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)88 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._


_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._


_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)*

_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-

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bination perfectly suited for an attack on the mistress. The narrative identified her with the 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—departs 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 subcultures.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 distantiﬁed 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. 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


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.)


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 Baudrilladian.

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), 35–34, 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 postcolonial), 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 unwar-
ranted, 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 con-
textualist 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 limi-
tation of space but the complicity of any streaks-in-the-tulip approach with the rhet-
oric 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, difference, and
differends.

10. Though Schor sometimes invokes “postmodern,” her basic paradigm for current
detailism is high modernist and poststructuralist (with Barthes serving as terminus ad
quern). According to this paradigm, the detail emerged in the twentieth century from
past aesthetic regimes—Hegelian and realist—that had subordinated it to transcen-
dental sublimity or (what Schor considers its equivalent) brute immanence. Liberation
from such aesthetics came through a “desublimation” of detail or Barthesian valor-
ization of “truly inessential” particulars (79–80, 84–85, and passim). I use the designa-
tion 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 conclu-
sions 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 desub-
limation. Detachment or desublimation names the moment when the perceiver sud-
denly 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 dis-
cernment 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.
173.
(Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 7, 122, 124. McGann quotes the phrase from Milman Par-

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 rectified 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 informative (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, -historical, 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 Historicism 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).


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.


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

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 *Historius* and traditional American pragmatism in his "The New Historicism and Other Old-Fashioned Topics," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser [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."


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.


33. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 427, n. 13. In general, Geertz’s footnotes to the cockfight essay are intriguing: they insert under the argument of cultural interpretation a semiofoundational 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.”


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*.


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: “Strip tease 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).


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.


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.

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 Michael'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 "anthetical" fashion (for "anthetical," 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 interpolated 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 transcendentally "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 “ahah!” 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).


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.


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 theorizers 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.)


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.


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.

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 different” (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 romantic-
cism 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 consti-
tutes 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 Historicism
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 Mul-
laney's Place of the Stage (I cite other examples from Renaissance New Historicism in
note 2 to my "Power of Formalism").
dence," 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 Trans-
scendence (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
mediation of the sublime and of culture—are not always.

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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 obsesssional 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 quote 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’y” (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- 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 Weber’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. . . ."


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.


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?