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Introduction

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Introduction

But the truth is, they be not the highest instances that give the securest information; as may be well expressed in the tale so common of the philosopher, that while he gazed upwards to the stars fell into the water; for if he had looked down he might have seen the stars in the water, but looking aloft he could not see the water in the stars. So it cometh often to pass, that mean and small things discover great, better than great can discover the small.¹

Prefatory:

Politics and authority have become the most active areas of intellectual debate in recent years, superseding deconstruction and, lately, Bakhtinian dialogue. Current discussions often give prominence to terms such as "totalization" and "particularism," which quickly assume polemical overtones: the "totalizers" are neo-Stalinists, the "particularists" neo-bourgeois fetishists, their minds clouded by Romantic nostalgia.² Mutual accusations of ideology masquerading as opinion inevitably ensue.

Taking the position of the particularist faction, at least for the purposes of this introduction, one might protest that a commitment to the value of experience does not automatically reduce one's degree of altruism or the level of one's social concern. But neither such common-sense objections to the assertion that particularism is inherently reactionary, nor the more sophisticated contention that no single discourse, not even that of politics, includes all the others,³ seems to have helped. We are too deeply rooted in the La Rochefoucauld-Nietzsche tradition to rise above suspicion and allow ourselves a moment of freedom from doubt, a moment of acceptance, a glance at the sky. Of course every utterance is fraught with ignorance, of both ourselves and our environment. Assuredly no one will ever fight his/her way out of the paper bag of the hermeneutic circle, or at least out of that loop in it which blinds us to our own role in the interpretive process; but is it worth trying? Utterances, whether political or other, are by their very nature both over-determined and objective, as are perceptions. Shall we cease to report our physical perceptions because they are ours? Of course our perceptions do not rest on a uni-
versal basis; but, since there is none, and can be none, why worry? Every experience is real; the sum of all human experiences still does not exhaust or add up to the whole of reality, but that is all we have to go by. The most we can do is try to approach one another’s viewpoints in an attempt to negotiate a mutually habitable world.

Origins of the Conference:

To set aside questions of political philosophy for the present, I should like to glance back over the history of particularism, in order to set our present concerns in context. Such a history might begin with medieval nominalism and with Duns Scotus’s “haecceitas” or “thisness.” Or, again, it could begin with Romantic individualism, which is also assumed to entail a special interest in detail and an acceptance of the fragmentary. Others have found the strongest manifestations of particularism among the Victorians, with figures like Ruskin and Hopkins insisting on the centrality of the specific and the visible. For our purposes it will be sufficient to recall phenomenology and pragmatism as proximate antecedents of the movement in the twentieth century.

In our time, rapid industrialization and standardization in every field have conspired to jeopardize uniqueness for those still attached to that value. At least in American poetry, though, the claim that a great deal depends on a red wheelbarrow in the rain (W. C. Williams) continues to be taken very seriously. Whether through fear that such immediate experiences may soon be lost to us, or, perhaps, for the very opposite reason—that in the debacle of systems and generalizations, after the collapse of the myth of progress, all that we have left to cling to is the particular—there has been a proliferation of works, in many disciplines, that stress the local, the individual, the incomensurate. A powerful stimulus to this movement was supplied by the discovery of Kurt Gödel in 1931 that no arithmetical system could exhaust its material without having recourse to another system. This form of indeterminacy discouraged efforts at totalization in the most formal domain of thought (mathematics). Thomas Kuhn’s Structure of Scientific Revolutions undermined confidence in the orderly progress of science in general, showing that it lies at the mercy of local circumstances, historical, social, and personal as well as intellectual. (From this approach follows the so-called “particularist” movement in the history of science: see David Hull’s paper, below.)

A review of the steps that led to the calling of a conference on par-
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Particularism in the spring of 1989 will give some sense of the momentum which the movement has achieved in recent years. In literary studies, the field with which the conference sponsors were most familiar, an "anti-theory" polemic was launched in the early 1980s in *Critical Inquiry*. About the same time Paul Fry's *The Reach of Criticism* appeared; it argued that systematic literary criticism was generally unsuccessful, and that better results were obtained by eclectic or impressionistic approaches. It soon became apparent that an anti-systematic bias was spreading through a number of fields. Reading Oliver Sacks, for instance, on Tourette's syndrome, and even on sleeping sickness, we realized that some physicians regarded the peculiarities of the individual case as eluding or perhaps transcending any general diagnosis. Sacks is constantly invoking "the singularities of experience, the richness of the phenomenal." A similar concern with the uniqueness of each patient is found in the lately revived work of Georges Canguilhem. Laurence McCullough of the Baylor College of Medicine has seconded this approach by analyzing the experience of illness from the patient's own point of view.

In paleontology, Stephen Jay Gould and his associates (among them Martin Rudwick) argue for the importance of variety and exception in the evolution and survival of species. It may even be suggested (though here we are on uncertain ground, not being mathematicians) that catastrophe theory (Thom) and its offshoot, the theory of fractals (Mandelbrot) were especially concerned with what might be learned from situations characterized by singularity, discontinuity, or uniqueness. Here, as literary scholars, some of us observed links to John Ruskin, whose studies of detail in mountain topography bore a striking resemblance to some of Mandelbrot's diagrams.

As one thing led to another, we were reminded of Carol Christ's excellent study of Victorian literature, *The Finer Optic*, which identified particularism as a dominant theme in Victorian thought. That work appeared in 1975; but as recently as 1986 a new book on Victorian particularism was published, Father Walter J. Ong's *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, this time emphasizing human individuality, rather than (as Carol Christ had done) the uniqueness of objects or experiences. The points of departure of the two authors were entirely different, but they converged on the same issue: the importance of particularism as both historical phenomenon and ontological crux. Lynn Merrill's 1989 publication, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History*, has extended this tradition in Victorian studies to illustrated books in another field.
Soon evidence for the ubiquity of this approach began to crowd upon us. We recalled the Annales school of historians, together with their American branch, the Princeton school, and Paul Ricoeur’s defense of the event in historiography *(Temps et récit)*. Though there is the occasional dissenting voice, one often finds reviewers, now, extolling the virtues of particularism in history. Raymond Carr, for instance, asserts that “authoritarian political systems can truly be understood only by intensive study of their activities at the local levels for such studies reveal the mechanisms of compliance as they function in daily life.” In a footnote to the same page Carr declares that “Our understanding of the Civil War has been enriched if not transformed by local studies.”

The New Historicist group (Stephen Greenblatt et al.) has also contributed to the establishment of a powerful tradition in microhistory. Clifford Geertz, a dominant figure in American social science, has done the same for anthropology with his “thick description” (a phrase, as he tells us, borrowed from Ryle) or “microscopic description” and “bodied stuff.” In various branches of ethics a broad plea for the priority of the particular case or situation over the general principle has been entered by thinkers as various as Jean-François Lyotard, Martha Nussbaum, and Bernard Williams. Lyotard, the arch-particularist, has gone so far as to reread Kant himself as a crypto-particularist, obsessed with singularities, in order to find support for his (Lyotard’s) particularist ethics.

Important new documents seemed to be finding their way into our dossier with increasing frequency. Roland Kany’s *Mnemosyne als Programm* (1987) dealt with the role of detail in the work of Usener, Warburg, and Walter Benjamin. A feminist approach to detail was taken by Naomi Schor in *Reading in Detail* (1987), arguing that we associate details with the feminine, principles with the masculine. (See Schor’s essay in the present collection for a reconsideration of that argument.)

Finally, recalling that law itself is usually taught through the study of particular cases, and that, in fact, common law depends on particular cases, and noticing that wherever one looked—from studies of dialect distribution to the collection of psychiatric data to laboratory method to archaeology—there seemed to be a similar refrain: the rules don’t hold; generalizations mislead; the facts must be reexamined without preconceptions—we felt it behooved us to bring some practitioners of the method together in order to examine this phenomenon. As we said to one of our prospective speakers, we were in-
Interested in "exceptions, in those details that escape both law and foresight, in those cases in which the example is indistinguishable from the concept, in the concrete instance rather than the moral law, in the patient rather than in nosology," etc. Interestingly enough, we found, in communicating with potential participants in the conference, that many of them thought they had been working alone: they did not realize that they were members of a movement.

In part, the recent explosion of particularist thought may represent, at least as far as philosophy and literary criticism are concerned, a reaction against the overwhelmingly Kantian influence of Derrida and the deconstructionist model. With respect to the American tradition, as has been remarked above, one might speak of a revival of some aspects of Pragmatism.18 It may not be inappropriate to add that, in the political field, the clamor for self-determination that has followed upon détente, with its loosening of imperialistic controls, is very much in the particularist spirit. Hans Magnus Enzensberger seems not unhappy to find in the European Community itself nothing more than "A medley of particularist loyalties";19 and Milan Kundera has after all lived to see the variety of central Europe survive the standardization of the Soviet model.20

In practice, the conference came to dwell more on the issues raised in the individual papers than on broader questions such as the history of the movement, its major characteristics, or its probable future. Matters of principle tended (perhaps appropriately) to be passed over. In an attempt to fill some gaps I have appended my own introductory and concluding remarks for the conference, together with a sample of the discussion from the Plenary Session, as a minimal background for the Proceedings.

Introduction to the Conference:

As I tried to think of ways to launch this conference, I found myself worrying that anything I said would end up sounding like support for motherhood and apple pie, or the equivalent for this field, such as "small is beautiful." Of course everybody recognizes the value of particulars and of particularism; and, of course, every particularist recognizes the value of generalizations. There is no point in substituting one set of slogans for another. It will not do simply to quote Blake as an oracle, announcing that "To Generalize is to be an Idiot, To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit" ("Annotations to Reynolds"). Nor will it suffice to point out Charles Olson's addressing
Robert Creeley "As one particularist to another. . ."21 To invoke the "Immediate Experience" of the Pragmatist tradition would also keep us in familiar fields. As an alternative it occurred to me to recall a line of thought that goes from eighteenth-century theories of personification and the concrete universal through Goethe and up to Karl Popper, in an effort, not to prove the superiority of the particular to the general, but to change, albeit in a minute degree, our understanding of the relation between the two.

When one personifies, even in the elementary sense of identifying some person as distinguished in some way, one is on the way to creating a concept. If the concept of the hero starts out with the characterization of Achilles, then that individual, Achilles, both contains and gives rise to the concept of the hero. The formation of the concept "Heroism" is not a prior condition for either the recognition or the invention of the character. Locke speaks of "precise naked appearances in the mind [which] the understanding lays up as the standards to rank real existences into sorts."22 Class concepts, then, are founded on single powerful images. Goethe went so far as to claim that his ideas presented themselves to him in physical shape: "I . . . can see them with my eyes."23 There was no distinction for him between the particular experience and its "meaning."24 "Above all, one should not look for anything behind phenomena. They themselves are the lesson."25 Again, "There is a delicate empiricism that makes itself inwardly identical with the object and thereby becomes actual theory."26

A later version of this principle is to be found in Karl Popper's insistence on the deductive character of scientific thought. A long series of observations does not of its own accord produce an idea. For all practical purposes, the story that Newton arrived at the law of gravity as a result of a single apple's having fallen on his head might as well be true. A single event may precipitate an immensely comprehensive generalization.

And such an event may still happen. We tend to think that we have probably worn out the universe with repeated thinking about it,27 but we can also choose to remember Hopkins' sonnet, "God's Grandeur:"

For all this, nature is never spent.
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things
And though the last light off the black West went
O, morning at the brown brink Eastward springs.
The sonnet is about toil and the smudging of the world by man’s physical presence, but it is also, I believe, about the smudging of the world by thought. Hopkins requires us to recall that the freshness of thought is as inescapable as the smudge.

All the above views have distinctly un-Kantian implications, since they emphasize not the categories and the prior hypotheses which supposedly situate and govern our experiences, but rather the unforeseen intellectual consequences that may ensue upon any experience. It is not a matter of particularism’s rejecting theory, but of its loosening the grip of the theoretical on the particular so that the particular may be free to engender new thought. The relationship of the general (the idea) to the particular (the experience) is always provisional anyway, and always remains to be renegotiated; to assume the fixed priority of theory is to freeze thought at its source. In fact, I would like to argue for the existence of a category of experiences that I would call defining experiences: experiences that become an idea instead of depending on one. Perhaps even this formulation is wrong: it is rather that the generalization is the experience; it doesn’t result from the experience. As Cardinal Newman puts it, “experiences and reasonings may be indistinguishable from each other.”28 In these situations, the definition itself, the formulation and specification of a new thought, is dependent on the particular experience: without the experience, the idea would never have arisen.

Examples of “defining experiences” spring readily to mind in anecdotal form, though to develop any one such observation might require a treatise. “I was driving back from Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland when I realized that there are two different kinds of reverie, one involving metaphor, the other without metaphor.” Or, “When I was last in love I realized that, for the erotic state, connotative vision precedes denotative vision.” Or, “It dawned on me recently that, contrary to received opinion, people from widely different cultures understand one another better in language than they do through personal contact.” And so forth. (I am assuming that something comparable happens in the sciences.) Taking the general notion to be self-evident, I would like to move this argument one step further.

Maybe the reason why a particular experience can also be a generalization, as well as a definition in the sense of something that sets borders, identifies and names, is that all experiences are already to some extent these things. Reversing the implications of the Kantian truism, we may argue that “No percept without a concept” means,
not that every percept is the conclusion of a thought, but rather that every percept is the beginning of a thought. In other words, every percept is an idea in embryo. To quote Goethe again, "every attentive glance which we cast on the world is an act of theorizing." I would go so far as to remove the word "attentive": every glance which we cast on the world is an act of theorizing.

I think this is true if we see at all; but (to pursue a private interest of mine for a moment) it is even more obviously true if we add the element of metaphor to vision. Wipe the film of threat from the thistle, and everything is immediately metaphorical; we cannot see without thinking. Part of what makes an experience an experience is that it contains and/or creates a generalization. If a percept were only the sum of previous thoughts it couldn’t be perceived. It is the possibility of its being the start of a new thought that makes one turn towards it, that makes one turn it into a perception. Whether it remain at the level of what Leibnitz would call a "confused perception," or whether it achieve some degree of articulation (as every perception should do, in the context of a Leibnitzian theory of perception as expression), it leads to an idea. Even if a percept only implies an act of adaptation—and that is, in fact, James’s definition of theory itself—it leads to an idea.

What I want to propose, then, is not a policy of opposition to theory, not a crusade against the intellect, but, if anything, a hyperintellectual principle, for which, as I have said, every percept would be an idea in embryo. Part of the immediacy and the richness of the percept is then seen to lie in its intellectual content. In this way, nothing is lost, and there is much to be gained.

Every experience equips itself with a space around it, a moat, or torus, that protects it from prior influences, and guarantees that it will be something more than just the sum of what went before. And, after all, what do we do in our profession except wait for the chance to purchase a space where a thought can rise, or a gull can settle? Then percept, concept, and vision can be at one, and we see the possibility once more that in fact, as I think Claudio Guillén once put it, "Todo es nuevo."

Concluding Remarks, with Excerpts from Plenary Session:

(It will be noticed that the theme of the imagination in its relation to particularism, which had come up only in passing towards the end of the Introduction, became the dominant topic of the concluding session.)
What is more, this novelty, this "something more" (see paragraph above), is also something shared. The particularity, the uniqueness of the new experience is the guarantee of its universality. We all recognize each other at the point of sharing in an act of the imagination, the point at which someone else's imagination also becomes the focus of our imagination. Such an event may take place in our encounter with the artist through works of art or literature, but it may also occur in much more ordinary circumstances: for instance, in recognizing shapes in clouds: "Very like a whale." Or is it perhaps more like a camel? In any case, it has never been obvious to me why another person (not necessarily Polonius) so readily identifies our projective act of the imagination as his/her own experience. Yet this is exactly the event that the particular is the mark of: it is the locus where the individual imagination can be joined by everybody else's imagination. It is a place where we come together, where our monadic condition is temporarily superseded; where we know each other in our individuality, our imaginative and creative uniqueness, as something that we all know.

It is, then, in the most private, the idiosyncratic experience, that we know our commonness, our jointness, our universality most clearly. That is where we all recognize each other and can be one, before we part on our different roads of theory, rationalization, or ideology. As long as we live in the detail we live in each other: we are a community. It is in the detail that we meet and that we know what we are. Both as ordinary, familiar people and in our creative idiosyncracy we are all one in our uniqueness, our singularity. The imaginative detail is, in the best sense, the lieu commun of humanity.

Discussion:

(Some of the following material is paraphrase rather than direct quotation: I hope that it does not often misrepresent the intentions of the speakers. Constraints of space have limited us to a few fragments of the discussion.)

Thom: How do you pass from subjective uniqueness to objective universality? It requires from the subject something like a connection with some transcendent universal.

Massey: No: what I said is that you pass from the unique to the general by asking somebody else to see that whale in that cloud. And the other person is capable of doing so.

Peradotto: What if they don't see it?
Massey: But they do see it. That’s the whole point. They do see it. That’s where we recognize each other: in our capacity for recognizing our imaginations in the particular.

Newman: Massey’s example provides a very precise locale for the resolution of conflict [i.e., it brings all conflicts down to facts].

Massey: There is on the other hand the possibility [suggested earlier by Wickert] that the particular is only the point of intersection of power relations, rather than an independent entity.

Bucher: The detail, out of history, does nothing. [On the sense of community in history]: Literature is about the origin of meaning... We can be a community only to the extent that we partake in the same experience of something that happens and which is meaningful, and didn’t exist before, will vanish again later on—as in the example of the cloud... metaphor... is the experience that makes any communication possible... all of a sudden I exist because this exists to me...

LeHuenen: The particular (for instance, the Crucifixion—a “fait divers”—) ceases to be merely a particular when it enters a narrative...

Wickert: There is a difference between the particularity of a datum and the particularity of an experience.

Thom: The experience of the meaningful particular is always associated with an experience of empathy... [One must] project oneself into a specific external entity in order to feel this entity internally.

Massey: Wickert has pointed out that I have failed to distinguish between the particular as mere event and the particular as charged event, which is characterized by empathy, transformation, etc.

Thom: When Archimedes said “Eureka” in his bath, he had lots of previous opportunities to have this intuition.

Massey: Yes, it’s like the story of Newton and the single apple (that fell on his head).

Thom: In my book I say that, precisely, the passage from subjective prégnance to objective prégnance is made essentially by an act of empathy.

Massey: But what do you do with the things that have no prégnance? And which are nevertheless there?
Thom: Things which have no *prégnance*? For what reason are you interested in something which has no *prégnance*?

Massey: Because Wickert accused me of leaving that category of existence out of consideration.

Bunn: There is, of course, the uniqueness of triviality . . . there is nothing important about that. We don’t listen for good Gestalts: we look for disorder (seeing the cloud), for the anomalous, because that’s what threatens us. (Gombrich, *The Sense of Order.*) We develop a break-spotting capacity in perception, and we try to interpret the breaks. There is a charged significance attached to the break (we call it metaphor). It combines two different sign systems.

Massey: So how have you dealt with the problem of all the stuff that’s left out? Where you *don’t* see the break?

Bunn: You suppress the rest of the environment—or you make another choice.

Wickert: What makes something [hard to notice, or] trivial—for instance, what made the other crucifixions trivial—is a collective power decision. The raising of *one* to importance is making it part of a story . . . characterized by repetition (as in the *Koran*).32

Massey: We are back to the problem of the “événement” and to the meaning of the documentary. Let us say that someone is known to have gone out on a Thursday afternoon in 1909 from Anticosti Island and to have caught two herring. At what point does that recorded event become history, and what do you do with it if it does not become “historical?” There is the whole question of the status of that material.33

LeHuenen: Take the case of Sartre writing on Genet, Genet’s first theft could have been an accident, insignificant. Where there is repetition, there is a story—and Genet becomes “a thief.”

Massey: Let’s get back to the question of empathy and of the affectivity of the concept.

Thom: I can’t endorse that formulation; it seems to be a bit strong. Empathy for me is an activity of the subject, not of the concept.

Massey: Nevertheless it is a necessary part of the intellectual act—as in the Gedanken-experiment you spoke of the
other day, which required you to put yourself in the position of something with which something else collides. This is a highly subjective way of thinking, but at the same time it is a legitimate component of conceptual activity.

Thom: Ah, you could put it that way, yes—there is a sort of participation of the concept in subjectivity.

Schulz: What I want, though, is the opposite—an impersonal base to support the connections among us: a part of nature that is detached from the human; something that makes it possible to go beyond private identity, purifying the empathy.

Thom (to Massey): Perhaps you base your problematic on the so-called lusus naturae. Cassirer claims that much of symbolic activity started from the considerations of exceptional natural forms: human-faced rocks and so on; but I don’t think this is your “particular.”

Bunn (to Thom, on the subject of empathy): Does mathematics make Einfühlung possible? Does it act as a mediator for the empathetic relation between the observer and nature?

Thom: The use of anthropomorphic language in science is probably more than a purely metaphoric way of expression. One speaks of “killing” an element; one wants to get rid of something—so one kills it. To what extent one could speak of empathy in that case . . . ? Perhaps . . .

Bucher (returns to the problem of meaning): The emergence of meaning takes place in an atmosphere of affective crisis: something is given to me that recreates a meaningful world in a situation where I am always alert to the lack or the collapse of meaning. This experience that we have been speaking about may be at the origin of rationality itself in a way that has never been recognized—not even in Plato. Theoria as vision.34

The paper on English literary history in the eighteenth century read by Ludmila Kostova during the second half of the plenary session raised the question of historicist vs. universalist literary thought. In the course of the ensuing discussion distinctions were drawn (by Newman, Prus, and Wickert) among the universal, the conceptual, and the absolute. Much of this segment of the conference was
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summed up by Wickert in the remark that the particular is not what is opposed to the absolute or to the general, but to the stereotypical. 35

Addenda:

Clearly, there were some important points made during the discussion that were not adequately developed. Among these, at least two were notable: (a) that there are sub-types of the particular and the detail that need to be distinguished, and (b) that at a certain level the particular may rejoin the universal, if not the absolute. (c) The general question of the future of the particularist movement and the nature of its contribution so far were also left largely unsettled.

(a) It is important to distinguish at least three kinds of detail: (1) the “rich” detail that yields an idea; (2) the genuinely insignificant detail; (3) the obsessive detail that refuses either to be important (to be narratized or cathected) or to subside into insignificance.

A larger philosophical question—what constitutes a particular or a detail? What are its defining attributes?—seemed too difficult to be dealt with as a conference topic. 36 Suffice it to say that the meaning of the particular will vary from area to area, from the unique experience of the artist in aesthetics to personal identity in psychology to dialectal variants in linguistics, and that the particular may simply be something that stands out against a field or that draws our attention by exceptionality.

(b) It can be seen that various speakers were trying to beat a path from the particular to the universal without losing the immediacy of the particular: myself (Massey) by identifying the detail as the common locus of humanity; Thom by introducing the concept of empathy; Schulz by insisting on the need to transcend the individual. Even for myself (presumably representing an extreme particularist position) the particular is not the strictly private (as it was for Newman, for the early Hopkins, for Bataille).

(c) I will resist the temptation to engage in a further defence of particularism against its polemical detractors, who have accused it of everything from crypto-Fascism to Incarnationism, but I will make some attempt to answer a single and legitimate question: what difference has particularism made, and what further difference will it make? Some of the specific answers, for ethics, for Darwinian theory, for medical practice, for political thought, have been given in the earlier part of this Introduction or will be apparent from the Bibliography. But in general, one can expect that in each field there will be a
greater hospitality to intuition, to the irregular, to the transitory, an acceptance of non-closure, incompleteness, provisionality (which is not to be confused with the Deconstructionists' indeterminacy), and even of disorderly information as such. In literary criticism we can foresee that there will be a greater interest in minor or peripheral texts, and a greater willingness to acknowledge the role of our personal motivation in both our choice of subject-matter and our approach to the material. It is not merely a matter of returning to *explication de texte*: not only will we have less jargon, but, one may hope, a richer and more personal style will come to prevail in criticism. The ideal would be to return the aura of language to the center of meaning, its proper place.

The models for this whole style of thinking would be, then (to cull a few from those named above): for psychology and social science, William James; for mathematics, Hassler Whitney; for scientific method, Karl Popper; and, to sum up the change, Goethe in the place of Nietzsche, as a milder prophet of a more tolerant humanity.

*The Papers:*

Naomi Schor's essay summarizes her well-known book, *Reading in Detail,* and goes on to consider the place of George Sand in the framework of particularist thought. In the eighteenth century idealist critics such as Reynolds rejected the detail and identified it with the feminine. In the nineteenth century, when realism restored the detail to prominence, it was a fetishized detail that again exemplified a phallocentric position. In her early work George Sand makes use of the fetishistic detail, but later repudiates it in favor of her own form of idealism that is arrived at, not by a principle of selection (à la Reynolds) but simply by the suppression of the fetishism that is alien to her femininity.

Roland Kany's essay takes what might be called a revisionist approach to Walter Benjamin's particularism. While presenting the most striking elements of Benjamin's doctrine on the detail, Kany also questions some of those crucial assertions on common-sense grounds. For instance, if truth is punctiform and without relations (cf. note 32, below), how can Benjamin's truths relate to our own?

Paul Fry's "Distracted Reader" takes the unusual view that reader's error, perceptual error, or "distraction," often fruitful in its consequences, has not been countenanced in the modern period. Since its advancement by Schleiermacher to an essential role, it has been con-
denied (as by Freud) or, more often, systematized and co-opted. Critics such as Stanley Fish and Harold Bloom, while appearing to recognize its importance, eventually return it to the service of a larger organic scheme. Two generalizations in the essay may be quoted: "until the time of Rousseau it went without saying that . . . consciousness itself is grounded in alienation"; and "mistakes when we do justice to them trigger the remembrance of something missing."

David Hull’s intriguing essay begins by pointing out that, in the history of science, "particularism" usually refers to the doctrine that scientific conclusions gain acceptance through local or social circumstances, rather than through meeting the universal, impersonal criteria of validity. As the essay goes on, it leads to the conclusion that both explanations, the local and the universal, break down during the inspection of individual cases. In other words, a particularist analysis (in the wider sense) casts doubt on the claims of both localists and universalists.

Lawrence McCullough’s paper (originally a supplement to David Hull’s) argues that medicine pretends to take seriously the individuality of the patient and the specific characteristics of his/her ailment, but in fact fails to do so. Its impersonality is reflected in its abstract language. Medical language describes disease, not the experience of disease. A narrative medical ethics may help to cope with the problem.

Finally: I will not presume to summarize René Thom’s "Itinerary for a Science of the Detail," but, in so far as I can determine, it deals with what Wallace Stevens calls "The Course of a Particular," in this case as the particular (detail) becomes invested with "pregnance" or enters into the field of coherence. Although Professor Thom does not seem to take an explicitly supportive position with respect to particularism, his concern with "prégignance"—albeit in a technical sense related to the Gestalt term Prügnanz rather than to its English cognate—appears to extend his previous preoccupation with critical moments. At that juncture one might wish to recall once more Ruskin’s remark: "It is the distinctiveness, not the universality of the truth, which renders it important." (Note 22, below)

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Notes

1. Francis Bacon, Of the Advancement of Learning, II, i, 5. I am indebted to Jim Bunn for recalling the passage to me. Bacon goes on to cite Aristotle as his authority.

On the status of objectivity in historical research see also Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Jörn Rüschen, eds., *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft* (München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977.)

3. For instance, in Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 188: “It is, in any case, impossible to reduce the functioning of a whole society to a single, dominant type of procedure.” For similar ideas in Jean-François Lyotard, see, for instance, *Économie libidinale*, passim.

4. A typical quotation from John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1958), 177: “The object of . . . perception is not one of a kind in general, a sample of a cloud or river, but is this individual thing existing here and now with all the unrepeatable particularities that accompany and mark such existences.” I am grateful to Art Efron for this reference. Particularism is, of course, everywhere in William James: “. . . the things of worth are all concretes andsingulars. The only value of universal characters is that they help us, by reasoning, to know new truths about individual things . . . the traditional universal-worship can only be called a bit of perverse sentimentalism . . . .” (*Principles of Psychology* [New York: Henry Holt, 1902], 1:479–80).


5. Theodor Adorno, for instance, somewhere worries that reality may come to be seen as “only a reservoir for concepts.” See Alexander Gelley’s “Thematics and Historical Construction in Benjamin’s ‘Arcades Project’” (*Strumenti Critici Nuova Serie, Anno IV, Fascicolo 2* [N.60], Maggio 1989, 233–51), 235, for other pertinent quotations from Adorno.


9. See attached bibliography under “Medicine.”


For another kind of contribution to ethical particularism one might read James L. Nelson’s “Particularism and Parenthood,” which argues that people need to be loved particularly—need to be special, singled out; and, that if we don’t love our children in this way, as particular people, we fail as parents. (See attached bibliography under “Ethics.”)


20. See, for instance, the interview with Kundera at the end of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.


passage in R.L. Stevenson’s *Travels with a Donkey* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1988), 192, is worth recalling: “… perhaps some thought of my own had come and gone unnoticed, and yet done me good. For some thoughts, which sure would be the most beautiful, vanish before we can rightly scan their features; as though a god, travelling by our green highways, should but open the door, give one smiling look into the house, and go again forever.”

24. Cf. Gillian Beer on Darwin: “He persistently controverts all attempts to distinguish meaning from matter.” *Darwin’s Plots* (London, etc.: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 40. In her concern with the creative potential of the particular and the exceptional, Beer makes Darwin sound much like the Hopkins of “Pied Beauty.” See pp. 41–2, 65: and, on real things as having the force of models (cf. the quotation from Locke, note 22, above), p. 38. It begins to seem as if the *Origin of Species* had its own origins in particularism, as if it were rather an “Origin of Individual Variations.”

See also Robert McRae, *Leibniz* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 76: “One instance is sufficient for the acquisition of . . . the capacity to recognize the universal in a particular.”


26. “Es gibt eine zarte Empirie, die sich mit dem Gegenstand innigst identisch macht und dadurch zur eigentlichen Theorie wird.” *Jubiläumsausgabe* XXXIX:70. I am grateful to Roland Kany for identifying the source of this quotation.

27. Cf. note 5, above. My argument also has something in common with that of Edward Young’s “Conjectures on Original Composition.”


30. To paraphrase Wordsworth’s “The eye—it cannot choose but see” (“Expostulation and Reply”) I would say “The eye—it cannot choose but think.” It will be noticed that this view of metaphoric perception is the opposite of the one suggested by Bunn during the plenary session (see below). Bunn takes threat to be the very root of metaphor, rather than (as I do) its antithesis. An important topic that remains to be explored is the difference between pleasurable and morbid metaphoric perception.


32. On Lyotard’s suspicions of story or narrative as a totalizing form see Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), especially p. 160. For that matter, truth itself (in the Benjaminian tradition) is conceived of by Lyotard as not extensive but only punctiform (69, 75). Cf. John Ruskin: “It is the distinctiveness, not the universality of the truth, which renders it important.” *Modern Painters*, I, pt. 2, sec. 1, ch. 3.

33. This may be what Lyotard calls the “occurrence”—the event that (fortunately) escapes history. See *Le Differend* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), 260.

My own note on Jay's p. 321 reads: “Maybe the 'redeeming detail' is the visual moment in hermeneutic, or the metaphoric pivot in dialogue (see my *Find You the Virtue* [Fairfax, Va.: George Mason University Press, 1987], 145-47); or is it the irredeemable (unnarrizable, un-inscap-able) stick in the toilet (Massey, 153-54); or the two herrings on Anticosti (see discussion, above); i.e., the point at which unresolvable opacity reaffirms itself?” See also the end of the section entitled “The Rise of the Detail” in Naomi Schor's paper, below, on Freud's respect for the uninterpretable detail.

35. Cf. the first sentence of René Thom's paper on “The True, the False, the Insignificant” (typescript): “What limits the true is not the false but the insignificant.”

36. Manfred Frank provides a valuable if selective commentary on the status of the particular and the individual in recent philosophy in *What is Neostructuralism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); see especially lecture 23.

37. For the attempt of linguistics to come to terms with the provisionality of structure see Paul J. Hopper, “Discourse Analysis: Grammar and Critical Theory in the 1980's,” *Profession 88* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1988), 18-26. “By acknowledging the fragmentary, temporal nature of structure . . . linguistics can respond to, absorb, and grow on these powerful new forces” (23). From the perspective from which it is presented in such an article, deconstruction, leading to post-modernism, appears as a facet of the larger phenomenon, Particularism, rather than as an alternative to it.