

The Great Effects of Small Things: Insignificance With Immanence in Critical Theory

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It is the minute detail that blocks the infinite invasion.
Bataille, *Manet*

You know of the expression: "The trembling of a branch against the sky is more important than Hitler."
Malraux, *Les Chênes qu'on abat*

Who didn't find shelter in the huge looks to the small.
Adam Zagajewski, "Kierkegaard and Hegel"

The mandate was minutiae-specks on or *against* the horizon of angry process. At the point of near invisibility, garrulously joined is the diversity of art's ethical claims, expressed in the only way they can be, through the temporalities of negligibility, the visibilities and agencies of negative increment. Things almost no things, oppositely pulling the connective tissue of the mass, now whim and now woe, those that take and those that unknow the *measure* of the responsibility for calamitous change, the ones causing to be unnecessary a story that others-with the status of blood debt-to scare us tell. King and economy-sized smalls, belittling littles of the "big house"-evidence of merited suffering-and those of its revolving door, the bread crumbs or body parts with which Hegel's return path to self-love is strewn. There was the sequence that *made* a point, and the point that unmade the sequence of Hegel's negativity cycle, the blazing appearance and disappearance of the master-small of the vanishing point and small of the missing of the point of vanishing. Small minus the recall of a splendid atrocity, and small as *caput mortuum*, the forensic small-the too-much-too-soon that became the too-little-too-late. A splitting of the function-memory of a mistake, the small as baleful vestige of an arrogance that had invited an overcoming, or the mistake of memory, small of explanation, small of interpretation, fine print of the dialectic. To them attached are differently tasked, as differently timed, the now dispersed, now coalesced,

more and less ritualizable possibilities of insolent unconcern. There at the flex point of the life cycle of negativity, always. Always about surface construction, the detail-but inviting in and out, or slickening to touch and go? "Hero dust" (Byron)-indelibility of the reminder remainer, the tainted remnant of the festive bounty of the post-prandial group can-context depending-wheel to become the sign of the muddling of what had been the moral clarity of the unforgiving choice celebrated in collective feast. The small is always the sign of a splitting of a difference, but to contrasting effect, either its liquidation or proliferation, mediation either of the self-love that was the torpor of the compact many, or that of the invulnerably animated one. Broker of recursion, always, but for the one or the many does it cause the world to disappear? The near nothing was the trophy or the undoing of *whose* persecutorial zeal?

A comfort, always, these auspicious omens, but for whom?-had through murderous trial or the mistrial of the innocent finding of what had never been lost? Pathetic evidence of the action of a social law of gravity or the sign of its transformation into untroubled forward movement? Some smalls mock the process that others (those that have *earned* their humility) cause to fearfully serve. A detail chauvinism, art is a nanotechnology, minutely perceptive of the spoils of, or what spoils into, the absence of a fight. "What is the virtue of reduction either of scale or in number of properties?" asks Lévi-Strauss.⁽¹⁾ Upon an *agency* of insignificance does the answer depend. What separates the small from the small-the long from the short of the sequence of negativity, longest or shortest shadow of a reversible cruelty-is what serves or spares the cognition of violent potential. The site of fallibility-it is either *within* the form, or what the witness, from the vantage of his or her misery, is summoned to foresee as the result of *whose* ambivalently imagined doing?

2

A small thing is one of the locations of greatness, Bachelard said.⁽²⁾ But *whose* greatness? we will really need to know. The greatness of America? "The beauty of the American landscape: even the smallest of its segments is inscribed, as its expression, with the immensity of the whole country."⁽³⁾ Nothing good about this mocking fund, for Adorno, stash vault of smalls in the rapture of big love: "If . . . oneness . . . inevitably implies the use of force against the many . . . then it follows that the many must also fear oneness. Oneness is like the ephemeral but alluring images of nature in ancient myth. The unity of *logos* is caught up in a complex of blame because it tends to mutilate what it unifies."⁽⁴⁾ Size matters, Heidegger said-art was about relative scale, about seeing oneself against what was larger, a larger that did not *become* smaller. It is in poetry that "man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being."⁽⁵⁾ The temporality, that is, the *stringency* of comparison eluding him, the entire economics of it did as well. The presence or absence of guilt will be about the timing of the sizing of self-enjoyment, the spacing of the pulse of negativity. Nanoaesthetics was the study of the hemophobic art that was the *business* of charismatic disincentive-the small that had never been anything other than itself. None of

either your, or my own doing—the stork brought it.

The antidote to the small of American monstrosity was France, Adorno said. There was no getting over the greatness-guilt relation, feature as it was of negativity itself, but the redeeming mitigation of a sublimation seemed to have its home address:

The idea of greatness as a rule is bound up with the element of unity, sometimes at the cost of its relation to the nonidentical; for this reason the concept of greatness itself is dubious in art. The authoritarian effect of great artworks, especially in architecture, both legitimates and indicts them. Integral form is inseparable from domination, though it sublimates it; *the instinct against it is specifically French*. Greatness is the guilt that works bear, but without this guilt they would remain insufficient. This is perhaps the reason for the superiority of major fragments, and the fragmentary character of others that are more finished, over complete works. This has always been registered by various types of form that are not among the most highly regarded.(6) (my emphasis)

Everything happens here. The small-final light that permits seeing that confounds with not seeing-mediates a self-appreciation to differing “American” or “French” effect. Scene of an intersection anxiety, the small is the crack through which there is passing back and forth from a zero-sum affective economy to one of infinite good. What frees into distraction can also be rallied to form the crust that exposes to avenging fracture, that guilty imagination of the great that is the coming to appearance of the small that we see coming, as a result of a going, small that was the experience of the disappearance of the great. (This the fate of the opportunistic small-André Green: “The search for greatness requires that one make oneself small before it.”(7)) Free smalls, strong only through their scattered fragilities, root out the trace of development from the image imposed by the “climactic” small, small as relic of the short work of the impassioned community, cautionary memory, reminder/remainder of dissolutive process. If there is an “iconology of the interval,” as Aby Warburg said,(8)correspondingly there is an “interval of the icon,” the disastrous *becoming* of the image, or the timeless, hence guilt-free unknowing of the violent embarrassment of an offending greatness.

The processual small was the sign of the terrible work you have already done, or could flip to be that of the work (of resentment) you will never know, much less do. It can be the sign of what, in the unknowing of transfer anger, is always mine, or that of the unmediated relation that was *once* yours. The small takes time in both senses of the phrase.(9) Oppositely transnarcissistic smalls, mediating passage from the narcissism of the one to the compact many, or from the one to the dispersed many, unaccountable smalls and those spread abroad but charged with the memory of the violent conditions of their dispersal. Opposed, in smalls of construction, and those of accident that cause surface and depth to not connect, the time sensitivities of the destruction of objects, the two bodies of Freud’s

ego ideal and the relations with the world attached. The evidence of the almost-not-seen is the indispensable reference in the encounter.

I begin my summary of what will follow with Lyotard, who speaks of “the accomplishment of the loss of the object without which there is no literature.”⁽¹⁰⁾ This is to be put in touch with the point of Lévi-Strauss who argues that the aesthetic always has a relation to the miniature. The pleasure attached to it has to do with the absence of effort: “Being smaller, the object as a whole seems less formidable. By being quantitatively diminished, it seems to us qualitatively simplified. More exactly, this quantitative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed and apprehended at a glance.”⁽¹¹⁾ The small would be the object that is the sign of the absence of an object, the end of effort communicating the pleasure of the end of a degrading irritation of a desiring attention. But does not Lévi-Strauss’s argument immediately prove vulnerable to the vast evidence of the monumental? His point is rescued with reference to Generative Anthropology’s knowledge of the relation of the aesthetic to resentment. What is great is always imagined by me to have been violently replaced. *Key in the experience of art is the presence or the absence of the transition to the small, the presence or absence of a temporality, an agency of reduction.* This sense that my happiness—that is, my absence of effort due to my experience of the small before me—is or is not due to a violent replacement in turn determines the extent to which I learn or do not learn the lesson of the reversibility of my potential violence, the lesson that my insistence upon my personal centrality, as a replacement centrality, will prove contagious to my terminal disadvantage.

3

Art happens at the point of interaction of a witness’s desire for a missing strength with the illusion of a narcissistic form’s power to compensate for this lack. The small is the indication that a humiliating identification with this ambivalently viewed structure has come to an end, that the illusion of a compensation for personal failure has been revealed as such, and that self-love has been restored through the liquidation of the external power upon which, at least for a moment, I had come to depend. In this sequence—that mirrors Hegel’s negativity cycle—everything hinges on how this condition of anobjectality (that is communicated through one’s relation to the small) is imagined to have been brought about, the agency of that success that is the disappearance of the obstacle for which the small stands, whether or not I imagine myself to be or not to be a guilty party in its disappearance. Decisive is the presence or absence of a locatable agency of the distress of a narcissism that *once* provocatively contrasted with my own perceived inadequacy—whether violence is perceived to be immanent to the form, or is something for which I imagine that I am responsible. Aesthetic theory is *gap analysis*, the study of the source of the trouble that is the condition of my self-reconnection.

To say that in representation the object is at once present and not is to say that involved are at once an identification and its negation. Contrasting smalls are the products of contrasting regimes of representation that differently manage the relation of identification to its end: one that spaces the moments of its onset and end and one that destages the split by causing the identification and its end to appear to occur at the same time. While in one case the moments of identification and its conclusion are markedly spaced, in the other the two moments blur into indistinction. Critical theory is about the search for a vocabulary to describe this split, and to demonize one form of identification to the advantage of the other.

I illustrate my point with two scenes of destruction from Bataille, scenes oppositely socializing, illuminating in their confusions of the destructions of the self involved. In the first passage there is the lesson of the reversibility of violence: "On the basis of the principle of negation that one finds in Sade, it is strange to notice that the unlimited negation of the other amounts to the negation of one's own self." (12) But modern poetry is not the same thing as this interpersonal struggle: "The profound importance of poetry consists in the fact that from the sacrifice of words and images, and on the very account of the misery of this sacrifice (and in this respect poetry is no different from any other sacrifice), there is a *gliding* that takes one from the impotent sacrifice of objects to that of the subject. What Rimbaud sacrificed was not only poetry as object but the poet as subject at the same time." (13) In one case there is a violence emerging from without, while in the other, the violence is always already present in the misery of the form. Two sacrifices here—the distinction being that between *the becoming-small* and *the already small*. Two negations of the subject—while in the Sade case one is negated as antisocial, negated back into the social, in the other one is negated as social—through the identification with useless junk—but one is *preserved* as antisocial, resident alien. Two identification regimes: "identify *then* don't identify" versus—through the mediation of the miserable thing—the simultaneity of the two moments ("identify/don't identify"). If it is indeed the case that the small "maintains itself as the energy of disappearance," (14) it can do so to contrastive effect, either—through the *becoming* small—by imposing the brutal news of the necessity of the reversibility of violence, or—through what is always already small—by *indemnifying* the witness through the unschooling that is the agencylessness of the violence that makes possible its (now unbloody) pass through Hegel's negativity rotation.

To continue my preview of what follows, it will be my eventual point that at the same time that Critical Theory discovered its task to be that of posing the timelessness of the "identify/don't identify" pattern against the "identify *then* don't identify" narrative, it became anxiously aware of the antagonistic complicity that characterized the relation between the two, the fragility of the border that separated one from the other. Derrida and Adorno, and, as we have just seen, Bataille before them, were all aware of the how their favored lesser negativities seemed an excruciatingly vulnerable resource, always in the process of slipping into the modernly inadmissible greater. The cunning of what was always already insignificant, the discovery of the shrinkability of negativities, proved an insufficient

power, threatening in its volatility, at least on its own, in that-and this was the no less the whole point of Deconstruction than it was that of "the negative dialectic"-it was always in the process of fainting into the pattern from which it had been emancipated, into a return of the sacred, or history in the strong sense, those regressions into the market-dissolving lessons of the reversibility of violence. The company of an ideal of immanence-rather than the entire collapse into it!-was then sought to block the potential to slide, to disconnect one negativity from another, one of Bataille's sacrifices from the other. The goal was the discovery of the Eldorado of that reliability of a lesser negativity reservoir, the stabilized affectivities of which were the condition of the existence of a market. In the company of immanence, Critical Theory, we shall see, discovered its hybrid vigor-not the liquidation of negativity but the negativity *cap*. Critical Theory seeks a final disconnect from the controlled or uncontrolled, overfocused spasms of its Dark Side by becoming a heterology, finding alliance without dissolving into that *selectively* exploited blessing that was its opposite. In anticipation, an example of the blur of moral sympathy and contempt from Susan Sontag: "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of 'character.' . . . Camp is a tender feeling." [\(15\)](#)

4

Our "good" small is not big enough to finish the job it had been assigned-the *selectivity* of the exclusion of exclusion. Post-modern logic involves the cross action of yoked safeties: two ends of the end-two forms of identification harnessed to block a third-"identify/don't identify" in no elapsed time, bonds with but does not dissolve into the imperative to seamlessly, timelessly "identify," in order to discipline the "identify *then* don't identify" pattern. With the friendly ghost of immanence-containing, without proceeding to entirely dissolve negativity's stray from its grace-at once narrowing and exploding the range of the expression of negativity, limiting its vertical leap while unlimiting the energies of its lateral animation, the small, now the perfect crime, achieves the status of resident rather than excludable alien, a negativity at once widely suffused yet strongly repressed. The negativity cap-the imperative to "identify" (the endlessness of it)-is summoned by the "identify/don't identify" regime to assist in an outflanking operation, summoned to put the "identify *then* don't identify" pattern into a box from which its antieconomic volatilities cannot emerge, while at once allowing to the lesser negativity-now the *constancy* of a *practical* negativity-the fullest display of its animating potential. For the *A Team* of Critical Theory, negativity was a snap. Our eventual point-the lack of correspondence between the body parts of Critical Theory, between its defensive *jouissance* and its victimology, is the mirror of the heterology of the market itself.

The small was said to be the greatness of Proust. "A little patch of yellow wall." murmurs the fading Bergotte, "a little patch of yellow wall with an awning." [\(16\)](#) The critic expires in the course of a final visit to the Vermeer he so admired. A dash into a world he said that he

had loved but a single day and from which he had long shied was motivated less, pointedly, by the requirement of the Dutch villagescape as anchoring whole than by the need to borrow final spontaneity from a single dab that had a diffident life of its own within the "View of Delft," a spot not near-lost into a hoarding, but neglected into indifferent availability-inalienable possession for each and all, inalienable out of indifference. Neither the great public rooms of the hotel at Balbec nor the structure of the building itself sustain attention. In full scurry, details not turned towards the expressionless face of the ego ideal in an architecture in flight from itself: "One was moved," instead, "to a greater level of curiosity by the tiny rooms which, without regard for symmetry, were scattered around the main hall, which, numberless and astonished, fled in all directions. . . ." [\(17\)](#)

Swarming through the novel, these and their unincorporated like leave one poised for assent when told that "In Proust . . . the relationship of the whole to the detail is not that of an overall architectonic plan to the specifics that fill it in: it is against precisely that, against the brutal untruth of a subsuming form forced from above, that Proust revolted." [\(18\)](#) But there is not, here, just the model of Bergotte's *détournement* of the painting. The novel's activities chaotically resist the flattening of the drama upon which Adorno in his remark insists, where discouraged is acknowledgment of the split decision that is instead foundational, a garbling of microallegiances, a conflicted deployment, a two-way traffic of smalls, the richness of a tense exchange between details saddled to contrary purpose, some fuzzing the outlines that others produce, tokens of differently plotted redemptions, each differently assembling a moral world, undoing the education offered by the contending other, each summoned before the judgment of the other, abridged and unabridged forms of the sequence.

Louis Marin spotted this elasticity, this close-quartered struggle, in his notice of what he called the "opacities" of painting-its spots of colors, textures, varnish effects, fluxes, explosions, viscosities, drops. Fluid loyalties, the variously treacherous nothings, wholly owned subsidiaries, "made" and unmaking smalls, can be taken in either direction-liberated from or galvanized into the service of a story. Nothings that precede representation in painting are that through which the whole is constructed and perceived. They can be recruited to dissolve into the transparency, the remainderlessness of the sign in classical communication. But the truancy of modern painting, allergic to this service, autonomizes "those opacities that have, in artistic practice, the characteristic of-through the processes of representation-subverting the transitive operations of representation." [\(19\)](#) Able to express only themselves, the details are available in no-fault release. The result: the unmediated relation absent the necessity of exposure to the intimidating lesson attached to the transfer of happiness that occurs in the course of a zero-sum game.

Sartre: "The smallest piece is several, but, inversely, the largest plurality seems to be one. For the multiple requires distinct individualities which frankly oppose each other." [\(20\)](#) Volatile frontier of artistic and moral risk, the small comes large and small, happy and

unhappy to drift in solvent, gaseous diffusion—there is the “wrong note” small with no known address, no visible means of support, and the ingratiating small basking in reflected celebrity, the integrated part relating to the general rule in the mode of mere illustration or example (something that can always be “cut out”), the harmonistic small that hastens a maddeningly gorged fund to its reckoning, priming it with a destiny, death-bound difference, this the small as feature of a tale of repossession that poisons the prosperity of the whole and its unsensed witness with a shared fate-weapon-grade insignificance—detail as plenipotentiary of a whole in which the particularity of the particular is effaced, extinguishing itself as it carries out the synthesis that is its humble work, integrated by a formal law and thereby confirming of it. Met with indeed is what Adorno hoped exclusively to see—heterozygous twins, the ones for which the question of power is not *posed*, ones that insist that there is no fantasy behind their (or our) happiness. But we can only be aware of others staked against it: the shape-serving smallnesses of a red-bordered roundness of the self-love that is the charismatic focus of the morbid longings of the noneconomic mass, those working smalls of connected space and time that one can only feel less free to describe in Adorno’s insufficiently complicated terms.

5

Of Proust’s Bergotte: “C’était surtout un homme qui au fond n’aimait vraiment que certains images. . . (comme une miniature au fond d’un coffret.) [He was above all a man who in the last analysis loved nothing but certain images . . . (such as a miniature at the bottom of a jewelry box)]”(21) Was this *lost* small, plunged in after, the same as the *found* small, with the same scattered status of “les petits faits vrais,” those discrete challenges to massiveness and nostalgic concentration favored by (“the first”) Swann? But to no single effect does the adjective of the dying author—used with near comic frequency *passim*—spray through *A la recherche*. It is from “la petite madeleine” that the novel as conquering whole is born, its crumbs compared to “les petites boules de papier japonais [little Japanese paper balls]” that when dropped into a cup of water produce a world in miniature. It is less Vinteuil’s sonata than it is “la petite phrase” that moves Swann, but this fragment, steadied in a whole, stands in for a now inaccessible, subordinating reality, as does the centripetal “petit chapeau plat d’Albertine,” the church at Balbec described as “une petite vieille de pierre,” or “le petit concert” offered to Marcel by the flies on a summer day. But often triage is just not possible. In fluid patterns of exchange there emerge overlapping, ambivalent cases—the distinctions between smallnesses are often in the process of being diluted and washed away.

A la recherche is the site of the struggle where jostling small things fall short, or play big, fluctuating as signs of unschooled happiness, or, as forfeit objects, of the existence of a symphonically presiding whole. The novel, based as it is upon the centrality of the almost nothing, is always splitting, blurring judgment over its proper use. Indignant before the pressures attached to Elstir’s little painting of a wretched vegetable, Basin de Guermantes complains to wife Oriane:

Swann had the nerve of trying to talk us into buying "A Bunch of Asparagus." That was the only thing that there is in the picture, a bunch of asparagus, no different from what you are dining on at this minute. But I refused to go for these asparagus by Elstir. He is asking 300 francs for it. 300 francs for a bunch of asparagus. It's worth a louis at most.

Lessing condemned the painting of miniatures because the attention of the viewer strayed alarmingly from the referent, fixing instead upon the materiality of the sign. The small could tend against the story, but didn't have to be its absence. That scale was not itself the problem, is clear, as the Duke preempts the charge of undivided prejudice:

Given this genre I much prefer that small study by M. Vibert that we saw at the watercolor exhibition. It's nothing, I know, you could hold it in the palm of your hand.

But there is an infinite amount of wit in this picture of an emaciated missionary before this insipid priest who is playing with his little dog. It's a whole little poem of shrewdness and profundity.[\(22\)](#)

The whole little poem was the whole little story that the other was not. The perspective of objects decreasing in scale within a visual field of shifting remove constitutes an experience that is morally identical to that which occurs in narrative. And therefore decisive will be the intimidations attached or not to smalls, telling details, details of depth and intrigue, the smalls at the end of an angry space or time path, details of untelling, the smalls of suspended animation that annul laws of perspective, avoiding thus a wedge aesthetic, unmoralizing the going-outside-oneself, unmoralizing negativity. Dots-connectable and not; the small as synecdoche versus the small as syncope. There is the small that is the residue of our time-line, indication of the completion of its mortal transfer, the small of the trouble of the *becoming* small. The becoming visible of the small was the relief attached to the becoming invisible of the great. Adorno: "Enlightenment leaves practically nothing of the metaphysical content of truth-*presque rien*, to use a modern musical term. That which recedes keeps getting smaller and smaller. . . ." [\(23\)](#) Through storm or stealth, the small is variously involved in our two economies, the determining role being the presence or absence of a temporality and culpable force of disappearance. The causality, the presence or absence of a narrative of lessness, will be the basis for all relevant distinctions. At issue will be the socioeconomic work of the renunciation of objectality *within* objectality that expresses those different relations between proximity and distance that communicate contrasting relations between delinquency and punishment.

Herder said that the fable was the paradigm of original and direct aesthetic creation because it is a miniature. Gans supplies a basis for this, taking note of an evolution that assumes the form of a reduction in elapsed time of an experience of resentment:

When narrative discourse replaces the final division of the sacrificial spoils, then the life and death of the victim-hero will be expressed in the narrative in the short-term temporality borrowed from ritual. As discourse becomes rationalized, and the violent collective component attenuated, the mythic "biography" of the hero, whether terminated by death or a symbolic substitute, remains bounded by these same temporal limits; the hero as we find him, say, in Homer, has his "story" whose telling occupies a similarly brief period of time. For the hearer of the narrative, *the concentration of the significant events of the hero's life span into these limits is a source of aesthetic satisfaction.* (my emphasis)

6

Resentment is time critical. De Man's remark on this trajectory's destination—"It is the persistent temptation of literature to fulfill itself in a single moment"(24)—must be understood as ethically related to the critique of a succession of which Nietzsche here speaks: "*Ressentiment* itself, if it should appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not *poison*." (25) Through use of a contrastive ego-ideal-interrupting small, made possible is a knotting of preconditions and consequences that results in the avoidance of the lumbering acknowledgment of destructive impulse. The achievement struggled for is that of the wizardry of the spontaneity that emerges from minimizing the umbrage that would be incompatible with dynamic patterns of social development.

"The parasite produces small oscillations of the system, small differences. . . ." (26) And Serres continues: "[T]he parasite is always small; it never exceeds the size of insects. . . . In fact, the most numerous are protozoa or bacteria or viruses. Their small effects are usually well-tolerated by the organisms, which quickly rediscover their health, that is to say, their silence (at least relatively). This equilibrium that is well taken care of, thanks to the defense systems, is more solid than the preceding one." (27) This last mentioned structure would be the scarifying sequence, involving the small of the story, undone by the stealth of the self-countervailing of distance and proximity in interaction with another collapse, that of self-pleasure and protection, of the subterfuge of a form that is in a dialectical relationship with itself, rather than with other elements in a contrasting social field, making possible "a small consciousness upon waking, a small creak, a short run to safety and then immediate return." (28) The goal of this minimal pass through a threshold of visibility will be to produce the "soft" sequence that decouples, that suppresses the historically vital element of the dialectic while striving at once to give autonomous life to the economic.

"Envy down," a "mimetics of social inferiority" (Kenneth Burke) brings about the immediate return of desire to the self, a return unschooled in violence because unmediated by violence. Listing taboo figures, Freud overlaps omnipotences that are to be distinguished: "The king or chief arouses envy on account of his privileges: everyone,

perhaps, would like to be a king. Dead men, new-born babies and women menstruating or in labor stimulate desire by their special helplessness.”(29) And in the 1914 essay on narcissism, contrasted with impressive cases of self-enjoyment are those relatively pale figures, also constituted narcissistically, that provoke the shrug or laughter instead—infants, cats, comedians. No explanation is offered as to why these last are described weakly as “charming,” but the reason is clear enough. The infant, or kitten’s indifference is *already demystified*, its claim enfeebled by the certainty that subhumanity embarrasses the co-present illusion of autonomy. The powerless figures are the negative, inert mirrors of omnipotence, but figures of omnipotence just the same. These mutilated tyrants marked at once by deficiency *and* self-completion are osmotic of the threat posed by any anticipated rival. The two smalls, it will be my point to develop, are the two mediations for achievement of these oppositely corrected self-appreciations. From small to small—the story of the ritually targeted one who cannot tell the difference, is replaced with the absence of the story, or deritualizing indifference to the one who cannot tell the difference.

“The immaterialization of the thing—*its becoming invisible*—that is what modern art, in its most radical gesture, seeks to make visible.”(30) Nothing—hence my italics—could be more misleading. There is only sequence—the aesthetic always involves commitment to contingency, but the vicissitudes surrounding its demonstration are what matter. The specificity of the literature of the successfully freest market is to be found in the occulting of the process falsely underscored here as characteristic. Edmund Burke wrote that: “A great beautiful thing, is a manner of expression scarcely ever used.”(31) But reason for uneasiness emerges when it is added that: “We submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance.”(32) Unsettling is that contrast is centralized in this centralization of the small: “Beautiful objects are *comparatively* small.”(33) (my emphasis) Thus the small here does not rescue from a narcissism in (of) crisis. An indifference is achieved through a process, instead of being found there at the beginning. Burke was not able to take what would soon become a commonplace notice of a double life of the small.

The vanishing point absent the painful process of vanishing—a come-upon rather than the schooling of the come-to, inversely matched to the scale of my malice. In Kafka’s letter to his father we learn of two smalls: “Two possibilities: *making* oneself infinitely small or *being* so. The second is perfection, that is to say inactivity, the first is being, that is to say action.” (emphasis added) The same distinction between smalls of shrinking and those preshrunk had already been the basis of Kant’s Third Critique, minus the ranking that now appears. Schlegel remarked that many works of antiquity have become fragments, but many modern works are fragments at the moment of their birth. A conflict of the smalls, then, over whether or not they are seen to be processual between the poles of the visible and the invisible. “Endosmosis” (Bergson’s term for spatialization(34)) versus temporalization, shifts the location of ego ideal, and the social costs of its realization. The temporalities of disengagement: The good-as-gone that mediates our location within the humbling of a

corrective unfolding, is replaced by good as *almost* gone. Crucial are conditions of arrival, the business of how reduction of scale is achieved. One detail seeks and finds refuge in itself from the other; one will be harvested, the detail that is an anticipation of violence to come, that the other, a disconnected happiness, causes us to unknow, its lesson unlearned. The experience of comparative scale is the vehicle of transfer, and the transfer is the rude school of the limits that constrict my individual powers, Melanie Klein's "envious superego." If indifference is to be subtracted from a zero-sum game—if I am to see small, but to appear small as I see it, risk avoidance through risk inflation—the small needs to be subdivided away from the small of catastrophic temporality.



7

Just how much fun is the small and whose fun is it? Northwest humor helps in seeing that the issue is whether it serves as a *passage* to a shared or a hoarded indifference. We find in Jules Feiffer—in the becoming small of the immense, thus the detail of *transfer*—a parody of the sequence-based sublime that stands brutal forfeit. This is a small that doesn't measure up, product as it is of the work of a sizing up and down. Bill Griffith focuses instead on that which is already small, appearing in his last frame as the no-longer-available talisman that wards off figural distraction, dividing one away from it without incident. The small is used against the becoming small. Through the small of a not-knowing, one becomes invulnerable to a seduction. Freedom is available from charismatic bearings through the collapse of distance and proximity—one catches the sun that the other enables us not to know.

Smalls in Breton and Flaubert clarify the contrast. The issue in the passages below is the assignment of the privilege of seeing small—in the former it is the beloved, in the latter it is the reader; in Breton, one, in Flaubert, all. Their details broker differently addressed, differently fated self-satisfactions—those contrasting and those not. Whose detail settles whose indifference. From *Nadja*: "I am but an atom that dies if not allowed to breathe at the corner of your lips." (35) The small here, in dependency absolutely threatened, is an eagerly recombinatory deficiency, and thus not forfeit is the sentence to anxiety. From the scene of the *fiacre* in *Madame Bovary*, in the midst of the description of the rounds of the amorously turbulent coach: "Continuing on its way, it passed by Saint-Sever, by the Quai des Curandiers, by the Quai aux Meules, and once again by the bridge, by the parade grounds, and behind the gardens of the old folks' home, where black-jacketed old men strolled in the sun, along the terrace entirely greened with ivy." (36) More than simply dishing up the coarse fun, Flaubert graciously provides the disengaging specks that atomize happiness for the reader, causing her or him not to look *amare conspectu* upon any image of happiness not shared. These details bring an egalitarian, atomized indifference, achieved by the reader at the moment that it is also experienced by the reciprocally absorbed lovers. In terms of

Freud's "On Narcissism," this small permits the unknowing of the ego ideal, because one now is the ego ideal, but, as we shall see, in the form of "his majesty the baby." The blessing of Perec: "To force the flattening of attention."[\(37\)](#)-the small of undedicated focus, of generalized substitution and accelerating displacements that put at one's disposal a uniformly indistinct world of the interchangeability of the objects of (the absence of) desire, dizzying one into all innocence, and out of the conviction of the existence of a morally consequential event, evenly allowing the joy in the world as an undifferentiated state, that of the indifference of not being able to tell the difference.

Homeopathic identification, then, a.k.a. Adorno's "mimesis,"-an identification, through an effect of scale, that solves the problem of identification. Flaubert's list of insignificant places does for the reader the trick noticed by Beckett, who anticipates the Bill Griffith point that the small enables avoidance of identification, the horror of belief and stable group formation: "And without the company of these little objects that I have picked up by chance in the course of my wanderings. . . I would have perhaps been reduced to associating with decent folk, or to seeking solace in some religion. . . ."[\(38\)](#)

Baudelaire on a derelict commotion, the relation of the detail to a proper group, confirming the point while reversing Beckett's valuation. The artist who lies down with the small fails in his concentrating duty to impose conquest over chaotic insurrection:

An artist having the sense of form, but having the habit of exercising especially his memory and imagination, now finds himself assaulted by a riot of details, each of which cries out for justice with all the fury of the crowd in love with the idea of absolute equality. All justice here finds itself necessarily violated and all harmony destroyed, sacrificed. Every trivial thing becomes enormous, each trivial thing becomes a usurper. The more the artist impartially focuses upon, the more the anarchy is increased. Whether he be presbyopic or myopic, for him there disappears all subordination and all hierarchy.[\(39\)](#)

This older hostility survived in the influential Paul Bourget who, recalling the upset of Baudelaire, saw in this errant matter an affront to a compact community that was a symptom of *la décadence*: "A decadent style is one in which the unity of the book is undone in favor of the independence of the page, in which the page is less important than the autonomy of the sentence, a sentence that decomposes in favor of the word." This misused language in turn is the mirror of "a society that reduces itself to a collection of individuals."[\(40\)](#) The point was taken up by the careful Bourget reader Nietzsche, who noticed that "The preferred theme of the moment is the great effect of very small things."[\(41\)](#) An excess of dexterity was no mastery:

What is the sign of every literary decadence? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The

word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole—the whole is no longer a whole. But this is the simile of every style of decadence: every time, the anarchy of atoms, disaggregation of the will, “freedom of the individual,” to use moral terms—expanded into political theory, “equal rights for all.” Life, equal vitality, the vibration and exuberance of life pushed back into the smallest forms.(42)

8

But then for Nietzsche, who could marshal the strength to turn, Wagner remained worthy, not as a charismatic, but only as a composer of details that had acquired their own rights: “Wagner is admirable and gracious only in the invention of what is smallest, in spinning out the details. Here one is entirely justified in proclaiming him a master of the first rank, as our greatest *miniaturist* in music. . . .”(43) “But quite apart from the *magnétiseur* and fresco-painter Wagner, there is another Wagner who lays aside small gems. . . .”(44) “What can be done well today, can be masterly, is only what is small. Here alone integrity is still possible.”(45) And Adorno explains the basis of the dignity that requires the reversal of the judgment of Bourget: “The detail can be understood as the representative of the individual, and the whole as the universal, namely that which has received social approbation. . . .”(46)

When so much is there, so much is missing. The small employed against the becoming small is the small against the group. Adorno’s affection for the reduced scale in Proust had to do with its deployment for undoing the crowd so despised by the novelist. (Proust writes that “The spirit of imitation and the absence of courage govern society just as it does the crowd.”(47)) Interrupting the ego-ideal food chain, the small separates imitation from imitation, dissolving reversal of the mass. Bataille, author of “Le Petit” (that interested Derrida), wrote of “The misunderstood sovereignty of the small, the divinity of its impossible certainty.”(48) And he added, in unpublished notes: “There is the sense that society in no way touches the core of being, that one can touch it only as an individual. Hence the meaning of the sovereignty of the small, and its impossibility in society.”(49) At once it conjures away the nondetachable indignities of imitation and the group. Vico, anticipating Proust and Derrida, saw the small as an instrument of unherding, noting that an index of modern detachment from the senses, from a primordial “sympathetic nature,” was use of “diminutive signs.”(50)

Horkheimer made the general point concerning the relation between the small and the group-undoing “pure” aesthetic feeling of Kant:

In the modern period . . . sculpture and painting were dissociated from town and building, and the creation of these arts reduced to a size suitable to any interior; during the same historical process, aesthetic feeling acquired independent status, separate

from fear, awe, exuberance, prestige. . . . It became “pure.” The purely aesthetic feeling is the reaction of the private atomic subject. It is the judgment of an individual who abstracts from prevailing standards. The definition of the beautiful as an object of disinterested pleasure had its roots in this relation.(51)

Hegel, upon whom this is based, had complained of the deceit involved in the focus upon the insignificant, and remarked approvingly that in ancient Greece public spaces were adorned and described as beautiful, while private areas were barren of aestheticizing intent. Perpetuated here was an old critique—the ancients did not usually admit, or at least encourage attention to diminished forms. Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*) said that greatness of soul implies impressive size. Small things may be neat and well-proportioned, but they cannot be described as beautiful. The shaming of *curiositas* that extended from early Christian thought to the late seventeenth century, and beyond, to Heidegger, prominently involved criticism of attention to the small. Augustine, in the *Confessions*, associates the vice with a pleasure involving reduced scale. The small was a problem because it could not be used, he argued elsewhere, anticipating Kant’s point. The condition of an unmoralized self-love: The return of love to the self, following the brevity of its investment in the insignificant, because this inconsequential thing is already diminished, diminished not on account of my own real or imagined violence. La Bruyère continues the tradition in defining curiosity: “It is not an amusement but a passion, and often so violent that it yields nothing to love and ambition except in the diminutiveness of its object.”(52) The man for whom “The whole is the untrue” noticed the problem of the bad small in Hegel and the solution to it:

The philosophical call for immersion in detail, a demand not to be steered by any philosophy from above or by any intentions infiltrated into it, was Hegel’s one side already. Only, in his case the execution caught in a tautology: as by prearrangement, his kind of immersion in detail brings forth that spirit which from the outset was posited as total and absolute. Opposing this tautology was Benjamin’s intent—developed by the metaphysicist in the preface to *Origins of German Tragedy*—to save inductive reasoning. When Benjamin writes that the smallest cell of visualized reality outweighs the rest of the world, this line already attests to the self-consciousness of our present state of experience, and it does so with particular authenticity because it was shaped outside the domain of the so-called “great philosophical issues” which a changed concept of dialectics calls upon us to distrust.(53)

But Frankfurt School smalls had been already understood by Hegel, those smalls from which nothing could come—smalls just too small. The drive to conceptualize could be blocked through effects of scale: “Physics with its molecules and particles suffers from the atom, this principle of extreme externality, which is thus utterly devoid of the Notion, just as much as does the theory of the State which starts from the particular will of individuals.”(54) And: “[The artist] must omit little hairs, pores, little scars, blemishes, and grasp and represent

the subject in its universal character.”(55)

9

But before we misread this dismissal as grounds for finding Hegel to be at odds with those who preceded and immediately followed, we must notice that it is easy to imagine how, given his terms, a beautiful small thing could be said to exist. A divinity’s detail might well qualify. Jean-Paul Richter offers a view of its function: “The aesthetic sublimity of the action . . . always stands in inverse relationship to the importance of the sensuous sign. Thus, while the person and great actions of the god Jupiter may be merely majestic, it is only the smallest twitching of the god’s eyebrow that is worthy of being termed sublime.” The eyebrow, as germ of the heliotropic plague of the charismatic, draws into an identification based upon contrast, as does that of Burke. His and Kant’s approval of the small do not seem distant from Hegel’s condemnation. Kant is more advanced in that the charismatic result he seeks (society-wide in the beautiful, pan-species in the sublime) is achieved in the absence of (figural) charismatic conditions. But, as noted in Burke, the small could be turned to for perpetuation of contrast, and represent a continuation of the Hegelian position by other means.

Kant was reluctant to remain anything other than (furtively) contrastive in focus. Aesthetic judgment upon the sublime “is a might enabling us to assert our independence as against the influence of nature, to degrade what is great in respect of the latter to the level of what is little, and thus to locate the absolutely great only in the proper state of the subject.”(56) Examples of the beautiful tend also be reduced in scale: “Our sympathy with the mirth of a dear little creature is confused with the beauty of its song.”(57) In Kant there is always the small—both Kafka’s what is small and what becomes small (the sublime). The beautiful is said to be *in the object* because it was always already small, and thus one is little tempted to match, best or borrow its limited strength. But the sublime comes to reside *in the subject* because it, the subject, has been agitated into stealing power from an object that becomes small through forcible transfer of authority. We here answer Derrida’s question: “Why would the sublime be the absolutely large and not the absolutely small? Why would the absolute excess of dimension, or rather quantity, be schematized on the side of largeness and not of smallness?”(58)

Smallness alone, then, does not do the job as it can be a simple transposition, allowing for a change in address of enormity. Size is not everything—contrast here remains. There can be a shift in the location of its framing, of an arrogant vantage. But simply to shift scale is not so much to attack an idealizing transference as it is to alter the address of its occurrence. And thus refinement was required in the habits of smallness. The small would contain the virus of the contrast unless it could be self-divided. To complete the undoing of idealizing transference, the small had to be split, freeing one small to be activated against that other that makes of us the witness of the successful work of invidious process.

A small ever more insistently divided against itself is required, and hence checked must be any praise that might appear to be indiscriminating. Nancy, revealingly confused, on the now familiar *triage*:

Fragment: not the part fallen from a whole that has become disassembled or broken, but instead the eruption of what is neither immanent nor transcendent. Not the part that has *fallen*, or even less, something *dethroned*, but the part that just happens to have your way, that is to say comes to you through, or supplied by devolution. Devolution is passing on, sharing, destination, transmission, transfer through development (de-volere), through an unfolding and coming apart. Fragment: devolved being.

The scraps, refuse, shards, shreds, remainders, left-overs, rubbish, innards, the excrements of which contemporary art is full and that it vomits up, are all posed and exposed at the limit, infinitely narrow, that separates the falling in caste from the being-your-due, that separates the loss of prestige from the abandon of abandonment itself.

[\(59\)](#)

And, reminding of Marin: "There would thus be two extremes in fragment types: the one of exhaustion and finishing, the other being that of the event and presentation." [\(60\)](#)

The small is the name of a proliferation—"rhopography." [\(61\)](#) A constellation of smalls, filling an entire landscape: "Little wheels, little stars, little screws, little worms, little nails, gobs and gobs of thingamabobs, little springs, sparrows wings, cigarettes. . . ."; Derrida is happy to quote Genet. [\(62\)](#) Thinking today is necessarily compelled "to abide with minutiae," Adorno said. [\(63\)](#) Here, as in Baudrillard, there is relation between the small and the Kantian beautiful: "[Miniatures are] liberated from human reference." [\(64\)](#) Metaphysics and theology, which once had the power to contest worldly absolutes, Adorno argued, have migrated into secular consciousness where they survive only as the most minute and inconsequential particulars. Anticipating the practice of Deleuze and Derrida: "Micrology is the place where metaphysics finds a haven from totality." [\(65\)](#) And, with another Third Critique-related point: "The infinitesimal, that which escapes the concept." [\(66\)](#) The insubordinate because inassimilable small avoids reification, exposing the fraud that the particular is merely an example of the universal, so goes Frankfurt School logic. In Adorno with Horkheimer, the break-away miniature is promoted as disorganizing an oppression: "When the detail won its freedom, it became rebellious, and in the period from romanticism to expressionism asserted itself as free expression, as a vehicle of protest against the organization." [\(67\)](#) Not the small of exclusive possession (eyebrow of the god), but that of possibility. We know that Lévi-Strauss is not with Kant and Burke when he says that only the small can be beautiful, for he remarks of the viewer of miniatures: "In a confused way, he feels himself to be their creator with more right than the creator himself because the latter

abandoned them in excluding them from his creation.”(68) Brevity was the soul of critical theory—it was about how to guarantee the authorless arrival of the small—more and more eyebrows, but not those belonging to a god.

10

Tocqueville said that in democratic America “Short works will be commoner than long books, wit than erudition, imagination than depth.” Ionesco: “Art brings a tiny, a very tiny light, a tiny grayish light, a little tiny beginning of illumination.” Barthes describes himself and adds the politics: “Propensity for division: fragments, miniatures, partitions, glittering details. . . . This propensity is labeled progressive: art of the rising classes proceeds by just such framing.” Chiming with Adorno, he notices that reduction of size constitutes a designification—it results in “an excision which removes the flourish of meaning.” Malraux: “Classical aesthetics proceeded from the part to the whole. Ours, after proceeding from the whole to the fragment, finds a precious ally in photographic reproduction.”(69) And Barthes too saw photography as involved with the small—the *punctum*.(70) Derrida describes this as the basis of alliance with Barthes: “Like him, I sought the *freshness* of a reading that was associated with the detail.”(71) “My interest in the detail was also his.”(72) The affection expressed in his synonyms: “sting, little hole, little stain, little cut.”(73)

The insignificant telescopes a great cluster of issues. In its work of calling the small so many things, theory appears a pointillism, capable of renewing itself exclusively through the recycling of the motif in a fresh scattering of synonyms whose numbers only grow luxuriantly. Benjamin, in affection for the citational mode, approved of Giedion’s saying that montage played the role of the unconscious of the nineteenth century.(74) Could the substitution of the word *small* permit a justification and amplification of the point? Sorting through the sheer embarrassment of examples: “Le petit récit” of Lyotard is to be used against the homogenizing powers of “le grand.”(75) Oppressive structures are said to be given the slip if we accept the advice: “Seek always the molecular, or even the submolecular particle, with which we can make alliance.”(76) Deleuze and Guattari praise the “minor qualities of minor characters—part of the project of a literature that wants to be deliberately minor and draws its revolutionary force from that.”(77) “Only the minor is grand and revolutionary.”(78) Appearing also to justify the supplement to the point is Deleuze and Guattari’s contention that Kafka’s desire to be a small animal constitutes deculturation. They quote from “The Bucket Rider: “In the thick, hard frozen snow, I walk along the tracks of small arctic dogs, my movement has lost all direction.” The comment, recalling Kafka’s own description of the relation of the small to process:

Kafka is fascinated by everything that is small. If he doesn’t seem to like children that is because they are caught in an irreversible becoming-big; the animal kingdom, in contrast, involves smallness and imperceptibility. But, even more, in Kafka, the

molecular multiplicity tends itself to become integrated with, or make room for, a machine, or rather a machinic assemblage, the parts of which are independent of each other. . . .[\(79\)](#)

And Foucault on Deleuze, recalling Hegel's own view of its function: "To reverse Platonism with Deleuze is to displace oneself insidiously within it, to descend to its smallest gestures. . . . To pervert Platonism is to search out the smallest details, to descend (with the natural gravitation of humor) as far as its crop of hair or the dirt under its fingernails—those things that were never hallowed by an idea."[\(80\)](#) And : "He points out its interruptions, its gaps, those small things of little value that were neglected by philosophical discourse. He carefully reintroduces the barely perceptible omissions, knowing full well that they imply a fundamental negligence."[\(81\)](#)

Designed to sustain the myopia of which Baudelaire complained, an attention that is only a squinting, that does not become a squinting after having been something else, to guarantee an indifferentiation in the ubiquity of the small, that there is no shifting in scale, that the small substitutes only for another small, is enthusiasm for such matters as embarrassment concerning "the substantialist illusion," "the subject that would be almost invisible," the search for a minimal term, heightened present consciousness, literature as the question of itself, narrative as an act of language, the suspension of narrative movement that causes details to be focused upon for themselves, the intricate, small, smart moves of theory, the project of demonstrating how at every moment a discourse loses strength it was presumed to possess (versus the biography of the hero in which strength is lost at the end), the writer's erasure of his or her own capacity to adhere to statements, an interest in the material features of writing (or art's focus upon its own instrumentalities, in general), the minutiae of everyday speech, and other examples of intentional banality (the *cliché*, *bêtise*, the exhaustion of forms), the effort to isolate and identify the minimal units of narrative, parataxis, the insistence upon the image as the most prominent dimension of style, an ideal of style itself. (See Queneau who described the literature of OULIPO as "une petite musique chinoise,"[\(82\)](#) and Céline, who referred to his "petite musique.") There was the ellipse, the search for the *mytheme*, flat characterization, consciously contrived plots, noncausal and antilinear sequences of events, Benjamin's allegory and his "distracted perception," or Deconstruction's efforts to name the smallest differential event. Also Bakhtin's vocabulary: "the microdialogic," the "intra-atomic counterpoint." Also, the supposed decline of the cultural place of narrative, narrative seen as an act of language rather than plot and character. The small umbrellas the idea that a text can be decomposed into a set of interwoven fragments that belie definitive reconstitution as an intentional whole, the idea of the work that divests itself critically of all the determinants not immanent to its own form.

Bengt Hasselrot readies us for a versatility of temperament, compressions of mercy and contempt. In a study of the diminutive in the Romance languages, he describes “the multiplicity of qualities that diminutive suffixes express: smallness, perhaps, but also and especially admiration, love, affection, compassion, modesty, scorn, irony, obsequiousness.” The downsize-seeing Nietzsche and Bourget found that the crisis of the modern spirit was to be noted in terms of the perversity of effects of scale. Valéry: “the universe is breaking up, losing all prospect of being viewed as a unity. The world of extreme smallness seems strangely different from the big world of which it forms a part. Even the identity of bodies is being lost in the process. . . .”(83) In “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger, recalling Hegel’s example, writes that “Everywhere and in the most varied forms and disguises the gigantic is making its appearance. In so doing, it evidences itself simultaneously as the increasingly small. We have only to think of numbers in atomic physics. The gigantic presses forward in a form that actually seems to make it disappear.” The essay can be said to concern the small, the problem of the *becoming small*. We are said to live in the age of the reduction of experience to the picture, a project of conquest. Man has become a certain kind of depicting animal, the agency of the becoming small. The position reminds of Foucault, always attentive to the sinister use of detail, the micro-physical strategies unflaggingly employed to objectify and manipulate: “A meticulous observation of detail, and at the same time a political awareness of these small things, for the control and use of men, emerge through the classical age bearing with them a whole set of techniques, a whole corpus of methods and knowledge, descriptions, plans and data. And from such trifles, no doubt, the man of modern humanism was born.”(84) While Adorno associates the small with the victim, he can also be found linking it with the violent equivalence of the malevolently normal: “Freud and Rank have pointed out that in fairy tales, small animals such as bees and ants ‘would be the brothers in the primal horde,’ just as in the same way in dream symbolism insects or vermin signify brothers and sisters (contemptuously considered as babies).”(85)

“Why the small?” Nancy asks, “this, of course, requires reflection.”(86) Survival is its first instinct, we would guess from the frequency with which such point is made. Insisting upon the primacy of the defensive crouch, here is Quignard with the beginning of an answer: “The fragment is a hedgehog.”(87) Canetti describes Kafka as an honorary member of the ancient Chinese civilization that so enjoyed tales of small animals and insects, and in particular produced a tradition of games and stories surrounding the cricket. A predilection for small things (the creature in “The Burrow,” “Josephine the Mouse Singer,” etc.) is described as protection. Dreading involvement in the great unison currents of his time, Canetti writes, recalling Beckett’s argument, “[Kafka] trained himself to disappear.” “By means of physical diminution, he withdrew power from himself, and thus had less part in it; this asceticism . . . was directed against power. The same penchant for disappearing reveals itself in his relation to his own name.”(88)

Since he abominated violence, but did not credit himself with the strength to combat it, he

enlarged the distance between the stronger entity and himself by becoming smaller and smaller in relation to it. Through this shrinkage he gained two advantages: he evaded the threat by becoming too diminutive for it, and he freed himself from all exceptional means of violence; the small animals into which he liked to transform himself were harmless ones.(89)

Deleuze: "A force would not survive if it did not first of all borrow the features of the forces with which it struggles." (90) Bataille quotes Nietzsche: "If someone aspires to greatness, he thereby betrays himself. The most substantial of men aspire to smallness." (91) Cioran: "While works die, fragments, never having lived, cannot further die." (92) Deleuze: "You can never get rid of ants, because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed." (93) And similar lines in Adorno: "What guarantees the aesthetic quality of modern art? It is the scars of damage and disruption inflicted by them on the smooth surface of the immutable." (94) "Art partakes of weakness no less than strength. In fact, the unconditional surrender of dignity may even become a vehicle of strength in modern art." (95) "Modern art would become the subject of ridicule if it were to affect the pose of solemnity or of grandeur and power." (96) Was this the strategy of family romance, in which the new aristocratic parent bore the trace of a humble real one? Apotropaic synergy of omnipotence and failure.

Already Brandes described romanticism's glorification of desire as involving an argument for "impotence as a power." (97) Here is Giovanni Vattimo: "The techniques of art, for example, and perhaps above all else poetic versification, can be seen as stratagems—which themselves are, not coincidentally, minutely institutionalized and monumentalized—that transform the work of art into a residue and into a monument capable of enduring because from the outset it is produced in the form of that which is dead. It is capable of enduring not because of its force, in other words, but because of its weakness." (98) Invulnerability also had appeal for Derrida, quoting Bataille, from *Le Petit*: "I am myself the 'little one,' I have only a hidden place." (99) Genet, quoted by Derrida: "Nevertheless, I was sure that this puny and most humble object would hold its own against them; by its mere presence it would be able to exasperate all of the police in the world; it would draw down upon itself contempt, hatred, white and dumb rages." (100) And there is a relation between the small as redoubt to literature in general. Derrida writes: "Life negates itself in literature, in order to be better able to survive." (101) Wallace Stevens: "[Poetry] is a violence from within that protects us from a violence from without." (102) Bobin:

What I do is very small, of the order of the minuscule, the infinitesimal. To the question "What do you do in life?" this is how I would like to respond, this is how I dare not respond: I do what is very small. I bear witness for a blade of grass. The world as it is goes badly, and I suffer this perhaps less than do you, having taken up residence beneath a blade of grass where one is protected from many things.(103)

"The philosophy of fragments is a by-product of war but equally a technique of conservation. Museums are stuffed with bits and pieces, with disparate members," Serres writes. And here on the anxious destroyer:

Let's take a vase or some object that is more solid, more constructed, larger. The larger it is, the more fragile it is. If you break it, the smaller the fragment is, the more resistant it is. Consequently, when you create a fragment, you seek refuge in places, in localities, which are more resistant than a global construction. *The destroyer himself fears destruction, since he can only keep what is least destructible.* In the end the particle is indivisible; the element is invincible—united as we know, by an enormous force. So, the philosophy of fragments is hyperdefensive; it is the result of hypercriticism, of polemics, of battle and hatred. It produces what is the most resistant to the strongest aggression.(104) (my emphasis)

Constituted of what would otherwise be its overthrow, the small contains its own safety, confiscating violence in avoidance of external threat, like "the self-punishing paranoid" of Lacan, who kills the eminent person she wants to be and is simultaneously cured of the obsession, punishing herself at the very instant of the execution of the crime. This immanent shaming is termed in Freud "the reversal of an instinct *into its opposite*," or "the turning round of an instinct *upon the subject*." (105) The beleaguered organism, the argument goes, seeks to remain in an unstimulated condition. A kind of peace is purchased by transforming this threat into its own thing, by taking it under its jurisdiction, by remaking stimulus into instinct: "The instincts are, at least in part, the precipitates of different forms of external stimulation. . . ." (106) Through tactical capitulation to external irritant, the noxious effects of stimuli are indeed regularized, but a definitive escape from the threatening pressure is quite impossible because of the imperfectly mastering interiorization of the threat. "As it makes its attack not from without but from within the organism, it follows that no flight can avail against it." (107)

Related is Freud's analysis of the psychosomatic epilepsy of Dostoevsky, where offered is a model of the endosmosis of the story of the individual who negates the other, and is then self-punished for the crime. In the case of the novelist, the significance of the attack of epilepsy lies in the victim's identification with a resented father. It is against the background of a wish to see him dead that this identification occurs. The epilepsy of the novelist is said to realize both the parricidal wish as well as the imagined retribution. The seizure expresses that one has wished another dead, and now *is* this other person and is dead already. This autoregulatory, gridlock sublime that is the small, contains the passionate entropy that is sacrifice in both senses of the word "contain," while not exposing either in either sense of the word "expose."

Each of these figures becomes then a kind of armored beast, protected as immobilized by an immanent death. The assimilation of violence by the small, the completion and reversal of paranoia, has the character and motivation of instinct formation. All of this amounts to saying, as does Nancy, that the small is the undoing of ritual violence: "The fragment is the opposite of sacrifice, because it is the opposite of this continuity, this cohesion of essence that the Western representation of sacrifice seeks to present (that of the Eucharist that brings together and incorporates the fragments of its grace)." [\(108\)](#) And Sartre's words for this: "To introduce the notion of the fragile into the world. What is fragile resists synthesis and, when pressed by force to form a whole, always tends towards the multiplicity of juxtaposition." [\(109\)](#) Adorno praised "Berg's principle of the infinitesimal; the principle of the smallest transition." [\(110\)](#) And thus the logic of his cringe at what happens in Stravinsky, where music submits "to the rhythmic blows dealt it from an external source." [\(111\)](#)

What is already small, by preserving a mobility that lessens distinctions within "a field of variable distance," is continuously involved in a struggle to resist its own moralizability. Robert Musil, from his story "The Mouse": "But that's all for this little story, that had already come to an end every time you tried to end it." [\(112\)](#) The issue of the location, source, temporality of the crisis of nonparticipation in a whole has an ethical consequence. Benjamin: "Real time is not experienced in the dialectical image as lived time. . . . It rather enters in most reduced form possible." [\(113\)](#) As narrative is punishment, the struggle between the smalls will be about subtracting time from space. Adorno, referring to *Parsifal*: "What Gurnemanz says about time becoming space is true of art-works, those of the so-called temporal arts included." "Everything happens by way of a shortcut. . . ." (Mallarmé, "Un Coup de dés") [\(114\)](#) It was all a matter of collapse. To tell the difference between classical and modern comedy, Hegel says, we must be sensitive to "Whether the folly and one-sidedness of the *dramatis personae* appears laughable to the audience only or to themselves as well, whether therefore the characters in the comedy can be mocked solely by the audience or by themselves also." [\(115\)](#)

Was the small merely a widow tied to a railroad track, just a *bagatelle contre un massacre*? "On how many occasions," asks Bachelard, "has not the poet or the painter . . . escaped through a crack in the wall?" [\(116\)](#) (Slip through a crack in time, rather.) Does the small merely predict rude acts and scheme its precautions? Is it merely this palliative struck with circumspection, a figure of self-beset resiliency realizing itself only in retreat, in so far as it packs the forces of its undoing? Is it only homeopathic, merely an apotropaic stoop, the frontloading of disenchantment, the incompetent because internalized lightning on the brow of Harry Potter? Serving what end is genius for lying low?

Could it at once be a wealth, and if so, of what might it consist, and how could it and this misery be a single thing? Not to lose can only be half a strategy-multiple are "the tasks of

the least.”(117) We have it from another, more complicated hedgehog that the contempt built into smallness is inseparable from self-pleasure. Walzer’s recluse has a flair for self-enjoyment:

Hedgehog: I am puny. My spines, what’s more, are mockery itself; they mock me.

Stork: So you’re mocked by what seems called upon to shield you. I love you all the more for your forsakenness.

Hedgehog: But I’m in enormously good spirits. You have no idea how splendidly one can live inside a covering that’s laughable. My well-being is unspeakably original. The assurance that I look pretty streams through me.(118)

Unavailable to ritual through the contraction of its moments, the attrition of sheltering modesty, Derrida’s hedgehog, metaphor for poetry, at worst is candidate for Kant’s roadkill status-natural form slaughtered by the automatisms of human proxy: “This thing that at once exposes itself to and protects itself from death-in a word, the skill, the withdrawal of the hedgehog, like an animal that rolls itself into a ball on the highway. The temptation is to take it into one’s hands, to instruct and to understand it, to keep it for oneself, near to oneself.”(119) “The accident that can happen to a hedgehog is without the status of sacrifice, for sacrifice is never an accident.”(120) Not entirely unprovoked is any threat it averts-cf. the sufficiency with which the imagery is charged. But the creature is a provocation minimalist: “The propensity to amplify the disastrous quality of the accident is foreign to what I have called the humility of the poetic aspect of the hedgehog: low, very low, close to the ground, humble (*humilis*).”(121) The simultaneity of the double satisfaction.

Nietzsche’s hedgehog is a “poor doctor of the spirit,” figure of a stabilized, because embarrassing happiness:

What he seeks is to live nameless and lightly mocked at, too humble to awaken envy or hostility, with a head free of fever, equipped with a handful of knowledge and a bagful of experience, as it were a poor-doctor of the spirit aiding those whose head is confused by opinions without their being really aware who has aided them! Not desiring to maintain his own opinion or celebrate a victory over them, but to address them in such a way that, after the slightest of imperceptible hints or contradictions, they themselves arrive at the truth and go away proud of the fact! To be like a little inn which rejects no one who is in need but which is afterwards forgotten or ridiculed! To possess no advantage, neither better food nor purer air nor a more joyful spirit-but to give away, to give back, to communicate, to grow poorer! To be able to be humble, so as to be accessible to many and humiliating to none! To

have much injustice done him, and to have crept through the worm-holes of errors of every kind, so as to be able to reach many hidden souls on their secret paths! Forever in a kind of love and forever in a kind of selfishness and self-enjoyment. To be in possession of a dominion and at the same time concealed and renouncing! To lie continually in the sunshine and gentleness of grace, and yet to know that the paths that rise up to the sublime are close by! That would be a reason for a long life!(122)

Innocuously does the small give all access to its not entirely unmalicious self. And relating to another Nietzschean theme, that of the eternal return: repetition is reflexivity (*i.e.*, self-enjoyment) lived without decisive incident—the temporality of hedgehog happiness.

“The point is the space that does not take up space,” Derrida says, “the place that does not take place; it suppresses and replaces the place, it takes the place of the space that it negates and conserves. It spatially negates space.”(123) The question we must answer, however, is how to then translate this negation of space by what is almost not space into the terms of social experience, that is, into the terms of the sacred and the profane. For what groups and individuals and to what effect can the point be allowed to undo space; in other terms, can there be access to an object that is the sign of the end of objects of desiring attention?

Michel Serres argues for the centrality of size: “There is no such thing as the attractive and the unattractive, the beautiful and the ugly: there are large scales and small scales.”(124) And this would be the point made in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, in effect an entire nanoaesthetic founded in relative size, a logic that parallels the bimetallism of the Third Critique. Mirth, Freud insists, always involves the revelation of the small. “*Brevity* is the body and soul of wit, it is its very self,” Jean-Paul is quoted.(125) And so is Spencer, adding the experience of sequence that will be resisted and cause what it produces to be no joke: “Laughter naturally results only when consciousness is unawares *transferred* from great things to small. . . .”(126) (my emphasis)

14

Attention to the small is said by Freud to permit laughter in two ways. There is the censor function:

Among displacements are to be counted not merely diversions from a train of thought but every sort of indirect representation as well, and in particular the replacement of an important but objectionable element by one that is indifferent and that appears innocent to the censorship, something that seems like a very remote allusion to the other one—substitution by a piece of symbolism, or an analogy, or something small.(127)

But if transfer of consciousness from great things to small were simply defensive, then it would not provoke hilarity, since we laugh only when inhibitions have been released. Required is *an economy in the expenditure of affect*, when there is impression of effortless satisfaction, when a cathexis that was formerly present has ceased to exist. In a passage of the greatest interest for us, Freud (seeming to reproduce an argument of Burke) contrasts the sublime with the relation to small forms:

What is sublime is something large in the figurative, psychical sense; and I should like to suggest . . . that, like what is somatically large, it is represented by an increased expenditure. It requires little observation to establish that when I speak of something sublime I innervate my speech in a different way. I make different facial expressions, and I try to bring the whole way in which I hold myself in harmony with the dignity of what I am having an idea of. I impose a solemn restraint upon myself—not very different from what I should adopt if I were to enter the presence of an exalted personality, a monarch, or a prince of science. I shall hardly be wrong in assuming that this different innervation in my ideational mimetics corresponds to an increased expenditure.(128)

And elsewhere this behavior is explained:

Direct observation shows that human beings are in the habit of expressing the attributes of largeness and smallness in the contents of their ideas by means of varying expenditure in a kind of *ideational mimetics*. If a child or a man from the common people, or a member of certain races, narrates or describes something, it is easy to see that he is not content to make his idea plain to the hearer by the choice of clear words, but he also represents its subject matter in his expressive movements: he combines the mimetic and the verbal forms of representation. And he especially demonstrates quantities and intensities: “a high mountain”—and he raises his hand over his head, “a little dwarf” and he holds it near the ground. He may have broken himself of the habit of painting with his hands, yet for that reason he will do it with his voice; and if he exercises self-control in this too, it may be wagered that he will open his eyes wide when he describes something large and squeeze them shut when he comes to something small. What he is thus expressing is not his affects but actually the content of what he is having an idea of.(129)

Eliciting a gesture that takes in the scale of what is witnessed, “The idea of something large demands more expenditure than the idea of something small.”(130) Blind spots—smalls that permits the seeing of oneself as not seeing are the “more than enough:”

[T]he grimace characteristic of smiling, which twists up the corners of the mouth,

appears first in an infant at the breast when it is satisfied and satiated and lets go of the breast as it falls asleep. Here it is a genuine expression of the emotions, for it corresponds to a decision to take no more nourishment, and represents as it were an “enough” or rather a “more than enough.” This original meaning of pleasurable satiety may have brought the smile which is after all the basic phenomenon of laughter. . . .
(131)

And the book concludes that the small involves reliving of that period in life when “we were accustomed to deal with our psychical work in general with a small expenditure of energy—the mood of our childhood when we were ignorant of the comic, when we were incapable of jokes and when we had no need of humor to make us feel happy in our life.” (132) An omnipotence that does not have to be exercised, invulnerable as it is the atomization of the forgetting of the world, a forgetting that does not occur before deprived witnesses. In the face of that which is small we close our eyes, Freud wrote, we become windowless monads, desire having come to an end. And energy is the issue for Nietzsche as well. On free spirits: “They expend as little energy as possible on all . . . things. . . . Such a spirit prefers to be happy to take in only the fringes of an event; he does not love things in all the breadth and vastness of their folds; for he does not want to entangle himself in them.” (133)

15

Agency of infantilization, this impairment: “The man with a looking glass,” noticed Bachelard, “is an innocent glance at a new object. The magnifying glass of the botanist is childhood rediscovered.” (134) Other terms are used by Lyotard to make the point of Freud: “The eye is the symbol of desire—its perpetual movement is the movement of desire.” (135) The small does the work of transfer for you; it is, through incorporation, the agency of the transfer of the absence of expenditure, and thus minimizes the extent to which one is conscious of one’s own grievance. And, as noticed by Nietzsche, diminished in the same stroke is the resentment of the other: before the small power need not manifest itself as such—expressing itself as a passivity, it appears as an invulnerability. The small was about the location of still life. As it makes available to each co-child a uniform, indistinct world in which no power need be exercised, it is the unresentful undoing of the experience of virtuosic skill, of talent that is unshared efficiency, the effortlessness of the contrasting *one*, not your worklessness, but another’s to be gawked at from the perspective of the loss of our self-loving life. Benjamin quotes Nietzsche: “The economy of art has as its origin the masking of work.” (136) (Mauss and Hubert said “mana” expressed “automatic efficacy.”) But it is always *more* or *less* about the charismatic dissimulation of work. “One must try . . . to see in order to see, and no longer in order to act,” Bergson said. (137) The deritualized small is the infinite good of the effect, not the memory of its intimidating passage, the injurious transfer of the status of still life from one point to another.

Derrida would appear to be making the point of Freud. Before writing, because it is a miniature, as it is experienced at a distance, and does not penetrate me violently, Derrida writes, "One can more naturally close one's eyes or distract his glance than avoid listening. Let us not forget that this natural situation is primarily that of the child at the breast."[\(138\)](#) "Man has thus put out his eyes, he blinds himself [with writing]."[\(139\)](#) And he too takes notice of the issue of effort unknown: "Yes, it was from a detail that I demanded a revelatory ecstasy, a direct channel to the one and only Roland Barthes, grace-filled access to *that which is alien to all labor*"[\(140\)](#) (my emphasis). Derrida approvingly quotes Ponge's *Proem*: "If I prefer La Fontaine-the slightest fable-to Schopenhauer or Hegel, I certainly know why. It seems to me . . . less tiring . . . "[\(141\)](#) The temporality of punishment is not present-as this is *infantile* omnipotence, Freud's "his majesty the baby."

Important, as Freud notices, is "the position of the unproductive one,"[\(142\)](#) who is without effort, and the means for achievement of this enviable position. Theory is not the comic because it involves no downward movement of the becoming small. Thus Derrida unsequences it-the small never having been other than itself. There is a split in the object function-symmetrical reversal of the splitting of the paternal function-what places it close to hand rather than at vulnerable distance. And of this Freud makes us aware when he writes of a process-oriented experience of reduced scale that recalls the degradation that occurs in Kant's sublime: "By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him. . . ."[\(143\)](#) These remarks we must see in terms of the following:

Thus a uniform explanation is provided of the fact that a person appears comic to us if, in comparison with ourselves, he makes too great an expenditure. . . ; and it cannot be denied that . . . our laughter expresses a pleasurable sense of the superiority which we feel in relation to him. If the relation . . . is reversed-if the other person's . . . expenditure is found to be less than ours. . . -then we no longer laugh, we are filled with astonishment and admiration.[\(144\)](#)

The separating issues are the temporality and agency of the small. Critical theory is no joke-no revelation of the small-for the small is *always already*. While one small blocks catastrophe and lives spontaneously by conjuring up (through incorporation) its neutralized image, the other leaves us unshielded from exposure to the contrast that is disaster's provocation. The same instinct that caused Adorno to say that Mahler's vast compositions were simply frames for saving particulars, has the author of *Grammatology* arguing that the book is always a miniature: "Writing *reduces* the dimensions of presence in its sign. The *miniature* is not reserved to illuminated capitals; it is, understood in its derivative sense, the very form of writing. The history of writing would then follow the continuous and linear progress of the techniques of abbreviation."[\(145\)](#) There is not the voice against writing, as

the voice is always already writing. In Derrida there is no progress towards closed eyes. Eyes don't close at the end of a story of degradation. There can be no *process* of disillusionment-this is the entire logic of Deconstruction.

While the small might always have "the quality of always being destroyed," there is the possibility of neutralizing culpability through the elimination of an unfolding embarrassment, the disappearance of a specific culpable agency. The small of Derrida is a joke without a punch line, for he detemporalizes it, removing it from a stage of contrast by describing it as always already existing in a condition of reduced scale. The small may be the sign of an identification come to an end, but the ending can never be distinguished from its beginning. *Différance* cannot be defined through its oppositional relation to presence. Described as "older" than presence, *différance* is within auto-affection. Derrida: "In opposition to a metaphysical, dialectical and Hegelian interpretation of the economic movement of *différance*, one must allow for a game in which the loser wins, and in which one at once wins and loses on each occasion." (146) If there is only the small there is no experience of a successor still life and the learning curve that it is the intimidated product of. There is winning and losing in this small, but the moments are experienced in simultaneity. As there is only the noncustodial volatility of the small, there is no *prevailing* of one element over another, disclosure of the small in time, relay relation, no interruption of the life of one ego ideal for the sake of giving birth to another.

16

Barthes was praised by Derrida for focus upon the small, but the alliance is finally based on common insistence upon seeing it uncontrastively. We have noted Barthes happily describing Japan as the land of miniatures. Here "all is small." Consequent with himself he praises it as the utopia of permanently closed eyes. Where the diminutive reigns we find "eyes lowered, eyes closed, eyes 'asleep,' a closed line closes further in a lowering of the eyelids which is never ended." Opposed is said to be "the Western eye . . . subject to a whole mythology of the soul, central and secret, whose fire, sheltered in the orbital cavity, radiates toward a fleshy, sensuous, passionate exterior." (147) Adorno: "Art can do no better than close its eyes." (148) And now Blanchot, alive to the requirement of the rescheduled small, also saying that there should only be the small, one that does not lure into a domesticating sequence that is always finally the biography of the hero: "All beauty lies in details: so Valéry said. . . . But this would be true only if there were *only an art of details* that would no longer have the art of the whole for its context." (149)

The whole point made by Beckett: "I can see me quite tiny the same as now more or less only tinier quite tiny no more objects." (150) The small allows me to see myself as not seeing, as in the case of the experience of the angry god of Lacan, but one is now not involved in a shift in the location of happiness. The small does not disperse the imperative "identify/don't identify" over several persons-the imperatives are collapsed, caused to appear in each

individual at once. In the blindness before the small-I do not *see* indifference, *for that is what I myself am*, more certainly than with Hegel's master, for before the small there is the possibility of the parallel experiences of indifference, the parity of being fulfilled in every instant. The co-achievement of this still life subtracts from it the terror before the Other who would seek to occupy my exclusive space. In a field of contiguous self-appreciations, a *there is* becomes indistinguishable from an uncontested *I am*. That happiness is in the observer position is the Freud/Derrida confirming point made by Bachelard as he writes that the small "causes there to be a shift from the experience of the image that one sees to the condition of the image that one lives." (151) The small always permits me to see myself as not seeing-to *occupy* the still-life position-but its timeline settles the matter of whether or not there is a threat of shift in location of happiness.

Reconciled are positions noticed here as Lyotard quotes Heraclitus: "Those who are awake (vigilant) share a single, common world, but every sleeper falls back upon his own idiom." (152) Proust locates the genius of Impressionism in its having produced an atomized squinting. In *Jean Santeuil*, writing of the project of Monet who seeks to share an inability to see, in this case to ascertain whether a ship, depicted as sailing in a fog, does or does not have port-holes: "In this place in the picture there is a painting neither of what one sees, for one sees nothing, nor of what one does not see, for one must paint only what one sees, but rather a painting of the experience of a not seeing, a painting of the failing of the eye unable to cut through the fog that is imposed in the picture as it is on the river. This is really beautiful." (153) Instead of the seeing who is not seeing, one is doing the not seeing oneself. When shared is a not seeing, there is no seeing, imagining seeing the *becoming* small. The function of critical theory has been that of saturating the field with the small, to the exclusion of the process of becoming small-an identification with a prehumiliation vs. the identification with an agency of humiliation that is always subject to at least the imagination of the reversibility of its violence. Absent is thrust towards the vanishing point, gone the killing lines of approach. The relation of viewer to form now constitutes a "flat organization." Absence of effort is lived simultaneously as omnipotence and sheltering inadequacy. (154) There is only a successor blindness in the aesthetic, but it becomes unpunitive when the small is always already small, when it makes possible a not seeing that is not a punishment of a not seeing.

Hand-Eye Coordination

This split in the experience parallels the one in the undecidable function. Distance is required for spontaneity-the path to the free subject being through the free object. Writing of Kant, Žižek speaks of "his fundamental insight according to which I retain my capacity of a spontaneous-autonomous agent precisely and only insofar as I am not accessible to myself as a Thing." (155) A familiar Frankfurt School position, here. As in Adorno, for example: "Natural beauty is defined by its undefinability, which is an aspect of the object as well as of the concept thereof. As an indeterminate something, natural beauty is hostile to all

definition.”(156) The hostility excites a hostility, as we see in Hazlitt, who says that not just any remove can assure the stability of difference:

Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure; and all but the present moment, but the present spot, passion claims for its own, and brooding over it with wings outspread, stamps it with an image of itself. Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines, and are molded by its touch.(157)

17

Discernible here is our familiar envious superego pattern. Precious spontaneity cannot be guaranteed by exciting the traumatic antagonism attached to the process of the descending of an incongruity. But there is the double bind of distance, the issue of the durability, the vulnerability of this power one acquires through contact with variously scaled obstacles to knowledge.

Balthus liked to quote Ingres: “What one knows, one knows sword in hand.”(158) An example from Hegel, who sees only this reification in cognition:

Indeed, the grasp of an object consists in nothing else but that an I will make the object its own, will penetrate it, and will bring it into its own form, *i.e.*, into the universality which immediately is definition, or into definition, which immediately is universality. In visuality, or even in visualization, the object is still something external and strange. By grasping it, the being-in-and-for-itself which the object has in visuality and visualization is transformed into posited being; the I penetrates it in thought. Yet the object is in and for itself as it is in thought; it is phenomenal as it is in visuality and visualization; thinking voids the immediacy of our first encounter with it and thus turns it into a posited being. . . .

The goal is for the object to be a feature of self-consciousness, to have “no other moments or definitions than the I itself.”(159) Conquest of the strange assures no spontaneity, for the possibility of mastering seizure surely rebounds against any subject proving successful in any work of seizure. The anxious knowledge of Critical Theory. It is through an object that is no object, the availability of which is not contested, either by another *or by itself*, that one is not accessible to oneself as a thing. In this situation, one will not risk being gutted of one’s difference. Derrida: “‘I’ can only save an inner self by placing it in ‘me,’ separate from myself, outside.”(160)

Malebranche’s *De la Recherche de la vérité* has a role in the history of the legitimation of

curiosity, for found here, albeit in dismissal, is an alternative to difference as self-limiting trap, as set-up moment of the experience of the reversibility of violence:

There is nothing so difficult than to apply oneself to a thing for a long time without wonder, the animal spirits not carrying themselves easily to the necessary places in order to represent it. . . . It is necessary that we deceive our imagination in order to awaken our spirits, and that we represent the subject upon which we wish to meditate in a new way, so as to excite in us some movement of wonder.(161)

Insistence-in this civil war of strangeness-is on coarsening rules of engagement, heightening competitive metabolism, a hardening of resolve that is the condition of the reversibility of violence, of the maintenance of a tension that risks being resolved, ultimately, to my own disadvantage. In order for an object to have a role in a scientific *story*, an important degree of difficulty needs to be retained, it has to “stand up” to scrutiny, that is, to supply the killer with energies required for redeeming death. Awe must command wonder in order to block the meeting with unmastered materials, unmastered merely as unworthy of my self-defeating strength. Descartes describes as condemnable “those who seek out rarities simply in order to wonder at them and not in order to know them.” “When we are astonished in looking at things which merit little or no consideration, this may entirely prevent or pervert the use of reason.”(162) Deweaponization of attention-an incompetent curiosity, curiosity denied its juice, disinclination to the projection of force, the blessing of a defense from defense.(163)

There is only the playing off the object’s challenge. Assuring fullest pursuit, die-hard difference supplies ardor for a hungry ascendance. Valéry: “I cannot see, feel or depict anything to myself without there being some sense of greatness. Willing, doing and perceiving, each have something to do with greatness.”(164) And then, Bachelard: “In scientific work, one must first of all, psychologically, *digest* the surprise.”(165) (my emphasis) The climbing point is developed by Malebranche who held that the object had to be artificially charged with difference if it were to not corrupt into that inert response attached to what would be the lazy infinity of Hegel.(166) And what is the obdurate material of the oddity that stood its ground, provoking the failure of tenacity, if not the unmediated relation as *not yet* detached from the provocation of a hoarding matrix? A ramping up of wonder for the sake of its productive beating down. The mind inflames itself in order to move to adequately maddened levels of manipulative intelligence.

“The forms of objects call for the hand and the grasp,” Levinas said. “Vision moves into grasp.”(167) This the hunger of what Blanchot termed “persecutive prehension.”(168) “At certain moments, this hand feels a very great need to grasp: it must take the pencil, this is necessary, this is an order, an imperious requirement.”(169) It is in the nature of the teaser to excite us “to examine things with the highest level of exactitude.”(170) But if wonder

proves minimally robust there is not this hot pursuit, but rather the stalling into an indolence not motorized into a controlling drive. When wonder was rather just the incompetence of strangeness, strangeness as pathos, enticed was the soul to “enjoy its riches rather than to dissipate them” (171) in vigorous inquiry. On either side of the catastrophe—that *will* occur, or will be avoided because of catastrophe’s immanence in the contraction of the moments of sequence—there is elation/depression, the mix differing in each instance according to the intensity of destructive agency that strangeness solicits. The enervation of the merely puzzled response protects me from myself, feed-back loop that starves attention of suicide energies, the easy way around negativity’s bend, the rising to a near pulselessness of challenge, the sleep of the envious superego, ethically, but not economically disengaged self-love.

18

Two ways were there, then, for an object to be reassuringly disappointing, and to each a distinct pattern of self-recovery is attached. *The degenerate object, a strange form that sheds the epistemological altitude of reversibility, failing to provoke an action, liquidates degenerative potential.* Before the form intact in its misery, a wonder gap results in a ferocity gap—underemployed is the witness, absent a violence in the contracting response. When the eye is not the agent of an object’s infirmity, it is not infirmed by this infirmity. I am always at once diminished and strengthened by an object’s infirmity, but in varied measure according to the temporalities of its infirmity, temporalities that moralize to differently stringent, incapacitating and capacitating social result. Wonder, lazying rather than busying, could be occasion for the inefficiency of that self-pleasure that had been austere noticed by Augustine and La Bruyère.

Towards prolepsis. Insignificance was the sequence accelerator. Reflection assuming the form of deflection, banality is the warp speed of sequence. Simone Weil: “To rob desires of their energy by subtracting from them their temporal orientation.” (172) To remove the time is to lift the haunting, that is, the effect of the reversibility of violence. The splitting of *curiositas*, therefore, between passive and aggressive versions, this last in which we are invited to *overkill* the prey. Who or what is making difficulty easy, and over what interval? The distinction to be made between the materials of reflection—whose desire do they aid to send home, and at the expense, or nonexpense, of whom?

An opacity on strike! The Malebranche nightmare of “A Jellyfish.” Marianne Moore: “Visible, invisible,/A fluctuating charm/. . . you had meant/To catch it, and it quivers;/You abandon your intent.” (173) Unstoried attention is worklessly half-amazed before a strangeness that only half holds its ground. Obtuse wonder is absence of degenerative potential, subtracting the process from mystery. Barthes: “*Obtus*us meansthat which is blunted, rounded in form.” “The obtuse meaning appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, information; analytically, it has something derisory about it: opening out into the infinity of language, it

can come through as limited in the eyes of analytic reason . . . Indifferent to moral or aesthetic categories(the trivial, the futile. . . ." "[O]btuse meaning is discontinuous, indifferent to the story." It is "the epitome of counter-narrative." It "can only come and go, appearing and disappearing." (174) By underserving the drive, it generates low-yield narcissism. The lazying of attention, the obtuse only *looks* dumb, declining to participate as it does in its becoming familiar. The double action of the strange, then (its synchronicity an Enlightenment feature)-a matter of the efficiency of self-love, through objects of action and those of inaction.

Usable and unusable forms of intimidation are to be put in touch with those of G. H. Mead, expanding upon what Whitehead called "the pushiness of things." (175) There is agreement with Freud, in notice of "the identification of the inner effort of the organism with the matter of the object." (176) A thing is said to arouse an organism to act in the same manner that the thing acts upon the organism. Recalling the electric relations that characterize ritual process, he tells us that the action of the thing is the organism's resistance to pressure that arises when a hard object is firmly grasped by the agitated hand. The difficulties of the precategorical object, through which it brings itself into hurting range, excite the very best efforts of the hand. "The distant object, setting in train the responses of grasping and manipulation, calls out in the organism its own inner nature of resistance." (177) The hand responds, its forces concentrated, irritably reaching, only as much as its reference moves. "The vision of the distant object is not only the stimulus to movement toward it. It is also, in its changing distance values, a continual control of the act of approach. The contours of the object determine the organization of the act in its seizure." (178) And thus the significance of the properties specific to the thing-the intensity of a predatory relation depending upon the extent to which the features are epistemologically aphrodisiac. Hence Adorno's anxiety before simply replacing a subject with an object. This distinction was required: "But it is not the purpose of critical thought to place the object on the orphaned throne once occupied by the subject. On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol. The purpose of critical thought is to abolish the hierarchy." (179) The object hefty with mystery can turn a knowledge of it against the knower. As knowledge had the structure of a leveraged buy-out, negativity's bouncing off the bottom will replace its bouncing off the top.

Before the irritant "disqualified nature becomes the chaotic matter of mere classification, and the all-powerful self becomes mere possession-abstract identity." (180) How banalizing the consequences of the strong difference were finally discovered to be! Ponge: "That is why man, out of a resentment against that immensity that humiliates him, rushes towards those shores or intersections where he can discover great things to define." (181) Because "transgression does not transgress," the choice is for the insignificant. Differently resistant forms differently deliver self-love. The replacement of the subject by the resistant object-in the rehabilitation of nature in the eighteenth century-does indeed involve a weakening of envious superego. But opacity invites our pattern reversibility-the drive excited will be that

to which one will fall victim oneself. The self-satisfied subject as well as, to an albeit lesser extent, its stand-in object, share the horror of mediating the witness subject's self-initiated death. The *enthroned* object retains the status of *caput mortuum*.

19

Now Mead's support of Malebranche has the virtue of alerting to the trap, one organizing the entire anxiety system of critical theory, to be noticed especially in that distinction it makes between imitation and mimesis. Through attention to Mead on the exotic form, we see that distance is something that participates in its own overcoming. Why is it that "We cannot eliminate from the dialectics of the extant what is experienced in consciousness as an alien thing." (182) Distance, we have seen, there must be, if there is to be a free subject: "There is truly no identity without something nonidentical." (183) And it is the duty of art to base itself in this understanding: "[M]odern art is constantly practicing the impossible trick of trying to identify the non-identical." (184) But if this distance is to not be the deceit of drawing one onto the rocks by the power of its solicitation, it can broker no killing repair. Because it moralizes access to strangeness, there can be no happiness in *capturing* power. Adorno:

The spell cast by the subject becomes equally a spell cast *over* the subject. . . . The subject is spent and impoverished in its categorical performance; to be able to define and articulate what it confronts . . . the subject must dilute itself to the point of mere universality, for the sake of the objective validity of those definitions. . . . The objectifying subject contracts into a point of abstract reason, and finally into logical noncontradictoriness, which in turn means nothing except to a definite object. (185) (my emphasis)

And: "The more autocratically the I rises above the entity, the greater its imperceptible objectification and ironic retraction of its constitutive role." (186) "In so far as there are social acts, there are social objects, and . . . social control is bringing the act of the individual into relation with this social object." (187) And what is the social object? The distant object, because it produces envious superego. Thus distance is required, distance is impossible.

The guile-to preserve the remote without sparking process in the unhauntedly self-enjoying paralysis of depthless attention. The preshrunk wonder of Lyotard: "To touch the object that is at a distance, *without having it*." (188) But *pace* Lyotard, this cannot be his touted sublime, for we read in the Third Critique that it is the reversibility of a counterpoise to the beautiful "because our effort and attempt to move to a grasp of the object awakens in us a feeling of our own greatness and strength." (189) Precisely our iron-rich, gaze-hardening Malebranche point, one without which it is impossible to read Kant politically. The crisis generated in the relation with the distant is to be stroked rather than consummated. If

"[W]e recognize the identity of resistance and effort," (190) how to frustrate distance from participating in its own, autonomy-ruining overcoming? The object must be a prelude to a release from the object-this is the sequence: "The primacy of the object, as the potential freedom from domination of what is, manifests itself in art as its freedom from objects." (191) But not just any provocative object will do, for the harsh loop must be unkillingly lived. If there is to be a yielding to the object, required will be the support of the object itself, Malebranche noticed, the eye moving to the extent to which its reference does. There must be "the primacy of the object," but this has to be experienced by the subject "against its own omnipotence" (192) if avoided is to be the unfolding of a muscular corrective. The danger is that of which Kant spoke, in his description of what occurs in the sublime, of "a certain . . . substitution of a respect for the Object in place of one for the idea of humanity in our own self-the Subject." (193) The choice: Be the always already small, or Be the agent (and victim) of its forcible, preachy revelation in time. For there to be otiose wonder, time must be subtracted from the experience of distance so that the small will not appear as the byproduct of a hostile takeover. The indiscrimination of distance and proximity, banalization of distance, the defamiliarization of the proximate, the small is wonder divided against itself, the self-distance, the diplomatic immunity, the soft regime, of distance.

Vanished is succession anxiety as anesthetized is capturing instinct, lazied the movement outside the self. "Two basic qualities," the artist must possess, Diderot said, "morality and perspective." (194) We now understand the relation, perspective being an example of the margin of disappointment. "There is both a technical and moral side to the imitation of nature," he said. "The artistic fire is of two kinds: that of the soul and that of the craft." (195) The relation between morality and perspective is that between difficulty and disappearance. Lévi-Strauss:

What gives *trompe l'oeil* its power of enchantment? The latter results from the seemingly miraculous coalescence of the indefinable and fleeting aspects of the sensible world, as obtained by technical procedures that, after considerable intellectual labor and a slowly acquired mastery, allow these aspects to be reconstituted and permanently fixed. "Our understanding revels in imitation as of something that belongs to it," Plutarch said. Rousseau was opposed to this extremely difficult art form, condemning "conventional standards of beauty whose sole merit lies with the difficulty overcome." To which Chabanon, his contemporary, rightly replied: "In the theory of the Arts, it is wrong to pretend that the difficulty to be overcome counts for nothing; on the contrary, it plays a considerable part in the pleasure procured by the Arts." (196)

"Slowly acquired mastery," through the sense of the progressive dimension of victory, suggests that the agency of the control of conditions of disappearance belongs to a force

that is external to the challenged form. Lévi-Strauss is wrong to argue that collage is simply another form of *trompe l'oeil*.[\(197\)](#) As there is here lessened the sense of difficulty overcome, lessened is the ethical charge. Revelatory is the philistine complaint that "anybody could have done it," for it communicates the sequence anxiety that caused Benjamin to notice that story-telling is no longer possible.

20

Lévi-Strauss says that representation and the small are inextricable.[\(198\)](#) We are now in a position to notice the moral dimension of the equation. "Representation is hatred, someone takes the place of someone else," Serres writes.[\(199\)](#) But the distinctive feature of this hatred can only be grasped if the factor of illusion is added to the mix. Representation is the taking the place of a taking of a place. The judgment of judgment-autoimmunity of judgment.

Enthusiast of Cézanne's "little sensations,"[\(200\)](#) "the minute thrills" provoked by "the chromatic sands" of Rothko, the "little objects" of Pol Bury,[\(201\)](#) Lyotard describes a hand to match, a left hand, to (un)match Mead's rapacious right. Writing of the depiction of the open hand, hand of no bounty, in the paintings of Valerio Adami:

The hand of resipiscence, which says, "I give up. I have surrendered my weapons, my concepts; come and see." A hand lying horizontal, holding nothing. The hollow palm of surrender is a refutation of its obverse, or the aspect which appears when the hand grasps the object, suddenly clasps it, captures it, measures it and violates it. The hidden side to it, the hollow palm that is usually concealed by the gesture of intrigue. Intriguing means not opening your hand, holding things in the present. . . . A hand is like an eye; in order to seize something, it closes, takes aim, focuses, grasps. When it is open wide, extended, fingers spread, it reveals its susceptibility, the vacant gaze that awaits the caress it promises. When it is in recline, it has already received. It has already both admitted and denied the crime, the drama and the intrigue of its poignant closure. It has freed the gaze from the grip of the present.[\(202\)](#)

Rescipiscence from rescipiscence, finally. The opened eyes here void the view that the closed make acutely possible. Valéry: "To make the hand free *in the sense of the eye*, one must take away its freedom *in the sense of the muscles*."[\(203\)](#) If the hand is at one with itself it is because there is no galvanizing hiddenness—it is not in command of its objects. The inside/outside juxtaposition is "intrigue," undone by the open, abandoning hand. The open hand abandons, and as we saw in Lévi-Strauss, the small is produced through an effect of abandonment that causes it be, nonexclusively, my thing: "In a confused way, he feels himself to be their creator with more right than the creator himself because the latter abandoned them in excluding them from his creation."[\(204\)](#) The small is released by the

open hand and makes possible the open hand. And the open hand is related to an eye that does not see, crime “admitted and denied.” The small is not the sign of domination but of a dispossession that is at once possession. The take-it-or-leave-it hand produces an open series of take-it-or-leave-it hands. The subject attached to this open hand is spontaneous as dispossessed, as dispossessing.

Ponge on the ridiculous success of “The Shrimp,” jellyfish relative:

Through lively, sudden, successive and choppy leaps, now forwards, and now back, it escapes at once from the devouring jaws that rush forward in a straight line, from all slightly sustained attention, from all ideal possession that might be a little satisfying. [\(205\)](#)

Single silly survival of any “gesture of intrigue” makes for double success—in spite of his best efforts, the predator wins as well. Adorno on part of the why of it:

The primacy of subjectivity is a spiritualized continuation of Darwin’s struggle for existence. The suppression of nature for human ends is a mere natural relationship, which is why the supremacy of nature-controlling reason and its principle is a delusion. When the subject proclaims itself a Baconian master of all things, and finally their idealistic creator, it takes an epistemological and metaphysical part in this delusion. The practice of its rule makes it a part of what it thinks it is ruling; it succumbs like the Hegelian master. It reveals the extent to which in consuming the object it is beholden to the object. What it does is the spell of that to which the subject believes under its own spell. The subject’s desperate self-exaltation is its reaction to the experience of its impotence, which prevents self-reflection. Absolute consciousness is unconscious. [\(206\)](#)

Valéry sees the syllogism: “Man can fool his desire, by directing himself toward the object, brushing against it without definitive intention, and without irreversible act—And to the extent to which it is in this way that he approaches it—the desire *that up to that point* is satisfied, does not cause him to suffer, nor does it cause any rival of this desire to protest.” [\(207\)](#) Derrida:

Almost nothing remains (to me): neither the thing, nor its existence, nor mine, neither the pure object nor the pure subject, no interest of anything that is in anything that is. . . . I do not like, but I take pleasure in what does not interest me, in something of which it is at least a matter of indifference whether I like it or not. . . . And yet *there is* pleasure, some still remains, *there is, es gibt, it gives* the pleasure is what *it gives*; to nobody but

some remains and it's the best, the purest.(208)

21

Packed is the choice of the inconsequential: the movement outside communicates need, a need the experience of which is partially undone by the undesirability of the form held in so easily distracted embrace.

The small that is not the detail of the windowless citadel discloses the function of the depthlessness that Jameson says is the supreme trait of postmodern-buffered difference, it persuades the eye to be no hunter, but produces no hunter as response. And this may be another way of saying that pleasure replaces fantasy. The predatory movement of attention is blocked by insistence upon an intimate alterity, distance perceived to be immanently undone. We thus readily understand why Anthony Cascardi can notice that "[S]ome of the most interesting efforts in philosophy after Kant have attempted to preserve the experience of alterity that is transmitted in the sublime—the strangeness that incites reflective judgment—while reducing its alliance with the play of mastery." (209) Heidegger would be an example, as he spoke of the idea of a return "into that nearest, which we invariably rush past, which surprises us anew each time we get sight of it." (210) There should be the respectful relation with the nearest, but the nearest as mystery: "That which is ontically closest and well known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked." (211) Required were efforts to preserve the world of readiness-to-hand for thought, as most of the time it is "overtaken" by philosophical recognition. This would be coherent with his blurring of what Aristotle sets at the decisive temporal distance. Heidegger writes that great art reveals "what is holy and what unholy, what great and what small, what brave and what cowardly, what lofty and what flighty, what master and what slave." (212) But in the small, *pianissimo*, all this happens at once; all battle is (un)joined, invisibly within the form itself: translating as the incompetence to conclude, contraction of the energies of the narratable and those that will bring story to an end, that which departs from concepts, not pursued by contrasting weakness that can barely now tell the difference between identification and its end. Benjamin famously spoke of the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be. And coherent was fondness for allegory, as here the world is exalted and depreciated at the same time. Adorno: "That is the landscape of the late Mahler. For this firmament has the blackness of Japanese lacquer boxes with the golden moon painted on, a precious, yet . . . all too common, worn out thing." (213) *Klein aber mein*.

On the trap of counterviolence and what escapes the irony attached to reversal, Adorno on Goethe's *Iphigenie*:

The deep dialectic of the drama . . . should be sought in the fact that through his harsh

antithesis to myth Orestes threatens to fall prey to myth. By condemning myth as something he is distant from, if not something he has fled from, Orestes identifies himself with the principle of domination through which, in and through Enlightenment, the mythic doom is prolonged. Enlightenment that flees from itself, that does not preserve in self-reflection the natural context from which it separates itself through freedom, turns into guilt toward nature and becomes a piece of mythic entanglement in nature.(214)

Adorno quotes the character Thoas from the play: "The Greek often turns his covetous eye/To the distant treasures of the barbarians,/ The golden fleece, horses, beautiful daughters,/ But violence and cunning did not always/ Bring them safely home with the goods they had won"(215) In opposition, Adorno mentions the story of the new Melusina:

During the periods when she withdraws from her impetuous and virtually barbaric lover, Melusina disappears into a kingdom within a little chest. It is a phantasmagoria of blissful smallness, which the beloved, who is received there in a friendly fashion, cannot tolerate and causes to be destroyed by violence so that he can return to earth. The little chest in the Melusina story . . . is the counterauthority to myth; it does not attack myth but rather undercuts it through nonviolence. . . .

Here: "It is not the optical, objective Goethe, an accomplice in the domination of nature up to the very end of *Faust*, who stands beyond myth, but a passive Goethe who is no longer willing to engage in the deed that was supposed to have been there in the beginning. . . ."(216)

There is the focus upon the proximate as strange in the Russian Formalists, the Surrealists, Bataille and Derrida, etc. (Bataille: "If poetry introduces the strange, it does so via the path of the familiar. The poetic is the familiar dissolving itself into the strange, and dissolving us with it. It never dispossesses us entirely, for words . . . contain emotions already felt, attached to objects that link them to the known."(217)) From his friend Blanchot: "Always these two sides are found together, the everyday with its aspect that is fastidious, tedious and sordid (the amorphous, the stagnant), and the everyday that is inexhaustible, . . . always unfinished and ever escaping forms and structures (in particular those of political society, governmental machinery, parties)." There is the expression of Cavell: the "quotidian as forever fantastic."(218) Deleuze praises Foucault, finding in him "this conversion of the faraway and the near," "*an inner space*, that will be entirely co-present with an outside." Here, "To think . . . is to layer an innerspace with an outside with which it is coextensive."(219) Serres praises Hergé's creation on the same basis: "Tintin . . . reduces distance and makes of the far a thing that is near."(220) The unbounded (unrivalrous) self is the result: "The self, porous and mixed, accumulates presence and absence, sows together

the near and the far . . . separates and connects the here and the there.”(221) Seeing small is renewal of perception through which there is recovery of natural existence, socially unburdened self-appreciation.

22

Kojève:

The analysis of “thought,” “reason,” “understanding,” and so on—in general, of the cognitive, contemplative, passive behavior of a being or a “knowing subject” never reveals the why or the how of the birth of the word “I,” and consequently of self-consciousness—that is, of the human reality. The man who contemplates is “absorbed” by what he contemplates; the “knowing subject” “loses” himself in the object that is known. Contemplation reveals the object, not the subject. The object, and not the subject, is what shows itself to him in and by—or better, as—the act of knowing. The man who is “absorbed” by the object that he is contemplating can be brought back to himself” [*rappelé à lui*] only by a Desire; by the desire to eat, for example. The conscious Desire of being is what constitutes that being as I and reveals it as such by moving it to say “I” . . . (222)

This condition of absorption implies a certain type of object, one not strong enough to be understood as generating a drive that is compensatory for lost power. Unless the object is poor, Kojève’s two moments would not be opposed.

To posit a form in which the near and the far are reciprocally dissolved is to make available this passivity before the irreducible felt to be the guarantee of spontaneity: “Contemplation without violence, the source of all the joy of truth, presupposes that he who contemplates does not absorb the object into himself: a distanced nearness.”(223) “The reconciled condition would not be the philosophical imperialism of annexing the alien. Instead, its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity it is granted, remains what is distant and different, . . . beyond that which is one’s own.”(224) Intention to appropriate or not is anticipatorily contained within the object itself. And it is the form’s insignificance that makes possible this passivity: “But a cognition that is to bear fruit will throw itself to the objects *à fond perdu*.”(225) It is up to the thing to masterfully renounce activity:

As radiant things give up their magic claims, renounce the power with which the subject invested them and hoped with their help himself to wield, they become transformed into images of gentleness, promises of a happiness cured of domination over nature . . . In the magic of what reveals itself in absolute powerlessness, of beauty, at once perfection and nothingness, the illusion of omnipotence is mirrored negatively as hope. It has eclipsed

every trial of strength.(226)

Through this relation the subject is spontaneous as dispossessed, dispossessing. Through the nonobject, whose availability is not contested, one is not accessible to oneself as a thing. Enlightenment cannot allow red-meat difference to define itself as ideal.

All this clarifies a struggle internal to Adorno and Horkheimer, one that exposes a fragility of found-object logic that will cause it to become eventually vulnerable to the appeal of immanence. The attempt to describe Enlightenment as monolithic thing, which includes cunning, involves one in the confusion of our two patterns of identification. This cunning produces the “identify/don’t identify,” replacing the markedly temporalized version. And continuous with this cunning is the shrewdness of the small, that we have seen repeatedly offered by the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as the only available resource to be deployed against the crushing forces they associate with modern society. (“To the Enlightenment, that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion. . . . The destruction of gods and qualities alike is insisted upon.” On objects: “He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them.”(227))

If Enlightenment is described as including the self-camouflage of cunning, it must be understood as critically inhabited by something older than Enlightenment-the umbrella movement of the neoclassical, that force that drives towards the collapse of victimage and the values that oppose the jacketing of the community through exclusion, ending with the neoclassical revisionist breast that solves the problem of the dangerous luster of the ego ideal, not through its negation, but the spraying of its ingredients throughout all of life. As the small is this unknowing through dispersion, and as the logic of the Frankfurt School strictly associates its negative dialectic with the critical potential of the small against the sequence, we see that its members-at least in this early essay-prove not entirely sensitive to their role in the autocritique of Enlightenment. Frankfurt School poses the small against the Enlightenment when it is clear that the small (as “interest”) is one of the Enlightenment’s major achievements. If the Enlightenment is what the authors say it is, then the small is its moment of immanent self-correction, a feature of an internal self-differentiation, a critique of victimage born before it, but preserved within. Seeing this, we can only agree with Cascardi in his noting of “the self-criticism of the Enlightenment that originates in Kant’s third *Critique*,”(228) and in his remarking “that a contemporary critique of the Enlightenment originates from within the Enlightenment itself and must be understood as a consequence or continuation of the Enlightenment, and not as a rejection of its critical program.”(229)

The two Goethes stood for the two cardinal features of Enlightenment. The Adorno of *Aesthetic Theory* notices that the idea of Enlightenment folds into itself respect for a passive

relation: "Thrown back on itself, Enlightenment distances itself from the guileless objectivity that it would like to achieve: that is why, under the compulsion of its own ideal of truth, it is conjoined with the pressure to hold on to what it has condemned in the name of truth." [\(230\)](#) How and why so? Enlightenment ambivalence, double bind of sequence, as necessary, as impossible, involving a push-pull-*coexistence of Malebranche effects*-blocking an entropic pattern that would otherwise be the fate of any knowing that would be exclusively manipulative. Incorrectly, Adorno and Horkheimer once said that "Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsidedness is the very source of fear." [\(231\)](#) Strangeness needed to be a renewable resource, Lévi-Strauss said, and as Schumpeter said before him, if the hot culture was not to follow the path of the undynamic cold.

Adorno:

Mimetic behavior does not imitate something but assimilates itself to that something. Works of art take it upon themselves to realize this assimilation. They do not imitate the impulses of an individual in the medium of expression, much less those of the artist himself. If they do, they immediately fall prey to replication and objectification of the kind which their mimetic impulse reacts against. At the same time, artistic expression carries out the judgment of history which has condemned mimesis as an archaic mode of behavior, a judgment that finds mimesis falling short of cognition; that finds mimetic assimilation falling short of true identity; that finds mimesis falling short period-except in art, which absorbs both the mimetic impulse and the critique of that impulse by objectifying it. [\(232\)](#)

The small, communicating objectality and objectality's end, gives the body to this paradox, as it simultaneously preserves and undoes imitation. Aestheticized, the small is both-it cannot tell the difference between imitation and mimesis-it is the small of the custodial and the unstoried breast, the various insignificant objectalities promoted by the divergent Enlightenment likes of John Law, Voltaire, and Rousseau, and as such is the dialectic of the Enlightenment, the collapse of the interests of administration and those of would-be autonomous entities.

Ritually unintelligible because of its extreme narrative shorthand, the self-violent small congeals into objectality the experience of the unreality of the image, of mere appearance, mere seeming, as it provocatively drops away from a pattern of reified forms, negating itself in the process. Delicate firewall that blocks the spreading of the lava of the compact group that is the liquefaction of the one into the many, it causes desire to wash back to the self and immediately drives it guiltlessly forwards, gathering us together and then with all modesty, pointing immediately elsewhere. Here, in a condition of continuous creation, the ever new, that which provokes desire contains within itself a mechanism that liberates from the desire that is generated, and sends it traveling along a potentially endless horizontal

axis containing an infinite number of such provocations, contemporaneous compulsions to attach and permissions to detach. Musset on the remobilization effect: “Le plus chétif objet suffit pour me changer en abeille et me fait voltiger çà et là avec un plaisir toujours nouveau” [The frailest object suffices to change me into a bee and makes me flit hither and thither with an ever-renewed pleasure].(233) The synergism of its fused effects overriding the listlessness of the energies emerging from the clearest disjunction between irreconcilable components and their claims to priority causes the constitutive roles in aesthetic phenomena of individual mastery and correction to escape detection, to escape their modernly inadmissible consequences. The small, according to Pascal: “We do not sustain ourselves in virtue by resorting to our own strength alone, but rather through the counterbalancing of opposing vices that hold us upright, as if supported by oppositely blowing winds.”(234)

Ponge: “Curious antagonism and link . . . between abundance and abandon,”(235) the small takes all parts and makes short work of itself. The sequence, accelerated into an imagination of invulnerable fragility, unhappens by happening all at once-synchronic totemism. Through anticipatory accommodation, the temporal unfolding of the scene of ritual dissolves as opposing forms of violence are compressed into indistinguishability. Here, in Adorno, it takes the form of “taste”:

[T]he horror of the ending lights up the deception of the origin. -It is the fortune and limitation of French art never to have entirely eradicated the pride in making little pictures. . . . In countless significant manifestations it casts a conciliatory glance at what pleases because it was skillfully made: sublime artistry keeps a hold on sensuous life by a moment of harmless pleasure in the *bien fait*. While the absolute claim of *perfection without becoming*, the dialectic of truth and appearance, is thus renounced, the untruth of those dubbed by Haydn the Grand Moguls is also avoided. . . . Taste is the ability to keep in balance the contradiction in art *between the made and the apparent not-having-become*.(236) (my emphasis)

24

One keeps the company of the small, then, rather than being responsible for its *production*. The small, the unimagining of the *becoming* insignificant, does not emerge at the *conclusion* of a self-limitingly triumphalistic desire rotation. In this immanence that is the perdition of the ritual division of labor, preserved and negated are the separability of opposing, consecutively revealed terms-the dialectic is seized up because sized down. The collapse of complimentary absurdities, the small realizes every ambition, says everything at once. Less a dissolving agency than a double effacement, or double preterition, a spatialized irony, figure of internal torsion, that dissolves the force and consequences of the contrast, that resembles neither and that will thus frustrate the formulation of decisive questions by

insuring that the anthropological/social-psychological ground will remain unperceived. Pseudomorph of the sequence that negates the moral eventfulness of the turnaround, synergy of omnipotence and failure, it doubly negates the outside—the outside of desire, the outside of revenge. Protectively yet provocatively luckless, releasing as it regulates, powerlessness destroys the contrast between perfection and nothingness.

In terms of the metapsychology of Freud, the small collapses the chronological succession of founding episodes of totemic society into a single moment. Coiled back into a single figure are all of the events of the story that describes the relation of the band of brothers to their preposterous father. This all-possessing patriarch, indifferent to his sons, is libidinally organized like the narcissistic leader of the essay on group psychology. Sacrificed by the brothers, his body is broken apart, turned into something small, and redistributed among the first triumphant but then guilty and dependent parricides. In the small the sublime is revealed, humiliated, its powers retained and redistributed in a flash. Marked at once by lack and possession, these mutilated tyrants survive as osmotic of the threat posed by the rivalry Freud describes them as engendering. Idempotent, the narcissisms our small generates are unchanged after multiplication. Diaspora of self-content-through the faintest impropriety, smallest thinkable unit of removal, one gets to keep one's distance.

The making naïve of negativity, the small embarrasses as it randomizes its stream. Safe passage of still life, miracle of repay with no delay, hassle-free refund of self-love, the busiest little oxymoron, it steers clear of the calamity of the group's pride, the unassisted passage through the life cycle of the sequence. One can't tell the difference between where it begins and where it ends, barely noticeable happiness, barely distinguishable from a barely noticed demoralization. Insoluble indifference conjures away the impasse of *Civilization and its Discontents*—the incompatibility of individual gratification and social survival. The small—it was over as soon as it started. Sacrifice has gotten ahead of itself; speed-reading of the stations of its cross, it meets itself coming and going—preconditions and consequences strike their bargain, insensibly combined, the tangling of narcissisms communicating through reciprocal sabotage. Resilience sustained by the interiority of its tensions, that socializes as it unsocializes, the contraction supporting social practices independent of hieratic institutions, regulating themselves not on the basis of the threat of external correction. Quasi-objectality that approximates a no-fault anobjectality, a self-confounding narcissism—the happiness of ego ideal minus its fate. Our rising and falling arc of the learning curve is replaced by the innocuousness of an amoralizingly distracting incident overload. One decision at a time is replaced by all decisions all the time—the small means never having to say you're sorry—a narcissism in just too many places at once. The contemporaneousness of fascination and disillusion, mix-up of now you see it and now you don't, art's saving itself from art, always dying, never dead, hairpin turn of negativity, the imperceptibility of transition, good as *almost* gone replacing good as going, good as gone—fastest *unbreaking* story, needlepoint of negativity, self-love and its correction in a state of reciprocal betrayal. The discovery—that the entitlements of visibly perishable

limited-good supremacies dispossess of everything worth having—results in the conclusion that the problem posed by the remote object can only be solved by replacing it with one that sustains the resource of its remoteness with dulling proximity, cipher of the system of autoregulatory differences that is the market. (The less there is distinction between the sequence stages, the greater the profit margin.) Perfect anticipation, sequentialist overdrive, invisibilizing warp speed of justice, the sublime, now an unnoticeably internal predicament, struggles through the eye of a needle and emerges, no longer recognizable to itself, as economics. “Where’s Waldo” of ritualized death, emancipating figure of the low-intensity abrasions of “interest” and the fused antagonistic complicities of Schumpeter, the unphasing that is the unfazing, parodic objectality is both parodic crime and parodic punishment—*Totem and Taboo* rewritten on the head of a pin.

Doctrine of Containment: Preemption Plus



The above, however, is but half of the *absence* of the story. Identification, Derrida said, nothing better, nothing worse, “the worst of temptations, the most indecent, the most murderous.” (237) Derrida has described his warm feelings for the Frankfurt School, and it is in his exaltation of a passive against an aggressive identification that we find the basis of the alliance (with Adorno’s ideal of “mimesis” that is posed against “identification.”) Given the fact that both Deconstruction and the Frankfurt School describe the Hegelian negativity cycle as the unavoidable way of the world, one can understand how passivity before the insignificant thing would appear to be the only resource against interpersonal violence. As they find that the problem can only be solved *within* the terms of negativity, there may be applied to their logic the legal expression “imperfect necessity”—the use of small crime to block the possibility of a greater.

25

“The new wants non-identity,” Adorno said, “yet intention reduces it to identity.” (238) Exposed in this remark is the sense of the fragility of the lesser negativity as solution to the threat posed by those full-bore versions that when awoken from their slumber produce compact groups that are stultifyingly allergic to those animated patterns of desire upon which the market must depend. It is a vigilance concerning lability that focuses the fears of the market, and its Critical Theory mirror, the danger represented by the endless threat of the fall upwards of the lesser to the greater negativity—that pattern of negativity that Max Weber called the charismatic, and that he described as the opposite of the market: “Pure charisma is opposed to all systematic economic activities, in fact it is *the* strongest anti-economic force. . . .” (239) “Charisma is basically an extraordinary and hence necessarily non-economic power.” (240) Within the regime of the lesser negativity clouds of charismatics cloud the charismatic.

The question of questions for Critical Theory, was, however, regarding the forms of lesser negativity: Would the banalization of strangeness *alone* guarantee the perfect drift away from the charismatic, block the always menacing glide from the one, functional, small to the economically dysfunctional other? There was the suspicion that mitigated strangeness of insignificant mystery could not alone suffice to be the perfect scourge of the charismatic, could not alone do the work of obstructing passage between the always collapsing scales of self-love. The second safety would be recruited to brace the first.

And thus there developed the immanence partnership, the use of immanence as “minder.” Joseph Schumpeter said that the market needed to be protected from itself, that its freedom required the support of the flying buttresses of premodern values that would soften the savageries that might otherwise result in arousing dysfunctionalizing indignations against its animating inequalities. This would be a different way of putting the point of Weber. But, obviously, distinctions had to be made between past ethical worlds. What Schumpeter clearly had in mind is the advantage that Judeo-Christian patterns of identification have demonstrated over the rigidities of sacrificially organized groups. But for Critical Theory a refinement was required: the Judeo-Christian tradition proved to be insufficiently rigorous in its critique of sacrifice, and had to be stripped of its residual charismatic features, its ironic structure, its signature use of the charismatic against the charismatic. The radicalization of external mediation that is at the core of Judeo-Christian logic is nudged aside by an unmediated empathy, one supported by a notion of seamless participation in divine substance. Thus summoned from its sleep is an ideal of immanence that would seem to have no relation the lesser negativity that it is nonetheless called upon to protect.

The current has not gone unnoticed. The present French Minister of Education, Luc Ferry, writes in his *L’homme-Dieu ou le sens de la vie*: “We live today . . . in a period when the processes of the divinization of man and the humanization of God are in the process of intersecting.” (241) And Derrida has himself turned to the expression “*l’homme-Dieu*” to explain what he feels to be the major mood of the contemporary West. We live a culture of pardon, he says, and this “convulsive theater of pardon” can only be sustained as supported by a planetarily shared immanence ideal. (242) To argue, as he does, that immanence makes possible a world pardon project, is to support the argument I have sought to make concerning how the lesser negativity fortifies itself with the company of immanence that traps negativity in the status of the lesser. Pardon is the nonviolent conclusion of an identification, the soft landing of self-love after its pass through the negativity cycle, a self-love that has landed lightly. A universe of pardon—one of the allowability of a certain threshold of antisocial demonstration, “downward definition of deviance,” one of a mitigated, unbloodied negativity—would be one in which there would be minimized the extent to which I would be haunted by the reversibility of my own violence.

In Daniel Sibony we find another clarifying example of the immanence obbligator, of an immanence-assisted effort to snap the communication between the two negativities,

allowing the free life of the lesser by attaching it to a pattern of identification that is foreign to it. First, we find a restatement of the narcissistic force of insignificance, now accompanied by awareness of its Christian roots:

A narcissistic being is a more severe critic of the image than is either you or I. Narcissism is a critique of the image that is fairly desperate; it is a belief in an image that is missing, one that, if exhibited, would be the final image. It is a belief in the true encounter with the image that would be the *true* image. The paradox of narcissism is well known. Well before psychoanalysis the mystics were aware of the immense pride attached to the imagery of having no pride, in the pretension of pretending to nothing. [\(243\)](#)

And below we find immanence yoked together with a strategy of the attenuation of the spectacle of self-love through building failure into this image. A etiolated identification nonviolently come and and gone blurs with one that knows no end; the check that is the steadying grace of immanence:

Narcissism is the fleeting disappearance of the other, causing you to forget that this other also faces obstacles. But to fully relocate the other in the midst of the dramaturgy of his or her frustrations is to escape his or her hatreds and attacks. *But how would this be possible without embracing a notion of the love of being?* Hardly the love of the other—and just why would one offer love in exchange for the hatred he or she feels for us? *Rather the environment is altered through reference to the love of being, the sharing of being that allows one the possibility of living the confrontation of narcissisms without reducing oneself to them.* Like a scene in a long play, and not like a final event. That said, it is impossible to pass through the field of the other without narcissistic support. A certain connivance with being would involve a transcending of what one is, of not being completely forgotten by being, not being reduced to oneself. [\(244\)](#) (my emphasis)

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The usual, apotropaic, awareness, here, of the necessity of the vision of the other as constituted of *built-in* insufficiencies. But the *identify/don't identify* produced, against the *identify then don't identify* mentioned in the first sentence, is described as requiring the bracing supplied by a third pattern: *Identify*. This relation is not described as bringing the experience of negativity to a close, but as that which makes possible its sustainable everydayness.

A paraplegia of negativity—a negativity frozen on one side, the *nanism* of negativity. From Clément Rosset another case of an augmented lesser negativity, a different labiability of

narcissisms, the postmodernly “good” labiability. Rosset exalts what he terms “the real,” easily recognizable as the redoubt of our modest singularity, possessing all virtue as through it “the other is not convoked.”(245) “Allégresse” is the emotion before the insignificant: “Such is in effect the real, and this is its most general definition: an unclosed gathering of nonidentifiable objects. Identification consists in the reduction of the unknown to the known. An operation that is impossible in the case of the real.”(246) Representation is violence, the image that hoards the real, causing it to disappearingly recoil into a provocatively invisible depth.(247) “The real,” mediation of the unmediated relation, is always present, not at any remove, and is thus our predictable banality of strangeness. But, as in Sibony, prehumiliation tips over into a related but entirely different pattern of identification. Conjointly and antithetically are these points made:

Desire, without doubt, in order play a trick on its hunger, can solve its problem by attaching itself to something that is undesirable, while ignoring the undesirable character of the thing and thus becoming as absurdly low as the object that is coveted, as fragile as it is, as uninteresting. But is there to this an alternative that can be also offered to desire? Can one imagine a desire that is attached to the undesirable with a love that is unconditional and without reservation, one implying a full awareness of the object’s status as undesirable? If such a desire exists it would present to philosophy the most serious of questions, perhaps the only serious question.(248)

Handily summarized here in this harnessing of insignificance and immanence is the conclusion of the work that characterizes the neoclassical project in general. The goal is that of producing a double loss of tension in which the contrasting naïve and sentimental outflank and cause to appear morally repulsive the now doubly discredited lesson of the reversibility of violence. This yoking of an identification with *no* beginning or end with one whose beginning is *indistinguishable* from its end, in turn mirrors the solution of the market to its own woes, endlessly pressured as it is to at once create and mitigate the tensions upon which it feeds.

Understandable within this context are an array of what would otherwise appear to be odd moments in modern thought. *Tristes tropiques* ends in such a way as to leave one suspended within an incompatibility of identification regimes. Silliness here, in harness with cosmic elation, yoked towards the unknowing of interpersonal struggle:

When the spectrum or rainbow of human cultures has finally sunk into the void created by our frenzy [there becomes possible] a privilege coveted by every society, whatever its beliefs, its political system or its level of civilization; a privilege to which it attaches its leisure, its pleasure, its peace of mind and its freedom; the possibility, vital for life, of *unhitching*, which consists—Oh! fond farewell to savages and explorations!—in grasping,

during the brief intervals in which our species can bring itself to interrupt its hive-like activity, the essence of what it was and continues to be, below the threshold of thought and over and above society: in the contemplation of a mineral more beautiful than all of our creations; in the scent that can be smelt at the heart of a lily and is more imbued with learning than all our books; or in the brief glance, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness, that, through some involuntary understanding, one can sometimes exchange with a cat.(249)

There may be the Kantian beautiful here—in the lily and the cat—but certainly not his sublime, that involves a final triumph over a now humiliated nature that was once humiliating. Kant's excluding sublime, being the ghost of the "identify then don't identify" pattern, finds itself in this text excluded by the sacrifice-outflanking forces of the exclusion of exclusion.

Adorno with Deleuze and Derrida are the most rigorous of supporters of the lesser negativity. But for each of their smalls, "home alone" was not an option. Consistent with our pattern, Deleuze's enthusiasm of the free smalls of literary modernity was matched only by his energy for praising the immanence of Spinoza. Adorno's relation to immanence is discovered in his ambivalence towards Kant, whom he at once praises for rehabilitating an identification with nature, but whom he at once criticizes for including in his idea of the sublime the idea of a detaching victory over that thing with which we first came to identify.

27

The hedgehog might have had a privileged role for Derrida, but it wasn't the only animal he loved. Deconstruction's tireless insistence upon the lesser negativity as our fragile grace is now shadowed by catch-up work on behalf of an empathic perspective that includes a necessity of vegetarianism as a logical support for the postmodern insistence upon the priority of the part over the whole. Derrida's passivity before the undecidable now finds itself retrofitted with a morality that might seem not immediately to square with the one implied by the lesser negativity of his nanoaestheticism: "This industrial, scientific, and technological violence cannot be tolerated for much longer, either in actual fact or legally. It will find itself more and more discredited. The relations between man and animals *must* change. They *must* change in both two senses—in the 'ontological' sense as well as in the sense of 'ethical' responsibility." (250) Reminding us of the Freud of the final pages of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Derrida says that this will occur inevitably out of our growing sympathy for animals. "Regardless of how one qualifies this, the violence that we inflict upon animals will not be lacking in profound consequences (either conscious or unconscious) upon the image that men have of themselves. This violence, I believe, will become less and less acceptable." (251) Less and less acceptable because of the increasing impossibility of the lesson of the reversibility of violence. Less and less tolerable because of

the growing necessity of a cross-pressuring against the charismatic—a redundancy in the critique that causes a slipping of the gear of the transmission from one negativity to another. The wounded animal was the charismatically impaired negativity—the indelibility of its benign face.

Immanence was called upon not for the task of the liquidation of negativity, but to serve as its loyal opposition, a filtering agency to give reliable separation that is the security of the lesser negativity supply, the atomization of its suspension, the blocking of its aspiration towards the unanimity of its expression, the *productivity* of the tension between self- and public interest. The work upon negativity of the neighborly, selectively pardoning immanence—the freest dispersal of the downward calibration of the energies of its display, the restriction of the range of its expressions to an atomization of compressions, inseparably and illimitably exploding as it does so the array of possible differences it can assume, a misting that shifts negativity from an economy of zero sum to one of infinite good. In *economic* negativity the timed and spaced negativity cycles of history and ritual are unavoidably maintained, but are now invisibilized, everywhere gone as soon as come. Unlike Girard, whose critique of sacrifice is leveled from the single vantage of the imperative to “identify,” Critical Theory discovers the principle of the *redundant* critique of sacrifice, that augmented power that causes it to be finally recognizable as a neoconservative logic. Where, without its supplement, there was a perpetually menacing aspiring, a true arrow with the charismatic as its destination, there was now a bifurcation, a breaking into levels, and the blocking of passage from one to the other. Negativity lite: from religious horror to shopper’s remorse. To mitigate the force of its sacrificially haunting superego, the burden of its defensive work, our allowable negativity hands itself over to a colloidal relation—suspension of finely divided particles in a continuous medium. The relation is lyophobic—there is a lack of attraction between the colloid medium and the dispersion medium in *a colloidal system*. Happinesses could now be atomistically coincident. This selective appropriation of immanence worked towards guaranteeing the free life of the small, that immanentization that now unoppressively lived the death that was the death of the entropic mass, the frustration of the torpor that was its entire hope. It was the customer who required these deaths, that is, this privatization of negativity, the kindler, gentler negativity, and, as we know, it is the customer who is always right.

Notes

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7. *Narcissisme de vie, narcissisme de mort*, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983), p. 45. [\(back\)](#)
8. See E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg, An Intellectual Biography* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1970), p. 253. [\(back\)](#)
9. Baudrillard sees the relation between time and objects: “Les temps sont venus d’une miniaturisation du temps, du corps. . . .” *Les Stratégies fatales* (Paris: Grasset, 1983), p. 92. [\(back\)](#)
10. *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), p. 63. [\(back\)](#)
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21. *A l'ombre*, p. 162. [\(back\)](#)
22. *Le côté de Guermantes, A la recherche du temps perdu*, Vol. II, p. 501. [\(back\)](#)
23. *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 407. [\(back\)](#)
24. *Blindness and Insight* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 152. [\(back\)](#)
25. *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), I, 10; 39. [\(back\)](#)
26. *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 192. [\(back\)](#)
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27. *The Parasite*, p. 193. [\(back\)](#)
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35. *Nadja* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 138. [\(back\)](#)
36. *Madame Bovary*, in *Oeuvres*, Vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 514. [\(back\)](#)
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44. "The Case of Wagner," p. 627. [\(back\)](#)
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58. *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 136. [\(back\)](#)
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60. "L'art, fragment," p. 156. [\(back\)](#)
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106. "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," p. 63. [\(back\)](#)

107. "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," p. 63. [\(back\)](#)

108. "L'art, fragment," p. 171. [\(back\)](#)

109. *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 57. [\(back\)](#)

110. "Berg and Webern-Schönberg's Heirs," *Modern Music*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (January/February 1931), p. 32. [\(back\)](#)

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111. *Philosophy of Modern Music*, pp. 156-57. [\(back\)](#)

112. "The Mouse," *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, trans. Peter Wortsman (New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 30. [\(back\)](#)

113. *Paris, capitale du XIXe*, (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996), p. 863. [\(back\)](#)

114. *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 455. [\(back\)](#)

115. *Aesthetics*, Vol. II, p. 1220. "La tragédie moderne . . . n'a ni premier plan ni arrière-plan épiques. Le héros existe et meurt par ses propres actes." Pierre Klossowski, on "Traduction d'Antigone de Kierkegaard," in Denis Hollier, ed. *Le Collège de Sociologie*

1937-1939 (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 263. [\(back\)](#)

116. *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970), pp. 141-42. [\(back\)](#)

117. An expression of Ruskin. [\(back\)](#)

118. *Selected Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982).

And from Osip Mandelstam:

I am growing smaller here—no one notices me anymore,

But in caressing books and children's games

I will rise from the dead to say the sun is shining.

Selected Poems, trans. David McDuff (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975), p. 133. [\(back\)](#)

119. "Che cos'è la poesia?" *Points de suspension* (Paris: Galilée, 1992), p. 305. [\(back\)](#)

120. Derrida and Catherine Malabou, *La Contre-allée* (Paris: La Quinzaine Littéraire, 1998), p. 210. [\(back\)](#)

121. "Che cos'è la poesia?" p. 319. [\(back\)](#)

122. *Daybreak*, trans. Michael Tanner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 189. [\(back\)](#)

123. *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 41-42. [\(back\)](#)

124. *Eclaircissements. Entretiens avec Bruno Latour*, p. 178. [\(back\)](#)

125. Trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 28. [\(back\)](#)

126. *Jokes*, p. 146. [\(back\)](#)

127. *Jokes*, p. 171. [\(back\)](#)

128. P. 200. The influence here of Bergson, who said that dream involved the usual mental activity minus the tension of effort. [\(back\)](#)

129. *Jokes*, p. 193. [\(back\)](#)

130. *Jokes*, p. 191. [\(back\)](#)

131. *Jokes*, pp. 148-149. [\(back\)](#)

132. *Jokes*, p. 236. [\(back\)](#)

133. *Human All too Human*, I, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 173. Baudrillard also associates the small with efficiency and speed. See *Le Système des objets*, p. 73. [\(back\)](#)

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134. [no content] [\(back\)](#)

135. *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), p. 128. [\(back\)](#)

136. Quoted by Benjamin, in *Paris, Capitale du XIXe siècle*, p. 684. [\(back\)](#)

137. *L'Evolution créatrice*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959), p. 747. [\(back\)](#)

138. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 235-36. [\(back\)](#)

139. *Of Grammatology*, p. 148. [\(back\)](#)

140. "Les Morts de Roland Barthes," in *Psyché* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), p. 277. [\(back\)](#)

141. *Signéponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 32. Bataille sees the eternal return of Nietzsche: "En lui la répercussion infini du retour eut un sens: . . . Absence d'effort! " *Sur Nietzsche*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. VI (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 159. [\(back\)](#)

142. *Jokes*, p. 186. [\(back\)](#)

143. *Jokes*, p. 103. [\(back\)](#)

144. *Jokes*, p. 195. [\(back\)](#)

145. *Grammatology*, p. 39. [\(back\)](#)

146. *Marges de la philosophie*, p. 22. [\(back\)](#)

147. *L'Empire des signes* (Geneva: Skira, 1970), p. 24. [\(back\)](#)

148. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 321. [\(back\)](#)

149. *The Writing of Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska

Press, 1986), p. 62. [\(back\)](#)

150. *How it Is* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 17. [\(back\)](#)

151. *La Poétique de l'espace*, p. 142. [\(back\)](#)

152. "Anamnesis of the Visible, or Candour," trans. David Macey, in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Blackwell, 1989), p. 232. [\(back\)](#)

153. *Jean Santeuil*, ed. Pierre Clarac (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 896. Nietzsche: "Art is based in the imprecision of sight." *Le Livre du philosophe*, p. 71. [\(back\)](#)

154. Barthes in *Camera lucida* writes: "Ultimately—or at the limit—in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes." And then he quotes a remark made to Kafka: "The necessary condition for an image is sight," Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes." Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 72. [\(back\)](#)

155. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 15. [\(back\)](#)

156. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 107. [\(back\)](#)

157. "Why Distant Objects Please," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Ronald Blythe (New York: Penguin, 1970), p. 148. [\(back\)](#)

158. Quoted by Balthus, in *Balthus*, by Claude Roy (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 257. [\(back\)](#)

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159. Quoted in *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 174-75. [\(back\)](#)

160. Quoted by Blanchot, in *The Writing of Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 60 [\(back\)](#)

161. *De la Recherche de la vérité* [1674-75], 5.8, 6th ed. [1712], in *Oeuvres*, Vol. 2, p. 204. *Oeuvres de Malebranche*, ed. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (Paris: J. Vrin, 1962-67), Vol. 2, p. 204. [\(back\)](#)

162. *The Passions of the Soul*, p. 355. [\(back\)](#)

163. From the Dada Manifesto of 1918: "What we need are strong, straightforward, precise works which will be forever misunderstood." According to the Malebranche logic, banality is

thus the indispensable ally. [\(back\)](#)

164. *Cahiers 1894-1914*, Vol. VII (1902-03) ed. Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 97. [\(back\)](#)

165. *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970), p. 146. [\(back\)](#)

166. Adorno on the same distinction: "Amazement is rediscovered, but it is an astonishment at individual things, not a Platonic amazement; an amazement saturated with nominalism and also emphatically opposed to the power of convention, which is a dingy lens in front of the eye and a layer of dust on the object. Audacious reflection wants to give thought what cautious reflection drove out of it-naïveté." "The Handle, the Pot, and Early Experience," in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. II, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 219. [\(back\)](#)

167. *Totality and Infinity*, p. 191. [\(back\)](#)

168. "The Essential Solitude," in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction and Literary Essays*, trans. Lydia Davis and others, ed. George Quasha (Barytown, N. Y.: Station Hill, 1999), p. 405. [\(back\)](#)

169. "The Essential Solitude," p. 405. [\(back\)](#)

170. *De la Recherche de la vérité*, p. 205. [\(back\)](#)

171. *De la Recherche de la vérité*, p. 207. [\(back\)](#)

172. *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (Paris: Agora, 1974), p. 138. [\(back\)](#)

173. *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: Viking, 1981). [\(back\)](#)

174. "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills," in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), pp. 320, 324, 326, 328. [\(back\)](#)

175. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 121. [\(back\)](#)

176. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 124. [\(back\)](#)

177. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 123. [\(back\)](#)

178. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 191. [\(back\)](#)

179. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 78. [\(back\)](#)

180. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 10. [\(back\)](#)

181. *Tome premier, Le Parti pris des choses*, p. 64. [\(back\)](#)

182. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 191. [\(back\)](#)

183. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 120. [\(back\)](#)

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184. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 33. [\(back\)](#)

185. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 139. [\(back\)](#)

186. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 177. [\(back\)](#)

187. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 191 [\(back\)](#)

188. *Discours, figure*, p. 284. [\(back\)](#)

189. *Critique of Judgment*, p. 264. [\(back\)](#)

190. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 126. [\(back\)](#)

191. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 259. [\(back\)](#)

192. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 188. [\(back\)](#)

193. *Critique of Judgment*, p. 106. [\(back\)](#)

194. "Essais sur la peinture," in *Oeuvres esthétiques* (Paris: Garnier, 1959), p. 718. [\(back\)](#)

195. "Essais sur la peinture," p. 765. [\(back\)](#)

196. *Look, Listen, Read*, trans. Brian C. J. Singer (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 28. [\(back\)](#)

197. *Look, Listen, Read*, p. 27. [\(back\)](#)

198. *The Savage Mind*, p. 23. [\(back\)](#)

199. *Genesis*, p. 76. [\(back\)](#)

200. "Anamnesis of the Visible, or Candour," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin; trans. David Macey (London: Blackwell, 1989), p. 207. [\(back\)](#)

201. "Acinema," in *The Lyotard Reader*, p. 179. [\(back\)](#)
202. "Anamnesis of the Visible, or Candour," p. 225. [\(back\)](#)
203. *Cahiers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 945. [\(back\)](#)
204. *The Savage Mind*, p. 24. [\(back\)](#)
205. "La Crevette dans tous ses états," in *Le Grand Recueil, Pièces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 17. [\(back\)](#)
206. *Negative Dialectics* p. 179. [\(back\)](#)
207. *Cahiers 1894-1914*, Vol. V (1902-03) ed. Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 310. "L'homme peut tromper son désir, en se conduisant lui-même vers l'objet, en le frôlant sans intention définitive et sans acte irréversible—Et tant qu'il s'en rapproche de la sorte—le désir qui *jusque-là* , est satisfait, ne le fait souffrir, ni l'adversaire du désir ne proteste." [\(back\)](#)
208. *Truth in Painting*, p. 48. [\(back\)](#)
209. *Consequences of Enlightenment*, pp. 260-261. [\(back\)](#)
210. *Unterwegs Zur Sprache*, in *Gesamtausgabe: Ausgabe letzter Hand*, Vol. 12, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt:), p. 94. [\(back\)](#)
211. *Gesamtausgabe: Ausgabe letzter Hand*, Vol. 20, p. 204. [\(back\)](#)
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212. "Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (London: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 43. [\(back\)](#)
213. "Marginalia on Mahler," in *Telos* No. 87 (Spring 1991), p. 81. [\(back\)](#)
214. "On the Classicism of Goethe's Iphigenie," *Notes to Literature*, Vol. II, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 168. [\(back\)](#)
215. "On the Classicism of Goethe's Iphigenie," p. 168. [\(back\)](#)
216. "On the Classicism of Goethe's Iphigenie," p. 170. [\(back\)](#)
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218. "The Uncanniness of the Ordinary," in *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 154. [\(back\)](#)
219. *Foucault* (Paris: Minuit, 1986), p. 127. [\(back\)](#)
220. *Atlas* (Paris: Julliard, 1994), p. 254 [\(back\)](#)
221. *Atlas*, p. 83. [\(back\)](#)
222. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 3. [\(back\)](#)
223. *Minima Moralia*, pp. 89-90. [\(back\)](#)
224. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 191. John Cage: "The enjoyment of things as they come, as they happen, rather than as they are possessed or kept or forced to be." "How the Piano Came to be Prepared," in *Empty Words* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), p. 8. [\(back\)](#)
225. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 33. [\(back\)](#)
226. *Minima Moralia*, p. 224. The logic behind Adorno's recommending "conspicuously and willfully ceding to crude material." *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 258. [\(back\)](#)
227. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 8, 9. [\(back\)](#)
228. *Consequences of Enlightenment*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 57. [\(back\)](#)
229. *Consequences of Enlightenment*, p. 49. [\(back\)](#)
230. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 80. [\(back\)](#)
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232. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 162. [\(back\)](#)
233. *Fantasio* [\(back\)](#)
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235. *Comment une figure de paroles et pourquoi* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), p. 18. [\(back\)](#)
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237. "Les Morts de Roland Barthes," in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), p. 277. [\(back\)](#)

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239. "The Nature and Impact of Charisma," in *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), Vol. II , p. 1113. [\(back\)](#)

240. "The Nature and Impact of Charisma," p. 1120. [\(back\)](#)

241. Paris: Grasset, 1996, pp. 246-47. [\(back\)](#)

242. *Foi et savoir* suivi de *Le Siècle et le pardon* (Paris: Seuil, 2000). [\(back\)](#)

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244. *Le "Racisme" ou la haine identitaire*, p. 386. [\(back\)](#)

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