

SCALE, ECOLOGICAL ATTENTION, AND THE IT-NARRATIVE

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ANITA CARMEN LAW

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ABSTRACT

My thesis proposes a reconsideration of the ways in which we deploy formal analysis to analyze canonically minor texts and genres. In doing so, it reacts to and departs from a Jamesonian vein of material-historical formalism that treats minor texts as the mere evolutionary dead-end, or the ossified remnants of what was once “authentic artistic expression.” Unlike canonical texts, which have both the potential to be historicized and the ability to make claims to deep philosophical insight and formal innovativeness, minor texts tend to signify in more circumscribed ways. My thesis asks: how can we shift the terms upon which we evaluate minor genres without completely flattening out distinctions between texts or rendering aesthetic judgment void or purely subjective?

Following in the footsteps of diverse theorists such as Franco Moretti, Anne-Lise François, Eve Sedgwick, and Sianne Ngai, and inspired by the inventive ways in which they broach the analysis of minor texts, my project seeks to generate formal-theoretical frameworks to apply to the analysis of the it-narrative, frameworks that would be able to sustain the considerable pressures of originality and significant signification associated with formal analysis. Rather than approaching minor genres and major works as separate but equally valued objects of study, my study brackets questions of value in favour of (1) scale: questions of relative size which, while still dependent on notions of form, depend less on a critic’s sense of aesthetic discrimination and (2) ecological attention: issues of critical disposition, and how a critic’s relation to the forms that he or she interacts with manifests itself in practice.

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1 Introduction/Motive

It is not merely the performance situation, but the generic contract and institution itself, which, along with so many other institutions and traditional practices, falls casualty to the gradual penetration of a market system and a money economy. With the elimination of an institutionalized social status for the cultural producer and the opening of the work of art itself to commodification, the older generic specifications are transformed into a brand-name system against which any authentic artistic expression must necessarily struggle. The older generic categories do not, for all that, die out, but persist in the half-life of the subliterate genres of mass cultures, transformed into the drugstore and the airport paperback lines of gothics, mysteries, romances, bestsellers and popular biographies.

- Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*

1.1 Context

My thesis proposes a reconsideration of the ways in which we deploy formal analysis to analyze canonically minor texts and genres. In doing so, it reacts to and departs from a Jamesonian vein of material-historical formalism that treats minor texts (“the subliterate genres of mass culture” (93)) as the mere evolutionary dead-end, or the ossified remnants of what was once “authentic artistic expression.” My thesis asks: how can we shift the terms upon which we evaluate minor genres¹ without completely flattening out distinctions between texts or rendering aesthetic

¹ Here I hold the category of “minor literatures” as defined by Gilles and Deleuze, and David Lloyd as distinct from the category of “minor genres.” Minor literatures are literatures or literary traditions of the minority, with all the attendant political significances that it might hold. In the last section of chapter 2, I will propose a definition of minor genres in terms of the types of analysis and affective response these genres provoke, but for now I define minor genres more generally as genres of the “low culture” – genres that are not standard on school curriculums and that are not expected to stand (or, indeed, have not stood) the test of time. A genre such as the it-narrative (if indeed, the it-narrative can be called a genre) is a minor genre comprised of relatively minor texts, that has stayed minor throughout its historical lifespan (unlike Walter Scott, or the historical novel, it has not moved in and out of approbation and prominence). Minor texts are texts that are not standard, and have not (or are not expected) to survive past their contemporary scene of emergence. A minor text, however, can also be part of a major (“important,” more respected) genre (i.e. the realist novel, tragedy), so minor texts do not always have to be from minor genres. Conversely, the canonical (the institutionally established) and the minor are not necessarily at odds – major/canonical texts can be part of minor genres (e.g. Anne Radcliffe and the gothic). At this point, “minor” for me is a predominantly sociological term describing a type of social and institutional (re: academic) response to genres and texts. It will be one of the aims of this essay to look at how “minor” can also be complexly approached in formal terms.

judgment void or purely subjective? The most popular alternative to the Jamesonian approach is, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's words, to see everything in the minor as political (17). Broadening the term "political," the ethos behind this statement conceives of the minor as always linked to its context and to the spirit of its age. Unlike canonical texts, which have both the potential to be historicized and the ability to make claims to deep philosophical insight and formal innovativeness, minor texts tend to signify in more circumscribed ways.

Following in the footsteps of diverse theorists such as Franco Moretti, Anne-Lise François, Eve Sedgwick, and Sianne Ngai, and inspired by the inventive ways in which their analysis of minor texts also calls for a re-evaluation of the concept of form and the limits of formal analysis, my project seeks to generate formal-theoretical frameworks to apply to the analysis of the it-narrative, frameworks that would be able to sustain the considerable pressures of originality and significant signification associated with formal analysis without resorting to the position that *The Secret History of an Old Shoe* should be uttered in the same breath as *Tristram Shandy*. Rather than approaching the minor and the major or canonical as separate but equally valued objects of study, my study brackets instrumental, value-centred questions about the study of minor genres (Why should we study them? What will they tell us?) in favour of developing more descriptive approaches. Shifting the focus from explicit justifications of value frees me to up to consider form for form's sake (even if those forms are not particularly interesting, original, or relevant to their context) and critical dispositions that are less concerned with teleology and more concerned with relationality.

The two approaches I will theorize in this thesis are (1) scale, which deals with questions of relative size – questions which, while still dependent on notions of form, depend less on a critic's sense of aesthetic discrimination and (2) ecological attention, which deals with issues of

critical disposition, and how a critic's relation to form manifests itself in critical practice. Although descriptive in method, neither scale nor attention are heavily invested in "reading" proper as the de facto epistemological mode for literary study – that is, neither approach is particularly concerned with the nuances and details of language and linguistic technique. My theorizing of scale and ecological attention as frameworks for the analysis of minor genres and texts, then, has less to do with how these two approach language and more to do with the way in which scale – an analytic tool to be applied to the analysis of structures – can make room for ecological attention, which is concerned with the individual's reception of form, and vice versa – how an emphasis on individual reception can open onto an understanding of the dynamic, potentially nested structures that gird that reception.

1.2 Scale

I see scalar analysis, in its most basic instantiation, as less a structured critical framework than a set of concerns about limits and boundaries that help us generate local, context-specific questions about how form regulates our faculties of attention, inattention, absorption and repulsion. My definition of scale, which is heavily informed by human geography (Brenner, Marston, Jonas, Howitt, Jarvis et al., Valentine) sees scale in terms of (1) relative size and (2) systems of human activity that operate at certain physical dimensions and with certain sets of objects. Scalar analysis proposes an understanding of form that is attentive to the limits and boundaries that form places on a reader's experience of a text or a group of texts; what those limits and boundaries might be, however, depends on the rhetorical situation in which we read the interaction between reader(s) and text(s).

In Chapter 1, I demonstrate what a "scalar" reading might look like by applying an

understanding of scale to three literary situations, each operating at levels of increasing generality and each contributing different knowledge about the implications of scalar analysis: (1) an analysis of the formal features of it-narratives, to show how scale may work with close reading to highlight a text's treatment of dimensions, movements, and (a)synchronicity; (2) an analysis of the disjunction between formal and cultural-critical approaches to it-narratives, to observe how issues of scale play into the assignment of aesthetic value; (3) a focus on the recent debate between Franco Moretti and Katie Trumpener about the merits of quantitative analysis versus close reading, to see how scale may be implicated in the construction of literary history as a history of form. My readings attempt to demonstrate not only how the it-narrative is a genre centrally concerned with working through the concept of scale, and the problem how to view the world in scalar terms, but also how a scalar approach to meta-critical thought can be diagnostic, working as a tool to clarify points of ambiguity and contradiction that may be a result of jumping between scales.²

1.3 Ecological Attention

If scale looks at form as the interactions between boundaries of different spread (and therefore, perhaps, of different internal organization), then ecological attention telescopes those boundaries and refracts them through the subject's inner life. Ecological attention looks at how objects, broadly conceived, constitute, interact with, delimit, and extend a subject's mental

² A concrete example of scale jumping can be found in Alan Liu's article "Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism and the Romanticism of Detail." Even though scale as a term is not used in this piece, Liu's piece is nevertheless an analysis of the complexities and contradictions of scale-jumping. His article essentially launches a critique of high cultural criticism's disavowal of theory and almost religious stress on the achievement of immanence through a focus on detail and context. Such disavowal is illusory, Liu argues, for in the end cultural criticism's focus on the local proves to be only another way for the critic to attain aesthetic detachment and transcendence over his or her object of study.

energies and psychic environment.³

I use the term “attention” because I want ecological attention to be understood less as a framework for response and more as an ethos that leads us into a certain attentiveness to our surroundings – an attentiveness that allows critical thought the space to do two things: (1) grow rich and difficult affective relationships with its objects of study, relationships based as much on the unpredictability of feeling as on the mastery of knowing⁴ (“Melanie Klein,” *Touching Feeling*) and (2) establish a relation between critics and texts that could help us understand, respect, and preserve the “minorness” of minor literature while still being able to critically apprehend it.

I use the term “ecological” because my model is concerned with the critic’s psychic environment – environment being a term to be understood in its loosest sense as the philosophical niches, phenomenologies, practices, feelings, beliefs, ideologies, genres, sedimentations that jostle beside each other and draw the critic in and out of relation with a work.⁵ A diversity of processes (or ways of relating) is just as important as a diversity in objects, and in such an ecological model, I propose that practices of relating to texts are expanded beyond the processes of reading/not-reading, or knowing/not-knowing to include other processes and

³ The contrast between “attention” – a purposeful, object-directed encounter between self and outside – and “environment” – an inclusive mash-up of context – is intentional. I am interested in the liminal understandings this contrast opens up: of a context that we try to manipulate and make sense of, but that is always slightly beyond our mastery a perceptive faculties, and of an attention that is enabled by a relationality predicated on our generous disinterest.

⁴ Because knowledge about minor genres such as the it-narrative is easily mastered (what you see is what you get), mining minor genres for endless meaning would prove unsustainable.

⁵ My use of “ecology” and “environment,” rather than “field” or “system,” to refer to this method is mainly because I would like to preserve some of the disciplinary baggage that goes with ecology and environment – for example, the emphasis on sustainability, the necessity of co-dependence for survival, the unpredictability of our attempts to control and foresee the consequences of our actions and the room these terms make for a mindfulness of the local effects of individual actions. Also, “ecology” and “environment” seem so me two terms that are encouraging not only of learning, but also different ways of learning, whether it be the crawling-through-the-mud sort of learning, the gathering-microscopic-organisms-for-lab-analysis learning or understanding-the-big-picture-through-a-flow-chart learning.

types of knowledge such as the never-read, the half-read, the read-but-not-understood, or the only-heard-about (“Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes”). The inclusion of these processes into critical practice offers us ways of understanding minor literary objects⁶ without focusing exclusively on those objects or making them subservient to a context. The broad vision of the environment and the analytic strategies employed by ecological attention are all for the purpose of allowing us to sustain a critical interest in a minor text, one that does not pressure the text to signify abundantly and thus opens up the minor text to different avenues of inquiry and possibilities for self-relation.

Put colloquially, scale is about sizing up and syncing up objects, and ecological attention about realizing the degree to which we are dependent on and pushed around by objects. In the end, my investigations of scale and ecology aspire to be supplementary: if scale observes and theorizes the relationships between forms in terms of vertical integratedness and concentric expansion, ecological attention takes that spatially graded understanding of relations between forms and compresses it into a horizontal landscape that is able to be experienced and to be charged with the individual’s affective investments and psychic energy (or, conversely, a landscape that is able to reject/resist those affects and energies). At the end of the day, what both scale and ecological attention offer are critical frameworks that can conceive of minor forms in relational terms – terms that are, moreover, largely separate from judgments of aesthetic value. This is because scale and ecology are concepts that do not prioritize linguistic nuance in the study of form, choosing to see language as instead embedded in a wider network of relations and imaginative processes, all of which work together to manifest literary form, whether that form be understood in literary-critical, theoretical, or in historical terms. Furthermore, scale and

⁶ I define “literary objects” as objects that are studied in a literary way. This could mean an individual work (such as a text), a grouping of works (such as genre, or forms), or formal features (such as literary techniques), or time periods.

ecology's focus on the relational encourages the critic to adopt an observant, descriptive approach to his or her object of study, one that is attentive to how texts, genres, and forms interact with each other, their readers, and their critical and historical environments. In the case of scale, the interaction is approached in terms of how and to what effect objects and processes that operate at different sizes and scopes intermingle, while in the case of ecology, the interaction is approached in terms of the cathexes and donations of affective energy that occur between critics and the literary objects they study.

1.4 The It-Narrative

In this thesis, the it-narrative will act as a touchstone and case for my theoretical experimentation, as well as a representative for minor and inept writings. Though having enjoyed some notoriety in its time, the it-narrative is now seen as an ill-fated novelistic genre roughly spanning 1750-1790, whose existence, some critics lament, has since “languished in critical purgatory” (Blackwell 11). Largely scattered and episodic in nature, these stories are narrated from the point of view of an animal or inanimate object – “its” who can be bought, snatched, traded, lost, and who are thus able to move from situation to situation as passive, unnoticed observers. Concerned as they are with the follies, foibles, and mischances of their human subjects, most it-narratives read straightforwardly as bawdy and satiric, preachy and didactic, or a mixture of both.

In the “canon” of minor genres, the it-narrative can be considered a relatively minor entry. Even at the its inception, the it-narrative was considered an ossified genre; its contemporary reviews ranged from mild approbation (e.g. *Tales of a Guinea*, *Pompey the Little*) to outright derision (i.e. almost everything else), but none of the responses saw these narratives

as distinct from the morass of novels and miscellanies that had gone before. That these stories tended to be penned by anonymous “hack” writers, who had a reputation of being more financially than artistically motivated, did little to further the genre in posterity (Keen, Lupton). Not only was the it-narrative a small player in the eighteenth century literary field, it was also formally minor – part of a nascent form (the novel), featuring an unobtrusive protagonist (an object), and largely focused on daily occurrences.

While the lack of contemporary critical interest in it-lit can be attributed to the perception of the it-narrative as an unoriginal genre, the strangeness the genre poses to modern critics hasn’t, until recently, done much to further its study either. Part of the reason is practical: it is easy to lose sight of it-narratives amongst the sheer volume of ephemera published in the eighteenth century. Part of the reason is thematic: compared to other non-canonical texts such as slave narratives or travel writing, the study of the it-narrative is less politically and culturally worthwhile. Part of the reason is also formal: modern readers tend to see the it-narrative as structurally and stylistically inept (i.e. as badly crafted or written). Although we no longer subscribe to Aristotelian unities, certain expectations about unity and plot development still undergird our literary judgments, especially with regards to the evaluation of minor genres. The it-narrative’s formal ineptitude lies not only in its failure to tell a coherent story or to offer satisfying narrative resolution, but also in the failure of its form to generate and sustain interest.

2 Scale

2.1 Introducing Scale

Insofar as any project must, from the outset, define its scope and find frameworks that will allow it to convincingly jump between specific instances and general conclusions, questions of scale are implicit to any research project. However, questions *about* scale as a methodological lens have been both under- and unsystematically theorized in the realm of literary studies. This is may be because, unlike disciplines such as geography and urban planning,⁷ scale does not seem to be a particularly high-stakes analytic apparatus to be reflexive about, especially when compared to categories such as the canonical or the formal.⁸ It seems apt, however, that it is now, in this boundary-consolidating and boundary-eclipsing moment of globalization, of technological bulking-up (faster, stronger, sleeker, more) and of the explosion of digital information (evoking concerns about information management), that literary critics should turn their attention to questions of scale.⁹ But what is scale, and how is scale distinct from size or level (or for that

⁷ In a discipline such as human geography, the analytic distribution and segmentation of space and time is tied to empirically observable human activity, while in materialist cultural criticism, space and time are set within observable historical timelines and material developments. Although geography has contributed immensely to theories about scale (see Brenner, Marson, Jonas, Fraser, Howitt, Jarvis et al., Valentine), this theoretical work appears in my thesis only peripherally, because it is tailored for application to empirically measurable “stuff.” It would simply take too much qualification to make the theories fit the unique spatial/temporal instabilities of the literary object.

⁸ The ideological charge surrounding the canon debate is what motivates Deleuze and Guattari to staunchly proclaim that: “everything in them [minor texts] is political” (17). John Guillory has written about the creation of the canon as a function of the institutionalization of poetic form in *Cultural Capital*; Terry Eagleton’s *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* argues that the aesthetic’s revisionist impulse serves to de-politicize the ideological.

⁹ In *The Program Era*, Mark McGurl asks, “What is the proper scale of literary analysis?” (400) His answer: “There is... no one proper scale of analysis. It’s a fairly basic point, but one worth underlining: not only do different perspectives yield different appearances of truth, but different scales of analysis can be differently insightful” (401). Why McGurl feels it necessary to highlight this fairly obvious point is because, so far, “literary scholars have been so blind to the question of scale,” the reason being that the “commitment to one scale of analysis over another on the part of any given literary critic is usually intense enough that the question of scale as such never arises” (400).

matter, frame, angle, or dimension)?¹⁰ The first question is slightly misleading, because scale in this chapter is less a “what” than a “how” – a method of analysis which will emerge through my case studies. In answer to the second question: insofar as it is concerned with spread and duration, scale is linked to size, and because it works as a sort of perceptual sieve for analysis,¹¹ scale is tied to level. What makes scale a higher-order concept than size or level and enables it to be such a useful unit of analysis, however, is that scale is not only concerned with units of measurement and degrees of specificity, but also parses and modulates the relationship between the measurement and abstraction of space and time, and connects it to human activity in a dynamic yet systematic way, enabling us to see connections between our measurement of space (or space as a collectively perceived and objectifiable phenomenon) our experience of space (or our less easily externalized or vocalized sense of space and spatial relations) and how these notions of space could be brought to bear on an understanding of form.¹²

In this chapter, I theorize the use of scale in a research context, seeing scale in its most general form as a sort of organizing principle that not only generates and mediates its object (as we will see with Moretti’s approach to literary history, where form is literally visualized through the aggregation of forces that work at a certain scale), but that is also generated by its object (as we will see in my discussion of the it-narrative). Scale, then, isn’t exactly a principle so much as an approach to seeing and knowing that assumes that the processes of organization, generation, and mediation are materially constrained, historically dependent, and potentially nested, and

¹⁰ The stakes in answering this question are not as high as one might think; defining scale as a term is less important to me than being able to theorize the scalar as a useful analytic concept. It could very well be argued that level, dimension, or angle would be a better term to use than the “scale.” My choice of “scale” is informed by its prominence in geography, where the term is deeply rooted in spatial demarcation of ranges of human activity (Jonas).

¹¹ I hesitate to conflate the analytic with the “subjective.” I prefer to look at analysis as a mix of institutional and phenomenological limits and contingencies.

¹² “It is constructive to view the relationship between the different scales as nested rather than hierarchical, and simultaneous rather than discontinuous” (Jonas 261). It is constructive because scale is as much about the relationships between levels as about the levels themselves.

furthermore, tries to figure out how those processes are nested and why they are nested in that way. The sections that follow attempt to flesh out this notion of scale through a series of case studies, which offer me the opportunity to experiment with ways of conceiving of and using scale. I will look at scale on two fronts – (1) critically, to explore the use of the it-narrative's use of scalar comparisons and (2) meta-critically, to look at other critics' implicit or explicit use of scale.

In the former, I will use it-narratives as a sort of training ground to examine how a consciousness of scale might enliven the formal analyses of minor genres. My choice of the it-narrative as a representative of minor genres is informed by its critical marginality (and the way in which critics have recently tried to bring the it-narrative in from the margins), its formal ineptitude (i.e. its inability as a genre to fulfill the requirements for rigorous formal analysis, because its form fails to signify in an interesting and coherent way), and the way in which its form seems to manifest the problem of scale in its eighteenth-century context. What I will try to demonstrate in my reading of the it-narrative is that it is a genre centrally concerned with the epistemology of scale, and how scale can be used epistemologically, in order to understand the different scales at which human life can be observed.

The meta-critical sections on scale build on my scalar reading of it-narratives by expanding the scope of the epistemological work that a scalar reading might perform. If my scalar reading of it-narratives helps us understand the workings of literary form, then my theorization of the scalar workings of meta-criticism helps us understand the workings of literary criticism and literary history in light of a scalar understanding of form. I will look at how a scalar understanding of literary criticism – in particular, the processes of scale-jumping and scale-manipulation – can help us clarify, if not resolve, critical impasses and constraints that arise in

the act of analysis. My aim in doing this is to provide insight into scale's usefulness as a methodological tool, a tool that is capable of parsing and modulating orders of analysis and experience that manifest literary objects.

In the case of the it-narrative, I argue that the tension between the cultural-critical valuation and negative formal evaluation of the it-narrative is generated by the different ways each critical approach "syncs up" text with context, with the former being dependent on the process of gigantizing and latter on the act of miniaturizing. My second case study, which focuses on the debate between Franco Moretti and Katie Trumpener about the merits of close reading versus quantitative/computational criticism, extrapolates my arguments about scale's usefulness into a wider domain of methodological and critical thought by arguing that the distinction made in this debate between the qualitative and the quantitative are different in (scalar) degree, rather than in kind.

2.2 Scale and It-Narratives

Both the recent flourishing of it-narrative criticism within a model of cultural studies and the it-narrative's marginal contribution to formal analysis seem characteristic of critical approaches to minor genres. The primary scale at which critics analyze the it-narrative is that of genre – in many cases a result, I intuit, of the texts themselves not being very rewarding to study. However, in the analyses of the it-narrative, genre becomes synonymous with a literary feature i.e. narration-by-an-object, and tends to be discussed as a defining characteristic of it-lit. By conflating feature with genre in practice, it-crit collapses the socio-formal complexity of genre¹³

¹³ Genre, as I define it, is a combination of structure and content, and response/recognition that sits midway in time between form and experience, and midway in space between the individual and the collective. Form is the collectivization and the ossification of the reading experience, so that experience is, through sheer repetition,

into a single defining feature (or set of defining features) – in other words, the scale at which a feature operates becomes the scale at which genre is defined. A similar process is enacted in Franco Moretti's study of detective novels, where the detective novel as a genre becomes defined purely by the presence or absence of clues (*Graphs* 67-92). Possible analytic constraints that arise when conflating a nebulous category, such as genre, with a clearly defined feature, such as clues or narration style are, first, that such formally consistent definitions tend to internally divide the object of study, splitting it into representative texts that exemplify the genre/function, and marginal texts judged according to their distance from the generic exemplar – a move that dilutes the sociological richness of genre criticism because the representative texts form their own more homogeneous group; second, that a stress on formal consistency comes with its own analytic cost, namely a limiting of the potential for unique interpretations of individual texts, because a text from a minor genre tends to be treated much like a minority; that is, it carries the burden of representing its group and is always considered in terms of its adherence or deviance from an implicit standard. I would suggest that these are concerns that a scalar reading is uniquely suited to grapple with. The question is not only, however, about the scale at which a subject like the it-narrative can be most productively broached, but also about how the relationship between the levels upon which the it-narrative is broached lead us to make certain conclusions about its nature as an object of study. For example, if we take genre as a category worth preserving, how can it be differentiated in practice from a set of defining features, and how can genre be related to defining features in a way that still respects the scales at which both

turned into rhythm, intuition – precipitated into a common sense and schema that in turn enables us to make sense of experience. Genre in this process is located in (1) the median point on the loop between experience becoming form, and form enabling experience to be understood as such (2) the structured yet flexible ambit that undergirds encounters between readers and texts (Bakhtin's spheres of action) and (3) the dynamic, continually evolving product of those encounters (Miller). Genre is, in Carolyn Miller's new rhetorical definition, comprised of, "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" – a dynamic conception, but one that helps us understand literary change in a more situational way.

categories operate? And how can an understanding of the dynamic between genre and feature be integrated into an analysis of the object, rather than compartmentalized as a separate problem?

The more we lean on techniques, features or formal patterns to explain a genre, the more it is that the uniqueness of individual texts resist those definitive patterns, and the more elaborating on and qualifying of those traits need to occur in order to support analysis; conversely, an extended analysis of *Memoirs and Adventures of an Embroidered Waistcoat* could be done, but one would be sorely pressed to make it into an interesting or worthwhile endeavor. As mentioned before, the solutions to these problems is something to be worked out on a case-by-case basis. This section, which focuses solely on it-narratives, starts to answer some of these questions through an investigation of the function and functioning of the it-narrative's defining feature: narration-by-an-object.

In terms of their fascination with relative size, it-narratives borrow from a tradition of picaresque and fantastic tales as represented by Swift and Rabelais. Formally and historically speaking, we can see the it-narrative as also related to the slightly scandalous, somewhat moralistic, episodic miscellanies of Addison, Steele, and Haywood, as well as the disjointed faux-travel narratives of Oliver Goldsmith and Montesquieu. However, unlike the tales of Swift and Rabelais, it-narratives do not use the human body as a yardstick for size, but the object's; and unlike the stories of Addison and Haywood, the narrator does not have a human's mobility, but instead relies on being moved. It-narratives are also distinct from texts such as *Citizen of the World* and *Persian Letters*. Whereas the narrator's naiveté is used in these stories as a defamiliarizing device to point out the ridiculousness, foibles, and hypocrisy of contemporary life, the narrating object, in contrast, speaks at the outset from a place of knowledge and skepticism. In the it-narrative, the scenes of confusion and misinterpretation that the foreign

narrator recounts are de-emphasized or omitted. In short, the knowledgeable, complacent, non-agency of the speaking object distinguishes it from other episodic narratives of the time by making the quality of the it-narrator's journey – its experience of movement and its acquisition of knowledge – different from that of a human's. Unlike the travel narrative or the picaresque, what is de-centred or de-familiarized in the it-narrative is not human culture and custom; nor is it even the ontology of the human (these objects speak in very human voices).¹⁴ What the it-narrative de-familiarizes and highlights are the different scales at which humans and human activity can be understood. The conflation of these scales and scalar processes leads to a vertiginous, thrumming mix of movement, agencies, and tones – of omniscience,¹⁵ powerlessness, pathos, and humour – that makes the it-narrative unique from other episodic genres that cast narrators with human bodies.

In it-narratives such as *Adventures of a Bank-Note* and *Tales of a Rupee*, the experience of the object as it travels through space is often described in vicarious detail. We witness the bank-note devolve into paroxysms of pleasure upon finding itself nestled snug between a woman's "snowy mountains" (51-2 – Vol. 2), before experiencing a sobering confinement in the sixth layer of tights next to a Dutchman's sweaty thigh (134), or the corkscrew, who is constantly being dropped into pockets and left on tables, or the atom, whose arduous journey to the writer's pineal gland necessitates a detour through a toenail and an anus. On the level of the everyday, Susan Stewart posits the body to be our "primary mode for perceiving scale" (132) – with our understanding of size and our relation to our environment being mediated by the amount of space

¹⁴ Although it-narratives require the reader to substitute the human body for an object's body, whether intentionally or due to a deficiency in imagination and/or skill, the voice of the narrating object is never quite convincing as the voice of an object. This juxtaposition between the almost omniscient voice of the object and its inert body could be seen as another incongruity between levels of knowing and being, brought on by the experience of changes in epistemology and ontology whose intellectual import was still sinking in.

¹⁵ Omniscient as in all-knowing, rather than all-powerful (omnipotent), or even all-wise (omnisapient).

we take up, as well as the duration and manner in which our matter inhabits that space. It-narratives, however, throw the body-as-a-yardstick operating rule into relief by routing the self's experience of itself through an object's physicality and potential for movement. What happens to our use of the body as a reference point for our experience of the physical world when we read ourselves narrated through the eyes of a usually small, disposable object?

These brief moments, scattered periodically throughout the object's lengthy recounting of human affairs, generally comprise very little of the overall narrative and never seriously delimit the object's ability to narrate the story. Nevertheless, I would argue that these small, constant reminders subtly and systematically decenter the reader's experience of the body – in these descriptions, the body is gigantized and rendered into a hulking landscape of truncated hands, breasts, thighs, and deep pockets. As with the accounts of Gulliver and Pantagruel, the enveloping aspect of the body is more often than not played for laughs; there is also a sense conveyed of the awkward monstrosity of the human – a hyper-awareness of the human's fleshy occupation of space and the ramifications of his or her movement – an intense focus built into the genre itself of the ripples of harm (or pleasure!) that casual motion may inflict on an inert, helpless pin or silver penny. God-like, the human body relative to the “it” is gigantic, filling the world and moving the world – humorous precisely because of its exaggerated agency and its lumbering thoughtlessness.¹⁶ From the object's vantage point, there is a sort of omniscient glee that comes with being a sentient cork-screw, guinea, slipper, shoe, watch, pin or bank-note, because while stories *happen* on the scale of the human, stories are *overheard* and *told* on the

¹⁶ According to Liz Bellamy's bibliography of the it-narrative, from 1730-1800, of the sixty-three volumes counted, ten or eleven fit into the “unportable” category (depending on whether you consider a pony portable.) (134-44) Other than *Memoirs of Dick, the Little Poney*, all the other objects are concerned with transporting or supporting people i.e. hackney coach, settee, sofa. So, I'd say that vehicles are the exception to the rule – in a story such as *Tales of a Stage Coach* the pretense of a coach narrating is at times dropped wholesale – rather than trying to account for it, I see it as something to be investigated separately.

scale of the object.¹⁷ This feeds into a sense these novels convey: that being of a human size is not enough to know, or even fully experience. In the it-narrative, what is highlighted is not only the size and power of the human body, but the possibility that such size and power engenders a state of clumsy inattention, causing the body to miss the knowledge and spectacle of itself, which must be supplemented by the small object.

If the narrating object's empirical size destabilizes the normalcy of the body by enlarging the body, dividing it into parts, and over-endowing it with agency and range of motion (as in *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel*), unlike other fantastic tales, the object's wide circulation defamiliarizes the scale at which people live by placing human actions within a larger circuit of operation. The view of humanity offered by these objects is one of human agency complicated by compulsion. It betrays an endless recursiveness to human behavior: the heavily conventional parade of human virtues and weaknesses on display in the tale of the fallen woman, the gallant, the loveless marriage, the moneylending Jew, the gamester, the hypocritical holy man, the hack writer, the kindly poor, etc., show people moving in the same circles and exhibiting the same behavior, much like hamsters on a wheel. Characters such as the impoverished writer in *Tales of a Bank-Note*, who moves in circles between his home, publisher, and grocer, or the suicidal narrator of *The Golden Spy*, whose life consists of lonely treks between his home and the bar, exemplify the typicality of these characters and the limited circles in which they move. The gallant divides his life between seducing weak-willed women in masques and making rounds to his mistress' house (as gallants do) while innocent girls wait in their houses to be courted by handsome, smooth-talking, no-good scoundrels bent on seducing them for their inheritance.

¹⁷ Here I use the term "scale" instead of "point of view" because I'm denoting more a class of objects and their movements more than a specific vantage point.

The satirical mode generally assumed by the it-narrative divests human life of its nuance, not only for the ostensible purpose of social reform, but also because, in doing so, it is able to evoke a sense of the ceaselessly moving, yet highly circumscribed motions that make up the scale at which life is lived. Here, the it-narrative's account of scale moves beyond the terms of relative size to comprehend scale as levels of activity. These behaviors, which caricature the movement of a human life lived, are scales of operation created by varying combinations of volition, need, structure, and chance. The familiar, well-worn path of each of character provides a sort of piecemeal map of society, one achieved through tracing the "desire lines"¹⁸ that emerge under an increasingly variegated class structure and cosmopolitan society. The effect of stringing these ongoing narratives and cycles of movement together, I think, is that it gives readers a sort of split-screen view of human society. From the parts emerge a more synchronized sense of the whole, and this sense of the whole is refracted through the small, non-agential object and its passive relation to the human body.

Size and range of motion may give the narrating object a one-up on its human owner when it comes to apprehending scale, but it also results in a complicated play of agencies, where a subject's agency is dependent on the scale you look at it. In it-narratives, both humans and things embody qualities that prove beneficial or detrimental depending on the scale at which they appear. As a result of its portability and lack of bodily animation – its suspension of control over its own body's movement – the object is able to both access and make visible scales otherwise inaccessible to or overlooked by human experience: the wide panorama of society (as evidenced

¹⁸ Desire lines, a term I borrow from urban planning, are "straight lines that connect... the centroids of the zones households lived in with the centroids of the zones that they travel... to" (n.pg.). They are paths frequented by pedestrians that urban planners have not created – for example, cutting through the field to get home rather than walking on the sidewalk. I use desire lines here to loosely describe the paths one takes in everyday life – I find the term to be a useful way of looking at how and why the body is propelled through space, for we must account for "the multiple ways in which origins, destinations, and hence desire lines are produced and circumscribed by a variety of forces, overt and hegemonic" (n.pg.).

by the typicality of characters' movements) and the minutiae of everyday human activity and existence (down to private conversations and private parts). At the same time, a comprehensive vision of these scales are juggled against the omnipresent threat of being lost, broken, stepped on, or forgotten about. Although each episode can be viewed at a scale unto itself, the stories are rarely resolved before the object moves on, presumably continuing after the object has left the owner's hands.

In the it-narrative, the scale of the empirically-small-thing and the scale of the large-circulating-thing-subject-to-social-forces are where events can be pulled apart and put together, but the middle scale, that of the body, is where things happen, or where agency is manifest – the narrating object is able to access scales of life inaccessible to the person not in spite of, but *because* it is unable to do what the person can do. Similarly, people can only act in the way they do – to effect change in the way they do, and to provide fodder for laughs in the way they do – because they are unaware of the object's "secret" life. The it-narrative is a genre centrally concerned with using the problem of scalar disjunction (or how things that fit and don't fit together).

Although it may be a stretch to see the narrating objects of the it-narrative as offering their readers a unique and nuanced insight into the internal life of a thing, by virtue of being narrated by an object, these stories at a very basic level make palatable, simultaneous, and apprehensible for the reader the coexistence of some of the different scales at which human life operates. The it-narrative's bringing together of the large- and small-scale results in the uneven reading experience remarked upon by its critics in terms that by turns hint at or explicitly point out its formal ineptitude. This messiness of form and lack of thematic focus can be seen, though, to be one index of a form that was experimenting with the scale at which it best operated, and

how the scale at which it best operated might fit with the scale of social life (literature's relation to experience). This co-existence and supplementation of scales is what I see to be primarily responsible for what Bellamy refers to as the genre's "distinctive vision." My take on the "distinctive vision" offered by the it-narrative, however, differs from Bellamy's in that I see the vision as less a portrait of an "atomized and fragmented society, full of diverse individuals" (124) than a vision predicated on how humans, objects, and the paths they move in fit together in the same space. The it-narrative, I think, was an experiment in questioning what man-as-the-empirical-measure meant in a world where the standard of the human body needed to somehow sync itself with an overwhelming sense of the large (the system) and the furtive movement of the small (the object) to achieve some sort of homeostasis.¹⁹

To be clear, it is not the psychically debilitating aspect of this asynchronicity that I am interested in, but how our intellectual knowledge that the world is in a constant state of change co-ordinates itself with the sense that life, as always, goes on. For in non-catastrophic times, the predictable life-work-play paths of human life continue on, as we see in the stereotypicality of each episode. But in the it-narrative, it is a predictability slightly torqued by the object's provenance, for the circumstances surrounding the object and its circulation gesture outwards towards the mundane, yet inexorable forces of the political, economic, sexual, and philosophical that guide thought and action.

¹⁹ My argument riffs on Celeste Langan's approach to the modification of the body-as-standard; Langan argues from a material perspective – that technological advances and the restructuring of the circulation of capital that was a hallmark of modernity changed our conception of the body as a standard for movement and mobility. My thesis focuses less on material conditions than on the juncture between material and historical consciousness.

2.3 Scale Manipulation and It-Crit

Criticism on the it-narrative in the last few years has bloomed, with scholars connecting it-narratives to the rise of capitalism and market economies, to changing conceptions of property, and separately but relatedly, to the increased circulation of books in the book trade.²⁰ In *The Secret Lives of Things*, one of the most prominent works in the field of it-narrative criticism, Mark Blackwell describes his edited volume of essays as broadly united by their interest in how it-narratives help scholars understand the boundaries between object and person in an increasingly commodified eighteenth-century culture (Blackwell, Flint, Ellis, Kibbie, Bellamy). Chapters deal with the it-narrative's relation to hack writing (Blackwell) and hack writers (Flint); its relation to the emergence of humanistic discourse fueled by the slave trade (Ellis), prostitution (Blackwell), and anti-Semitism (Kibbie); and its canny representation and subversion of "the economic system and commercial values" of eighteenth-century culture (Bellamy). Blackwell's volume can be loosely described as an effort to generate critical interest in the it-narrative by arguing for its salience from a cultural studies perspective. By placing larger frames around the it-narrative in order to register its intervention in culture, critics make the it-narrative's inconsequentiality a thing of consequence, its low stakes into high stakes, and its technical ineptitude and aesthetic incoherence symptomatic and critical of larger cultural shifts.

While the strength of the essays in Blackwell's volume generally lies in the urgency with which they argue for the cultural salience of it-lit, the essays put less work into arguing for the formal study of it-narratives – a result, likely, of the narratives' lack of formal complexity and ingenuity. In other words, due to the it-narratives' paucity of formal richness, whether it be understood as the texts' lack of ambiguity, their unartful plot construction, their banal,

²⁰ See Festa, Park, Miruna Stanica.

conventional use of language, or their ossified tropes and plots, criticism of a minor genre such as the it-narrative is unable to sustain the rigors of traditional formalist readings that emphasize virtuosity, originality, and the affective intensity of the reading response (Jameson).

We can see Blackwell's claim that it-narratives comprise "one of the richest records of things' growing importance... in eighteenth-century Britain," (10) then, as voiced in opposition to the perception of a formal-critical tradition, seen as descending from the classicizing impulses of Pope and Arnold, that, in its emphasis on concepts of "decorum, propriety, unity, and the mixture of *dulce* and *utile*," (Prince 455) has lacked the critical apparatus to sophisticatedly deal with minor literary genres. In "Mauvais Genre," Michael Prince explains the vexed status of modern genre criticism (i.e. its tendency to either play a prescriptive, hermetically literary role or be used as a tool for rhetorical analysis) by sketching out the history from which genre theory emerged. Genre criticism he argues, operates at the crossroads between a belief in the neo-classicizing impulses of the Enlightenment that made "Criticism ... quite naturally, the criticism of forms" and "modern factors that weakened the authority of classical models" such as the rise in literary experimentation, the proliferation of printed forms, the rise of print culture and the rise of the reading middle class (Prince 455). The simultaneous emphasis on neo-classical principles of form and their undermining by more egalitarian shifts within literary culture leaves genre criticism eager, but ill-equipped to deal with minor forms that do not adhere to neo-classical tenets. Although Blackwell never openly repudiates formalist criticism (indeed, some of the essays in his volume engage themselves deeply with formal concerns), he seems to attribute the paucity of it-crit to twentieth-century critics' overemphasis on form, which to his mind comes at the neglect of important cultural and historical knowledge:

Despite the evident popularity of it-fictions in the second half of the eighteenth century and their continuing importance in the nineteenth century ... [it-narratives have] dropped from even the most eccentric list of the period's canonical works... most twentieth-century considerations of novels like *Chrysal* have been confined to editorial introductions and to the sweeping and encyclopedic critical surveys more commonly written before 1950. [In 1948] George Sherburn connected it-narratives with other satirical novels 'hark[ing] back to the picaresque pattern,' though 'instead of a human adventurer' he noted, 'they... frequently substitute some unhuman piece of currency.' Some years earlier, Ernest Baker had... dismissed works like *Chrysal* by proclaiming their literary interest 'insignificant'" (11).

Blackwell cites the reductive judgments of Sherburn (it-narratives are simply the picaresque in another key) and Baker (it-narratives aren't worthy of "literary" interest) not only to characterize dismissive formalist attitudes toward the it-narrative, but to subtly criticize a type of thinking that cannot give analytic space to texts that cannot sustain a purely literary interest. By aligning "popularity" and "importance" against "canonical works" and "literary interest," Blackwell sets the cultural-critical in opposition to the formal.

The reductive judgments of the it-narrative that provoke Blackwell can be traced back to the genre's earliest commentators, who espoused the tenets of "decorum, propriety, and unity"

that were hallmarks of neo-classicism in this dismissal of the “it” of the it-narrative as a gimmick and as ineptly-packaged miscellany.²¹

This subject might have been sufficient to furnish an agreeable entertainment in one essay; but it is insupportably tedious, by being spun out into a book of this size. Not the adventures of the coat, but of the persons who wore it, make up the greatest part of the performance; and those adventures could have been more artificially connected by several other expedients. There are several unsuccessful attempts in our language of stringing a parcel of adventures together, by the feeble dies of an ill-designed personification. (*Critical Review* 499)

Only a few decades before, the episodic satires of Haywood, Addison, and Steele, the picaresque adventures of Cervantes, Fielding, and Defoe, and the travel narratives of Goldsmith and Montesquieu had been considered, if not high literature, then at least culturally influential. By 1760, though, this review of *Adventures of a Black Coat* shows an impatience, perhaps even a fatigue, with the reading experience offered by episodic narratives. The sheer length of *Adventures of a Black Coat*, combined with its loose, episodic form and its transparent, ineffectual attempts at creating narrative coherence quickly make the narrative “insupportably tedious” for the anonymous reviewer. The reviewer dismisses the it-narrative’s defining formal trait as just that – only form – nothing more than a flimsy narrative device used to impose an illusion of unity on a fragmentary and episodic narrative. In a way that would be fatal for the future of the it-narrative as a genre, the form used by the it-narrative had ossified to the point where it could be easily discerned from the it-narrative’s content, and therefore more amenable

²¹ Christina Lupton riffs productively on this criticism in her description of the it-narrative as a genre that thematizes what it might mean for literature to be aware of its own materiality without being able to transcend the conditions of its own being – basically, knowing what it is, but also knowing that it is what it is.

to totalizing knowledge.

While contemporary critics mocked the “ill design” of the use of the narrating object as a device, modern critics instead argue for the significance of such ill design, as in the case of Liz Bellamy: “The combination of the absence of closure and the often hectic accumulation of very diverse and unresolved interpolated narratives... should not be seen as texts that tried and failed to achieve... coherence... They are aiming for a different, more diffuse, form which is crucial in the construction of their distinctive vision of the social system” (124).

These two approaches to the it-narrative – the formal and the cultural-critical – not only offer different ways of evaluating or valuing the it-narrative’s form; when viewed in terms of scale, they also present divergent models within which to conceive the work (or lack thereof) of that form, and the kind of knowledge it can offer. Observing these two models with scale in mind could provide us with a more process-oriented understanding of how these models come to produce the valuations and evaluations they do. The first model judges the the it-narrative as a microcosm, hermetic and functioning unto itself, while the second sees the text as always working within a series of larger cultural frames, functioning to register, distort, remediate, and disseminate broader aspects of human life and activity. It-narratives fail in one viewpoint because the seams of the text show through; in the other view, those seams become valued for their cultural and historical import.²²

In the case of microcosmic thinking, the displacements and maneuvers that allow an object (in this case, the it-narrative) to be comprehended as a functioning whole, are, Susan

²² At this point, my definition of culture would be anything that happens outside of the text. Of course, if we read Derrida’s *Truth in Painting* and his discussion of parergon – how the frame, supposed to separate the object from its context, instead draws attention to their permeability and ontological instability – it becomes easy to deconstruct my argument. Basically, I draw this simple distinction because scale needs simple boundaries to work; my focus is not on the complexity of the boundaries, but the complexity that arises from what happens between these boundaries.

Stewart points out, “a matter of the establishment of correspondences between seemingly disparate phenomena in order to demonstrate [that] all phenomena are miniaturizations of the essential features of the universe” (128). Rather than being mimetic, microcosmic thinking is defined more accurately as telescopic – microcosmic thinking reflects the world, but on a smaller scale, shrinking the world to the contours of the text in service of understanding the text.²³

Conversely, a “gigantizing” argument such as Bellamy’s, which emphasizes the it-narrative’s cultural salience, expands the text to cover a part of the world (or in the case of a genre such as the epic, the world itself), making the text’s identity responsive to, continuous with, and perhaps even determined by the context it is webbed into. Microcosmic thinking attends to a text’s aesthetic coherence, and achieves that coherence through positing a relation between text and world that emphasizes similarity; gigantizing thought, on the other hand, emphasizes a text’s relevance and importance, treating the text as a part of the world from which lines of influence, rather than points of similarity must be discerned.²⁴

Although miniaturization and expansion are acts of synchronization, they are distinct processes that cause distortions of different kinds. Making the world small is an act of condensation that results in a text charged with significance and available for close reading, but also, in giving us the ability to apprehend the text as whole and representative, it makes the world and the text more available to being critically mastered, because “what is, in fact, lost in

²³ Denise Gigante’s work on vitalist conception of form, or “epigenesist poetics” is a modern example of microcosmic thinking. Gigante’s interest is in recovering form from the heterogeneity and fragmentation imposed on it by sociological and ideological analysis (40) – to see form as unified and animated by the principles of power and life, “self-generating and self-maintaining” (5).

²⁴ An important basic question that arises from my analysis is, ‘In what way is a literary text smaller than a culture?’ The simple answer takes human perception as its starting point: texts are “smaller” because they are more spatially and temporally delimited to us – texts deal with certain events and spaces and not others, are able to be read in a certain period of time, and are made out of words, whose definitions may change, but which do not themselves change. At the risk of gross oversimplification (as well as sounding coldhearted) culture is ‘bigger’ and less able to be cognized as a whole because more people and things go into making it work – there are more variables.

this idealized miniaturization... [is] the danger of power,” for “the diminutive is a term of manipulation and control...” (124). In contrast, syncing a text with the expansiveness of culture puts it out of joint, for while “the miniature represents a mental world of proportion, control, and balance, the gigantic presents a physical world of disorder and disproportion” (Stewart 74). In other words, by enlarging the text, we know it only partially, for rather than setting it at a remove, we move through it, allowing it envelop us in its immediate, asynchronous detail.²⁵ This approach lends itself to readings of a different kind – the attempt to grapple with wholeness at a distance is succeeded by the effort to identify pervasiveness up close. One way to regain analytic perspective (i.e. distance) is to figure out our co-ordinates by mapping the text onto culture, such that we gain tangible points of connection to the “real,” but loosen our grip on explaining the whole of the text.

It is important, however, to view the text-as-microcosm and text-as-context approach to the it-narrative as not mutually exclusive, since in both cases, analysis is predicated on one’s ability to co-ordinate or synchronize different levels of human production or activity. In other words, it is not size that matters, but scale – scale does not only deal with the issue of whether something is big or small, but of the complexities that arise when systems of activity that operate at certain physical dimensions and with certain objects encounter systems that work within different parameters, spans, and sets of objects. In geographic terms, these systems of activity might be named the regional, national, and global; in ecological terms, niches, eco-systems, and environments; in sociological terms, family, institution, society; in formal-literary terms, feature, text, genre, form. Although these levels of activity presumably fit together, how they specifically correspond is a matter of negotiation on a case-by-case basis. For example, it would be tempting to entertain a nested understanding of scale in literature, where literary features fit into a text,

²⁵ “The grotesque body, as a form of the gigantic, is a body of parts” (Stewart 105).

texts comprise a genre, and genres fall under the umbrella of form. Turning the structure at a different angle, however, complicates the neatness of this nestedness: the smallness of technique gives it a portability that has its range exceed that of text, genre, and form; the practice of using texts as representative of genres blurs the two categories; the boundaries of genre and technique are smudged in their conflation with form, due to form being extremely hard to locate.²⁶

As the elegance of theory rubs up against the fuzziness of detail, it becomes clear that scale can be a viable tool only if the structuration it offers remains flexible and able to coordinate the different scales at which literary objects of study are made visible. In the scenario of it-crit, which pits a brand of formalism against an instance of cultural criticism, it seems that scale is more of a diagnostic tool than an *a priori* set of guidelines for research. Scale does not so much erase ambiguity as clarify its location. What my discussion highlights is not only the existence and interaction of scales, but the work scholars need to do before the scales can interact and fit together – the manipulation and torsions of the literary object that arise in the practice of jumping between scales within a discipline and across the scales of different disciplines, as well as the critical productivity that grows out of those torsions.

2.4 Scale: Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Applied to textual analysis, scalar reading offers a critical framework centred on relations of dimension and movement, rather than language and meaning, a framework that gives us an alternative way of closely attending to the internal dynamics of a text. Applied meta-critically as in the case of it-criticism, scale can be used to more systematically and more precisely understand form's intervention in our own critical attentions and impulses. Expanding the

²⁶ To take the rather narrow example of *The Secret Life of Things*, we witness it-narrative referred to as a genre, a subgenre, and a form.

applicability of scalar readings beyond the internal dynamics of genres, texts, and their attendant criticism, this section aims to further explore the potential of a scalar understanding to theorize form in a dynamic and relational way. By recasting in scalar terms the argument between Franco Moretti and Katie Trumpener on quantitative versus idiosyncratic literary practices in the study of literary history, the section tries to understand what literary history as a history of form might look like when viewed with an attention to scale. I do this in order to theorize some sort of common ground upon which discussion of these divergent methodologies can be broached.

The most lively and current discussion of scale's use in literature can be found in the methodological debate between proponents of close reading and proponents of the digital humanities. Those who support close reading as the go-to practice for criticism argue that it is an exercise of imagination, craft, and holistic knowledge that is integral to and emblematic of the humanistic pursuit of knowledge, whereas more empirically-minded digital humanists find in "distant reading" the conceptual clarity and groundedness that will "save" the humanities from both institutional and financial marginalization. One of the more high-profile and rhetorically provocative of these dialogues starts with Franco Moretti's opening salvo in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2004). In this study, Moretti calls for "A more rational literary history" (1) in the form of quantitative studies. The dialogue continues through to Moretti's and Katie Trumpener's exchange in *Critical Inquiry* (2009) – where Trumpener accuses Moretti of using qualitative study to evade the "real" roll-up-your-sleeves task of archival work.

What an analysis of this debate has the potential to do is open up my discussion of scale: while my study of it-narrative shows how scalar thinking can be specifically applied to literary criticism, as well as certain genres and/or historical contexts, what is at stake in this charged exchange is the larger, yet still related matter of the methods by which we study literary history.

What is more specifically at stake in the debate about what literary history should “look like” (i.e. the form it should take) are the separate, but interrelated concerns of what literary history consists of (its ontology), how that history can be known (its epistemology), and how that history is best studied (our praxis). The unstated concept that both Moretti and Trumpener’s argument hinges on, I will argue, is a connection between the construction of scale and the generation of forms.

The more “rational” literary history Franco Moretti proposes is a study of history conducted at a scale that can best observe sociologically-minded “groups and repetitions” rather than history conducted at a scale where one can appreciate the aesthetic exceptionality and uniqueness of “exactly *this* word and *this* sentence here” (4). In contrast to the intimate, deictic space of “this” and “here” associated with close reading, the method of “distant reading” (as coined by Moretti) is abstract where close reading is specific, systematically reproducible where close reading is unique, and which approaches distance as “not an obstacle, but *a specific form of knowledge*” (1). What distance offers literary history is clarity: “fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnections” (1). Like an optical illusion in which what you see depends on what you focus on, distant reading enables the literary historian to see more comprehensively at some scales at the expense of seeing in a less nuanced way at others.²⁷ One way to explicate the epistemology of Moretti’s argument is that it sees distance as re-shaping the nature of literary attention – it recalibrates the gaze to focus less on idiosyncratic particulars, and more on “Shapes, relations, structures. Forms. Models” (1). What distance does, in the right amount, with the right technology, and with suitable data, is make certain forms visible.

²⁷ “Pamela, The Monk, The Wild Irish Girl, Persuasion, Oliver Twist – where are they? Five tiny dots in the graph... indistinguishable from all others” (Moretti 8).

Moretti's intervention in the "rise of the novel" narrative provides a lesson in how scale can manifest "force" – not only for the purpose of helping us understand the nature of form, but also the shape of literary history. In his essay "Graphs," Moretti outlines three scales at which the history of the novel has been studied: event, cycle, and *longue durée*. The individual event, which occurs at a specific time and place, is concerned with detailing the exact conditions for why this or that happened. In other words, the event, as Moretti argues, is the province of the literary critic (one can think of the New Critical school). Theorists (such as Bakhtin and Propp), in contrast, feel most at home on the other end of the spectrum, in "the very long span of nearly unchanging structures," (14) where detail and specificity are eschewed, or homogenized in service of ahistorical or universalizing propositions. It turns out that the "middle level" of cycle is where Moretti's interest lies:

The short span is all flow and no structure, the *longue durée* all structure and no flow, and cycles are the – unstable – border country between them. Structures, because they introduce repetition in history, and hence, regularity, order, pattern; and temporary, because they're short (ten, twenty, fifty years, this depend on the theory.)

Now, 'temporary structures' is also a good definition for – genres: morphological arrangements that *last* in time, but always only for *some* time. Janus-like creatures, with one face turned to history and the other to form, genres are thus the true protagonists of this middle layer of literary history – this... layer where flow and form meet. (14)

The scale at which one considers an object, like form, does not just shine a light on an *a priori* aspect of form; scale's use can also be defined in terms of distances and durations that are

optimal for noticing and aggregating certain forces, forces which differ in their effect on the literary object depending on the scale at which they are observed. For example, to study the effect of economic forces on a single text would be very different than studying its effect on a genre, a form, or a feature. If we agree with Moretti's enigmatic proposition of form as force (56) or form as a sort of negative space, made visible only by the forces that act on it, then form also becomes an artifact, or an index of history. In the previous two sections, I have been discussing the idea of scale as a fluid structure, but in this instance, scale is also dynamic in the most literal sense because it seems to be as much about movement (force) as magnitude (size). Moretti offers us a way of understanding scale as an analytic category comprised of, and thus sensitized to, degrees and combinations of movement and magnitude. While "the event," (or in our case, the text,) is spatially significant and temporally dynamic on a small scale, when fitted into a larger scale it registers as a synchronic "dot" on the flow chart of history, existing too briefly to be understood in terms of form. Conversely, "the novel" as a form is easily intuited across a large scale of minimally changing structures, but when one attempts to identify it in the historical moment, one is overwhelmed by the multiplicity of possibilities and genealogies that could be sketched.

The scale at which texts and form can meet, Moretti argues, is the middle scale of the cycle – also the scale at which Moretti claims literary history can be best studied. Cycles, as Moretti explains, work with "temporary structures," one of which is the "Janus-like creature" of genre (a category that serves as sort of midway point of its own). In this middle layer of delimited time, which takes genre as its building-block, form exists not as an overarching arc, but is instead composed of multiple generic shifts. It is only at the middle scale that certain relationships between genres (which are collectively visualized as a cycle), and between genre

and history (understood as form) can be comprehended. In this middle layer we can witness the chaos of genres competing – emerging, supplanting, and disappearing – in a cyclical pattern. Generic shifts sometimes occur for local, highly contingent reasons, or are a result of widespread societal rupture. But as Moretti discovers, the fate of a genre, and with it, the shape of literary history, is most typically tied to the ebb and flow of generational succession. By the end of “Graphs,” Moretti comes to the conclusion that “the history of the novel,” which is often seen as a linear arc sketching the novel’s emergence, rise, and decline, should instead be understood (or, I think, could on one scale be understood) as a field of competing subgenres that interact to create the wave-like historical trajectory of “the novel” as a form.

2.4.1 Idiosyncratic Reading

By viewing Moretti’s method in scalar terms, we gain an appreciation of how scalar thinking undergirds his argument, and how an understanding of scale can help us organize the aggregate forces that carve out the forms of literary history. Recasting existing criticism and critical assumptions in scalar terms can also provide a common ground to help us compare and contrast the workings of different methodologies. Trumpener’s “Paratext and Genre System: A Response to Franco Moretti” forms a direct reply to Franco Moretti’s “Style, Inc. Reflections on Seven Thousand Titles (British Novels, 1740–1850),” an article in which Moretti notes large-scale changes in novel titles between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g. they got shorter; they used more proper names) and argues for their sociological import. We can understand Katie Trumpener’s reply to Moretti as opening up discussion about these same concerns about method: what is the relationship between form and method? What limitations can method best theorize and what limitations should it concede to in its own disciplinary practice?

What should the play between limits look like? What forces should we consider to be the most influential to literary history?

By the end of her reply, it becomes clear that Trumpener's concern is not solely with Moretti's article; her larger argument is marshaled against Moretti's quantitative brand of literary study – a mix of computational methods, statistical sensibilities, and Moretti's own "exegetical verve." My interest in Trumpener's critique is not in the challenge that it poses to statistical computational analysis, but in its commentary on the importance of literary methodologies. Trumpener's reply poses implicit questions to my project, questions that provoke me to clarify some of scale's finer distinctions. To briefly summarize Trumpener's objections:

(1) We have little need for Moretti's type of macroanalysis because more established methods of study such as comparison, anecdote, browsing, and book history can make visible the same problems and dynamics as macroanalysis does: "Macroanalysis can certainly yield interesting observations and speculations. Yet the questions Moretti arrives at through statistics, I would argue, can be derived equally from comparing literary systems" (169).

(2) Moretti's "relatively blunt" use of data processing and statistical hermeneutics is separate from (and Trumpener will argue elsewhere, perhaps even antithetical to)²⁸ broad knowledge, historical sense, incisiveness, the aleatory, and the craft of reading: "But the answer can't lie simply in data processing and in what Moretti has previously dubbed 'distant reading' ... For as he [Moretti] himself demonstrates, any attempt to see the big picture needs to be informed by broad knowledge, an astute, historicized sense of how genres and literary institutions work, incisive interpretive tools. And an appreciation of the aleatory" (170-1).

²⁸ In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Katie Trumpener "considers [Moretti] a deservedly influential original thinker. But what happens when his 'dullard' descendants take up 'distant reading' for their research? 'If the whole field did that, that would be a disaster,' she says, one that could yield a slew of insignificant numbers with 'jumped-up claims about what they mean'" (*Chronicle* May 28, 2010).

(3) Scale can and should be reconceptualized by reading *more*, instead of reading *distantly*: “We can change our parameters and our questions simply by reading more:²⁹ more widely, more deeply, more eclectically, more comparatively. Browsing in addition to quantification;³⁰ *incessant rather than distant reading*: the unsystematic nature of our discipline is actually its salvation” (my own italics 171).

For me, the question this debate raises is not only, “How does method matter?” But more specifically, “Can a scalar reading of this debate help me reconceptualize or clarify what is at stake in debates over method?” As it stands, Trumpener finds quantitative analyses in the vein of Moretti’s are both mundane and threatening. On the one hand, Trumpener argues that we don’t necessarily need statistical analysis because comparative, idiosyncratic analyses are capable of generating the same sets of research questions as their statistic-driven counterparts; on the other hand, Trumpener appears to cast statistical analyses and systematic methods of study as the opposite of the discipline’s “salvation.” It seems to be the case that either method does not matter, since different methods can yield the same results, or that method does matter, and issues of methodology (how we study something) pose serious question to the disciplinarity of literary studies (what we are studying).

Accounting for both of these positions in light of an understanding of scale might provide us with a fuller understanding of scale, as well as a sense of how method matters. The idea that method is of marginal importance obviously runs counter to my beliefs, as my thesis so far has

²⁹ Moretti’s point in Chapter 3 of *Atlas of the European Novel*, on narrative markets, argues precisely the opposite – that *more* changes the field by the virtue of being more. His compelling example is book-historical in nature – through his study of book collections, he finds that larger book collections are more diverse (have books of different kinds/genres) while smaller book collections only carry the canonical works. Intuitive as this might be, his point is that the constitution of the literary field changes depending on its size.

³⁰ “It will be good for all of us if some of us keep counting. New forms of bibliography and publishing history can indeed help demarcate the material and social conditions within which literature arises, circulates, and changes” (170-1). Although Trumpener seems to concede that quantification has its uses, with the caveat that it must be supplemented, Trumpener means “quantification” in the sense of “reading more,” rather than of “processing literature by the ton.”

been spent arguing that it matters – that, in fact, an awareness of scale can help us to see the vital role method plays in manifesting its object of study. I would like to recast Trumpener’s comment in terms of scale – as gesturing toward a difference between research scales on the one hand, and material scales on the other – and suggest that scale can serve as a higher-order concept that can both reconcile the polarity of this debate and clarify points of impasse between the two methods. Roughly described, the difference between these two scales is that material scales are “real” scales, or “a set of processes [that] *a priori* operate at that scale,” (Jonas 260)³¹ while research scales are artificial constructs, created expressly for the purpose of providing “a manageable base for investigating tensions and interactions between material scales” (Jonas 260).³²

In arguing that divergent methods can yield the same results, a divide between the ontological and the epistemological is set up; Trumpener sees the correspondence between material and research scales as loose – the former exists independent of the latter, and the purpose of the latter is to uncover pre-existing aspects of the former. In contrast, my reading of scale’s role in Moretti’s formal account of literary history blends epistemology and ontology to a high degree. This is to say that the distinction between the research and the real, while useful, is not hard and fast. As such, I would argue that the most productive methodological thinking occurs not in the act of defining scales (as Moretti does with his clear, elegant formulations and as Trumpener does with her learned objections), but in our negotiation of the space and relations between scales – that figuring out the degree of interaction between analysis and processes that operate largely independent of that analysis is “the sort of creative tension that drives theory forwards” (Jonas 260).

Put in a way that is more in sync with this the rest of chapter’s concerns, to theorize the

³¹ In a political sense, think levels of government; in a book history sense, perhaps degree of circulation.

³² Think the different configurations of political analysis, or the imaginative import drawn from the comparison of book circulation figures and title pages.

relations between the scales of the “research” and the “real” is to clarify and contextualize the noise or ambiguity that arises when one way of apprehending and problem-solving is forced to share the same space, whether historical or literal, with another way of seeing things and working things out. And these are also the common, less polemical, less exciting terms upon which the difference between Moretti and Trumpener can be expressed – not as “new” versus “old,” “rational” versus “impressionistic,” “thoughtful, humanistic readers” versus “number-crunching grunts and dullards,” or even “systematic” versus “idiosyncratic,” but as two approaches at times convergent and at times divergent in their understanding of the rapport between the analytic and the real. It is not my intention, however, to use scale to elide the variety of epistemic stances and particular pleasures that arise from the adoption of different methods of analysis. By using a scalar framework to reframe the debate between Trumpener and Moretti, I have tried to show how scale can be an organizing concept that mediates the seemingly irreconcilable differences between methodologies, allowing them to co-exist and converse within the same disciplinary boundaries. More importantly, however, I have tried to demonstrate that scale’s importance to the study of literary history lies in its ability to help us theorize the underlying epistemological processes that participate in the creation of that history – indeed, to more clearly understand how literary history can not only be understood as a history of forms, but as a form in itself.

3 Ecological Attention

3.1 Ecology and Attention

Although “ecological attention” may be an oxymoron – with “ecological” indicating an environment that operates independent of individual consciousness and motivation, and “attention” denoting a person’s highly intentional, object-directed relation to his or her environment – these two words, juxtaposed, frame the critical spaces and relations I will try to describe in this chapter. The theoretical tension present in the term allows it to account for two directions of force: first, the critical possibilities that result from an increased attention to our psychic environment(s), and second, the relational possibilities that emerge from the environment acting on our faculties of attention. In practice, ecological attention should be understood as less a concept than a critical faculty that brings an individual into a transference, potentially transformative relationship with his or her environment – in this case, to his or her own critical landscape. This chapter seeks to understand how fine-tuning our faculties of attention can help us establish sustainable relationships to our literary environments – relationships that can make room for ecology (emphasis on others) as well as subjectivity (emphasis on the individual), and observation as well as action, because the relationships are object-directed and presaged less on knowing, having, and doing, and more on an attentiveness to and acceptance of what we minimally know, cannot own, and perhaps know that we are able to do, but feel that we shouldn’t.

My interest in the term ecological does not rest in its relationship to the natural environment, but uses “environment” to refer to spaces, whether real or imaginary, that are comprised by and that grow relations between persons and objects. The value that “ecological” brings to our discussion of attention is the concept of sustainability. Rather than being an

absolute value, the importance of sustainability lies in its potential to re-orient the individual. Inhabiting a mindfulness about sustainability necessitates a re-framing of perception, where one is compelled to think in the long-term and to look at the effect of one's own actions in broader spatial and temporal terms. The shift of focus could be encapsulated by a shift in questioning from "What do I need? What can I do for me?" to "What does it need? How can I care for it?" "Attention" in "ecological attention" taps into a vein of thinking that sees the ecological as, more passively, an ethos, a mindfulness of, and an orientation toward. More actively, we can understand it as an ethos/mindfulness/orientation toward that encourages one into a position of interest and learning. In terms of critical method, I take ecological attention to mean a thoughtful approach to relationality that involves figuring/feeling out strategies to locate bodies and objects in the nourishing, consuming, void, or potentially catastrophic environments they can inhabit.

This chapter theoretically engages with three texts: Anne Lise François' *Open Secrets*, and Eve Sedgwick's "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes" and "The Weather in Proust." In their separate ways, each work proposes alternatives to a critical model that emphasizes heroic action on the part of the individual, whether that individual be a critic or a novel's protagonist. François suggests the inhabiting of a disposition grace and an acceptance of the minimal, while Sedgwick explores how the individual is vitally environed in networks of affective and life-sustaining relations. Each work proposes an alternative that collapses the distance between foreground and background, or the distance between the subject and his/her environment, effectively setting the stage for the cultivation of the ethos of ecological attention.

I open this chapter with François' quarrel with "a hermeneutics of suspicion"³³ and the

³³ "Hermeneutics of suspicion" was a term originally coined by Paul Ricoeur to describe a method of interpretation that was incredibly active in the discovery and/or creation of meaning. For Ricoeur, the "suspicion" underlying these hermeneutic acts is not object-directed; rather, suspicion seems more to be an

practices of recovery and demystification such hermeneutics motivate. This quarrel feeds into her larger concern with literary criticism's emphasis on, and perhaps even valorization of, development, productivity, and "work" (where even the refusal to make productive is seen as productive) at the expense of the grace that comes with letting things be. François forms the starting point for my theorizing because she outlines the stakes for focusing on "attention" rather than "action" or "transformation" – she makes a case for the importance of forming a critical sensibility that is able to detect and account for things that don't quite matter without making them matter.

Such a sensibility is employed and further developed in Eve Sedgwick's attempt in "Melanie Klein" to sketch out the relations that inform her own psychic environment – relations that, in working together to sustain the workings of her critical life, can be seen as ecological in nature. I will be focusing on the portions of "Melanie Klein" where Sedgwick details her experiences with the recalcitrance of Melanie Klein's theory and with the durability of objects both material and psychic. In "Proust," the importance of the object's durability once again comes to the forefront, but this time Sedgwick's argument occurs in the context of a material, rather than a psychic, environment, where the possibilities for an individual's relation and attentiveness to the world are enabled by their inattention to, or their taking for granted of, the durability of certain objects. My last section aims to demonstrate and theorize how the idea of ecological attention that has been outlined in my discussion of these three texts might be useful in the formal analysis of minor genres. I end with a brief return to the it-narrative with a few thoughts on how minor genres may well be the most productive place to start an investigation into and development of sustainable methodologies for literary criticism.

underlying disposition or orientation that affects our pursuit of meaning and the way we interact with others (Scott-Baumann).

In light of my interest in quieter, more passive forms of relationality, my style of engagement with Sedgwick and François reflects the direction of my theorizing. One can conceive of the texts under discussion as less objects to be examined and more as an environment that I feel a part of – a sort of textual environing that I am still finding my way through and figuring out. If, compared to Chapter 1, my criticism of theory is less defined and the conclusions reached less clear, it is because this chapter is also an experiment in what enacting ecological attention might look like. The next step would be looking at how it might co-exist with other types of engagement and action.

3.2 François' *Open Secrets* and The Hermeneutics of Suspicion

In *Open Secrets*, Anne-Lise François responds to the absolute value contemporary Western society places in demonstrable development and in the fullest achievement of human potential and power, even at the cost of overdevelopment and exploitation (xvi). These values can be seen as undergirding both “the capitalist investment in value and work and the Enlightenment allegiances to rationalism and unbounded progress” (xvi). Current “prized” interpretive models, François notes, with their investment in the “work” of criticism, share certain the values associated with capitalism and the Enlightenment. These interpretive models are largely dependent either on methods of “recovery” or of “demystification,” where recovery is defined as the bringing of attention to and valuing of something heretofore “overlooked, neglected, or undervalued,” and demystification is defined as the act of uncovering the “secret ideological workings of power” that lie beneath the facade of the aesthetic. (In this case, the methods themselves seem less important or potentially deleterious than the attitude of “suspicion” that motivates their use.)

For François, the high critical value that is placed on the practices of recovery and demystification comes from a long-standing appreciation of the “work” or labour these practices allow critics to perform.³⁴ Instead of lauding such industriousness, however, François claims that this emphasis on work is harmful to the study of literature as a discipline, and, furthermore, shares an impulse and underpinning philosophy with capitalism and its drive for productivity, as well as Enlightenment rationalism and its belief in progress for progress’ sake (22). The danger that François sees in such a critical impulse is not only that it is systematically unable to own up to a brand of criticism that is distinctly unheroic in its lack of investment in moral action and instrumental knowledge,³⁵ and it is not only that it channels into the literary realm a view of ethics (François xxxvi) modeled on “limitless duty” and quantifiable, demonstrable, action, where everything that is not action or cannot effect action is constituted as deficiency or lack, effectively consigning the possibility for ethical being to highly circumscribed behaviors and a strict temporality,³⁶ but that it also “cannot admit the waste of unexploited powers” (22). It is this imperative-to-take-advantage-of, François argues, that leads to a “a corresponding pressure to ‘develop’ (and exhaust) natural resources” (22).³⁷

Taken to its logical extreme, François sees the practices of recovery and demystification,

³⁴ This is opposed to a Jamesonian view of the critic as “a hero who performs interpretive feats of demystification,” (Best and Marcus 14) “wresting meaning from a resisting text or inserting it into a lifeless one... present[ing] professional literary criticism as a strenuous and heroic endeavor, one more akin to activism and labor than to leisure, and therefore fully deserving of remuneration” (Best and Marcus 5).

³⁵ François also notes that the lack of heroism and the inability or refusal to make something productive can be construed as heroic as well. That is why her theorization of the “open secret” lies outside of the binary of either taking up or refusing, acceptance or denial.

³⁶ “Indeed, we may have moved so far in the direction of registering the political reverberations of even the most singular, nongenerative... of gestures, that we cannot believe anyone ever simply buries her talent in the ground. Yet these critiques still leave us wondering where to put thoughts and desires to which we cannot or will not give consequence or empirical result” (François 32).

³⁷ It’s important to clarify that François is not directly equating literary criticism with the exhaustion of natural resources; she is stating that the impulse that leads us to exhaust our natural resources is the same one that drives literary and cultural criticism today. And if the critique of culture and cultural artifacts takes part in shaping the culture itself, then something more must be at stake.

which respectively seek to “find” a text or lay its meaning bare, as not critically sustainable, for once the text has been figured out, its critical possibilities are, if not exhausted, then rendered unworthy of study (François 53). I would also add that, in light of Eve Sedgwick’s theorization of paranoid reading,³⁸ even *before* the work of recovery and demystification begins, suspicion as an ethos already deadens our response to the text, because paranoia’s anticipatory strategy (“I think this will happen”; “oh, I just knew this would happen”) shuts down the enlivening affect of surprise and the affect of interest, the latter of which is crucial to a sustained attention to what it studies.³⁹

As a corrective to this bias, and more specifically, to this critical bias, François argues for the need to develop a critical model sensitive to the stasis and the surface of experience – a sensitivity to be understood in its most passive sense as the ability to articulate something in critical terms, rather than the ability to make something instrumental. Such a model would be capable of dealing with the grace of the open secret: knowledge that is just *there*, free to be taken up or set down – knowledge which neither makes a display of itself nor attempts concealment. François’ own rhetoric, as well as her choice of texts, work to cultivate a critical ethos attentive to “the reception of an address so light it is hard to know how one is concerned by it,” (9) a “non-appropriative” ethos sensitive to minimal expressiveness, experience that counts for little, and difference that does not make a difference. I believe that the liveness of attention that comes

³⁸ According to Sedgwick, paranoia in being “drawn toward and tends to construct symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies” (*Touching Feeling* 126). By imposing their own epistemological frameworks onto their objects of study and leaving no room for alternatives, the paranoid reader shuts down relational possibilities. Sedgwick includes Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion under the category of paranoid reading.

³⁹ “Our paranoid habits of reading these figures as paranoid (or melancholic or passive aggressive, etc.) may protect us from registering the surprise of the open secret’s simple ‘thereness’” (François 34). François’ use of the verb “protect” relates to Sedgwick’s claim that paranoia is pre-emptive and defensive, and thus anti-thetical to the affect of surprise “because [for the paranoid] there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known” (*Touching Feeling* 130).

with cultivating a sensitivity and appreciation for events of little consequence and minimal expressivity, adds an element of ease to the descriptively-oriented practice of ecological attention. As a critical habit, I see ecological attention as part of a wider range of attitudes and practices that, as François proposes, aim to be able to “sustain a reading of... the ‘fact’ of satisfied desire – of eyes that have their fill, possess their object, and, nevertheless, miraculously, continue gazing” (François 53). The nature of the attention that François proposes – open, generous, and keyed into a brand of imaginative possibility that stops before it becomes transformative – seems suited to respectfully deal with the nuanced relations between subject and objects that are the subject of Sedgwick’s “Melanie Klein” and “Proust.” However, Sedgwick adds a kink to the discussion when she speculates on how one can sustain this generous and open attention even when one’s gaze has difficulty possessing, or even perceiving, its object.

3.3 Ecological Attention and Eve Sedgwick

If François outlines a context and the stakes of cultivating an attentiveness attuned to and accepting of minimal possibility – that is, to the possibility that stasis or minimal difference is not being a mere facade, but just “something that does not register on the phenomenal world’s scales of experience” (François 59) – then Sedgwick looks at how that attentiveness might operate on the level of individual consciousness. It is in Eve Sedgwick’s theory, phenomenologically-centred as it is, that we can best find ways to make sense of missed opportunities and empirical/temporal *indifference* in ways that are not demonstrably productive, but rather, nourishing and psychically invigorating. How can a piece of critical writing register François’ sense of a possible “something” in terms other than what the phenomenal world is prepared to offer? François enacts her solution through her close reading of texts, but the terrain

upon which Sedgwick proposes these terms to be explored is the less frequently discussed psychic space of the critic. Under a hermeneutics of suspicion, the critic's psychic space is defined by relations of mastery – having or not having, knowing or not knowing, seeing or not seeing.⁴⁰ A scalar reading, in its abstraction of space, juggling of multiple dynamic structures, and focus on integration and movement, does not so much deny ontology as slip the questions it poses, and does not so much repudiate binaries as re-configure those binaries according to spatial gradations. Ecological attention operates in a similar way, but uses the person and his/her perception (François) and experience (Sedgwick) as a reference point. Under an approach guided by ecological attention, the scalar structures that are productive of criticism are given a centre – the individual – who can interact with the objects that populate his or her psychic/critical landscape, objects which, under a certain light, take on a life and resiliency of their own. It may be useful to see ecological attention as a reformulation of the questions and concerns of scale along subjective/phenomenological lines, with an emphasis on how that relationality can be generative/sustaining of critical experience, critical creativity and critical thought.

Sedgwick's "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes" and "The Weather in Proust" are two works that draw out aspects of thinking that could be named ecological, insofar as each stages criticism as an engagement with a richly populated environment of objects and experiences. In "Melanie Klein," Sedgwick introduces us to a phenomenological environment where to partake of fantasy is not to engage with repressive structures and narcissistic desires, but to open up dynamic spaces between subject/critics and objects, spaces that environ the subject, allowing him or her the potential to grow relationships with objects that are at turns painful, generous, quirky, nurturing, and unexpected. In "Proust," Sedgwick's description of the

⁴⁰ Even a method such as deconstruction, which seeks to dismantle these binaries, relies on its object to start in a place of certainty and knowledge, a position which the critic then undermines or demonstrates to be erroneous.

observer's non-dualistic relation to the environment leads to an understanding of how life-giving and life-sustaining it can be to acknowledge our dependency on, rather than our mastery of, our critical environments.

3.3.1 “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes”

Sedgwick's essay on Melanie Klein offers an incredibly useful yet somewhat counter-intuitive way of thinking ecologically about the domain of criticism: understanding the environment through the domain of fantasy. Sedgwick uses her experience with unread books as a departure point to theorize how an external object, through a rather ordinary turn of events, can become an internal object, and how that internal object comes to be an inhabitant and player in Sedgwick's psychic environment:

Sometimes I think the books that affect us most are fantasy books... books we know about—from their titles, from reading reviews, or hearing people talk about them—but haven't... actually read. Books that can therefore have a presence, or exert a pressure in our lives and thinking, that may... little to do with what's actually inside them... I seem to enhance and enrich them [the unread books] over time, investing them with my own obsessions and the fruits of my varying thought and self-relation. Except of course it's not “them” I invest in this way, but their titles or their authors' names as valued, phantasmatic objects internal to myself. (“Melanie Klein” 625)

In an admission that basically amounts to critical sacrilege, Sedgwick claims that some of her most satisfying and transformative engagements with books have come from books she has not

actually read. In not reading the book, Sedgwick allows it to exist in her consciousness as an un-reified object, half-suspended between here and there, receptive to all the resonances, imaginings, and mistakes that suspension makes possible. This suspended place is where the sometimes smug authority that comes with “having read it,” or the faint embarrassment of having not, dissolves in favour of a more fluid relationship with the book object – one that is able to accommodate and respect the difference between (1) the objective existence of the book object, independent of Sedgwick’s existence (2) the intersubjective existence of the book object, as it circulates through reviews and conversation and (3) Sedgwick’s own internal relationship with the book as a “phantasmatic object.” These three levels, each with their own vital and vitalizing soundness, enfold the book object and give the thinker continual access to its invigorating psychic (and, as I will discuss, reparative), charge – access to playful fantasy and speculation that demands no resolution, but also to a sense of associatedness presaged on terms other than plausibility and persuasiveness. In Sedgwick’s situation, to prioritize one’s knowledge of the text over one’s other relationships to the text would only serve to overwhelm the delicacy of one’s relationship to the book’s critical landscape, as well as the critic’s understanding of his or her own psyche (i.e. reformulating the question from “how can I fashion a product out of this knowledge?” to “how do these relations cradle me?”) By choosing not to take up the knowledge of the book, her attention is freed to consider not only the book’s obdurate thingness, whose survival is predicated on her neglect, but also her complicated relation to its critical landscape, populated at it is with competing voices, motivations, and fantasies.

The following passage by Sedgwick further illustrates the dynamic psychic landscape that is created at the intersection of memory, theory, and objects as well as how that landscape might be generative for critical insight:

Picture me around age three ... I absolutely don't want my sister's doll.

Characteristically, I have a well-reasoned account of what's wrong with it... An argument that apparently didn't persuade, since the next thing to happen seems to be my descent into the awful whirlpool of tantrum mode.

I could go on for ages about this story—which, while it's remained accessible in my memory for a long time, is the kind that nonetheless rearrives on the scene with a fairly ferocious new vitality when I'm really engaged with Melanie Klein. Along with the sense of access to vivid insight, these periodic reengagements with Klein are accompanied by painful dreams and painfully crabby days. Also by series of uncontrolled flashes in which many aspects of my life, including those I'm especially fond or proud of (call them Buddhist ones), appear in the light of fragile, exhausting, sometimes impoverishing, and barely successful defenses against being devoured by my own cycles of greed, envy, rage, and in particular, overwhelming anxiety. (“Melanie Klein” 626-7)

Here, the never-possessed object of the doll and the situation surrounding its un-attainment exists purely in Sedgwick's head. I would describe the relationship between Sedgwick, the doll and its attendant memory as an bemused, exasperated cohabitation. The doll seems also, in a slight, tangential, way, to share a critical space with Sedgwick's experience of Kleinian thought. The critical landscape that mediates Sedgwick's thoughts is one where past and present exist in simultaneity, and where objects and incidents reverberate off each other with a wild force that trigger loopings of affect, dormant remembrances, and sparks of introspection which, painful and unpleasant as they may be, at times prove instructive. The immense care Sedgwick takes in positioning herself *inside* this landscape, rather than looking over it – the attention she gives to

the interplay between herself, her critical work and the objects cathected in her imagination – is an example, I would argue, of how the ecological can be mapped onto phenomenological and psychic concerns. It also provides an example of how attention, while perhaps always subjectively motivated, can have that motivation disrupted and displaced by competing impulses and/or the psychic pressure exerted by the outside object.

So, the book unread, like the doll Sedgwick never got, or the wranglings with Klein that go nowhere (only in circles), encourages Sedgwick to indulge in a psychic world that is deeply integrated with a phenomenal world, but that nevertheless flies under the phenomenal world's radar. This dynamic between subjectivity and the objects' durability facilitates Sedgwick's entry into an imaginative space that allows her to inhabit what Melanie Klein terms the "depressive" position. The depressive position, as distinct from the paranoid/schizoid position, is characterized by a reparative impulse instead of a destructive one (*Touching Feeling* 128).

While inhabiting the paranoid/schizoid position, the subject tries to remake the world into one of binaries by splitting objects into wholly good and wholly bad parts in order to extricate the bad from the good.⁴¹ In contrast, people inhabiting the position of depressive anxiety are motivated by altruism, or unselfish love – their impulse is to repair and integrate objects (the objects that they themselves have split or truncated) into a whole. But as we see with the struggle Sedgwick is subjected to when reading Klein – the "fragile, exhausting, sometimes impoverishing, and barely successful defenses" she puts up "against being devoured by my own cycles of greed, envy, rage, and in particular, overwhelming anxiety" – reparation ain't easy, not least because there is no blueprint to indicate what this wholeness will look like: the conception

⁴¹ Klein's most prominent example is the infant's splitting of the mother's body into the good breast (giver of life) and the bad breast (threatener of life) (*Touching Feeling* 128). For our purposes, the circumstances are less dire: perhaps "what matters" and "what doesn't," or "what supports my argument and I must include" and "what detracts from it and I must do battle with."

of the “whole object” (that is, the object with its good and bad parts psychically re-integrated) is not bound to an archetype, or resemblance to a pre-existing object.

And this is where ecological attention can be not only descriptive, but also generative, creative, imaginative, and affective. Because the “repaired” object does not have to resemble a preexisting object, the implication of this lack of “blueprint” is that Klein’s model becomes viable and sustainable, for it cultivates imaginative possibility. However, due to our emplacement in the nexus of our own competing wants, moods, and memories, it is a possibility continually being diverted, supplemented, and supplanted by the affectively decentering, cognitively frustrating, academically productive, and ultimately nourishing founts of knowledge – the good vibrations – these half-experienced internal objects send us, that we find ourselves drawn to, and that we lovingly and exasperatedly send back. Reading the depressive position of Kleinian object relations through Sedgwick’s tangled attempts to achieve this position in relation to her own phantasmatic, internal objects, gives us a place to begin theorizing ecological attention as (1) a mindfulness and (2) a space that both operates beyond that mindfulness and is supportive of that mindfulness.

In terms of ecological attention, what I’ve been trying to draw out in Sedgwick is her delineation of the surprising dynamics of one’s own psychic environment as well as her positing of that psychic environment as object-directed, deeply imaginative, yet non-teleological and somehow beyond our control. (Beyond our control, that is, not because our psychic environment is unconscious, but because it is populated by so many motives, energies, things and perceptions all pinging off of each other.) Being able to integrate a diversity of affects, motivations, and disposition into our psychic environment makes it more critically sustainable. Instead of seeing our psychic environment as a fragile fantasy/illusion motivated predominantly by fear,

repression, and narcissistic desire, we have an environment suffused with non-acquisitive curiosity, responsive creativity, creative bewilderment – an environment that has the potential to open us up to a love that motivates us to use our energies to repair the object on its own terms. Sedgwick, through Klein, presents us with a psychic environment comprised of the interactions between internal objects – an environment that asks us to be generous, creative and reparative, and in return for our efforts, is made into a mental landscape “realistic, durable, and satisfying” (“Melanie Klein” 637).

3.3.2 “The Weather In Proust”

Going from the psychic ecologies of “Melanie Klein” to the environmental ecologies of “Weather in Proust” necessitates a shift from studying the internalized object and its crazily-cathected patterns of affect and association, to studying actual objects. This shift, however, proves not to be as ontologically radical as it might seem, for both internalized and externalized objects are a part of the economies, landscapes, and reality through which we move. In “Melanie Klein” Sedgwick offered for our contemplation and identification a dynamic environment that the individual struggles to resolve, in the midst of objects pushing back on her in unexpected ways. In “Proust,” Sedgwick’s discussion of “benign transference” presents a set of relations between the subject and the environment where the environment, rather than exerting pressure on us, supports us in ways that do not require our notice. The effect of this support is that our attention is freed up to pursue other avenues of relation and self-relation.

To start, Sedgwick cites Michael Balint’s description of two ways our psyche manages its relation to objects that sustain our needs – that of “malignant transference” and “benign transference”:

malignant [transference] is essentially... rivalrous, “aimed at gratification by external action” of the transferential object... I assume the reason Balint calls it malignant... is that it is, like cancer cells, immortal, self-replicating, and insatiable, involving the “constant threat of an unending spiral of demands or needs, and of development of addiction-like states” (146)... [Benign transference] differs from [malignant transference] by nature... it emerges from a different level of the psyche. It is called benign because its requirements do not expand: it is satiable... Neither competitively nor genitally organized, the benign transference does not demand to be gratified by “external action” on the part of its object. Instead, Balint writes, what it requires from its object is a mode of being, specifically the mode of being that characterizes the natural elements. (“Proust” 7)

While malignant transference frames a subject-object relationship that is dominated by the inability to experience satisfaction, which leads to a practice of never-ending consumption (think the Law of Desire), benign transference figures an alternative relationship to objects – objects that we need, but that we can also set down, once those needs are met. In this relationship, objects ask nothing of us, and all that we ask of them is that they are there. And it is in that implacable “thereness” – its ontological and physical non-oppositionality, its minimal difference, the playfulness that emerges from taking something for granted⁴² – that one finds a response to the hermeneutics of suspicion, and the potential for a relationality between self and (artistic) environment that is able to sustain the exigencies of critique, while continuing to remain refreshed.

Sedgwick on Proust: “Like, I think, many readers of Proust, I especially want to

⁴² This taking-for-granted is not to be taken in the context of our dependency on the infiniteness of our natural resources, but the taking-for-granted which accepts that what is there is there, and nothing more.

understand his continuing access to a psychology of surprise and refreshment, as well as his nourishing relation to work” (“Proust” 3). To understand this nourishing relation, Sedgwick leads us through a dizzying series of meditations on spirituality, reincarnation, sleep, romantic love, object relations, and the weather, all of which are somehow webbed into her quotation of Michael Balint: “It is difficult to say whether the air in our lungs or in our guts is us, or not us; and it does not even matter” (“Proust” 9). As her fluid discussions of mysticism, sleep, love, art, things, etc. show, these areas are not discrete categories, but work together to support our cognitive, and psychic life – to cradle and suspend us within these sets of relations and boundaries. Our physical and psychical dependence on our environment presents a limit case for theory, but, as in the case of scale, one from which criticism might emerge. Dualisms such as subject/object, self/other, nature/civilization, viewer/artwork are not erroneous, but simply rendered irrelevant through the observation that nourishment comes from things that are just *there* – things that (1) don’t depend on us, that (2) survive independent of us, that (3) surround us and give us energy, support, comfort, companionship, that, (4) we can be satiated by and that, (5) push back.

Benign transference becomes so crucial a relationship to theorize in art and in life because it works on *how little* it requires of its environment/object, only “that [it] accepts and consents to sustain and carry the patient like the earth or the water sustains and carries a man who entrusts his weight to them” (“Proust” 8). Benign transference theorizes a type of relationship where support, rather than an overt action or visible contribution, is required of the object. Deprived of such support, the individual “cannot achieve any change: without water it is impossible to swim, without earth impossible to move on” (Balint qtd. Sedgwick 8). Moreover, it’s worth noting Sedgwick’s observation that “support” implies a certain amount of durability

on the part of the object in the face of the subject's actions or "range of omnipotent control" (Johnson qtd. Sedgwick 8).

Benign transference, then, becomes one way to figure the interplay between a subject's perception, the conditions necessary for life, and the outside environment – in short, a set of complex relations that help define the ecological in psychic as well as material terms, and that place the subject and the object in simultaneously psychic and material terrains.⁴³ Benign transference identifies an object's "usefulness" as paradoxically inhering in its recalcitrant/resilient relation to our fantasy, our manipulation, and our destruction, a stubbornness that, ironically, enables us to use the real object as a medium for *our own* change, because the object of benign transference forms "a vital way of environing the subject, one that inspires and permits the subject's ability, in turn, to hold its own vital contents and support a wealth of self-relation," ("Proust" 14) that assuages our "vulnerable sense of bodily borders not by consolidating them but by supporting their flexibility and permeability" ("Proust" 10). For Sedgwick, the index of the "real," or the object's recalcitrance, is its ability to surprise; its resistance to critical mastery; its ability to "manifest an agency distinct from either its creator or its consumer" ("Proust" 13). In this formulation, the environment's relation to the subject is defined as permissive, supportive, and inspiring of a wealth of self-relation and self-care.

3.4 Notes Toward Minor Genres

If my immersion into François and Sedgwick has been too complete to generate an independent analytic framework, it is because I have been more concerned with what ecological

⁴³ If we view benign transference as a scalar concept, where the form of "the real" emerges from a set of scalar relations.

attention might feel like as a disposition, and what the critical and phenomenological stakes might be in the cultivation of such a disposition. Ecological attention could be described as adopting a perception and disposition that can detect and accept the minimal; cultivating an awareness of the relations that support and inspire our criticism; accepting our continual fluttering in and out of awareness of the relations that we dwell within and that sustain us. These patterns, processes, objects, and perceptions cohere, under ecological attention, into an environment that can potentially support less structured, more dynamic formalisms – formalisms that may benefit the analysis of minor genres the most.

Minor genres in the vein of the it-narrative can be seen as the great “open secret” (texts that are just *there*, free to be taken up or set down) of literary study (in fact, they are likely minor *because* they are open secrets). This is because we take for granted that we know what they are, so nobody really cares much to study them in-depth. It-narratives once again prove a convenient example: as Christina Lupton observes, the it-narrative appears to be a genre self-conscious about the inefficacy of its own self-consciousness. From their modest prefaces and declamatory tones to their dreadful rehashing of last decade’s cautionary tales, the it-narrative is a genre that represents an open secret of the lowest kind, one that, “even when known... continues to insist, at some level, on *not* mattering,” (133). On the level of both form and content, the it-narrative renounces the possibility of transcendence, avoids dealing head-on with any issues of relevance, and furthermore, executes this in the most clumsy way possible.

Seen on a wider scale, the resilient quality of texts that Sedgwick detects in Klein and Proust formally manifests itself in minor genres as a series of structural failures. For example, by offering an episodic rather than a teleologically developed plot, and a narrator who neither grows nor has the opportunity to witness growth, the it-narrative “fails to organize narrative time as the

Aristotelian plot does, around the critical difference between the before and after of *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*” (François 133) – thus bypassing the significance of the event, and the understanding of “experience as progress, whether from the hypothetical to the real or from illusion to disillusion” (François 153). The flatlining of plot has the consequence of re-distributing time and reader attention/expectation in a more balanced way, and in doing so, changes the nature of the literary pleasure that can be gained. In effect, temporally-bound, “event-based” emotions such as anger, sadness, and excitement – emotions that help organize experience into “before” and “after” – absent themselves in favour of more muddled, less-detectable feelings (Ngai).

Another, less passive way of understanding the it-narrative’s resilience as inhering in its structural failure lies in its deflection of the issue of identity. By substituting human consciousness, with an object’s consciousness, it-narratives indirectly displace the emphasis on demonstrable experience and development that is integral to identity concerns. By eliding the slightly neurotic question of “Am I knowable to another? To myself?” (questions that seem silly for an object to ask of itself) and replacing it with questions such as, “What is happening? Where am I going? What will I see next?” identity concerns are displaced. In doing so, the it-narrative not only places less pressure on identity as hub for narrative, but more intriguingly, directs imagination away from “fantasies about the eventfulness of its [identity’s] achievement” (François 214). We can see this process at work in both Sedgwick’s writing and the it-narrative genre – in the former’s subjectivization of theory, where, by approaching theory and subjectivity as mutually implicated, she sets up an ongoing, ever-shifting relationality, rather than an “end” to argument/development, and in the latter’s propensity to end uneventfully – in an abrupt, truncated, painfully awkward fashion.

Defining the it-narrative with an attention attuned to relationality, we could perhaps understand the genre's structural "ineptness" in a more dynamic way: as its form pushing back at us in minimally productive ways, triggering feelings of discomfort, irritation, or boredom. Minor literature's seeming indifference to our critical efforts is manifested in its ability to deflect not only the forward momentum of narrative, but also deep philosophical and aesthetic inquiry. In doing so, it directs our attention toward a wider landscape of relations that include frivolous or difficult-to-mobilize feelings, re-occurring patterns of plot and character whose sheer repetitiveness frustrates knowledge, interest in what other people thought of the book, and an consideration of what the book could have been. As we have seen, critical strategies employed to relate to minor literature may take the form of grouping minor literatures into genres; of making them dots and lines on a graph of literary history as Moretti does; of connecting them to culture as with Blackwell's volume; of conceiving of them in relation to hard-to-notice minor affects and the suspension of political agency, as with Sianne Ngai;⁴⁴ or as in the case of François, looking at how their minimal expressiveness activates potentialities for inaction that are deeply ethical. So, the critical turn-off presented by minor literatures turns out to have an up-side: in order to study these texts, we are asked to accept the open display for their own minimal potential for yielding transformative formal analyses and pressed to seek alternative ways of critically relating to them.⁴⁵ De-emphasizing the priority of the text paradoxically allows us more room for analytic

⁴⁴ Sianne Ngai: "It is interesting to note here that while the texts chosen for the way they highlight these feelings are drawn from both high and mass culture, all are canonically minor. Something about the cultural canon itself seems to prefer higher passions and emotions – as if minor or ugly feelings were not only incapable of producing 'major' works, but somehow disabled the works they do drive from acquiring canonical distinction" (Ngai 11).

⁴⁵ In other words, from the outset we are pressed to adopt an ethos that, in its emphasis on relationality, and in its awareness of the critical tightrope one walks between making texts signify and letting them lie, is open to the ethos of ecological attention.

creativity, because it frees up our attention to consider the landscape in which the minor is embedded, as well as how our criticism can survive in that landscape.

4 Further Directions

My aim in this thesis was to look at how a sensitivity to issues of scale and attention could highlight heretofore overlooked formal aspects of minor literary genres. Scale offers a sort of compromise or synthesis between high formalism and a new historicist brand of strong materialism. It compels an attentiveness to aspects of form that are often glossed over in more committedly formalist or materialist ways of thinking – an approach to description that is attentive to patterns of movement and force rather than to language or deep structure. Ecological attention theorizes how an attention to one's environment and one's relation to the environment changes the very quality of one's attention by redirecting it, broadening its range and softening its purposefulness. This redirection contains the potential for individuals to cultivate sensitivities to minor genres or minor aspects of form that could be productive of new formalisms. Not only this, however: I propose that both scale and ecological attention have the potential to allow a reconsideration of the conditions under which texts and groupings of texts are made available to analysis; in other words, an understanding of scale and ecological attention might help us open up more common ground and find more common groupings between literary objects. Another way of putting it: I have been less interested in finding out ways to make minor genres do “work,” and more interested in imagining a type of baseline formalism that can broaden the possibilities of formal comparison between genres, works, and methodologies. It is this concern that my thesis has not directly addressed, and where further work may be done.

I end by speculating on four groupings that might gain more analytic cogency and explanatory power under a fuller theorization of scale and ecological attention: space and time, attention, agency, and reading practices. While these categories run the gamut of the ontological,

the epistemological, and the practical/discipline-specific, they are all different ways of approaching form in terms other than language, character, plot or poetics. What the application of scale and an ecological framework for attention does when applied to these categories is introduce a sense of structured contiguity and boundedness into both meta-criticism and the analysis of literature. If different constraints create different patterns or different critical landscapes, then an awareness of constraints may help us draw novel linkages and continuities between different objects of analysis, and indeed, may even help us to conceive of these objects on different terms, whether they be methodologies, textual groupings, or historical periods. Below, I suggest space and time, attention (understood in its more cognitive, object-directed instantiation), and agency as possible connections or discursive nets that emerge under and help demarcate different levels of scalar analyses and highlight some important relations that define ecological attention.

Space and time: Space and time seem to be very basic yet (until recently) neglected categories of formal literary analysis. Applying scalar concepts to these dimensions allows critics to parse or group their research in terms of empirical differences such as distance, length, duration, and range, while ecological attention lets us identify the experiential stakes of these differences. In tandem, scale and ecological attention enables critics to analyze space and time both in empirical and phenomenological terms, and furthermore, to see the relationship (the fit or clash) between empirical and phenomenological limits in a given rhetorical situation. Such thinking can be seen as following in the footsteps of Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope – that the operation of space and time in literature is inherently related to issues of form and genre. However, a scalar reading does not see space and time as absolute values, but relational ones: the relationship between text/genre and space-time configuration is not one-to-one. Multiple levels

of space and time can be found within texts and genres, and analyzing the relationships between those multiple levels is what lends a scalar reading its dynamism. How those scales are made available or unavailable to experience, or how they configure an individual's sightline, would be the province of ecological attention.

Attention: If space and time are basic categories when it comes to more formal-material analysis, attention seems a basic category of formal-phenomenological analysis (i.e. the structure and relations of apperception). Combined with an understanding of scale, the study of attention has the potential to historicize form in a way that is less dependent on a history that is conceived as a series of events. On an individual and collective level, scale can be seen as the product of a person's or a community's attention (i.e. capacity for recognition over a period time) when that person/community is forced by the practical constraints of space, time, energy, epistemological impasse etc., to decide what is pattern (form) and what is noise, or what fits and what belongs on another level of analysis. What patterns we pay attention to, or what we recognize as form, not only serves as an historical index of the times (i.e. what matters, what we can register in our perception or should give attention to) – with an understanding of scale, “what matters” is split into gradations, so that significance is dependent on the empirical dimensions of space and time (i.e. how wide we cast our net, at what distance, and how long we focus for.)⁴⁶

⁴⁶ What we deem worthy of being paid attention to is of course largely informed by cultural norms, but how our attention is guided towards certain things and not others is for me the interesting question. Here, Caren Kaplan's studies on the aerial view offers some insight, because it is able to elucidate some of the constraints and developments in the history of scale and attention. Although Kaplan's study is on point of view, it is point of view understood through the lens of materialist cultural criticism. This enables Kaplan to understand the aerial view as bound to a certain historical context – imperialist Europe, bent on expansion and a need for world-mastery – as well as in a certain material context – technological developments such as the air balloon, which enabled its subjects to certain experience of space by placing them at a certain distance (far away) and in a certain position (above) (397). This position in space made possible an attention to the “big picture,” by allowing the perceiver to focus on new objects and patterns – objects and patterns which then gained analytic and epistemological priority over those viewed from the ground. In a less material way, different analytic scales shift attention to different patterns and objects.

Agency: Seen as a product and index of historically delimited kinds of attention, form can be a potential record for understanding “what matters” in a certain time period, as well as the process whereby “what matters” comes to be. The addition of scalar concerns takes the question of what matters and fine-tunes it into a question of “what can be attended to, given the time and space available.” However, scale and ecological attention can not only be applied to issues surrounding the historical organization of perception, but also to issues of agency both contemporary and historical. Scale and ecological attention can help re-frame the concern of “what can be attended to” in more active terms: “what we believe to be able to act upon us and/or what we perceive ourselves capable of acting on.” This is something that I have started to do in my analysis of the it-narrative, where the passivity of the it-narrator is conflated with its omnisapience, as well as with my focus on Sedgwick’s response to Klein, where, some days, her critical acumen runs into finds itself blunted by her own negative affects. Scale and ecological attention can be used to detect and describe the ranges of agency that emerge from different critical situations (that is to say, to describe agency in a situational, rather than an absolute, manner). A spatially, temporally and psychically delimited approach to agency may clarify and steady our understanding of what Eve Sedgwick calls the “the middle ranges agency” (*Touching Feeling* 7) where on one end lies absolute free will, and on the other end lies complete determination by the system.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Many of the chapters in *Touching Feeling* are informed by Eve Sedgwick’s aim to find scales of analyses that lie between the binary of 2, and infinity (see especially her Introduction for talk about the “middle ranges of agency” and Chapter 3, on Sylvan Tomkins and his 7 affects). Likewise, Margaret Cohen’s article on “Narratology in the Archive of Literature” discusses book history’s potential to contribute to our contemporary turn to “specific theory” – theory that operates between the scales of “extreme empiricism” and “magical universalism.” What the two discussions have in common is a sense that, to continue to be productive, literary criticism must find a way to accept delimited multiplicity – whether it be in the areas of agency, theory, ethics, etc.

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