ON LONGING

Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection

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3. THE GIGANTIC

Skywriting: Exteriority and Nature

At the end of the Book of Job, God asks Job: “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish hook, or press down his tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in his nose, or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak to you soft words? Will he make a covenant with you to take him for your servant for ever? Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your maidens?” (41:1–5). The comic image of the monster on a leash, of the domesticated beast, the pet or “friendly” lion, tiger, or dragon, illustrates the absolute inversion of the miniature which the gigantic presents. Whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural. The elephant joke, for example, depends upon this principle, the pink elephant being the most incongruous mixture of nature and culture, a beast dreamed by an interior decorator.

The miniature offers us a transcendent vision which is known only through the visual. In approaching the miniature, our bodies erupt into a confusion of before-unrealized surfaces. We are able to hold the miniature object within our hand, but our hand is no longer in proportion with its world; instead our hand becomes a form of undifferentiated landscape, the body a kind of background. Once the miniature world is self-enclosed, as in the case of the dollhouse, we

can only stand outside, looking in, experiencing a type of tragic distance. Here we might think of the paintings of the contemporary folk artist Ralph Fasanella, who paints views of apartment buildings and tenements as if their structures could be sliced open and we could simultaneously examine all the interiors they enclose. Fasanella presents us with an arrangement of simultaneous and unconnected dramas which, as in viewing the dollhouse, we can attend to only one scene at a time. The confrontation of so much life results in an experience of profound aloneness akin to that which Socrates experiences suspended in a basket above The Clouds; or, perhaps less abstractly, the loneliness of Frankenstein outside the peasant hut or King Kong as his shadow falls over a sleeping New York City. Although the miniature makes the body gigantic, the gigantic transforms the body into miniature, especially pointing to the body’s “toylike” and “insignificant” aspects.

Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it “surrounds” us. Our position here is the antithesis of our position in relation to the miniature; we are enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially. We move through the landscape; it does not move through us. This relation to the landscape is expressed most often through an abstract projection of the body upon the natural world. Consequently, both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment—the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container.

We find the miniature at the origin of private, individual history, but we find the gigantic at the origin of public and natural history. The gigantic becomes an explanation for the environment, a figure on the interface between the natural and the human. Hence our words for the landscape are often projections of an enormous body upon it: the mouth of the river, the foot-hills, the fingers of the lake, the heartlands, the elbow of the stream. This gigantic reading of the landscape is often supplemented in folklore by accounts of causality: the Giant’s Causeway as part of a road constructed by giants between Scotland and Ireland; Stonehenge as the Giant’s Dance (chora gigantium); glacial pot-shaped cylindrical holes ascribed as Giants’ Kettles; Giant’s Leap, the name given in mountainous regions to the rocks separated from each other by large chasms. 2

In the British Isles many disproportions of landscape or aberrations in the environment are commonly attributed through legend to the activities of giants. For example, Warne’s Ancient Dorset gives an ac-
count of two large boulders in the hills above the Vale of Blackmoor that were positioned when two giants had a contest to see which was the stronger and thereby could throw a weight the greatest distance. Nearby is the Giant’s Grave, a large mound of earth said to be the burying place of the unsuccessful of the two. The Scottish giants, called Fomorians, are similarly attributed with the power to throw boulders. In his book on English giants, Harold John Massingham writes of giant figures etched into the turf at the villages of Cerne Abbas in Dorset and Wilmington in Sussex:

On the slope of a chalk hill surmounted by a small earthwork just outside the village, a rude colossus had been etched into the turf. Like its brother of Wilmington in Sussex, it is the seal of a god-mountain more towering, robust, and grandly moulded than any in its neighborhood; . . . climb the blowing hill and up the causeway of his swelling calves . . . the figure is 180 feet long and carries a great indented club in the right hand. Many of the turf figures on the Downs are, of course, comparatively modern, but the Cerne Giant, the Wilmington Long Man, and the White Horse of White Horse Vale in Berkshire “antiquitate Antiquity.”

Massingham concludes that the figures were not simply a form of what we now call “found” art, but rather were deliberately constructed anthropomorphic representations of the gods. He also argues that “it is tenable that the giants of folk-lore are the literary equivalents of the giants incised upon the chalk downs.”

In addition to the Cerne Abbas and Wilmington anthropomorphic representations, we find the white horses carved in the turf of the downs in southern England. The White Horse of Uffington Hill in Berkshire, which Massingham mentions, is the most famous of these figures, stretching 335 feet from nose to tail and 120 feet from ear to hoof. Massingham records that the duty of scouring the figure was undertaken by various local parishes. Up until the twentieth century the scouring ceremony was accompanied by a general festival of junketing, horseplay, feasting, and cudgel bouts.

Mary Williams suggests that “belief in giants can easily be accepted. Early invaders to these islands, seeing the gigantic menhirs, stone circles such as Stonehenge, Avebury and many others, would naturally conclude that only giants could have moved such immense masses of stone and set them upright. Again the very large boulders scattered over the countryside would suggest giants at play, hence the many tales of giants, including King Arthur and his Queen, casting huge rocks at one another.” In the same vein, large barrows would be attributed as giant’s graves. In Germanic tradition we find similar stories in which giants make canals, rivers, lakes, islands, and mountains, or in which lakes and streams are formed from the tears and blood of a giant. Large boulders are described as pebbles shaken from a giant’s shoe; large lakes are formed when giants leave their footprints in the earth to be filled by rain; a roaring in the forest, or billowing waves in a field of grain, mark the passage of a giant.

Such explanations of the origins of geographical features often contain corresponding accounts of how the earth was originally inhabited by a giant race of men, present-day man being a fallen descendant of these original figures. We find this idea developed into a philosophy in Blake’s prophetic books: “The giants who formed this world into its sensual existence, and now seem to live in it in chains, are in truth the causes of its life and the sources of all activity, but the chains are the cunning of weak and tame minds, which have power to resist energy, according to the proverb, ‘The weak in courage is strong in cunning’.” Similarly, the children of Uranus represent physical force and lawlessness, a superfluity of nature over culture. The Cyclops—his eye an affront to symmetry and the “correct” view, his cannibalism the ultimate assault upon domesticity and the privatizing functions of the cultural, his labor a mark upon the landscape, yet without cultivation—has his analogues in the one-eyed giants of Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Ireland, and Wales. Odysseus describes the Cyclops as “giants, louts, without a law to bless them, . . . Kyklopès have no master and no meeting, no consultation or old tribal ways, but each one dwells in his own mountain cave dealing out rough justice to wife and child, indifferent to what the others do.” The giant, from Leviathan to the sideshow freak, is a mixed category; a violator of boundary and rule; an overabundance of the natural and hence an affront to cultural systems. Here we find the opposite of the clockwork precision of the miniature; for while the miniature “works,” coordinating the social, animating a model universe, the gigantic unleashes a vast and “natural” creativity that bears within it the capacity for (self-)destruction.

In one Germanic legend, a giant girl comes down from the mountains into a valley. Here she sees a plowman at work in a field. She puts the peasant, the oxen, and the plow in her apron and takes them home as toys. When she shows these playthings to her parents, they are displeased and tell her she must take them back, “for these men are not playthings for giants, but belong to that race of people who will some day do great harm to giants.” Typically, the giants are not the gods; they do not inhabit a transcendent space; they inhabit the earth, and it is their movement through the sensual world which
gives shape and form to that world, if not meaning. The primordial character of such legendary giants is illustrated in the account Spenser gives us of the birth of the giant fought by the Red Cross Knight in Canto VII of The Faerie Queene:

> The greatest Earth his uncouth mother was,
And blustering Æolus his boasted sire,
Who with his breath, which through the world doth pass,
Her hollow Round did secretly inspire,
And fill'd her hidden caves with stormy yea,
That she conceiv'd; and trebling the dew time,
In which the wombs of women do expire,
Brought forth this monstrous masse of earthly slime.
Puff'd up with empty wind, and fill'd with sinfull crime. ¹¹

Here, as elsewhere, the giant is linked to the earth in its most primitive, or natural, state. In Germanic tradition, giants usually wear nothing at all, but sometimes are described as wearing garments made of gray moss, the skins of animals, or the bark of trees. ¹² Their merger with the natural is thus further emphasized by their lack of individual dress and, consequently, individual identity. Often such undifferentiated figures are defeated by heroes with names, such as King Arthur, who are “larger than life,” yet closer to present-day man in that they are believed to have lived in historical, legendary time and are thus contextualized by the narrative. Giants, like dinosaurs, in their anonymous singularity always seem to be the last of their race.

Just as the miniature presents us with an analogical mode of thought, a mode which matches world within world, so does the gigantic present an analogical mode of thought, world within world. Both involve the selection of elements that will be transformed and displayed in an exaggerated relation to the social construction of reality. But while the miniature represents a mental world of proportion, control, and balance, the gigantic presents a physical world of disorder and disproportion. It is significant that the most typical miniature world is the domestic model of the dollhouse, while the most typical gigantic world is the sky—a vast, undifferentiated space marked only by the constant movement of clouds with their amorphous forms. We can see these contrasting modes of analogy in relation to nature perhaps more clearly if we compare the picturesque and the sublime as historical styles of exaggeration in the depiction and presentation of nature.

Rooted in the Peri Hupsous of Longinus, the aesthetic experience of the sublime is characterized by astonishment and surprise: the grandeur of scenery results in a sudden expansion of the soul and the emotions. In the dominant romantic manifesto of the sublime, Edmund Burke’s essay “A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful” (1757), we see astonishment elaborated into a profound emotion of terror, an admiration of the destructive forces of nature. The graveyard school of art and poetry and the romantic taste for ruins each contributed to the shape of Burke’s conclusions. In his classification of the sublime he outlines the following qualities: obscurity, power, privations, vastness, infinity, difficulty (requiring vast expenditures of labor and effort), and magnificence. What distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful is that the former is individual and painful, while the second is social and pleasant, resting upon love and its attendant emotions. ¹⁴

This description of the beautiful thus appears historically on the interface between the sublime and the picturesque, that rather bourgeois taming of the sublime which emerges at the end of the eighteenth century and flowers during the Victorian period. The terrifying and giganticized nature of the sublime is domesticated into the orderly and cultivated nature of the picturesque. While the sublime is marked by a potential recklessness, a dangerous surrender to disorder in nature, the picturesque is marked by a harmony of form, color, and light, of modulation approached by a distant viewer. As is apparent in the word itself, the picturesque is formed by the transformation of nature into art and thus the manipulation of flux into form, infinity into frame. Poetry, painting, gardening, architecture, and “the art of travel” ¹⁵ make up an art of landscape, an art of meditation and arrangement, rather than an art of the astonishing or the overwhelming. In an essay entitled “Scenery and Mind,” printed in 1852 in The Home Book of the Picturesque, E. L. Magoon explains:

> Living with supreme delight far above a Lilliputian standard, the mind swells into something of the colossal grandeur it admires. A majestic landscape, often scorned and truly loved, imparts much of its greatness to the mind and heart of the spectator; so that while the species may dwindle in relative worth, the individual is ennobled by the expansion he has received. . . . Wide and dense masses of mankind form the appropriate field whereon superior talents are to be exercised; but, to the aspiring, the distraction and attrition of large cities are rather evils to be shunned, since they vitiate if not destroy that purity and calm which are essential to the best growth of mind. ¹⁶

Here we find the qualities involved in the apprehension of the miniature: the distant and “over-seeing” viewer, the transcendence of the upper classes, the reduction of labor to the toylke, and the reification of interiority. The distinction made by Arthur Benson in his book on the queen’s dollhouse, between the “tasteful harmony” of Queen
Mary's dollhouse and the "coarse and grotesque" qualities of the contemporary life of the lower classes, is a twentieth-century descendant of these Victorian ideals. "What an admirable picture! exclain the tasteful, contemplating a fine landscape from the artist's skill. Beautiful! exclain the less tasteful in view of coarser or the coarsest imitation. How pretty! cries childhood over almost anything," warned Warren Burton in his 1844 work, The Scenery-Shower, with Word Paintings of the Beautiful, the Picturesque, and the Grand in Nature. He urged the unappreciating to seek a "diligent self-culture" that would consist of surrounding oneself with the picturesque.17

In several forms of contemporary postminimalist sculpture we see a revival of both sublime and picturesque modes of presenting nature. In some cases, such as the work of Carl Andre, Stonehenge and other earth landmarks of the southern English countryside (as well as the Indian mounds that stretch through Minnesota) have had a direct influence on the development of contemporary forms of "earth art."18 Works arising from this movement have been characterized by the particular use of highly textured natural materials on a comparatively large scale in unstructured space; they usually display a strong relation to immediate context or environment. Furthermore, most of these works are flexible in the sense that they are designed to be manipulated by environmental changes. Stonehenge has been shaped by the rain and wind and sun as much as it has been shaped by an artistic intention. Similarly, Dennis Oppenheim's project to move rings ten miles wide in the wheat fields around an active volcano in Ecuador denies the permanence and classical status of the material art object. The gigantification of contemporary earth art is an attempt to make marks on or in the landscape on the scale of distant perception. In other words, earth art attempts to articulate significance to the same degree that features of the landscape articulate significance. Since such articulation is not a matter of an intrinsic process of selection on the part of nature, but rather a matter of the relation between cultural values and the consequent social shape of nature, earth art may be seen as a modern descendant of the sublime on the one hand and the picturesque on the other. In that earth art aims to astonish and to confront the viewer with a powerful display of the natural, it harkens to the sublime. But where the romantics evoked terror, the minimalists evoke humor and even irony, for contemporary earth art speaks of an immediate intention: its function is not ascribed to legendary time and remote, more natural, forms of human life, as is the case with the "earth art" of folk tradition. A piece like Jan Dibbet's work in Ithaca, New York, where fourteen trees standing in a row in a forest were selected and painted white from the ground up to a height of five feet, clearly articulates the trace of culture upon nature. In fact, we might be reminded of the hapless gardeners in Alice in Wonderland painting the Queen of Hearts' white roses red. Thus, insofar as the earth art movement centers on a humanistic rearrangement of nature, it may be linked to the picturesque. And, despite its gigantic scale, the enclosure of the earth object within gallery space further links it to the Victorian attempt to domesticate and re-form nature within cultural categories. The earthwork that is displayed out of doors and traveled through is closer to the experience of landscape in the sublime; the viewer is dwarfed by the landscape, which allows him or her a partial vision over time. But the earthwork that is contained becomes an object; the viewer stands away from it in a distanced position approximating a simultaneous and transcendent vision.19 The contained work of earth art must be linked to landscape arrangement, to the formal garden, and ultimately to nature under cover. Oppenheim's 1968 scale models in fact use grass, flowers, hedges, and furrows in a metaphor of cultivation and hence echo formal garden arrangements.

The critic Sidney Tillim has connected much contemporary earth art to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century picturesque tradition on semiotic grounds. "Less than sublime, yet seeking a surrogate for the ideal, it [the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century picturesque] signalled, by virtue of its resultant sentimentality, the end of the ideals of high art. It substituted the sentimental for nobility of feeling and developed the cult of nature as an antidote to the excessive sophistication of cultivated society. At the same time it was an affectation of cultivated taste at its most refined. As the 20th century form of the picturesque, Earthworks signify an analogous degree of overcultivation of the modernist idiom."20 Tillim links the earth art movement to the picturesque on the basis of its oversophistication, but he overlooks the strongly "moral" character of both artistic movements. Earth art cannot be separated from the ecological ideals of the 1960's and early 1970's, from the back-to-nature movement and a rejection of institutions, including the institutions of art. Walter De Maria has lamented, in all seriousness, that "God has created the earth—and we have ignored it."21 Such a "return to nature" must always be nostalgic. Because the earthwork is a work of the moment of creation and conception, it cannot be returned to in its original form; it exists only through the distance of the photograph. Like other forms of the picturesque, the earthwork is an art of the souvenir or memento insofar as the aesthetic artifact is a trace of an original event22 now subject to transformations out of the control of the creator and the beholder. But ironically, in its choice of the large scale (i.e., large in
an experimental or unusual point of view results in a “new perspective” on the object. For example, Lucian’s Ἰκαρομηδία and Varro’s Ἐνδυμιόνεσ εἰς the life of the city from a high altitude. 25 Such a point of view enables the viewer to trivialize the cultural landscape as he or she magnifies and situates the larger natural landscape. At the same time, this view remains radically outside the scene: one cannot enter into the life of the city without experiencing a corresponding change of perspective. Therefore the view from above remains a view from an elsewhere, a view which in making the city other must correspondingly employ metaphors of otherness. The view from above could only be a view into a mirror if it were accompanied by a sense of splitting or self-consciousness. For example, there is Burton’s citation of Lucian’s Menippian dialogue, Charon, or the Inspectors: “Charon in Lucian, as he wittilyteigns, was conducted by Mercury to such a place, where he might see all the world at once; after he had sufficiently viewed, and looked out. Mercury would needs know of what he had observed. He told him that he saw a vast multitude and a promiscuous, their habitations like molehills, the men as emmets... Some were brawling, some fighting, riding, running, solicite ambientes, callite litigantes (earnestly suing or cunningly disputing), for toys and trifles... In conclusion, he condemned them all for madmen, fools, idiots, asses.”26 Hence in this view the tendency toward satire, which always, in its critique of affectation and the artificial in society, approximates “the natural stance.”

But once we engage in the mode of consciousness offered by existence within the city, distance is collapsed into partiality, perception becomes fragmentary and above all temporal. Inside or outside, the typical view of the city is through the window—a view within a definite frame and limited perspective, mediated and refracted through the glass of the city’s abstraction of experience. The production of space in the city under industrialism necessarily involves the creation of a space of the family (the biological means of reproduction) in relation to the forms of production and to the state. As Henri Lefebvre has pointed out, these representations of space can be understood only as correspondences to a space of representation, a social space within which and through which ideological formations will be produced. 27 Under capitalism the abstractions of economy produce an abstraction of these spaces; within this abstraction, merchandise (goods/objects) and the social relations that form in contiguity to these commodities can develop. Preindustrial culture locates the gigantic within the surrounding natural landscape. The romantic sublime nostalgically recreates this location as it simultaneously merges it with the production of interiority (the vastness of

Exteriority: The City

If we attempt to describe the city from a distanced and transcendent position, to thereby miniaturize it, the tendency is to naturalize the city landscape. As Philip Fisher has noted, “Wordsworth’s sonnet on Westminster Bridge landscapes the city with a rural frame, captures the city across from the self as a view or prospect. The city is significantly asleep, still, not itself, and the observer, in order to frame the scene, does not stand within it at all but in midair, on a bridge outside and over against it as a whole.”24 This pastoralizing of the city may be traced to what Bakhtin has called the mode of “experimental fantasticality” in the Menippian satire. Here observation from

relation to the human body), the earthwork itself mimics the distance assumed by the monuments of public space. As Michael Fried has pointed out, literalist or minimalist sculpture’s aspirations toward a nonpersonal or public mode have an obvious theatricality: “the largeness of the piece, in conjunction with its non-relational, unitary character, distances the beholder—not just physically but psychically. It is, one might say, precisely this distancing that makes the beholder a subject and the piece in question... an object.”23 The irony of this theatricality is apparent in the double-voiced quality of all manifestations of the sublime. The loneliness of nature spreads out before the solitary figure at the edge of the cliff as the stage of his consequent (and consequential) experience. But this beholder must always remain aware of the frame, aware of the encompassing role of nature. Hence the natural in the sublime is always a tamed beast, is always a transformation of action into object and distance into transcendence, and hence always sublimely ironic.

In this section we have briefly looked at the ways in which the point of view chosen in the presentation of the natural will relate to the prevailing ideology of the natural. The clockwork charm of the pastoral in the Enlightenment, the terror of the romantic sublime, and the sentimental distancing of the picturesque each reflect the historical circumstances of their origin. Thus these forms must always be seen in relation to the modes of production, the perception of distance between classes, and the symbiosis between rural and urban landscapes that prevailed in their times. Furthermore, as can be seen in romanticism, such forms can be considered as reactions against or revivals of their own internal periodization. The gigantification of the natural is approached through cultural categories, nature “herself” being the object of such categorization and thus progressively domesticated and interiorized as an agent of a history invented by narrative.
the natural world mirrored in the vastness of the individual perceiving consciousness) and the mediation we see at work in the pastoral. But within the rise of industrial capitalism, the gigantic becomes located within the abstraction of an exchange economy. The gigantic is moved from a presocial world of the natural to a social world of material production.

In his study of Rabelais, Bakhtin notes that the gigantic figure, as part of the popular imagery of the grotesque, moved from its ascription to the landscape to the festive carnival world. *Gargantua*, as a carnivalesque narrative, displays this tradition of the gigantic features of landscape. For example, Rabelais mentions the gigantic bowl in which the giant ate his gruel, and adds that the bowl can still be seen in Bourges—an immense rock scooped out like a bowl and called Scutella gigantis. Under an agrarian economy, the giant became associated with the market and the fair and their attendant feasts. In both statuary and living form, the gigantic appeared as a symbol of surplus and licentiousness, of overabundance and unlimited consumption. Here the giant’s consuming image is placed at the center of local civic identity: the hub of the marketplace and its articulation of commodity relations. At the end of the Middle Ages a number of European cities employed “town giants,” even “families of giants,” along with town jesters, who would take part in all public festivals.

We see this world of feasting and the founding of towns in the opening books of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Gargantua is born amid a feast to consume an overabundance of tripe (itself, of course, an image of consumption): “The tripes were plentiful, as you will understand, and so appetizing that everyone licked his fingers. But the devil and all of it was that they could not possibly be kept any longer, for they were tainted, which seemed most improper. So it was resolved that they should be consumed without more ado. For this purpose there were invited all the citizens of Cinais, of Seuilly, of La Roche-Clermault, and of Vaugaudry, not to forget those of Le Cougray-Montpensier and the Gué de Vède, and other neighbors: all strong drinkers, jovial companions, and good skittle players.” Because Gargamelle eats too much (sixteen quarters, two bushels, and six pecks), her “fundament” slips out. And thanks to a midwife who stops up Gargamelle’s bottom, Gargantua eventually arrives crying “Drink, drink,” through his mother’s ear. We see Gargantua linked to the life of towns in the account of his trip to Paris. Here he drenches the citizens in his piss, drowning two hundred sixty thousand four hundred eighteen of them. Those who escape swear and curse, saying, “We’ve been drenched in sport! We’ve been drenched par ris.” The narrator explains that although the city was formerly called Leucetia, it is thenceforth called Paris. Gargantua is thus officially the founder of “Paris,” but he is a founder by inversion. His narrative reminds us of North American trickster tales, where, by a series of mishaps and mistakes, the trickster comes to establish a vital aspect of culture.

With the development of the bourgeoisie, the marketplace, and the life of towns, we see the gigantic, as part of the grotesque, split into sacred and secular aspects. The gigantic is appropriated by the state and its institutions and put on parade with great seriousness, not as a representative of the material life of the body, but as a symbol of the abstract social formations making up life in the city. On the other hand, the gigantic continues its secular life in the submerged world of the carnival grotesque; its celebrations of licentiousness and lusted reality are truly the underbelly of official life. In his book on the processional giants of northern France and Belgium, René Darré writes that the procession of gigantic wooden figures during the Middle Ages contained these two contradictory aspects. On the one hand, great license was allowed in the parading of the figures; festivals of the giants were accompanied by feasting, drinking, and parodying of official institutions. At the time of the Albigensian heresies, “on comprendra plus facilement les prédispositions de certains membres du clergé, de la population, à ridiculiser de plus en plus les moeurs du temps des religieux qui, bien souvent, sombraient dans les plus coupables des abus.” For example, in Lyon a giant depicted the Evangelist preaching the domination of Satan over men and nature.

On the other hand, in several areas such processions were accompanied by great religious fervor and piety, which, Darré explains, local commerce and industry were able to exploit for a profit by selling goods and exhibiting tributes to local crafts. This double-faceted nature of the giants is emblematic of the conflicts of the time: the giant as symbol of secular town life, vernacular language, and local religious institutions contrasted with the giant as symbol of the institutions of centralized state religion. The brutal suppression of the Albigensians from the crusade of Simon de Montfort to the Inquisition, and the resultant subjection of the provincial church to Rome and of the southern provinces to the central government in Paris, provide the political corollary to this conflict in symbol.

By the fifteenth century the gigantic and grotesque figures of cultural heroes (Renaud dressed as Hector or Hercules, the elder Aymon as Priam, Charlemagne as Agamemnon) are replaced by the local giant, who appears in procession along with figures of saints. The local giant is tied to the vernacular language, to the local dialect, and thus to the affection of the people for their native town. “Demandez à
were written of the giants Corineus and Gogmagog and other giants being displayed on London Bridge to celebrate the public entry into the city of some distinguished person; they are also recorded as being used in the Lord Mayor’s pageants and in Midsummer’s Eve festivals. Puttenham, in his Arte of English Poesie (1589), writes of “Midsummer pageants in London where, to make the people wonder, are set forth great and ugly giants, marching as if they were alive, and armed at all points, but within they are stuffed full of brown paper and tow, which the shrewd boyes, underpeeping, do guilishly discover, and turnt to a great derision.”

Although the English giants frequently were used for occasions of pomp and solemnity, their secularity and profanity also are strongly marked. The pageants in which they appear are performed by trading companies; thus they seem to be descendants of the more ancient feast-day giants. Of all monsters or animals depicted in gigantic form, the dragon was the most popular in England and France; in most cases such dragons conveyed the idea of evil, sorcery, or hersesy and were linked in legend to the patron saint of the town, who was said to have defeated the dragon in battle. Here we might be reminded, too, of the founding of Thebes, for the original citizens of that city were giants who sprang up from the ground where Cadmus had sown the teeth of a dragon. The dragon of Norwich was carried in mayoralty processions until 1832. Yet giants in human form were themselves often held to be evil figures associated with the pagan past. A History of Winchester, written in 1798, accuses the giants of Dunkirk and Douay of being symbolic of pagan giants who ate the inhabitants of the town until the town’s patron saint destroyed them. Thus, as was the case in twelfth- and thirteenth-century France, the giant continued to be associated with the inversion of orthodoxy and allegiance to the vernacular, decentralized, local political structure.

As the gigantic splits into the official parade and the unsanctioned festival, between central and local, sacred and secular respectively, it works to contribute to the creation of the new public spaces necessary to class society: the spaces of reproduction and production within which those classes define themselves by means of an exaggeration of boundaries. Fairholt records that the prosperous traders “rivalled the glories of the old nobility in the palaces they constructed for their Guildhalls; and having no pride of ancestry, they chose the legends of their old cities for display on public occasions.” Contrary to a feudal system of allegiances, allegiance here was directed toward the town and the middle class, which sustained the town’s economic relations. The giants of Malines and Douai were popularly called Le Grand-Papa and were exhibited on pedestals, while a “family” of smaller
giants, consisting of a father and mother, two daughters of different ages, and a young son, marched behind on foot. At Ath, Louvain, and Dunkirk, the town giants appeared as wedded pairs or family groups. The allegiance of the people to this secular "Father" and his family is further illustrated in processions like that at Cassel, where the giant was followed by the tallest humans of the town, who were dressed as babies. The maintenance and presentation of the giants shifted during the Renaissance to secular hands; the gigantic served the functions of free trade and merchandising as it represented the guilds and as the occasions for its celebration became more and more commercial. The giants themselves were sometimes lent by the corporations of one town to another to "swell the public shows."42

The appearance of the gigantic within the context of the city must be linked as well to the creation of public spectacle. The spectacle provides a clear example of what Tadeusz Kowzan has called the artificialization of the sign: "Le spectacle transforme les signes naturels en signes artificiels, il a donc le pouvoir d'"artificialiser" les signes."43 The appropriation of the gigantic out of the natural landscape and its placement within the urban milieu of market relations marks a transition from the ambivalent (productive and destructive) forces of the natural to the reproductive and productive forces of class societies, forces that are seen as humbly controlled and thereby secularized. Thus social forms such as the culture's particular version of the family are correspondingly naturalized. The gigantic moves away from the magical and religious toward the instrumental and the material life of the body in this transition from sacred to secular folk culture. But with the advent of mechanical reproduction, participation in the spectacle becomes more distanced.

In The Society of the Spectacle, Guy Debord suggests:

The origin of the spectacle is the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly translated in the spectacle, whose mode of being concrete is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world represents itself before the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What ties the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it as separate.44

For example, we might say that in contrast to the participatory experience of the carnival world, the parade marks a step away from the time of the body and its labor. The parade is the product of official discourse, the discourse of a history alienated from agrarian time.

Unlike the carnivalistic pageant, where the crowd moves with the image, the image in the parade is exaggerated by the very distance placed between it and its viewer. While the carnival plays on metaphors of display and concealment, on a licentious and sexual shifting between the official and its inverse, between performer as crowd and crowd as performer, the parade seeks a seamless presentation, the smooth movement of official apparatuses toward infinity at either end. We do not see the true origin or conclusion of the parade without experiencing a corresponding disillusionment with its power. Properly viewed, the parade's limits are beyond our own particular moment of viewing, beyond even "the shrewd boyes, underpeeping." And between us and its moving face is the perfectly uniform line of the police barricade, a line designed to perfect the parade's spatial closure as much as to protect the parade from the interruptions of inversion or speech. We might say that the barricade is to the parade as the cover is to the book, providing integrity and an aura of completeness.

Similarly, the spectacle in mass culture exists in a separateness which locates history outside lived reality at the same time that it locates lived reality within the realm of consumer time, outside the time of production. Debord writes that

time for the consumption of images, the medium of all commodities, is inseparably the field where the instruments of the spectacle fully take over, as well as the goal which these instruments present globally as the place and the central aspect of all particular consumptions; it is known that the saving of time constantly sought by modern society—whether in the form of the speed of transport vehicles or in the use of dried soups—is positively translated for the population of the United States by the fact that merely the contemplation of television occupies an average of three to six hours a day.45

Thus a radical transition has taken place, from the separated, yet participatory, time of carnival and its inversions, to the distanced and open-ended historical time of the parade and its official narrative, to the distanced and closed sphere of consumer time, where the gigantic is displaced from the human to the commodity itself. In face-to-face communities the final movement of the giant is that of exposure, the revelation of the machinery of the gigantic. But the appropriation of the gigantic on the part of commodity relations marks the magification of the commodity, the final masking of the gigantic apparatus which is the nature of class relations themselves. Here is the complement and the inverse of our view of the miniature, which presented a concrete materiality leading to an abstract (because radically separate) perception. The gigantification of commodity relations is experienced
as an abstract materiality that is equally separate from the body: the gigantic sale, the parade of values.

The Gigantic Described

The giant is represented through movement, through being in time. Even in the ascription of the still landscape to the giant, it is the activities of the giant, his or her legendary actions, that have resulted in the observable trace. In contrast to the still and perfect universe of the miniature, the gigantic represents the order and disorder of historical forces. The consumerism of the miniature is the consumerism of the classic; it is only fitting that consumer culture appropriates the gigantic whenever change is desired. We want the antique miniature and the gigantic new. And while our daydream may be to animate the miniature, we admire the fall or the death, the stopping, of the giant.

The preindustrial giant is the giant of natural forces in all their tempestuousness. This is the giant in Blake's prophetic books (the giant without constraints—prolific and producer) and the giant of Goya (both creator and destroyer). The gigantic is viewed as a consuming force, the antithesis of the miniature, whose objects offer themselves to the viewer in a utopia of perfect, because individual, consumption. The giant is frequently seen as a devourer, and even, as in the case of Cyclops, as a cannibal. In Eskimo and other North American Indian mythologies, the giants may be either human, animal, or bird in form; usually they are males, and they are almost always cannibalistically inclined. In Caesar (De Bello Gallico, Book VI, Chapter XVI) there is an account of Druidic practices of human sacrifice in which large wickerwork images were filled with living men and set on fire, thus allowing the giant to "consume his victim." In his History of Winchester Milner relates against the Dunkirk and Douay practice of, on certain holidays, building up an immense figure of basketwork and canvas to the height of forty or fifty feet to represent a huge giant. Inside were placed a number of living men who caused the basket to be moved from place to place. And in Lilliput, Gulliver as giant is similarly "reduced" to his bodily functions, a beast of consumption capable of producing much waste and destruction if unleashed.

The literary depiction of the gigantic involves the same problems of detail and comparison as that of the miniature, but whereas description of the miniature approaches an infinity of relevant detail, description of the gigantic frequently focuses on movement and its attendant consequences. Thus, while the Lilliput section of Gulliver's Travels tends toward the stillness and transcendence of the anthropological model, the Brobdingnag section tends toward the partial and immediate experience of the diary. The description of Lilliput moves toward scientific discourse in its transcendent concern with pattern, design, and replicability. The Lilliputian world is trivial in its comprehensiveness; its time is cyclical, the time of past and present meshed, the time of lyric. In contrast, the description of Brobdingnag tends toward narrative suspense in its concern with the immediate, the partial, and the surprising action. Its temporality moves toward an unknown closure. Because the first-person narrative voice is in the present looking back, we assume that Gulliver will survive, yet we don't know how many or what nature of obstacles he will face before the end of the story. The observer is subjected to manipulation and misunderstanding, just as Gulliver is condescended to by the king.

Tragedy in the first book is the threat to Gulliver's vision; tragedy in the second book is the threat of consumption, of having the entire body destroyed by being made into an object or small animal. After his road show in the farmer's box, Gulliver becomes the Queen's pet: "The Queen giving great Allowance for my Defectiveness in speaking, was however surprised at so much Wit and good Sense in so diminutive an Animal." He is housed in a traveling closet arranged with doll-size furnishings, and the King "was strongly bent to get me a Woman of my own Size, by whom I might propagate the Breed: But I think I should rather have died than undergone the Disgrace of leaving a posterity to be kept in cages like tame Canary Birds; and perhaps in time sold about the Kingdom to Persons of Quality for Curiosities." We might note that the contemporary science-fiction story Land of the Giants similarly portrays the capture of humans by giants and the giants' desire to keep the Earth creatures in cages amid collections of small animals. Just as Gulliver is continually threatened by the natural in Brobdingnag (among his adversaries are a cat, rats, hail, a dog, a kite, a frog, a monkey, and an eagle, along with the uncultured or anomalous human—the baby and the dwarf), so the Earth creatures in Land of the Giants are threatened by a cat, a snake, rats, and puppies as much as by the high-technology weapons of the giants. It is significant that the major victories against the giants in the latter text are made through the use of fire, a quantity and quality which, like any element, cannot be permanently miniaturized, and which presents the ultimate image of consumption.

The most horrible images in the Brobdingnag section of Gulliver's Travels have to do with women's bodies as images of the consuming. Particularly the breast, which often is so overly cultured and literally
disembodied as an image to be consumed, is inverted here into a
frightening symbol of growth and contamination. The breast turns
from nurturer to destroyer. First, there is the depiction of the nurse’s
breast: “I must confess no Object ever disgusted me so much as the
Sight of her monstrous Breast, which I cannot tell what to compare
with, so as to give the curious Reader an Idea of its Bulk, Shape and
Colour. It stood prominent six Foot, and could not be less than six
teen in Circumference. The Nipple was about half the Bigness of my
Head, and the Hue both of that and the Dug so varified with Spots,
Pimples and Freckles, that nothing could appear more nauseous.”
Later Gulliver sees a group of beggars who exhibit “the most horrible
Spectacles that ever an European Eye beheld.” Prominent among
these “there was a Woman with Cancer in her Breast, swelled to a
monstrous Size, full of Holes, in two or three of which I could have
easily crept, and covered my whole Body.” Similarly, when the
Maids of Honor strip him and lay him “at full Length in their
Bosoms” he becomes much disgusted by the offensive smell coming
from their skins. The breasts represent a superfluity of nature; they
will swallow Gulliver in their immediateness. And the Queen, who at
this point controls Gulliver’s fate, becomes the most horrible of these
devouring female giants: “the Queen (who had indeed but a weak
Stomach) took up at one Mouthful, as much as a dozen English Farm-
ers could eat at a Meal, which to me was for some time a very nau-
seous Sigh. She would crunch the Wing of a Lark, Bones and all,
between her Teeth, although it were nine Times as large as that of a
full grown Turkey; and put a Bit of Bread in her Mouth, as big as two
twelve-penny Loaves. She drank out of a Golden Cup, above a
Hogshead at a Draught.”

Gulliver of course notes that such disgust is a matter of perspective
and that the fairness of English ladies and the perfections of Lillipu-
tian physiognomy are a matter of point of view and its restriction
of knowledge. Here we have the basis for the idealization of the mini-
ature, its erasure of disorder, of nature and history, and the basis for
the grotesque realism of the gigantic. Microscopic description of the
small tends toward the surreal and the fantastic as it both enlarges its
object and “makes it strange.” Consider the description of the con-
tents of Gulliver’s pockets in Book I, the snuff box for example: “In
the left Pocket, we saw a huge Silver Chest, with a Cover of the same
Metal, which we, the Searchers, were not able to lift. We desired it
should be opened; and one of us stepping into it, found himself up to
the mid Leg in a sort of Dust, some part whereof flying up to our
Faces, set us both a sneezing for several Times together”; or the
description of the pistols as a “hollow Pillar of Iron, about the Length
of a Man, fastened to a strong Piece of Timber, larger than the Pillar,
and upon one side of the Pillar were huge Pieces of Iron sticking out,
cut into strange Figures.” The modern writer Francis Ponge con-
ducts a similar experiment in his “Notes Toward A Shell”:

A shell is a little thing, but I can make it look bigger by replacing it
where I found it, on the vast expanse of sand. For if I take a handful
of sand and observe what little remains in my hand after most of it has
run out between my fingers, if I observe a few grains, then each grain
individually, at the moment none of the grains seems small to me any
longer, and soon the shell itself—this oyster shell or limpet or razor
claim—will appear to be an enormous monument, both colossal and
intricate like the temples of Angkor, or the church of Saint-Maclou, or
the Pyramids, and with a meaning far stranger than these unquestioned
works of man.

Exaggeration here is not simply a matter of change in scale, for the
change in scale and quantity is significant only in relation to a corre-
spending change in quality and complexity. The more complicated
the object, the more intricate, and the more these complications and
intricacies are attended to, the “larger” the object is in significance.
As Ponge demonstrates, complexity is a matter of context and history
as much as it is a matter of number of elements, for the assignation of
elements is a cultural process: the description determines the form of
the object. The more synecdochic the description, the closer we are to
a cultural hierarchy of description. When description moves away
from synecdoche toward the “spelled out” and overarticulated, the
effect is an exaggeration of the object through estrangement.

What often happens in the depiction of the gigantic is a severing of
the synecdoche from its referent, or whole. The breasts of Bro-
dingnag have a frightening existence as objects or organisms separable
from the body. The partial vision of the observer prohibits closure of
the object. Our impulse is to create an environment for the miniature,
but such an environment is impossible for the gigantic: instead the
gigantic becomes our environment, swallowing us as nature or history
swallows us. In the representation of the gigantic within public space it
is therefore important that the gigantic be situated above and over, that
the transcendent position be denied the viewer. Traditionally, this
function has been met by public sculpture, a sculpture of commemora-
tion and celebration that looks to a definitive kind of contextualization,
a relation between work and environment which we similarly see in
earth art’s concern with the relation between site and nonsite. In
painting and in literature the gigantic is a matter of the readjustment of
depicted figure to depicted landscape, but the sculpture's three-dimensionality forces it to account for the immediate relation between its materiality and the human scale of the viewer.

Distinct from the domestic arts and the decontextualized art of the collection/museum, the art of public space is an eternalized parade, a fixing of the symbols of public life, of the state, within a midieu of the abstract authority of the polis. The reduction of the individual viewer in the face of the public monument is all the more evident in the function of the inscription; one is expected to read the instructions for perception of the work—to acknowledge the fallen, the victorious, the heroic, and be taken up in the history of place. All public monuments of this type are monuments to death and the individual's prostration before history and authority. On the other hand, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century obsessions with science, technology, and the occupation of the sky have resulted in a different form of public sculpture and monument. The very fact that you can climb inside and to the top of the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, or the statue of William Penn on the tower of Philadelphia's City Hall, simultaneously speaks to an abstract transcendence above and beyond the viewer and the possibility that the viewer can unveil the giant, can find the machinery hidden in the god and approach a transcendent view of the city himself or herself. It is a symbol of the corporate impulse toward absolute authority that the president's office and penthouse suite are often on the top floor of the skyscraper, while the public observatory deck is on the floor immediately below.

The gigantic art of the public space is an art of culture, not an art of nature; its forms and themes are taken from the life of the city that surrounds it. If the unleashed sea is the essential metaphor of the romantic sublime, the orchestrated fountain is the essential metaphor of the art of public space. Thus far in this section we have seen a movement from the legendary figures of natural force and destruction associated with the founding of cities and exhibited in pageant to the "heroic" statues of the public square to the abstract sculpture preferred by the corporate state. The town giant memorializes the imposition of central authority and, at the same time, the persistence of vernacular tradition in the face of and in the service of that authority. And like the town giant, the hero on the horse also symbolizes the reproduction of the social. In this case, a historical narrative, or instructions for the generation of ideology, is presented: the founding fathers, we may be assured, are eternally protecting us from the incursions of the outside, be it nature or the cultural other. The hero on the horse memorializes the status difference between those who can afford to ride and those who must walk as much as it celebrates the subjection of nature. In pageant and memorial, the giant states the differences between official and vernacular discourse; differences between state, sacred, and secular, and the system of class relations legitimated by particular versions of history. As we shall see as we turn to the abstractions of pop art, contemporary public forms of the gigantic serve an analogous ideological function as they both memorialize and call into question our relation to the system of commodities.

Leo Lowenthal's studies of popular culture traced a shift from the nineteenth-century hero of the sphere of production—Horatio Alger in the guise of Carnegie, Mellon, and others—to the twentieth-century hero of the sphere of consumption—the hero as an image to be consumed, the movie star or the media personality. Lowenthal correspondingly traces the movement of these aesthetic images, these representative and representational forms of the subject, away from the vernacular and into the abstract space of mass communication. The fact that such subjects are "larger than life" is not a result of their historical acts so much as it is a matter of their medium of presentation; the representation fully effaces its referent; there is only a series of images related to each other in a chainlike, cumulative formation. And that formation, that generation of sign by means of sign, provides the aesthetic corollary for the generative capacity of commodity relations.

This generative capacity of the sign is the phenomenon addressed by Warhol in his 1964 piece Jackie, a liquetix and silkscreen reproduction of sixteen familiar photographs of Jacqueline Kennedy at the time of her husband's assassination and funeral. The effect is a neutralization of content, a presentation of the image as gadget or ready-made emotion. As Warhol himself says, "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again it doesn't really have any effect." All experience becomes vicarious experience in spectacle forms, and the possibilities for the exaggeration of scale and significance are multiplied with the distance of each representation from lived reality. The relativizing capacity of context and history and the relativizing capacity of the body are absent to the viewer invented by spectacle.

It is important to remember that the mechanical reproduction of art objects, the movement away from the authenticity of the original that in fact might be seen as creating the authenticity of the original, results in the susceptibility of art itself to this mode of exaggeration. As recent psychoanalytic work has told us, repetition, in fact, creates a reproduction which initiates the very aura of the real. In an article on the death of modern monumental sculpture, Barbara Rose writes:

Our idea of the monumentality of Picasso's works is not dependent on actual scale; in fact, in my case an appreciation of their monumentality was largely a result of never having seen the originals, but of having experienced them as slides or photographs. In this way, the comparison
with the human body never came up, so that the epoch-making 1928–29 Construction in Wire, although a scant twenty inches high in actuality, was as large as the imagination cared to make it... The photograph, as Michelangelo Antonioni was scarcely the first to realize, permits a blowup to any scale, even the most gargantuan. Through the agency of the photograph, the viewer can mentally transform the intimate living-room art of early modern sculpture into the outdoor monuments Duchamp-Villon envisioned.57

We might also consider here the "monumental" small sculptures by Henry Moore. Rose’s experience is that of the tourist who finds the representation of culture in the guidebook and the postcard more significant and more attractive than the true culture, contaminated by history and difference, can ever be.

The paradoxes of this problem of the proliferation of images are most clearly articulated in pop art, which has taken its place within the abstract space of mass culture and the mass spectacle at the same time that it has usurped the space of public sculpture. The Oldenburgs that dot the urban landscapes of Chicago and Philadelphia are the legendary giants, the topographical mascots, of those cities. They are relatives of other forms of the architecture of the above, particularly the billboard and the neon sign, those forms which are all façade. And they are representations of mechanical reproduction arrested into authenticity by being "original objects." We see this paradox of the authentic object" moving out of mechanical reproduction in the phenomenon of people asking Andy Warhol to autograph "real" Campbell’s soup cans. Thus, as Lucy Lippard and others have noted, the authenticity of the artist, as well as the authenticity of the artwork, becomes tenuous. In the movement from Jasper Johns’s Ballantine Cans (1960), which is made of bronze, hand-painted, and displayed on a bronze base, to Warhol’s 1964 exhibit of boxes at the Stable Gallery, where piles of wooden boxes silkscreened with various brand insignias represented piled supermarket cartons, the work of art’s mode of production has been mapped upon the mode of production of its object—the consumer good. Johns’s piece still clearly speaks of its singularity, its marked-off-ness, while Warhol’s disappears into a chain of signifiers stretched in both directions toward referent and image. The result is a consumer aesthetic of mechanical reproduction which moves simultaneously toward art and commercial goods: the mechanization of the artwork (Warhol’s famous line, “I want to be a machine,” and the confusion over whether Rosenquist was in fact a billboard painter or a billboard artist) and the aestheticization of the consumer good.

Pop art’s primary qualities of gigantification and novelty, its obsession with the mechanical possibilities of exaggeration, and its anti-classicism, are the modern expression of the qualities of gigantification we find in previous uses of the spectacle—the articulation of quantity over quality, of “façade” over “content,” of materiality and movement over mediation and transcendence. But whereas the gigantic in landscape is approached as a relic of a more violent and natural era, and while the town giant eventually loses its ferocity and acquires the sentimental qualities of the vernacular at the same time that it speaks to a historically determined future, the gigantic in pop art celebrates the proliferation of the new. As Lippard has observed about “New York Pop,” “Use connotes the past, and the past, even the immediate past, evokes memories. Pop objects determinately forgo the uniqueness acquired by time. They are not yet worn or left over. Every Campbell’s soup can looks like every other Campbell’s soup can since it has had no time to acquire character; every TV commercial on one channel at a given moment is the same, whether it is seen in Sagatuck or in Sioux City.”58 The pop gigantic exists in the abstract space of mass production. The human body is not gigantic here; the image is, and the image is an object whether its referent is in fact an object or not. Unlike the use of objects in painting to simulate the interior world of the domestic (the still life), and even unlike the surrealist collage, which still tends toward the evocative and nostalgic in its choice of objects, the pop object resists the symbolic; it exists in an abstract and autonomous space, a space of the façade, of consumption without “meaning.” It is the next-to-the-last stage in the secularization and denaturalization of the gigantic, for in its wholesale rejection of temporality, pop becomes subject to temporality, to the process of periodization which attaches symbolic meaning to its context of production. Just as the location of the pop object in space makes it vulnerable to symbolization (e.g., the town mascot), so does its particular form of iconography, as well as its accompanying manifestoes (or lack of them), make it vulnerable to “dating.” As we shall see in our final chapter, the nemesis of pop is the nostalgia for novelty which we find in the contradictions of kitsch and camp.

The Lie: Gigantism in Language

The exaggeration of the gigantic in three-dimensional representation is obviously limited by materials and their relation to design. Once the representation is made through language or paint on canvas, the gap between image and the physical world makes exaggeration constrained by social convention rather than by engineering. The
work's "internal" system of signs forms a field of relativity within which elements are displayed. But it would be naive to assume that such aesthetic/social constraints play no part in the determination of scale. When Barbara Rose complains that many artists feel they can "blow up" any design—in her words, "to understand the pitfalls of such speculation, one need only entertain for a moment the nightmarish vision of a fifty-foot Degas bronze dancer"—she is articulating the aesthetic constraints offered by the subject and form of the work. We cannot have a mammoth petite and graceful ballerina unless we want a parody, for the history of the depiction of ballerinas has fixed their relation to scale. Indeed, our simultaneous and transcendent view of the clockwork precision of the classical ballet has resulted in a strong tendency toward miniaturization here. Thus we may also begin to ascribe Joseph Cornell's affinity for nineteenth-century ballet to formal as well as nostalgic and thematic considerations.

We have emphasized the skewed relation of language to physical scale, to the fact that description of the miniature and description of the gigantic rely on internal systems of comparisons and social notions of the hierarchy of detail. Describing something small involves the same type of work as describing something enormous: the work of comparison and selection of detail and example. These aesthetic conventions of description arise out of the constraints of making fictions, the constraints of genre. Hence, when Florence Moog publishes an article in Scientific American entitled "Why Gulliver is a Bad Biologist," she misses the point. A human the size of a Brobdingnagian may be a physical impossibility, but a fictive human the size of a Brobdingnagian is absolutely appropriate, particularly in relation to the physical impossibility and fictive possibility of its inverse, the Lilliputian. It was the Lilliputians as much as Swift who made the invention of the Brobdingnagians necessary.

These considerations of aesthetic conventions in relation to exaggeration bring us to the problem of "aesthetic size," the relation between genre and significance. In Chapter 7 of the Poetics, Aristotle writes:

But, besides this, a picture, or any other composite object, if it is to be beautiful, must not only have its parts properly arranged, but be of an appropriate size; for beauty depends on size and structure. Accordingly, a minute picture cannot be beautiful (for when our vision has almost lost its sense of time it becomes confused); nor can an immense one (for we cannot take it all in together, and so our vision loses its unity and wholeness)—imagine a picture a thousand miles long! So, just as there is a proper size for bodies and pictures (a size

that can be kept in view), there is also a proper amplitude for fables (what can be kept well in one's mind). This argument might be seen as a cognitive one, implying that complexity and simplicity are functions of the intellectual capacity of the viewer. Yet it can also be seen as a sociological one, implying that the proper amplitude of a form depends upon the expectations of genre. In a nonliterate culture the qualification "what can be kept well in one's mind" is an aesthetic value serving the particular and necessary functions of memory. Any work composed in such a way that it was unmemorable would, of course, quickly lose its social life. With the advent of mechanical reproduction, the text can acquire a number of properties, from seriality to disjunctiveness, properties that are made possible through its physical form. Repetition forms the most obvious example of this transformation, for whereas repetition may be a major structural and thematic principle of oral art, it tends to be a minor ludic principle in written works. The physical size of a work is dependent upon the social function of the genre; the economy of the proverb and of other forms of multum in parvo arises from their situation in the immediate context of conversation and the turn-taking rules prevalent in that context. The structure of War and Peace allows for maximum variation and complication at least in part because of the leisure time that is available to its readers and because of the physical status of the book, which permits "dipping," rereading, and the mapping of consecutive chapters onto consecutive situations of reading. Similarly, Bakhtin has traced the divergences between the "banquet dialogue" (through Menippean satire to carnival to the Dostoevskian novel) and the aphoristic thinking of the Enlightenment; he describes the first as a display of tensions between social classes, and the second as an idealization of a unified consciousness and, consequently, a valorization of the notion of individuality. It would be naive to argue, as Bertram Jessup does in his article "Aesthetic Size," that "size itself can be felt as quality, or yields quality. What is needed is a qualification of the principle of aesthetic size so that it may be maintained that a large work, otherwise equal in quality, is superior to a small one." There is no "otherwise equal in quality," no stance in which the social function of the work can be disregarded. We cannot speak of the small, or miniature, work independent of the social values expressed toward private space—particularly, of the ways the domestic and the interior imply the social formation of an interior subject. And we cannot speak of the grand and the gigantic independent of social values expressed toward nature and the public and exterior life of the city. Aesthetic size cannot be divorced from social function and social values.
Aside from their manipulation of length and complexity in relation to scale, works of verbal art can effect what Joyce called the technique of "gigantism" in the position they take with regard to the relation between the world and the word. In the Cyclops chapter of *Ulysses*, for example, Joyce arranges a pageant of language made up of the discourse of bourgeois society; that discourse's legal, medical, parliamentary, and scientific jargon, as well as the exaggerations of popular journalism, is put on display within the scene at Barney Kiernan's. In the schemes he circulated to his friends Linati, Gurman, and Gilbert, Joyce wrote that the scene in the tavern, characterized by the technique of "gigantism," was meant to be symbolic of "nation, state, religion, dynasty, idealism, exaggeration, fanaticism and collectivity."64 Joyce thus presents the literary equivalent of the gigantic we have seen in other forms of representation. And because of the abstractions of language, the possibilities for the "blowing up" of significance are heightened even further. Such fictions can exaggerate the gap between signified and signer, and between contexts of firsthand experience and the progressively distanced contexts of fiction. The more fictive the context establlished by the genre, the greater the possibility and potential for exaggeration. The best example of this type of exaggeration is, of course, the hyperbole and its extended form, the tall tale.

In Rabelais's work, language becomes so surfeited that it erupts into the list or the list's double, the collection. In the colloquy between Pantagruel and Panurge on "the virtues of Triboulet" ("A fatal fool! A high-toned fool! A natural fool! A b sharp and b flat fool")65 there is a threat of an infinite series of juxtaposed adjectives, as if language could clone itself into perpetuity without the necessity of returning "to earth." This hyperbolic language characteristic of the carnival grotesque arises out of folk tradition, and thus the feast of the body in Rabelais has its corollary in the feast of words and images offered during market celebrations. To further examine this earlier (and simultaneous) folk tradition, we might turn to one of the earliest collections of oral tall tales existing in an extant manuscript, "La Nouvelle Fabrique des Excellents Traits de Vérité," assembled by a Norman monk under the pseudonym Philippe d'Alcîre and first published in Paris in 1579, a generation after Rabelais. Although the tall-tale tradition has largely been thought to be a North American phenomenon, Gerald Thomas makes an argument in his translation and analysis of "La Nouvelle Fabrique" that there is a much older European tall-tale tradition. The d'Alcîre manuscript apparently arose from the telling sessions in a local tavern. D'Alcîre addresses his readers: "So, as they say, two useful words are enough, and yet I say quickly that it was not quite a hundred and a half years ago that being in Lyons, in flesh and bones, in the company of many boon companions, my good friends, while having a good feed at Mother Gillette's and drinking the freshest and the best, many merry stories and amusing tales, some fresh and others salty were told; there was as much crying as laughing over them."66 As in Rabelais, the tall-tale tradition incorporates the themes of the gigantic which we have been enumerating: the grotesque, the body, feasting, leisure, the exterior and the public over the domestic; the vernacular and secular over the official and sacred. In Europe, and later in America, the casual tall-tale session in the tavern becomes formalized into the Liar's Club. Thomas writes that in the eighteenth century, provincial clubs arose in France and the Netherlands for this purpose. In 1783, for example, La Société des Canaris was founded by men who cultivated songs in the Walloon dialect. This club later became a Cercle des Mineurs (Liars' Circle) and, in 1834, Li Cabinet des Minstres (The Cabinet of Joyful Lies). In order to join, one had to successfully narrate a tall tale in dialect.67 Thus the tall-tale session might be seen as the everyday equivalent of the public market days that involved a parading of the gigantic and a concomitant celebration of the vernacular. In both there is an interruption of the temporality of work, an inversion of official values into the vernacular, and a festive display of accumulation over balance.

In folklore, the tall tale bears a particular relation to its context of telling. Unlike the colloquy in the written work, which assumes a standard of exaggeration and remains there, the tall-tale session begins with understatement and proceeds with each narrative element to move farther away from reality as defined by everyday lived experience. A passage describing a hyperbole session from Zora Neale Hurston's study of Afro-American folklore in Florida, *Mules and Men*, might serve as an example:

> [Joe answered:] 'Man, he's too ugly. If a spell of sickness ever tried to slip up on him, he'd skeer it into a three weeks' spasm.'
> Blue Baby stuck in his oar and said: 'He ain't so ugly. Ye all jus' ain't seen no real ugly man. Ah seen a man so ugly till he could get behind a jimpson weed and hatch monkie.'
> Everybody laughed and moved closer together. Then Officer Richardson said: 'Ah seen a man so ugly till they had to spread a sheet over his head at night so sleep couldn't slip up on him.'
> They laughed some more, then Clifford Ulmer said: 'Ah'm goin' to talk with my mouth wide open. Those men y'all been talkin' 'bout
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wasn’t ugly at all. Those was pretty men. Ah knowed one so ugly till you could throw him in the Mississippi river and skin ugly for six months.”

“Give Clift de little dog,” Jim Allen said. “He done tole the biggest lie.”

On this particular morning the men are waiting for a foreman who never shows up, so they spend the morning bookkeeping (from beurceup, taking loudly and aimlessly) and “telling lies.” Clifford moves this passage toward closure because his is the most extreme exaggeration. And yet, like all tall-tale sessions, this set of lies threatens infinity. The context of the tall-tale session works cumulatively. Each lie sets a plateau for the following lie to take as a basis for the possible. (Here we see the appropriateness of Pinocchio’s magic nose.) Hence the fiction progressively moves from understatement to the most impossible and improbable of statements. Mostly a male genre, the tall tale is associated with the worker in a period of leisure. In contrast to the lived experience of work, an experience at least traditionally known “firsthand” through the body, the tall tale recounts/invents experiences that are possible only in a fictive universe. The fantastic here is ironically underscored by the juxtaposition of a first-person voice with fabulous events, or by the recounting of an “obvious lie” as legend—that is, true within some historical past. It has been noted in both Europe and North America that those who tell tall tales are often sailors, hunters, fishermen, emigrants, immigrants, soldiers, and, occasionally, farmers. These situations involve considerable distance between the workplace and the home. Often they are typified by solitary outdoor labor. They are “outside” positions in the sense that they are far from the domestic and domesticated modes of sociability. “The one that got away” is all the more credible because we have only the narrator as witness, yet all the more incredible because it is beyond the range of the audience’s experience. Thus the narrator plays upon his own credibility in a pattern of understatement and overstatement. Because of this positioning in context, the tall tale presents the generic antithesis of the aphorism. Aphoristic thinking moves toward transcendence and away from the immediate context of situation, seeking to subsume the situation beneath “the rule,” but the tall tale is caught up in its own narrative process, a process of invention through progressive stages. The tall tale is nearly unquotable: each of its elements is tied within the narrative structure of the overall tale, and the tale itself is tied into a contextual structure from which it cannot be detached without a considerable loss of effect. Hence the literary tall tale cannot employ the improvisational techniques of the oral tall-tale session.

THE GIGANTIC

The idea of a “New World,” the enormity of the wilderness and its demand for a type of physical labor correspondingly extraordinary, has been the locus for a particularly strong and widespread tall-tale tradition in North America. The tall tale is both a genre of the frontier, with its expansive form, and a genre of emigration, of experience conveyed second- to third-hand, of “the report.” The tradition of fabulous travel literature, which can be traced to the Middle Ages, via such works as The Letter from Presbyter John and Mandeville’s Travels, has its North American equivalent in oral travelers’ accounts, in occupational tall-tale traditions, and in the written versions of these narratives found in popular literature. Since the settlement of North America came in a postliterate period, oral and written forms of exaggeration arose at the same time. But it was in oral contexts—the leisure contexts of the lumber camp at night, the general store, the community liar’s bench—that such tales arose. Once the written form predominantly supplanted the oral form. Such tales were viewed nostalgically, even sentimentally. Seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century settlers’ accounts of mythical beasts and vegetation, of Native Americans possessing magic and sorcery, of the richness of the soil and the miraculous powers of the water, were supplanted from the late eighteenth century onward by both oral and written occupational tales centering on the frontiersman (Davy Crockett), the riverboat captain (Mike Fink), the lumberjack (Paul Bunyan), the cowboy (Pecos Bill), the sailor (Old Stormalong), the steelworker (Joe Magarac), the wheat farmer (Febold Feboldson), the oil worker (Gib Morgan), the guide (Jim Bridger), the farmer (Hathaway Jones), the railroad laborer (John Henry), and the engineer (Casey Jones). The historical existence of Crockett, Fink, Henry, and both Hathaway and Casey Jones does not make the cycles of narratives associated with such figures significantly less fantastic, for the tale relies on internal rather than external criteria of realism. These characters are heroes of production, supplanting the Old World giants of the natural. For example, the following literary tall tale of Febold Feboldson is etiological, like the European giants’ tales, but it also emphasizes the tremendous productive capacity of the giant:

Because Nebraska, in those days, was a treeless expanse of prairie, Febold realized that he would have to find trees in another locale if he were to build the log cabin he contemplated. The hardy pioneer started west and walked to the Redwood Forest in California before he found trees which he considered suitable. Febold picked a dozen choice trees, pulled them up by their roots, tied them securely with a huge log chain, and started back to Nebraska. When he got home, he was astounded to discover that the treetops had worn themselves out from
being dragged halfway across the continent. Even to this day, one can still see stretches of red soil and sand between California and Nebraska. Those Redwood trees were ground to powder as Fubold dragged them along.

He simply shrugged and said, “Oh, well, live and learn.” However, he did regret that he had wasted three days walking to and from California for nothing but a dozen tree stumps.71

Thus, although the Old World giants represented the unleashed forces of nature, these North American figures are often famous for taming nature. Fuboldson reduces giant redwoods to sawdust, and Pecos Bill is depicted as wearing a ten-foot rattlesnake around his neck for an ornament, riding on the backs of mountain lions and cyclones, and raising his horse Widow Maker from colthood on nitroglycerine and dynamite.72

The position of these New World giants within the occupational vernacular of either region or ethnicity makes them symbolic of the collective life. “Paul Bunyan’s Day,” for example, is held in several logging communities in Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Washington State. Richard Dorson records that “at these ceremonies the carved dummy of a majestic Paul presides over an active scene of logging contests and woodsmen sports, such as birling, canoe-tenting, log-bucking, log-rolling, and log-chopping, or winter pastimes of skiing, bobsledding, and ice skating. Sometimes images of Paul are fashioned from snow or metal, or men of heroic proportions play Bunyan for a day. So fast and far had the ‘myth’ spiraled upward in the popular imagination that figures of Old Paul adorned both the New York and California World’s Fairs of 1933.73 The legends associated with Paul Bunyan also connect his figure to images of feasting and unlicensed consumption. J. Frank Dobie writes in a story entitled “Royal Feasting”: “The immense camps were wonders for good eating and lodging as well as for gigantic labors. Feeding his men well was a mania for Paul. It kept one freighting outfit busy all the time hauling off prime stoves from the cook shack. The men were so fond of bean soup that finally Joe Mufferton had the wagons unload their beans in a geyser, and the geyser stewed up soup for a whole season. A dozen flunkies with sides of bacon strapped to their feet skated over the gridirons to keep them greased for the hot cakes that Paul’s men loved so well.”74 Similarly, the most prominent modern urban giant, “Mose the Bowery B’hoi,” for sport drank drayloads of beer at one sitting and, with the fumes of his two-foot cigar, blew ships down the East River.75 Feasting, physical strength, and connection with local tradition are the primary characteristics of these secular and occupational giants. John Henry’s tragic battle against the abstract

infinity of machine production offers closure to these accounts as a living tradition and marks the beginning of the nostalgic distancing of the gigantic.

The twentieth century has signaled the appropriation of the sphere of the gigantic by a centralized mode of commercial advertising. Whereas the early figures like Crockett are valorized as individual heroes and as symbols of community values, Pecos Bill, Joe Magarac, and Fubold Fuboldson were invented by “local color writers” to sell newspapers and magazines. Bunyan was made famous by an advertising executive for the Red River Lumber Company who prepared a pamphlet containing Bunyan stories punctuated with testimonials to the company’s product.76 This appropriation of the gigantic away from the vernacular by the domain of commodity advertising marks the gigantic’s transition into an abstract space of production. Contemporary giants such as “the Jolly Green Giant” or “Mr. Clean” are nothing more than their products. Behind them we see not labor but frozen peas and the smell of disinfectant: commodities are naturalized and made magically to appear by the narrative of advertising itself. Such giants are symbolic of a transition from production to anonymity, of the transformation of leisure and production into consumption. Similarly, the architecture of the sign (it is possible, for example, in southern New Jersey to give someone the directions “Turn left at the champagne bottle. If you pass the dinosaur you’ve gone too far”) marks the subsuming of lived relations regarding space and shelter to the abstract image of the commodity. The names of grocery chains alone—Giant, Star, Acme—speak to this abstraction of the exchange economy. To complete this process, the local-color hero becomes the symbol of the resort, or “fantasy island,” and thus is incorporated into the spectacle of consumption. Disney’s worlds become metaspectacles of the spectrum of decontextualized vernacular giants. Thus in late capitalism we see the incorporation of the gigantic into the sphere of private industrial production as it is translated into the pseudo-labor of consumption, and a simultaneous transference of the gigantic’s sensual and consuming ethic to the sphere.

Of necessity, our discussion of the miniature took place in the shadow of the gigantic. Now as we conclude our discussion of the gigantic—its relation to landscape, to the exteriority of nature and the city, its place within systems of representation—we find ourselves once again at the place of origin for any investigation of exaggeration: the site of the body. Traditionally, the body has served as our primary mode of understanding and perceiving scale. We have seen earlier in this chapter the ways in which the image of the body can be projected upon the landscape, giving it form and definition. The world in Eng-
lish is measured by the body—spans of hands and feet, a yard the length from nose to fingers at the end of an outstretched arm. Similarly, objects under a use-value economy cannot be defined aside from the terms of the body. The world of tools is a world of handles, arms, blades, and legs. We have only to think of the scythe as it both replaces and graphically represents the bent back of the reaper, or of the fist of the hammer, the clawed hand of the cultivator. This is the image of the body as implement, as moving in and through the environment in such a way that the material world is a physical extension of the needs and purposes of the body. But this relation between the body and the world takes place only in the domain of the physical space actually occupied by the body, the domain of immediate lived experience. The miniature allows us only visual access to surface and texture; it does not allow movement through space. Inversely, the gigantic envelops us, but is inaccessible to lived experience. Both modes of exaggeration tend toward abstraction in proportion to the degree of exaggeration they allow. The most miniature objects cannot be “seen with the naked eye.” The body must be clothed in an apparatus, a technological device. The miniature, or microcomputer, is the absolute culmination of the gadget; the transformation of the tool, with its human trace, into a mechanical extension into space. The microcomputer is a further abstraction and distancing of the mind, itself already the most abstract bodily locale. Hence our tendency to mythologize the computer, to see it as robot or machine-made-animate. The gigantic, occurring in a transcendent space, a space above, analogously mirrors the abstractions of institutions—either those of religion, the state, or, as is increasingly the case, the abstractions of technology and corporate power. This space above the body is occupied by the anonymity of corporate architecture and the complementary detached “personalism” of advertising. Whereas the miniature moves from hand to eye to abstraction, the gigantic moves from the occupation of the body’s immediate space to transcendence (a transcendence which allows the eye only imperfect and partial vision) to abstraction. Thus nuclear energy can be seen as the most extreme embodiment of technological abstraction, for it incorporates the most miniature abstraction (the split atom) with the most gigantic abstraction (that of a technological apocalypse).

Thus, although the body serves as a “still center,” or constant measure, of our articulation of the miniature and the gigantic, we must also remember the ways in which the body is interiorized by the miniature and exteriorized, made public, by the display modes of the gigantic. In the next chapter we will put this center, this measure,