Chase for pointing me to Kamuf, whom I unfortunately did not discover until after writing this article.)

52. Knapp and Michaels, "Against Theory," 12. Cf. Cleanth Brooks's discussion of "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal":

Yet to intimate that there are potential ironies in Wordsworth's lyric may seem to distort it. After all, is it not simple and spontaneous? . . . Are the terms *simple* and *ironical* mutually exclusive? What after all do we mean by *simple* or by *spontaneous*? We may mean that the poem came to the poet easily and even spontaneously. . . . What is likely to cause trouble here is the intrusion of a special theory of composition. . . . A theory as to how a poem is written is being allowed to dictate to us how the poem is to be read.

"Irony as a Principle of Structure," in Morton Dauwen Zobel, ed., *Literary Opinion in America: Essays Illustrating the Status, Methods, and Problems of Criticism in the United States in the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (New York, 1951), 737.

53. For "simplicity" in the Preface, see Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, 1:125. A final comment on "Against Theory": whether Knapp and Michaels's argument about intentionality is correct or useful we will never know from their example. To discover a Lucy poem at the heart of an argument that is otherwise numbingly clear (in the New Pragmatist style) is to come upon something like a Zen koan: we may or may not be enlightened, but not by way of understanding. To invoke a standard Blake koan: Knapp and Michaels "stain the water clear." If we read the line "stain'd the water clear" in Blake's "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* to mean that the water ends up stained, is the other possible meaning (according to which Blake stains the water *clear*) intended? Or

is it just a squiggle? What Blake's verse or Wordsworth's Lucy poems indicate, I suggest, is that Knapp and Michaels's analysis rests on an antithesis whose very precision makes it inadequate to the task of mapping objects (literature, language) akin to those defined by fuzzy set theory. The sets of language and squiggles are not mutually exclusive. Everything interesting in a literary text has to do with the fact that texts can seem both artifacts of language *and* squiggles simultaneously.

54. James K. Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago, 1984), 216–34.
55. Cf. Lentricchia on Rorty and romanticism, *Criticism and Social Change*, 17–19.
56. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 105, 190; *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 67, 149; *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 97, 109.
57. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 1, 1925, ed. Jo Ann Boydston with Patricia Baysinger and Barbara Levine (Carbondale, Ill., 1981), 270; William James, *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. Alburey Castell (New York, 1948), 11. Many other examples of Dewey's and James's explicit use of romanticism could be cited.
58. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 142, 67, 91, 148, 153; *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 25.
59. Bloom is important throughout *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, e.g., p. 53: "In my view, an ideally liberal polity would be one whose culture hero is Bloom's 'strong poet' rather than the warrior, the priest, the sage, or the truth-seeking, 'logical,' 'objective' scientist."
60. A variant example here would be Baudrillard, whose controversial "silent majority" thesis has been called a "populist neo-romanticism" by Michael Ryan, "Postmodern Politics," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 5 (1988): 566. To read Baudrillard and Lyotard together in the context of romanticism may well require thinking the relationship between the former's "silent majority" and the latter's "silent" "feeling of the differend" (see below).
61. For the connection between Lyotard's semiotic pragmatics and the tradition launched by Peirce and Morris, see *Postmodern Condition*, 9, 87, n. 28.
62. Lest there be any unclarity, I am here ventriloquizing Lyotard, who is himself ventriloquizing an investigator skeptical of the facticity of the gas chambers. On Auschwitz and the Final Solution as verification problem, see *Differend*, 3–4, 87–106, and *passim*.
63. *Ibid.*, 135. A fuller discussion of the role of romanticism in Lyotard would need to qualify that his is dark romanticism, the romanticism, for example, of Wordsworth on the Terror. We might thus juxtapose Lyotard's recurrent scene of "litigation" and the "supreme tribunal" with the following scene in *The Prelude* (1805 version):

Through months, through years, long after the last beat
 Of those atrocities (I speak bare truth,
 As if to thee alone in private talk)
 I scarcely had one night of quiet sleep,
 Such ghastly visions had I of despair,
 And tyranny, and implements of death,
 And long orations which in dreams I pleaded
 Before unjust tribunals.

(10.370–77)

Lyotard himself meditates on the French Revolution (*Differend*, 145ff.). (See also my discussion below of the romantic sublime that Lyotard invokes as the perfect comple-

- ment to the anxious, painful, or [in Edmund Burke's idiom] "terrible" feeling of the differend.) Of course, my claim is not that Lyotard is romantic but only that romanticism is one identifiable contestant in his complex debate of romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism—a triangular face-off of mutually implicated perspectives.
64. We might apply here Paul de Man's comment in "The Rhetoric of Temporality": "The world is then no longer seen as a configuration of entities that designate a plurality of distinct and isolated meanings, but as a configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a total, single, and universal meaning. This appeal to the infinity of a totality constitutes the main attraction of the symbol as opposed to allegory"; in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., revised (Minneapolis, 1983), 188. Two discussions relevant to my mention here of Coleridge on the symbol (especially in light of synecdoche) are de Man, "Rhetoric of Temporality," 191–92; and Steven Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime*, esp. 15.
 65. For Rorty's Antipodean myth, see *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, chap. 2. The myth opens upon the same sense of defamiliarized culture, of humanity glimpsed across a proscenium of otherness, that readers see staged in the stereotypical New Historicist paradigm or "anecdote": "Far away, on the other side of our galaxy, there was a planet on which lived beings like ourselves—featherless bipeds who built houses and bombs, and wrote poems and computer programs. These beings did not know that they had minds" (70). Cf. the chapter openings in Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* or Mulaney's *Place of the Stage* (I cite other examples from Renaissance New Historicism in note 2 to my "Power of Formalism").
 66. Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," in Foster, *Anti-Aesthetic*, 130.
 67. Baudrillard, "Structural Law of Value," 66. Cf. Adorno on "fragmented transcendence," *Aesthetic Theory*, 184–85.
 68. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, 213, 218.
 69. Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, 217.
 70. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 86.
 71. Liu, *Wordsworth*, 501.
 72. Schor, *Reading in Detail*, 5, 17–41, 141–47. "The detail," Schor writes, "was to become, as Blake had predicted it would, the very 'Foundation of the Sublime'" (22).
 73. On Schor's argument about desublimation, see note 10 above. I take the apt phrase *detail ideal* slightly out of context from Schor's chapter on Freudian detail; *ibid.*, 70.
 74. Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 81.
 75. Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore, 1976).
 76. Neil Hertz's "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime" is especially relevant to my discussion here; in *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York, 1985). The fact that the best recent work on the sublime has been psychoanalytic or otherwise "self" fixated (an orientation true to the Burkean universe of a single perceiver facing the mountain) indicates that there is at present an impasse or blockage between the criticism of the sublime and the criticism of culture. The cultural sublime, as it might be called, would much benefit from access to the rigor of thought that has been devoted to the aesthetic and subjective sublime—should some intermediary be found who could translate between Longinus, Burke, Kant (as well as Weiskel, Hertz, and others) and Lyotard or Baudrillard. One might predict that such a mediation would exploit the supplementary interest common to both the criticisms of the sublime and of culture: textuality and representation.

77. Wordsworth, 1805 *Prelude*, 13.52–65.
78. John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays on Contemporary Thought*, excerpted in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago, 1981), 173.
79. De Certeau, e.g., *Practice*, xxiii–xxiv; Lentricchia, “Return of William James,” 191, 193. I stress that this is just a partial view of the matter. There is also the alternative paradigm in cultural criticism of the subject as innately differential or split, discussion of which I defer for another occasion.
80. Indeed, it may be predicted that the effort to redefine “locality” or “region” will continue to offer cultural criticism room for innovation—both empirical and theoretical—long after its neo-individualist and often virtually biographical experiments have passed (I refer to the obsessional studies in the New Historicism, New Pragmatism, New Marxism, or French pragmatism of “More,” “Tyndale,” “Elizabeth,” “Wordsworth,” “Marx,” “Kant,” and so forth).
81. I do not wish to overlook, however, the dialectical use to which some of these person-concept localisms are put. Klancher, for instance, fashions his notion of a particular readership community (“a reader situated in a particular social space”) in an antithetical or “other”-aware fashion such that individual readership communities define themselves against a sense of competing communities (see *Making of English Reading Audiences*, 11–12). My critique here is that however heteroglossic person-concept localisms can be made, they still start upon a logic of individual identity. Characteristically: first there is an “I,” then a sense of the “other” (from the perspective of the “I” or its plural “we”), and finally a sense of “community” formed from the antithetical relation between self and other, “us” and “them.” The outcome of such logic is that local communities become magnified versions of the “I” in its intersubjective relations. An alternative model, perhaps, could be constructed by thinking through the implications of traditional “local history,” for which the beginning unit of analysis is characteristically not identity but loose, conflicting, overlapping, and multilayered archives of what might be called distributed identity (individuals whose identity is registered plurally across a jumble of age, sex, family, village, parish, and other archival categories). In this model, the distinction between the individual and the collective, and the self and the other, is not a matter of black and white. Rather, there is a whole series of overlapping boundaries involving “I,” “we,” and “other” in each other.
82. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 191.
83. For Rorty’s thought on the “we” and “we-intentions,” see especially the chapter on “Solidarity” in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Besides the authorial or generalizing “we”/“I,” there is also a busload of generalizing “one’s,” “he’s,” and (especially marked in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*) “she’s” in New Pragmatist discourse. The stylistic coordination of all these pronouns (several may occur in the same passage) is at times so complex and intrusive that it signals that “we” are in the presence of an overdetermination (see, for example, the pronouns in the last paragraph of Fish’s “Interpreting the *Variorum*” essay, only part of which I quote below). Put another way, passages especially thick with pronouns in New Pragmatist writing (as in the Rorty and Fish passages I example here) characteristically situate the pronoun on an unstable interface between being an overdetermined feature of style and an explicit *theme*. It is this doubling of the pronoun that distinguishes the New Pragmatist “we” or “I” from that of other discourses. Most authors engage in acts of consensus building by judicious deployments of “we’s,” “our’s,” and “I’s” (as we have seen in the present essay itself). But the case is different when an author deploys the rhetoric of consensus building to

define consensus. In this case, *we* or *I* used outside quotes to talk about a “we” in quotes has the effect less of rhetoric than of foundation. In Roland Barthes’s terms in “Myth Today,” the pronouns of New Pragmatism consist of a “second-order semiological system” built on top of a first-order one, and are thus structurally cognate with what Barthes calls ideological “mythology.” To follow the lines of Barthes’s analysis: the commonsensical speaking voice of the New Pragmatist “we” or “I” is analogous to “nature,” and the thematized “we” that defines the local or interpretive community is analogous to connotative ideology, which borrows its felt “reality” from “nature.” The thematized “we” of New Pragmatism, in short, is akin to the patriotism or “French imperialism” signified by the Paris *Match* cover in Barthes’s example; in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York, 1972), 109–59.

84. Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?*, 173.

85. More fully, my argument is that Fish’s careful defense against the charge of interpretive subjectivity suffers a return of the repressed. To ward off the threat of “independent” subjectivity, Fish subordinates subjectivity entirely to the determination of the community—e.g., *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 335: “The self is conceived of not as an independent entity but as a social construct whose operations are delimited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it.” In my view, however, communities are always slightly—but crucially—inadequate or conflicted in their determination of the self in any context, sufficiently so that they force the individual to draw upon alternative or past communities to fill in the missing dots. This act of recall or imagination splits the self in a manner that amounts to splitting the perceived interpretive community, and unless an effort is made to account for such differentiation in the self/community, then the argument that the community determines the self is hollow. More, the argument allows the essence of a foundational, integral self to reappear as *the community itself*, which can too easily seem a singleness because we do not look hard enough at the adequacy of its concept (put pragmatically: we do not test the adequacy of the community as a domain of actions whose consequence is the identity and behavior of member selves). The community becomes subjectivity.

I should add, however, that Fish’s later elaboration of the interpretive community, especially in regard to its potential for heterogeneity and change, goes a long way toward thinking the inner differentiation of self or community I call for; see his *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, N.C., 1989), esp. 141–60. A parallel for the interpretive community in this light would be the “*habitus*,” which Bourdieu builds not from identity-as-singleness but from identity-in-difference: the *habitus* is a moving horizon of relation between a past context that generates practices and a present context in which those practices are adapted; see Bourdieu, *Outline*, 72–95.

86. Cf. Samuel Webers’s criticism of Fish:

What has to be investigated and discussed is the process by which [the unity of the interpretive institution] is established, maintained, and disrupted. . . . A tension thus emerges between the given state of the institution, and its tendency to encourage or even demand innovation and transformation. As long as such changes do not call into question the basic premises that endow the institution with its particular identity, they can be rewarded and contained. But when, as today, those changes tend to affect the very founding assumptions of the institution, such containment can no longer be regarded as a given.

Institution and Interpretation (Minneapolis, 1987), 36–37. See also McGann’s critique of the “interpretive community,” *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, 188.

87. Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*, 76–77; Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 94; Lyotard, *Differend*, 3. Lyotard is quoting a source in the sentences beginning, “I have analyzed thousands of documents. . . .”
88. Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*, 98.
89. I have written on the subversion/containment problem in “Wordsworth and Subversion.” Carolyn Porter’s critique of oppositionality as conceived by New Historicism is especially apropos to detailism:
 By an appeal to richly suggestive “local episodes” and “particular historical encounters,” this tautology [that domination dominates] takes on the clothing of historical specificity so that each time it is found, once again, that resistance or opposition serves the interests of the powerful, the conclusion seems to be derived from a densely textured understanding of a particular, historically localized cultural space.
- “Are We Being Historical Yet?” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87 (1988): 769.
90. For the term “commitment,” cf. Adorno on “artistic commitment,” *Aesthetic Theory*, 349–52.
91. A full consideration of this topic would need to take up an especially thorny aspect of the pragmatist problem of “belief”: whether it is possible to view or imagine other people’s beliefs *qua* beliefs. Is it the case that everyone is trapped in a particular belief story whose nature is to make other people’s belief stories seem *mere* stories, or that no one in the postmodern world is trapped in a belief story because all are to some degree ironists? Such questions about the pragmatics of belief approach a vanishing point when applied to a case like Baudrillard’s “silent majority.” What does this silent majority like “an impenetrable and meaningless surface” believe?