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**At Home in the City:
Networked Space and Urban Domesticity in American Literature,
1850-1920**

Elizabeth Mowry Klimasmith

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2000

Program Authorized to Offer Degree: English

UMI Number: 9976008

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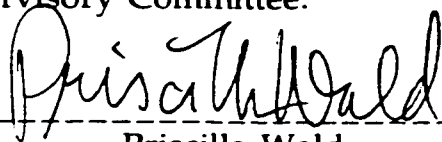
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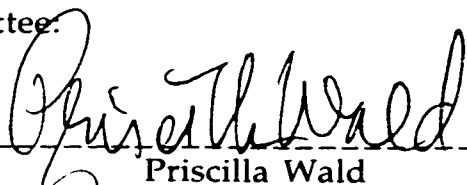


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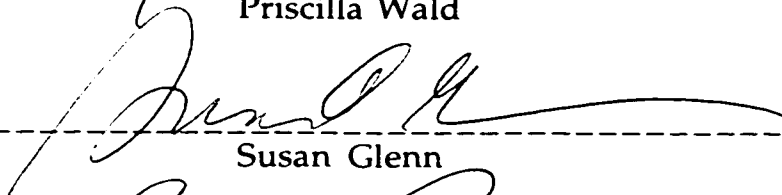


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Abstract

**At Home in the City:
Networked Space and Urban Domesticity in American Literature, 1850-1920**

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This dissertation explores the changing conceptions and uses of the notion of environment in nineteenth-century America. I argue that in this period of rapid urbanization, the novel became a testing ground for examining the relationship between urban spaces and the development of a new, modern subjectivity. As the "separate" spaces of public and private, urban and rural, masculine and feminine gave way to a paradigm of interconnected, networked cities, urban literature from the 1850's on became a realm where authors could explore networked spaces more quickly and on a wider scale than even the rapidly transforming landscape would allow. I examine literary treatments of urban domesticity such as *The Blithedale Romance*, *Ruth Hall*, *The Bostonians*, and *The Custom of the Country* alongside more prescriptive (and more thoroughly-studied) architectural, urban planning, and domestic advice texts of the period. This juxtaposition shows how the modern urban landscape's networked spaces, such as apartments, tenements, hotels, and parks disrupted and forced revisions of the notions of public and

private space foundational to early nation-building in the United States. My work challenges the notion that urban spaces and their literatures were characterized by separate, gendered spheres and contests the naturalization of gender and class in the urban landscape.

Though the dissertation draws on the extensive literature on domesticity, as well as literary, historical, and geographical approaches to the urban landscape, I move beyond offering connections between these bodies of work. Instead, I reconstruct the sociological and literary contexts of nineteenth-century U.S. cities in order to uncover the ways in which Americans grappled imaginatively and physically with the ever-evolving urban landscape. By attending to literary presentations of urban domestic spaces, I make visible theories of the modern subject's relationship to environment that are inaccessible through other approaches. My exploration of the resonances between physical, sociological and literary constructions of the urban landscape demonstrates that both concrete and fictive forces helped to shape a modern American subjectivity. I argue that to understand modernity we must begin to examine our modern notions of environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Figures.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Architectural Determinism and Urban Networks in <i>The Blithedale Romance</i> and <i>Ruth Hall</i>	20
Chapter Two: The City's Drawing Room: Spatial Practice in <i>The Bostonians</i> and Central Park.....	69
Chapter Three: Tenement Homes: At the Networked City's Limits.....	123
Chapter Four: From Artifact to Investment: Urban Homes and Modern Economies in Wharton and Gilman.....	177
Conclusion.....	230
Bibliography.....	245

LIST OF FIGURES

Number	Page
1.	The Barracks, Mott Street Between Bleecker and Houston Streets.....172
2.	Feast of Saint Rocco, Bandits' Roost, Mulberry Street.....172
3.	Bohemian Cigar-Makers at Work in their Tenement.....173
4.	Fighting Tuberculosis on the Roof.....173
5.	Bird's-eye View of an East Side Tenement Block.....174
6.	General Plan of the Riverside Buildings.....174
7.	Photograph of the Riverside Buildings.....174
8.	Lambrequins.....175
9.	Tenement Decorations.....175
10.	Room in a Tenement, 1910.....176
11.	Family Making Artificial Flowers.....176

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have written this dissertation without the help of my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors.

In a sense, the project began with my introduction to the field of American literature—and especially to women writers in the United States—when I began my graduate studies at the University of New Hampshire. I owe a great deal to the excellent teachers in the English Department there, particularly Lisa MacFarlane and Sarah Way Sherman.

The project has also benefited from my studies at the University of Washington. Ross Posnock, Mark Patterson, Richard White, and Susan Glenn all offered insights as literary critics and as environmental and social historians that have helped to make this project richer. My year as an Alvord Fellow allowed me a period of uninterrupted work on the project; I am very grateful to the Alvords for funding the fellowship.

Friends and colleagues have helped me to think more clearly about the project and have helped to distract me from it as well. Nancy LeCourt, Nancy Von Rosk, and Meg Kerr at UNH, along with Anne Raine and Gretchen Murphy at UW have offered challenging questions and sustaining friendship.

I am extremely fortunate to have worked closely with Melody Graulich and Priscilla Wald. As teachers, mentors, readers, and friends, Melody and Priscilla have given me support, insight, and confidence. Their inspiring mentorship is largely responsible for my decision to pursue my project and to choose a career in academe.

My family has never wavered in their support. My father, Jerry Klima, and sisters Kate Wilson and Abigail Klima have gamely expressed interest and have unfailingly offered their enthusiasm. Better than anyone, my mother, Melinda Ponder, has understood the demands and rewards of combining academe with motherhood. Her clear expressions of belief in me and in my work have sustained me throughout this project.

As ever, my husband, Bayard, has given generously of his time, spirit, enthusiasm, and sense of humor. Our daughter, Sophie, was born when I was beginning to write the dissertation, and Bayard's solidity as partner and parent becomes ever more essential as together we create our own version of home in the city.

DEDICATION

To my family.

Introduction

It is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and infinite.

—Charles Baudelaire¹

... he is beguiled by remembering how many of the things said in America are said for the house.

—Henry James²

In 1904, expatriate novelist Henry James returned to his childhood home in New York City. It was a profoundly dislocating experience. Where homes and churches had once stood, skyscrapers had risen, transforming the appearance and scale of the city James had once known intimately. But “nowhere,” James writes in *The American Scene*, is his shock at the changes in the landscape “quite so sharp as in presence, so to speak, of the rudely-suppressed birthplace on the other side of the Square.” His birthplace has “vanished”; it has been replaced by “a high, square, impersonal structure,” and consequently James is “amputated of half [his] history.”³ For him, self is constructed by place, and that place of self-construction is, significantly, the home. With his home “destroyed to make room for a skyscraper,” James’s

¹Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayal (London: Phaidon Publishers, 1964), 9.

²Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 125.

³James, *Scene*, 70-1.

own history has disappeared.⁴ In modern New York, the personal has been replaced by the impersonal, and with the passing of the home has come the loss of a past written in space.

This project traces the evolution of the urban home as U.S. cities became increasingly industrialized and notions of private and public space were reconfigured in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tensions between home and city preoccupied American writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fanny Fern, Edith Wharton, and Nella Larsen, authors whose novels explore relationships between modern settings and modern subjects as they each were integrated into a networked urban landscape. In so doing, the novels revise notions of environment itself. Understanding the changing function of the urban home in this period, I argue, allows us to witness the process of modernity as it unfolded and to view the modern subject—mobile and mutable—at its inception.

To explore the fictive relationships between setting and subjectivity in urban novels, I examine how an architectural determinism that equated the individual home with national morality changed as the industrial city developed in the United States.⁵ Simply put, architectural determinism is the “belief that spatial environments determine the social arrangements, daily behaviors, and political status of those who inhabit them.”⁶ Coined by architectural theorists in the 1970’s, the term essentially describes the approach to the American city employed by a wide range of nineteenth and early twentieth-century social theorists including Frederick Law Olmsted,

⁴James, *Scene*, 71.

⁵My use of the term “industrial city” to describe American cities between the mid-nineteenth century and 1920 derives from Dolores Hayden. See *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982), 10.

⁶Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 9.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Robert Park. Though these thinkers all believed that human beings developed in relation to their surroundings, they, along with the novelists who fictively explored the same relationships, struggled to understand what kind of modern subject would emerge from urban landscapes characterized by connection—and from urban homes that looked and operated differently from their predecessors.

The United States was built in part on notions of architectural, or at least environmental determinism; the idea that a built space could shape its inhabitants has marked the American landscape from the seventeenth century on. In its earliest incarnations, “America,” whether configured as Eden or wilderness, simultaneously seemed to be empty, eminently shapeable, and capable of molding a distinctly American identity. At the same time, the salient feature of citizenship in the republic was land ownership, a condition that was not restricted by birth, rank, or familial connections, but which carried with it the spoken or tacit assumption of “improving” the property. Theoretically, the landscape could Americanize its inhabitants through primeval confrontation or through legal possession, for even as they confronted untamed wilderness, settlers had both the right and the responsibility to participate in creating a new nation by building “cities on a hill” in the new world. Houses, commons, public buildings, parks, model tenements and utopian plans for cities all drew on the idea that particular designs for buildings could produce particular types of people. The formative power ascribed to these relationships between setting and subject would only become more complex with the rise of the city. And as Americans attempted to understand what changes in the landscape would mean to their conceptions of individuality and community, literature

emerged as the textual form which could best explore the cultural complexities that arose as city, home, and self converged.⁷

The bluntest architectural determinist would argue that landscapes can be regenerative or degenerative, that they can either help or harm the culture of which they are a part. In the nineteenth-century United States, settings that were broadly considered to be regenerative included the romantic pastoral landscape and the domestic space of the home. Architectural determinists and reformers such as Andrew Jackson Downing, Henry David Thoreau, and Catherine Beecher understood the American home, especially in a rural setting, as one locus for national regeneration. They precisely instructed homebuilders and homemakers on developing the physical surroundings that would produce a physically and morally healthy American citizenry. According to Beecher, nothing "more seriously involved the health and daily comfort of American women," and of course the men who would live there, too, "than the proper construction of homes."⁸ Reformers and other middle-class Americans conceived of the home as an inviolable space where the family could develop under the watchful eye of the Republican mother, a place from which emissaries—the children—could be sent to transform the nation.

⁷My discussion of these relationships is informed by the arguments laid out in: Howard Horwitz, *By the Law of Nature: Form and Value in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of The Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950; New York: Vintage Books, 1957); and Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

⁸Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841, New York: Schocken Books, 1977) 268.

But “home” can only operate as a civilizing, sanctified space when defined in opposition to the world outside, and in the early years of the republic that outside world was figured as the degenerative space of the wilderness, either an “empty” space waiting to be transformed by productive landowners à la Jefferson and Crèvecoeur, or more problematically, the wilderness of the American city. Urban space became a repository for fears of chaos, mingling, and all of the dark and lurid enterprises that could not bear scrutiny in the order and intimacy of the idealized home or rural community.⁹ The image of the city as wilderness is familiar to us from countless stories, both European and American, in which a young, naive country person travels to the city, only to be corrupted by the sex, money and desire circulating freely in the urban landscape.

American versions of these stories only obliquely reference a major nineteenth-century shift in the United States: the development of a network of physical, technological, economic and cultural connections that increasingly bound U.S. cities to their hinterlands and redefined “home” for the people who lived within the city’s borders.¹⁰ For the majority of Americans who were living in or moving to cities in the nineteenth century, as well as for their fictional counterparts, urban housing did not resemble the detached, unique, single-family cottage that reform-minded domestic architects envisioned as “home.” Even middle-class urban Americans lived in row houses, boarding houses, tenements, and hotels, buildings where public and private, interior and exterior, and feminine and masculine spaces mingled. Neither unique nor self-contained, these spaces raised the specter

⁹See Christine Stansell, *City of Women* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) for a cogent discussion of the association between city and vice from the late 1700’s on.

¹⁰My use of the terms city and hinterland derives from William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), a fascinating discussion of the rise of industrial Chicago and its relationships to the region and nation beyond.

that an urban subjectivity could develop that would challenge the individualism theoretically produced by separate, contained homes.

Observers versed in notions of architectural determinism worried that the uncontrolled spaces of the urban would probably reproduce themselves in their inhabitants. Chaotic streetscapes would produce an uncontrollable populace; lack of recognizable order in the home would produce a disorderly citizenry; crowding and dirt would produce mentally and physically stunted, unclean people.

An architectural determinism that assumed the presence of bounded, coherent spaces was destabilized by the networked, permeable spaces of the city. As opposed to the stability and order associated with the sentimentalized rural home, urban spaces were characterized by motion, randomness, change, connection, and repetition. In contrast to the variety among detached homes, row houses sharing roofs, walls, and fences presented a uniform, even monotonous appearance. Sound and heat traveled between residences. In urban apartment buildings, boarding houses, and hotels, the halls, elevators, stairways, lobbies, entryways, and sometimes dining rooms were spaces where extra-familial connections could be made within the walls of "home." Apartment buildings, boarding houses and hotels thus exemplified *permeable* architecture; once inside the building inhabitants could pass freely from place to place, entering and sharing interior spaces that would only have been shared by family members in the cottage home.¹¹ The porousness of these buildings echoed and was reinforced by their urban surroundings, in which streets, stores, restaurants,

¹¹And sometimes not even by family members. In their analyses of Downing's cottage plans, Wright and Adam Sweeting (*Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature, 1835-1855* [Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996]) show how spaces inside middle-class homes, such as the library or parlor, were designed to be the exclusive domain of one sex or the other.

parks, and taverns increased and extended the possibilities for contact among strangers and for the mixing of classes and genders. In the modern urban landscape, theatricality, voyeurism, and proximity simultaneously fragmented the broad notion of public space into individual stages, performances, and stories and transformed private spaces into shared spaces. And critically, urban spaces that confounded physical, linguistic, and imaginary boundaries necessitated new understandings of the relationships between space and subjectivity.

During this period of rapid change, the novel became a testing ground for examining the relationship between urban spaces and the development of a new, modern subjectivity. As the nominally separate spheres of public and private, urban and rural, masculine and feminine gave way to a paradigm of connection in networked cities, urban literature, beginning in the 1850's, became a realm where authors could explore networked spaces more quickly and on a wider scale than even the rapidly transforming landscape would allow. While authors imaginatively experimented with the possibilities and dangers of the fictive city, a transformative experiment on the city's physical landscape was carried out by reformers, planners, and engineers. In order to explore the relationships between the fictive and the physical, I examine literary treatments of urban domesticity alongside more prescriptive (and more thoroughly studied) architectural, urban planning, and domestic advice texts of the period. My readings show that the distinctively urban spaces of the modern landscape, such as apartments, tenements, hotels, and parks, disrupted and forced revisions of the notions of public and private space foundational to early nation-building in the United States and in so doing defined the modern subject.

Significantly, as the industrial landscape increasingly dominated the cultural horizon, it emerged in literature as a place of connection, not containment; a site structured by networks, not “spheres.” Literary and historical analyses of gender in the nineteenth-century United States have relied, at least in part, on the notion of “separate spheres” as an organizing metaphor.¹² “According to this metaphor, nineteenth-century America was neatly divided up according to an occupational, social, and affective geography of gender.”¹³ Stemming from such varied sources as de Toqueville and Engels, the logic of separate spheres asserts that in contrast to the public (male) sphere, women’s sphere was private, the realm of the domestic and the sentimental. Considered spatially, women’s sphere was the home. Yet as historian Linda K. Kerber suggests, the persistent “noise we hear about separate spheres” in nineteenth-century life and texts may signal “its breakdown . . . the shattering of an old order and the realignment of its fragments.”¹⁴ Exploring the spatial dimensions of this breakdown reveals why and how the notion of home was deployed rhetorically, linguistically, and physically to help order the potential chaos of the developing industrial city. In this light, the logic of separate spheres comes to resemble an ideology constructed to separate public from private precisely at the moment in which the city’s new organization of space was bringing private and public spaces together, changing the social landscape along with the physical.

In order to understand how, in theorist Henri Lefebvre’s terms, “social relations are achieved from the sensible,” I draw my approach to urban

¹²On separate spheres in literary scholarship, see Cathy Davidson, “Preface: No More Separate Spheres!” *American Literature* 70:3 (1998): 443–463. For an historiographic study of the notion of separate spheres, see Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* (June 1988): 9–39.

¹³Davidson, “Preface,” 444.

¹⁴Kerber, “Separate,” 22.

novels in part from historians of physical spaces such as Gwendolyn Wright and Dolores Hayden.¹⁵ Like them, I stress the “interplay between the metaphorical and the literal” in order to examine the ways in which notions of home and city, of containment and dissolution, helped to structure both the industrial city and a modern subjectivity.¹⁶ Far from operating as conservative spaces of containment, stasis, and safety, “havens in a heartless world,” the urban homes of nineteenth-century fiction were part of the city’s networks.¹⁷ Indeed, these so-called separate social and geographic spaces were mutually constituted and inseparably linked through the physical and imaginary networks that made up the modern American city as urban homes became increasingly integrated into networks of transportation, communication, and consumption. Mobility, agency and mutability were central to these urban homes in ways that the literary historical narrative of separate spheres has obscured. Urban networks changed social relations and shaped a subjectivity inherently porous, transformable, and public in a process similar to what David Harvey describes as the “urbanization of consciousness.”

Nineteenth-century novels anticipate Harvey, for they explore precisely “the roots of consciousness formation in the material realities of everyday life,” Harvey’s primary concern.¹⁸ Because novels take as their central concern the development of subjectivity, and because they uniquely combine the literal with the metaphorical, the novel was the ideal form with

¹⁵Henri Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, in *Writings on Cities*, tr. and ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth LeBas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 103.

¹⁶Kerber, “Separate,” 31.

¹⁷The phrase comes from the title of Christopher Lasch’s book, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

¹⁸David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 1989), 230.

which to imagine the rise of the city and its new subjects. As cities changed, the possibility arose that new and unfamiliar types of people would be molded by the material realities of the industrial landscape—and that a new urban consciousness, stemming from and in turn staging a new version of everyday life, would disrupt the status quo. Novelists explored the nuances of the relationships between city and subject; they saw the new urban subject as mobile and mutable, and importantly, as a self more public than private.

Fictional narratives about the industrial city were part of a range of responses to the urban voiced in established and developing fields including journalism, geography, sociology, ecology, and home economics. One response to the city's threat, famously formulated by Catharine Beecher in the 1840's, was to see transformative social potential as emanating from the home itself. She offered women domestic architecture and decoration as tools for improving the world outside. By developing a domestic architecture that allowed for multiple uses of interior space she claimed for women the agency—and provided the blueprints—to transform the families who inhabited the home's literally movable walls. Beecher, and later her great-niece, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, found these architectural connections liberating, especially in terms of gender roles. Beecher's conception of the home's power had wide cultural force; I explore how her expansive notion of home is visible in works as diverse as Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*. As connection and permeability come to characterize the architecture of the urban home, Beecher's fantasy of expansion, especially as explored by Gilman and other late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers, eroded the bounds of home and eventually, of nation.

A complementary response to changes in the urban environment at the center of novels was to reinforce the imaginary and physical boundaries between the home and the city, denying or effacing the urban connections that increasingly penetrated the city home. This fantasy of containment characterizes texts such as Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, which emphasizes separation and pathologizes contact, especially among immigrants. The idea that people are shaped socially, morally, and politically by the built spaces they inhabit was central to Riis's efforts to define detached homes as the only appropriate sites for the development of a distinctively American citizenry. His belief in the environment's force, combined with his anxieties about urban chaos, led him to construct the detached home as a bulwark against the city's advance.

Most attitudes towards the rise of the industrial city, especially those focused on the home, either oscillated between or combined Riis's anxious desire to contain the city and Gilman's utopian belief that the networked urban home could reform the nation politically and socially. But for both Riis and Gilman, theory became insufficient to explain the relationships between environment and subjectivity that fascinated and alarmed them. Significantly, both authors turned to fiction in order to elucidate more fully their ideas about home, city, and subject. In so doing, they joined a range of nineteenth and early twentieth-century American novelists from Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and George Lippard to Horatio Alger, Edith Wharton, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, setting novels in a networked urban architecture that allowed for the development—and tested the limits—of a mobile, permeable, and mutable modern subject.

In many ways, literature is about environment—about the role settings play in the narratives they unfold. In literature, the concrete and

metaphorical mix, and the relations of both imaginary and physical constructions of space to subjectivity may be traced. Even in the 1800's novelists had something the new social scientists did not—a tradition, a language, and a range of prior narratives to draw on as they attempted to evoke what the new urban landscape would signify regarding a new type of subject. The majority of the texts I explore here, including Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Henry James's *The Bostonians*, Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*, and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, are structured by the two competing fantasies of containment and dissolution that Riis and Gilman attempted to translate into social scientific terms. Attention to the urban domestic spaces in these texts reveals that they are constructed in part by a dialectic between the anxiety and the awe provoked by the networked city's urban subjects.

Because it is increasingly organized by architectural and technological connections, the urban landscape of the industrial era is a setting that usefully frames discussions about gender, class, and space that invigorate literary history. Yet urban domesticity has not been widely explored by academics, and has been virtually neglected by literary scholars. While social historians like Elizabeth Blackmar and Gwendolyn Wright, along with urban geographers such as Paul Groth and Dolores Hayden provide powerful and evocative analyses of urban homes, critical attention to the juncture between urban space and domestic space in American literature is surprisingly sparse. Thus, although my work draws upon the extensive literature on domesticity, as well as on literary, historical, and geographical approaches to the urban, I move beyond making connections between home and city to argue that analyzing literary presentations of architectural determinism in urban

domestic spaces makes visible the process of modern subject formation in relation to environment that is inaccessible through other approaches.

The theoretical basis for my analyses of urban domestic space in the industrial era derives in large part from the work of cultural geographers, particularly David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre. Harvey's understanding of urbanization as a *process* gives weight to the concrete, the daily, and the lived as the foundations for the construction of theory. Harvey writes, "The study of urbanization is a study of [capital] as it unfolds through the production of physical and social landscapes and the production of distinctive ways of thinking and acting among people who live in towns and cities."¹⁹ For Harvey, the writings of Marx connect the realms of theory and the everyday. In my project, novels, some almost contemporaneous with Marx's work, bridge the gap in a complementary way by narrating how, "out of the complexities and perplexities of [the urban] experience . . . we build understandings of the meanings of space and time; of social power and its legitimations; of forms of domination and social interaction; of the relation to nature through production and consumption; and of human nature, civil society, and political life."²⁰ These novels, and my analyses of them, are centrally concerned with both physical and social landscapes, and with the relationships between the concrete and the imaginary.

In articulating the constitutive role of space to social relations, Harvey builds on the work of Henri Lefebvre, who in *The Production of Space* sets out to "account for both representational spaces and representations of space, but above all for their interrelationships and their links with social practice."²¹ This goal is central to my project as well. I argue that writers

¹⁹Harvey, *Experience*, 6.

²⁰Harvey, *Experience*, 230.

²¹Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 116.

understood modern subject formation as a dialectic between fantasies of containment and fantasies of dissolution structured by and epitomized in the built spaces of the urban home. In addition, the project brings together two conceptions of the role of home in the rise of modernity articulated—and pronounced insufficient—by Lefebvre. Lefebvre contrasts nostalgic visions of the home as immobile and contained to conceptions of it as networked, in which “its image of immobility would then be replaced by an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits.”²² The works I explore here are structured by both of these conceptions; but uniquely, the novels construct an understanding of space that do not commit “the *theoretical error*” of seeing “a space without conceiving of it.” Rather, in bringing together literal and metaphorical conceptions of setting and subject, novels demonstrate a mode of conceptualizing space similar to that which Lefebvre calls for. They “concentrat[e] discrete perceptions,” bring together “details into a whole ‘reality,’” and imagine social relations “in terms of their interrelationships within the containing forms” they occupy.²³

A succinct example of this kind of Lefebvrian approach is found in Henry James’s travelogue, *The American Scene*. Considering the importance James attributes to his own home in the formation of his sense of self in the passage with which I opened, it is not surprising that he pays particular attention to the new types of housing that have come to characterize American cities during the decades he has spent in Europe. In what have come to be called “apartments,” public and private spaces merge in ways that disconcert James. Like Harvey and Lefebvre, James is particularly attuned to the ways in which this networked architecture will

²²Lefebvre, *Production*, 121, 93.

²³Lefebvre, *Production*, 93.

shape its inhabitants. As he muses on the distinctly American style of domestic architecture that has come to dominate New York in the early twentieth century, James begins to theorize how networked spaces operate in relation to modernity:

. . . the universal custom of the house with almost no one of its parts distinguishable from any other is an affliction. . . . This diffused vagueness of separation between apartments, between hall and room, between one room and another, between the one you are in and the one you are not in, between place of passage and place of privacy, is a provocation to despair which the public institution shares impartially with the luxurious "home."²⁴

The degree of connection and diffusion among the apartment's indistinguishable spaces forces James to refrain from calling even the most luxurious spaces "homes." The home has become public, institutional. Accustomed to privacy and differentiation between spaces, James is afflicted by the vagueness and lack of definition he encounters. But what should be separated in order for structure to claim the powerful title of "home"? Different dwellings should be separate; unrelated individuals should have their own spaces within which to define themselves as unique. Different functions should be clear; the architecture should in effect speak about itself and help the inhabitant understand how to experience it. Such specificity would help to ground James, who otherwise becomes so dissociated from the spaces he occupies that he cannot tell which he is in. Fundamentally, James's architectural unease stems from his inability to distinguish places of passage from places of privacy. Following James's assertion that his home has shaped at least half of who he is, the replacement of private space by

²⁴James, *Scene*, 125.

spaces for passage is equivalent to a threatening substitution of mobility for containment, of connection for enclosure. Architectural vagueness threatens the integrity of the self.

Not limited to New York, this degree of connection characterizes architecture “throughout the country”: to James, there is something distinctly American about the connectedness that has become “the very law of the structural fact.” He continues:

Thus we have the law fulfilled that every part of the house shall be, as nearly as may be, visible, visitable, penetrable, not only from every other part, but from as many parts of as many other houses as possible, if only they be near enough. Thus we see systematized the indefinite extension of all spaces and the definite merging of all functions; the enlargement of every opening, the exaggeration of every passage, the substitution of gaping arches and far perspectives and resounding voids for enclosing walls, for practicable doors, for controllable windows . . . so indispensable not only to occupation and concentration, but to conversation itself, to the play of the social relation at any other pitch than the pitch of a shriek or a shout.²⁵

What alarms James here is the openness, the visibility, the public-ness of supposedly interior spaces. The architecture enlarges, exaggerates, and gapes, distending and amplifying the individuals within, straining social relations. Confronted with a dizzying array of openings, such as passages, arches and voids, James longs for containment. He wants walls, windows and doors, anything representing enclosure. In these public interiors, both solitude and sociability as James understands them are eroded by “the complete proscription of privacy.”

²⁵James, *Scene*, 125.

Most upsetting for James is the impact these spaces have on his self-conception. As he looks around the modern home, he sees no protective structures, but only “doorless apertures, vainly festooned, which decline to tell him where he is, which make him still a homeless wanderer, which show him other apertures, corridors, staircases, yawning, expanding, ascending, descending, and all for the purpose of giving his presence ‘away,’ of reminding him that what he says may be said for the house.”²⁶ Decidedly modern in their arrangement, the rooms with their “yawning and expanding” connecting features do not simply render the house penetrable, they render James penetrable as well. He echoes the architecture in two ways. First, he becomes transparent in that both his presence and his thoughts are given away. Second, he begins to exhibit the decentered mobility, significantly conceived here as homelessness, associated with modernity. He becomes a “homeless wanderer,” mobile, public, and permeable.

If people are formed by their environments, as James claims, what are the implications of these networks’ structures for the American subject? That the architecture has this disturbing effect on James during his short visit does not bode well, he argues, for the people who inhabit it for the long term. He writes:

The instinct is throughout, as we catch it at play, that of minimizing, for any “interior,” the guilt or odium or responsibility, what ever these may appear, of its *being* an interior. The custom rages like a conspiracy for nipping the interior in the bud, for denying its right to exist, for ignoring and defeating it in every possible way, for wiping

²⁶James, *Scene*, 125. Emphasis in text.

out successively each sign by which it may be known from an exterior.²⁷

The notion of the interior, a contained self nurtured in a contained domestic space, is exploded by the penetrable space. The home has been exonerated from the “responsibility” of producing an individual with an interior of his or her own. Interiors, both architectural and psychic, are nipped, ignored, defeated, and wiped out by the almost violent penchant for openness and connectedness James attributes to American architecture. The decay of the self, James fears, will bring about the decay of society.

The fears James articulates in *The American Scene* are anticipated in novels from the mid-nineteenth century on. Moving geographically and chronologically, in the following chapters I track the relationships among changing urban infrastructure and manifestations of “home” both physical and literary. I begin in the 1850’s, as Boston and New York entered the modern networks of technology-driven capitalism and developed landscapes that blurred the boundaries between public and private spaces. Each of my chapters examines a different urban setting and explores the modes of modern subjectivity produced in each one. I begin with a focus on the boarding house and hotel as early settings for the modern subject, a topic I develop by examining how networked urban spaces become gendered, classed and ethnicized in Central Park, tenements, and apartment buildings. The 1920’s see the modern subject culminate in a figure who crosses boundaries easily, and yet in this freedom still longs for home. This figure augurs another critical shift, both exciting and terrifying, the gradual replacement of a contained “nation” by a globally networked culture.

²⁷James, *Scene*, 125.

My chronology follows the development of modern subjects, the “curious persons,” as James terms them, who inhabit the urban landscape. These persons would be shaped by the very spaces James finds so curious in *The American Scene*, spaces structured by architectural connections that manifest themselves in a permeable subjectivity. From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, this architectural permeability would be most evident in the burgeoning of new forms of architecture that would come to dominate the urban landscape—boarding houses, tenements, hotels, and apartments. *Ruth Hall* and *The Blithedale Romance*, in charting the erosion of containment in rural and domestic space, begin my inquiry into what kinds of subjectivity would be shaped by the modern city.

Chapter One

Architectural Determinism and Urban Networks in *The Blithedale Romance* and *Ruth Hall*

I try to take an interest in all the nooks and crannies and every development of cities.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne¹

As Nathaniel Hawthorne famously complained, the American literary marketplace of the 1850's was dominated by "scribbling women" writing popular "trash." Critics have widely interpreted Hawthorne's comment as a critique of sentimental narratives set in domestic spaces, a response that has helped to structure a divide in the American literary canon between "trash"—the popular sentimental and sensational novels—and literature.² Created and consumed mostly by women, popular novels about the home and family have been consigned to the "separate sphere" of domestic space and female concerns. Yet as many of the sentimental novels suggest, by the mid-nineteenth century, domesticity in the United States was produced in relation to an increasingly urban landscape. In many of the best-selling novels of this period, such as *The Lamplighter*, *Little Women*, and *Ruth Hall*,

¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, *American Notebooks* (entry dated May 6, 1850) in *Hawthorne's Works* Volume IX (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 377.

²See Fred Pattee, *The Feminine Fifties* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1940), for an early and influential discussion of sentimental novels.

industrial cities exert a powerful force on character and plotlines. And it wasn't just the scribbling women who were beginning to explore relationships among domesticity, subjectivity and the city. Hawthorne's friend Herman Melville, for instance, skewered the marriage plot in his 1852 novel *Pierre*. *Pierre* opens with a view of a country cottage where, "upon the sill of the casement, a snow-white glossy pillow reposes, and a trailing shrub has softly rested a rich, crimson flower upon it."³ But residence in a broken-down tenement transforms its characters; the novel ends with murder and suicide in a prison cell. Although the nightmare of incest begins in the country, the city is where efforts to normalize incestuous relations through domesticity turn deadly.

Hawthorne, too, explores the production of a modern subjectivity in two novels dealing with urban domesticity, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).⁴ In *Blithedale* Hawthorne presents what might pass for the happy ending of a sentimental novel. Priscilla, redeemed from a life of poverty and a questionable stage career as the Veiled Lady, has married Hollingsworth, the rugged reformer she formerly worshipped; a model wife, she dotes on her husband in their secluded cottage. But Hawthorne twists this ending so that the cozy scene becomes disturbing. Hollingsworth is broken and bitter, living with crushed ambitions and the knowledge that he is partially responsible for the death of Priscilla's half-sister Zenobia. Seclusion becomes isolation and Priscilla's

³Herman Melville, *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* (1851; New York: Signet Classic, 1964), 23.

⁴As Nina Baym notes regarding Hawthorne and domesticity, "The example of his own *The House of the Seven Gables*, which he persisted in calling his best and favorite novel, makes absolutely clear that he had a considerable stake in domestic ideology himself." ("Again and Again, the Scribbling Women," *Hawthorne and Women*, John L. Idol, Jr., and Melinda M. Ponder, eds (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 25-6. See also Gillian Brown's *Domestic Individualism*.

devotion mere denial. Fanny Fern's 1854 novel *Ruth Hall* rewrites this trajectory. *Ruth Hall's* beginning echoes Hawthorne's "happy ending," but Fern follows her eponymous heroine to the city, where she is forced to develop the skills that allow her to succeed and eventually prosper there as a single woman. Ruth has no husband, just a brotherly manager and a good deal of bank stock, and she has traded her suburban cottage for a hotel. In contrast to Priscilla, Ruth remains engaged with the artistic and commercial world of the city.

In disrupting their readers' expectations for the narrative inevitability of marriage, home, and happiness, and in positing alternative settings and definitions for success, the endings of these novels call attention to an important and overlooked thematic concern about the fate of the home in an urban nation, a concern common both to these texts and to American culture generally in the mid- to late nineteenth century. In exploring what it means to make the city one's home, these novels analyze the relationships between setting and psyche in the transition of the United States from a rural to an urban nation. *Blithedale* and *Ruth Hall* undermine the redemptive power attributed to the farm and cottage and imagine, albeit differently, what kind of subject might emerge from an urban landscape in which the boarding house, tenement, and eventually the luxury hotel and apartment replace more contained detached homes. In each novel, the networked spaces of the industrial city—spaces traversed by new conduits of transportation and communication—help to shape a particularly modern subject that registers both hope and anxiety about urban culture in the United States. Together, the novels narrate the birth of an urban subjectivity reflecting the permeable, transformable architecture of the industrial landscape.

The Blithedale Romance and *Ruth Hall* examine the onset of the historical and imaginary transition between the bounded spaces labeled as “rural” and “home” and the networked spaces of the American city. In these novels, Hawthorne and Fern tease out the development of a new urban subjectivity as they explore the limits of architectural determinism in the urban landscape, specifically, in the urban domestic spaces of the United States. Both novels depict the city as a landscape increasingly organized by networks of transportation and communication; both present views of urban domesticity that complicate commonly-held notions of the nineteenth-century middle-class home as a “separate sphere” where the “angel of the house” presided.⁵ In so doing, like other domestic novels of the period, they “problematize the relationship between interior and exterior,” exploring a “breakdown between internal and external spaces.”⁶ In redefining “home” as a permeable structure whose spaces mirror the city’s networks, Hawthorne and Fern explore the promise and expose the threat posed by the unfamiliar subject who develops in the modern city. Hawthorne’s architectural determinist vision of the city culminates in a paralysis that anticipates modernist ideas about the fragmented individual the modern landscape will produce.⁷ *Ruth Hall* shares with *Blithedale* the notion that the urban landscape shapes and rewards a consumable persona. But for Fern, commodification of the psyche leads not to paralysis but to profit; the novel’s economic logic situates *Ruth Hall* as a precursor to the realism of later decades. These relationships between environment and subject are distinctively American and modern. Although *Ruth Hall* questions the

⁵See the October 1998 issue of *American Literature* (70:3) for discussions of the history and current uses of separate-spheres scholarship in literary criticism.

⁶Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” *American Literature* 70:3 (Oct. 1998): 600.

⁷I am thinking especially of British modernists like Eliot and Woolf.

notion that urban space shapes its inhabitants in predictable ways, like *Blithedale* it positions the city as a fundamentally transformative place. The power of urban architecture to shape its inhabitants can be most clearly seen in the relationships Hawthorne and Fern analyze between urban domestic spaces and subjectivity.

In revising notions of character and setting to fit a new landscape, *Ruth Hall* and *The Blithedale Romance* redefine architectural determinism for a modern era by breaking down ideas about separate spheres and fictively reconfiguring “private” and “public” spaces. *Blithedale* shows how an urban setting characterized by connection and open to Coverdale’s gaze shapes an urban subjectivity inherently porous and transformable. Like *Blithedale*, *Ruth Hall*’s plot develops through descriptions of different nineteenth-century urban housing arrangements whose multiplicity and permeability argues for more complex formulations of domestic and public space. *Ruth Hall*, however, claims that while the networks connecting the city’s spaces fragment familial relations, they also offer an alternative site for connection, resistance, and self-commodification through story and memory.

As they explore the development of urban subjects and analyze how they are shaped by the networked urban home, *Ruth Hall* and *Blithedale* develop paradigms for literary conceptions of modern subjectivity that help to structure American urban fiction well into the twentieth century. The hopes and anxieties reflected in Hawthorne and Fern’s cities are exacerbated as urban transportation and communication networks increasingly dominate the national landscape. The future Hawthorne and Fern imagine for modern men and women—and the types of modern settings within which they will thrive—culminates in the fractured, rootless, anonymous subject we associate

with literary modernism. That mobile figure has a history in nineteenth-century literature.

Undermining Pastoral Domesticity

Both *Ruth Hall* and *The Blithedale Romance* begin in the settings most easily and frequently labeled as regenerative by architectural determinists: the cottage and the farm. As I have noted, nineteenth-century reformers saw both “home” and “rural” as spaces that could produce moral and physical improvement; by inhabiting these settings, individuals (and by extension, the republic) could be transformed for the better. As Gillian Brown notes, “utopian projects shared domesticity’s ideal of creating a sphere apart from the marketplace” where individual morals could temper the market’s force.⁸ Fern’s exposé of rural domesticity’s ultimate impotence in a market economy and Hawthorne’s ironic treatment of the Blithedalers’ rural experience raise questions about whether and how this separation between home and market could be maintained. If it cannot, they ask, what will become of “home” ?

In ironizing the settlement’s utopian project, *Blithedale* critiques romantic and pastoral formulations of rural landscapes. For romantic poets, natural settings offered the transformative experience necessary for remaking the self and the world. The natural environment served as a space for regeneration—a place to which the poet or artist could escape from society and be shocked, inspired, calmed or reassured. To narrate this potential, romantic writers drew in part on the form of the pastoral, in which “the story

⁸Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 121.

of reunion with nature and a more natural past is the essential drama. . . . By resorting to nature and the past, the hero seeks to rejoin the self fragmented by experience."⁹ Hawthorne ironizes this potential in *Blithedale*; reintegration of self is impossible in the modern urban setting that eventually dominates the novel.

While the city plays a role in all pastorals, and not just as a place from which to escape, in *Blithedale* the meaning of movement between city and country changes as the connections between rural landscapes and urban modes of production become increasingly obvious. According to Leo Marx, the trajectory of the complex pastoral leads from city to country and back again, bringing a "world which is more real into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision."¹⁰ Anhorn concurs, noting that "the cycle of recovery remains incomplete until the traveller returns to the city, where the complementary phase of his adventure begins," and the traveler gains the means to transform his journey into literature.¹¹ By the 1850's in the United States, this timeless motion from city to country and back took on new valences because urban networks made "escaping" to untouched rural places increasingly difficult. The regenerative power Thoreau felt at Walden Pond and Mount Katahdin would be tapped by tourists heading north to the White Mountains and to coastal Maine; the nine-mile trip from Blithedale to Boston would become a commute; the pastoral would be integrated into mass-produced plans for suburban cottages.¹² In order for environmental determinists to vaunt the

⁹Judy Schaaf Anhorn, "'Gifted Simplicity of Vision': Pastoral Expectations in *The Blithedale Romance*," ESQ 28 (1982): 136.

¹⁰Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 25.

¹¹Anhorn, "Vision," 138.

¹²On plans for cottages, see Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), Chapter 5.

transformative power of rural locations, their urban connections had to be elided.

In *Blithedale*, rural space, like nature, is mediate; it is a space both enmeshed in urban economics and overdetermined by artistic and literary representations of the pastoral.¹³ The farm is located near Boston, and many Blithedalers regularly commute between farm and city. The presence of these urbanites renders the rural escape less authentic. Coverdale remarks, “the presence of Zenobia caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia, in which we grown-up men and women were making a play-day of the years that were given to us to live in. I tried to analyze this impression, but not with much success.”¹⁴

Coverdale’s pairing of terms like masquerade, illusion and counterfeit with pastoral and Arcadia is worth analyzing. Juxtaposing gestures towards the rural with nineteenth century anxieties about the urban—that identities could be concealed, appearances transformed, and histories falsified in a setting removed from rural intimacy further links the two settings.

Encapsulated in the force of Zenobia’s public persona, the power of the urban to disrupt and reconfigure the rural shows that the rural experience, like the urban, is artificial and obviously produced. Both farm and city are environments where shifting conceptions of identity involve illusion and masquerade; both are places of modern deception.¹⁵

¹³I refer here to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s line in his 1836 essay “Nature”: “Nature is thoroughly mediate.” *Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 57.

¹⁴Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1978), 21. Subsequent parenthetical notations cited with BR refer to this volume.

¹⁵The definitive work on the topic of nineteenth-century anxiety over appearance, disguise and identity is Karen Haltunnen’s *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

The pastoral Arcadia at Blithedale, then, must be read as a particular kind of urban illusion; it is, in the chapter's title, "*A Modern Arcadia*" (my emphasis). It is a place for performing the rural. Though Coverdale notes, "our costume bore no resemblance to the beribboned doublets, silk breeches and stockings, and slippers fastened with artificial roses, that distinguish the pastoral people of poetry and the stage," to describe Blithedale and its inhabitants he evokes characters and quotations from notable pastoralists (*BR* 58-9). For instance, Hawthorne alludes to Virgil, in whose *Eclogues* were created Arcadia, "the symbolic landscape, a delicate blend of myth and reality, that was to be particularly relevant to the American experience."¹⁶ His other references, to Milton, Spenser and Shakespeare, show that Coverdale clearly cannot imagine his surroundings except through the lens of the literary.¹⁷ Traditionally, the pastoral serves to mediate between nature and art, rural and urban, garden and machine.¹⁸ Here, however, the landscape is simply a set, a stage upon which "pastoral" may be played out, albeit in costumes of "honest homespun and linsey-woolsey" instead of silk and ribbon. The setting and costumes, however, do not transform the urbanites into rustic, honest farmers. Indeed, the land's potential for regeneration and inspiration becomes ironic, and almost comic.

Because Coverdale, Zenobia, and the other Blithedalers can only perceive their environment as art, the rural landscape in general and the utopian project at Blithedale in particular lose their potential as sites for personal and cultural regeneration. All of the novel's characters come to Blithedale, an intentional farm community, for escape or for rejuvenation.

¹⁶Marx, *Machine*, 19.

¹⁷Leo B. Levy, "*The Blithedale Romance: Hawthorne's Voyage through Chaos*," *Studies in Romanticism* 8 (1968). Cited in *The Blithedale Romance*, 316.

¹⁸Marx, *Machine*, 22.

Coverdale, who assumes the position of somewhat-detached observer, narrates the development of the desires binding half-sisters Zenobia and Priscilla to Hollingsworth. These desires will bring about Zenobia's death, Hollingsworth's suffering, and Priscilla's marriage. Blithedale's impotence either to hide or to heal crystallizes in the moments following Zenobia's suicide in the river that traverses the settlement. Instead of gaining the beauty of pathos or sacrifice, Zenobia's body decays into an object of horrifying fascination. The farm has failed to improve her and nature fails to redeem her. Other examples of Blithedale's failure to offer redemption abound in the text. From the beginning of the novel, Hawthorne makes clear that working the soil will not elevate Blithedale's residents to the intellectual and spiritual heights toward which they strive. Coverdale notes, "the peril of our new life was not lest we should fail in becoming practical agriculturists, but that we should probably cease to be anything else. . . . The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the other hand, were fast becoming cloddish" (*BR* 61). Coverdale, of course, is a confirmed bachelor who revels in an urban existence consisting of writing poetry, reading diverting books, attending "wonderful exhibitions," basking in warm fires, and sipping fine sherry (*BR* 5). Luckily for Coverdale's sybaritic tendencies, his exposure to farm life does not distort his body or mind in any lasting way. Though farming makes him "quite another man," when he returns to Boston he notes, not at all dispiritedly, that, "all the effeminacy of past days had returned upon me at once" (*BR* 57, 135). Close physical connection to the land proves to have limited power to transform the body and even less potential to ennoble the

mind. This impotence reinforces the dominance of urban forms and spaces in the networked culture *Blithedale* constructs.

Like Hawthorne, Fanny Fern both ironizes the regenerative potential of the rural and exposes the economic and physical networks linking rural settings to the city in *Ruth Hall*. Ruth's story begins with a happy marriage and blissful motherhood, but after her husband dies Ruth is left alone and destitute to raise her two daughters. Unskilled and friendless, Ruth tries a variety of occupations: seamstress, washer-woman, and teacher, before eventually achieving financial success and fame as a writer.

Ruth's initial happiness as the wife of "handsome Harry" is predicated in part on the setting they inhabit. Their cottage, with its "nice old-fashioned beams," sports "honeysuckle, red and white, wreathed around the porches."¹⁹ The cottage follows nineteenth-century pattern-book and advice manual descriptions of the ideal structure in which to practice, in Catherine Beecher's terms, "domestic economy." Yet, located at the end of a "lovely winding lane. . . about five miles from the city," and linked to the city by Harry's daily commute to his job as an investment banker, the cottage's suburban setting positions rural domesticity within the networked space of the urban landscape (*RH* 28). Thus, as urban theorist Henri Lefebvre explains, "a de-urbanized yet dependent periphery is established around the city. Effectively, these new suburban dwellers are still urban even though they are unaware of it and believe themselves to be close to nature, to the sun, and to greenery."²⁰

¹⁹Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall* (1854) in *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, edited and with an introduction by Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 28. Subsequent parenthetical notations cited with *RH* refer to this volume.

²⁰Henri Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, in *Writings on Cities*, translated and edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth LeBas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 78.

Novels like *Ruth Hall* and *Blithedale* make clear that specific narratives construct our conceptions of space. For instance, while nineteenth-century architectural determinists glorified the single-family home's promise to reform the nation's morals in texts that emphasized cottages' rural aspects, *Ruth Hall* highlights and negates the cultural assumption that perfect homes like Ruth's would create an ideal citizenry.²¹ In location and appearance, Ruth's house epitomizes the Gothic cottage made popular in the designs and writing of Andrew Jackson Downing, who, like other pattern-book publishers, hoped to restore American virtue by designing virtuous American homes. Downing wanted "the country homes of a whole people [to] embody such ideas of beauty and truth as shall elevate and purify its feelings."²² The 1840's witnessed the publication of books of architecture that included details ranging from floor plans to personal testimonials, effectively advice manuals on how to, as Gwendolyn Wright puts it, "create perfect homes."²³ Periodical publications participated in this trend as well; *Godey's Lady's Book* published roughly 500 house designs in the second half of the nineteenth century, the models, Wright notes, for more than four thousand homes.²⁴ Ironically, the modern print media responsible for *Ruth Hall's* eventual national success reinforced the very notions of rural domesticity the novel challenges.

Though Ruth's house is not new, it contains many architectural elements that to Downing symbolized "home" and which, he claimed, would

²¹Mastering housekeeping skills emerges as an important theme in domestic literature. Two of the most popular American novels of the nineteenth century, *The Lamplighter* and *The Wide Wide World* both emphasize homemaking as a reflection of the self-control so prized in a sentimental heroine.

²²Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850; New York: Dover, 1969), 1.

²³Wright, *Building*, 80.

²⁴Wright, *Building*, 81.

evoke order and virtue in its inhabitants. Ruth's little house might have been one of Downing's, "whose humble roof, whose shady porch, whose verdant lawn and smiling flowers; all breathe forth to us in true, earnest tones, a domestic feeling that at once purifies the heart, and binds us more closely to our fellow-beings!"²⁵ In cottages like Ruth's, unpainted wood, local materials, and exterior colors chosen to blend with the immediate surroundings were desirable on two levels, first because they emphasized the home's picturesque qualities, and more importantly because these "honest" materials and colors marked the cottages as rural, not urban dwellings.²⁶ The age of the structure, emphasized by the "patches of moss [that] tuft the sloping roof" and the "tumble-down old summer house" in the backyard, both reinforces the setting's picturesque quality and links it closely to nature and thus to virtue (*RH* 28). According to Downing and the pattern-books, the more "natural" the house, the better, morally speaking.

Like its exterior, the cottage's interior emphasizes the young Ruth's adherence to the values upheld by nineteenth-century domestic reformers. Though we never see Ruth reading advice books or periodicals, she quickly undergoes a complete transformation from a girl "just home from boarding-school" to a paragon of virtuous homemaking (*RH* 20). Her house is spotless from the parlor to the bedroom, where "a snow-white quilt and a pair of plump, tempting pillows" grace the bed; "the furniture and carpet are of a light cream color; and there is a vase of honeysuckle on the little light-stand. Nothing could be more faultless, you see" (*RH* 35). If Ruth's environment is faultless, so will she be. Ruth imparts a virtuous beauty even to "the long, white curtains, looped up so prettily from the open windows, [of] plain, cheap

²⁵Andrew Jackson Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences* (1842; New York: Dover, 1981), 9.

²⁶Wright, *Building*, 86.

muslin . . . no artist could have disposed their folds more gracefully" (*RH* 34). Ruth covers her own furniture, makes beautiful and delicious preserves, and decorates with the woodland flowers she collects, efforts that all correspond to advice she might have gleaned from domestic advice manuals.²⁷ The architectural and material language of "home" evoked by Ruth's house would have been easily read and understood by Fern's readers. It reinforces the sacred happiness Ruth experiences during her early marriage and adds to the affective quality of later scenes when Ruth, living in far different material surroundings, recalls images and experiences of home.

Ruth's house, then, operates as a setting that demonstrates and solidifies her status as happy, productive mother and wife; it performs all of the functions that an architectural determinist could hope for. In this setting, she clearly fulfills the prerequisites to become the proud heroine of her separate sphere. As her husband Harry remarks, "You will be happy here, dear Ruth. . . . You will be your own mistress" (*RH* 28). Harry, after all, has "chosen a separate home, that he might be master of it" (*RH* 38). Individualism begins with a link to property; Ruth can be mistress of herself in a place where distance and ownership separate her from others, particularly members of her family. As Gillian Brown points out, if nineteenth-century "self-definition was secured in and nearly synonymous with domesticity," it was also synonymous with the enclosed space of the home, and with its "removal from the marketplace."²⁸ However, in *Ruth Hall* any equation between a contained home and a unified subjectivity

²⁷Beecher's *Treatise* is the best-known, but numerous other advice manuals for homebuilders and homemakers were published in the mid-nineteenth century.

²⁸ Brown, *Domestic Individualism*, 3.

dissolves because "home" is in fact neither contained by nor divorced from the marketplace.

Ruth Hall demonstrates that for the American woman, no solid boundary divides private from public, domestic space from the world outside. Economic and social realities quickly erode the order and containment advocated by domestic reformers. If women were the "mistresses" of their "separate sphere," they enjoyed little privacy there. Privacy did not even become part of the common law until well after the novel's publication.²⁹ That is to say, home historically was not a place of containment and privacy. Ruth's little cottage, for instance, ceases to be private soon after Harry and Ruth move in, for Harry's parents quickly take up residence only "a small piece of woods" away from Ruth and Harry (*RH* 32). Her prying mother-in-law gains access to Ruth's house by the cook's permission; the boundary lines of private property may be easily crossed by family members, a pattern that continues even after Ruth moves to the city's more anonymous spaces. And this permeability has precedents in Ruth's earlier life. Both Ruth's boarding school experience, "where she shared a room with four girls," and the early days of her marriage, when she and Harry live in "their own set of apartments, while the old people [Harry's domineering parents] keep house," take place in settings where Ruth enjoys little privacy (*RH* 14, 22). Ruth's father-in-law, for example, takes up the Coverdalean occupation of voyeur, "speculating on what Ruth was about, peeping over the balustrade, to see who called when the bell rang" (*RH* 23). Historically, it was quite common for young married couples to live with their parents; hotels and boarding houses drew a substantial percentage of their clientele from the ranks of the

²⁹See Brook Thomas, "The Construction of Privacy in and around *The Bostonians*," *American Literature* 64:4 (December 1992): 721.

newly married, who saw boarding house life as an alternative preferable to living with their families.³⁰

Both before and after establishing Ruth's early marriage and her homemaking skills as the middle-class ideal, Fern dismantles the notion that Ruth and Harry's detached home is particularly contained. In so doing, Fern simultaneously undermines the transformative power of the cottage that relies on its detachment from economic and social realities and makes acceptable, even inevitable, Ruth and Harry's move to a modern hotel. Thus Fern's initial narration of architectural determinist tenets is replaced with a skepticism towards the notion that domestic space is particularly beneficent.

Interior Networks in Upper-Class Lodgings

Just as Miles Coverdale leaves Blithedale, Ruth Hall leaves her cottage. Both characters travel to the city, where they exchange pastoral domestic surroundings for urban living spaces. Like their historical and fictional counterparts, the boarding houses and hotels to which Ruth and Coverdale resort disrupt and complicate notions of home based on containment. Their new homes are spaces of connection, where private space mixes with public, and domestic space mingles with the realm of the market. But these categories mix in different measures depending on the class of the lodgings in question.

At this time, urban boarding houses and hotels served the population across the class spectrum in accommodations ranging from first class hotels to

³⁰Paul Groth notes that, "By 1850 a young couple living in a boarding house or hotel were thought 'to occupy a position just as respectable as if they resided in a house of their own.'" "Forbidden Housing: The Evolution and Exclusion of Hotels, Boarding Houses, Rooming Houses and Lodging Houses in American Cities, 1880-1930," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1983), 141. Groth's quotation is from Richard A. Van Orman, *A Room For the Night*.

what were termed flops.³¹ Both housing options attracted long-term as well as transient residents, sometimes simultaneously; both offered quick turnover and required no permanent commitment on the part of the resident.³² The urban hotel and boarding house each redefined public and private space, and as such raised "complaints that they were improper, that they encouraged transience and discouraged domesticity."³³ More private than many homes, boarding houses and hotels offered their residents the freedom to live outside of the gaze of family members and allowed guests to mingle within the walls they shared. Wright points out that lodgers, "young and old, male and female, mixed with travelers in the dining room at meals and in the parlor during the day."³⁴ This mixing is one marker of permeable architectural space; whole rooms of boarding houses and hotels are devoted to facilitating connections between mobile strangers. In reconfiguring the spaces of the home and offering residents interior spaces in which to mix with strangers of the opposite sex, these housing options threatened to redefine gender, class, and family relations.

The hotel to which Ruth and her family retreat after the death of her first child is a seaside resort located far from the city yet inhabited mainly by vacationing urbanites; the presence of these tourists signals that the hotel is part of an urban network. A "large hotel in one of those seaport towns," the

³¹Flops were very cheap lodgings, sometimes as rudimentary as a warehouse with a pile of mattresses on the floor. See Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

³²Groth notes that though no legal definitions exist for either the boarding house or the hotel, one difference between the two is that by tradition stemming from English law, hotels had to accept any guest who was able to pay and "fit to be received," while lodging-house managers could choose their guests and enter into individual agreements with different guests for their room and board. *Forbidden*, 29.

³³Wright, *Building*, 38. As Paul Groth notes, however, "by the 1830's, boardinghouse life had become rather prevalent among well-to-do men and women in American cities" (Groth, *Forbidden*, 37).

³⁴Wright, *Building*, 37.

Halls' lodgings offer ample opportunity for interaction through innovative activities and architecture (*RH* 49). "There were 'hops' in the hall, and sails upon the lake; there were nine-pin alleys, and a gymnasium; there were bathing parties, and horse-back parties; there were billiard rooms and smoking rooms; reading rooms, flirtation rooms, —room for everything but — thought" (*RH* 50). Its various public spaces encourage gregarious interaction and militate against privacy; connections among guests, as well as between guests and servants are actively promoted by hotel architecture. And while other authors make a strong distinction between the hotel as a "public house" and the boarding-house as "private lodgings," Fern does not differentiate between the two categories.³⁵ Thus in *Ruth Hall*, we begin to see in the middle-class hotel the emergence of a model of home founded on sociability, a gregarious alternative to the detached cottage. Here, the quality of Ruth's interactions with others, and not her handiwork, will measure her worth.

Though distinct from the boarding house, the hotel in *Ruth Hall* foreshadows the potential for making positive connections within urban networks. Along with the specialized rooms and activities that draw individuals into a network of urban interaction, the hotel's servants and services reflect and promote this logic of relationships. The power of these connections is emphasized when Harry contracts a fatal case of typhus. His illness evokes the urban threat of contagion, but also elicits a degree of support from the Halls' fellow guests that works to neutralize this anxiety.³⁶ As Ruth tends Harry alone, refusing any relief, "regardless of the lapse of

³⁵See, for example, Maria Georgina Milward, "Mrs. Sad's Private Boarding House," *Southern Literary Messenger* 12 (1846): 691.

³⁶I treat the idea of urban contagion more fully in Chapter Three.

time—regardless of hunger thirst or weariness,” she enacts the role of the devoted wife that readers of nineteenth-century domestic novels would usually associate with the closed circle of the family and home (*RH* 53).³⁷ Yet in *Ruth Hall*, “many a friendly voice whisper[s] at the door” as Harry is dying (*RH* 53). The shared spaces of the hotel offer numerous opportunities for people to exchange information; thus, the family circle widens to include the waiters, porters and “gentlemen friends” who express concern for and gain knowledge about the dying man through the hotel’s networks.

The potential for hotel networks to stand in for family ties is made clear when a fellow lodger offers to take up a collection for Ruth and her two daughters. As he tells Ruth’s brother Hyacinth, “I have had the pleasure of living under the same roof, this summer, with your afflicted sister and her noble husband, and have become warmly attached to both” (*RH* 59). This attachment holds promise as a desirable alternative to the actual ties of family, especially because the novel’s denouement is punctuated by Ruth’s family and in-laws’ schemes to pay as little as possible to support Ruth and her daughters. As I will discuss in more detail later, the reconstruction of family is a prevalent theme in *Ruth Hall*; many quasi-familial connections are made possible by the shared spaces of the architecture Ruth inhabits.

If the hotel seems like a surprising choice of setting for the middle-class Hall family home, it would have been a logical destination for Miles Coverdale, who as a wealthy single man could enjoy the amenities of luxury

³⁷Good examples of disease and death occurring at home under the care of the family abound in sentimental literature. In *Little Women*, Beth dies clinging “to the hands that had led her all her life, as father and mother guided her tenderly through the valley of the shadow, and gave her up to God,” (Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (New York: Modern Library, 1983), 514). Similarly, Alice’s death in *The Wide, Wide World* occurs in the presence of her brother John and their charge, Ellen. Little Eva’s death in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is another that evokes the transformative power of family and death.

service and accommodation more economically at a hotel than in a home of his own. On his return to Boston, Coverdale notes parenthetically that his “bachelor rooms, long before this time, had received some other occupant,” establishing the mobility and impermanence of city living (*BR* 134). Mobility and transience are equally characteristic of boarding house and hotel guests, who in *Blithedale* come to embody both the buildings’ porous architecture and exemplify temporariness in their economic status as renters.

Yet, Hawthorne’s juxtaposition of the two housing types in chapters named respectively “The Hotel” and “The Boarding House” indicates a subtle distinction between the two. For instance, as a hotel resident, Coverdale dines out, often in the Albion restaurant, where he can choose from the “hundred dishes at command,” while Zenobia and Priscilla have the option of eating in their boarding house on the “soup, fish, and flesh” their “respectable mistress” serves (*BR* 37, 141). The hotel lets rooms on the basis of availability — Coverdale occupies the rooms that are open when he checks in. In contrast, the “rather stylish boarding house” visible through Coverdale’s window keeps rooms vacant for their long-term residents; as he looks from his window he notes that the housemaids are busily preparing for the return of “its most expensive and profitable guests” (*BR* 139, 140). Guests are both expensive and profitable because they require extra servants, luxurious food and drink, and other amenities provided by the boarding house. These particular guests, who of course turn out to be Zenobia and Priscilla, apparently keep the rooms rented even in their absence; Coverdale recalls that Zenobia “had retained an establishment in town, and had not unfrequently withdrawn herself from *Blithedale*” (*BR* 145). The boarding house, it appears, is more home-like than the hotel. Other boarding-house

fiction underscores this distinction; one character chooses “private lodgings” in a boarding house instead of a hotel because his “mother’s solemn injunction was to avoid a public house.”³⁸

Although these lodgings differ historically and fictionally, they offer—for a price—both an urban setting and the opportunity to change settings on demand. If, as an architectural determinist would argue, settings can shape people in particular ways, then possessing the resources to change settings at will offers the opportunity to avoid a fixed identity and retain the fluidity the city demands.

Whether classified as public or private, fictional buildings’ furnishings, location, and layout reinforce architecture’s potential to mark and shape the subject. Both Coverdale’s hotel and Zenobia’s boarding house occupy the upper echelons of available rental housing. The stylishness of Zenobia’s boarding house is evident not only in the “exceedingly rich” furnishings, but also in its clients (*BR* 151). Zenobia’s fellow boarders include a young man who patronizes a tailor and primps for half an hour before dinner parties, along with a family headed by a man employed in a “counting room or office” (*BR* 140). All of them are served by a “manservant in a white jacket” (*BR* 141). In the 1857 *Physiology of New York Boarding Houses*, Zenobia’s lodgings would be classed among the “Tip-Top” boarding houses, “huge, stylish mansions” catering to “families who preferred this mode of residence on the score of fashion or—convenience.”³⁹ The hotel and boarding house share a city block; proximity reinforces their shared upper-rank status. Though downtowns were far more mixed in the nineteenth century than

³⁸ Milward, “Mrs. Sad’s,” 691.

³⁹ Thomas Butler Gunn, *The Physiology of New York Boarding Houses* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1857), 135, 138.

they are today, economic distinctions separated neighborhoods from one another.⁴⁰ And as in all “tip-top” boarding houses, these lodgings demand and confer status on their dwellers.

Like the neighborhoods, floor plans both distinguished different ranks of hotels from one another and shaped public and private facets of the client’s experience. For the upper classes, “hotel life allowed all tenants—especially single people—to push . . . privacy and autonomy to a new limit,” a limit visible in Coverdale’s “pleasant bachelor-parlor, sunny and shadowy, curtained and carpeted, with the bed-table adjoining” (*BR* 37).⁴¹ Featuring both a centre-table and a writing desk, his room resembles those in Boston’s Tremont Hotel. Opened in 1829, the Tremont was an anomaly among hotels of the day not simply because it featured suites, but because it “was also one of the first hotels with truly private rooms: each room had a separate key, and strangers were not sent to share rooms.”⁴² Coverdale, in his first-rank hotel, enjoys a degree of privacy available only to the upper class. Geographer Paul Groth notes that “residents of midpriced and palace hotels could use their neighborhood as their homes . . . but for them it was a choice; the more expensive hotels, with their full housekeeping and dining services, were self-contained like private houses.”⁴³ That is, the layout and design of these new hotels allowed residents a degree and type of privileged privacy only available in the city. If, as Brook Thomas contends, rights of privacy in the United States were encoded in response to a modern “threat to privacy that [grew] out

⁴⁰Gwendolyn Wright notes: “The homes of the elite—whether mansions, row-houses, or fashionable boardinghouses—were grouped together.” *Building*, 39.

⁴¹Groth, *Living*, 127.

⁴²Groth, *Forbidden*, 38-9.

⁴³Groth, *Forbidden*, 126-7.

of the development of new technologies of publicity," modern housing arrangements clearly reveal the cultural force of this emerging concern.⁴⁴

Yet even within first-class nineteenth-century hotels and boarding houses, private and public spaces mixed, underlining the anxieties about privacy and urban connection highlighted by Coverdale's incessant peeping into his neighbors' windows. Private and public mix audibly as well as visually; even the highest-class lodgings echo with the characteristic sounds of the urban dwelling's shared interior spaces. Like the city street, whose sounds bring to Coverdale's mind the "entangled life of many men together," the hotel's sounds identify it as a permeable space where classes and genders mingle (*BR* 135). The hotel has a life and pulse of its own that rushes through its halls, entrances and other internal shared spaces. From his rooms, Coverdale can hear "the stir of the hotel; the loud voices of guests, landlord or barkeeper; steps echoing on the staircase; the ringing of a bell, announcing arrivals or departures; the person lumbering past my door with baggage, which he thumped down upon the floors of neighboring chambers; the lighter feet of chamber-maids scudding along the passages;—it is ridiculous to think what an interest they had for me" (*BR* 135, 136). Though Coverdale retrospectively terms his interest in the noise that surrounds him "ridiculous," it signals his awareness of the intramural connections possible within the confines of the hotel. Though somewhat anonymous, the sounds can be identifiably classed as guests, landlords, and servants. As he listens, Coverdale's memories of Blithedale become "far-off and intangible. . . vague [and] shadowy," and the sounds of the city enmesh him in urban space, where "entangled lives" are audibly so (*BR* 134).

⁴⁴Thomas, "Construction," 722.

Like the hotel's interior sounds, the noise penetrating Coverdale's room from outside helps to build a particular urban consciousness—or so Coverdale thinks. As the external sounds enter Coverdale's mind they emphasize the dissolution of individual boundaries within the repetitive patterns of the urban. The only specific sounds Coverdale picks out from the general hum that permeates his room are all mechanized, machine-like, or military. "City-soldiery, with a full military band," clocks, and bells, for instance, reinforce Coverdale's association of urban space with mechanized time (*BR* 135). But the most significant sound Coverdale hears is that of the "mechanical diorama," whose thrice-daily "repetition of obstreperous music, winding up with the rattle of imitative cannon and musketry and a huge final explosion" transforms the audience into so many automatons whose "clap of hands, thump of sticks, and . . . energetic pounding of their heels" is just as predictably-timed as the mechanized entertainment they view (*BR* 136). These sounds have the potential, like the "general sameness" of the houses Coverdale can see from his window, to shape a society of "inhabitants . . . cut out on one identical pattern, like little-wooden toy-people of German manufacture" (*BR* 139). The mechanical city seems apt to produce a culture of machines. In Lefebvre's view, the city's networks transform the rural in part by "mak[ing] simultaneous what in the countryside and according to nature passes and is distributed according to cycles and rhythms. It (the city) grasps and defends 'everything.'"⁴⁵

The pattern that results from this transformation of rural rhythms become one of the city's distinguishing characteristics, and potentially one of its pleasures. On leaving Boston, Coverdale moves "far beyond the strike of

⁴⁵Lefebvre, *Right*, 89.

city clocks," a phrase we might read as marking his eagerness to immerse himself in nature (BR 11). But parsed, the phrase parallels other city-pleasures Coverdale is somewhat loath to give up, such as his "warm fireside [and] freshly lighted cigar" (BR 11). Thus, the individual sounds that make up the "tumult of the pavements," and melt into "a continual uproar, . . . broad and deep," are inescapable, yet somehow pleasurable for urban dwellers (BR 136). Sound becomes, in theorist Michel de Certeau's words, "the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors and spectators."⁴⁶ But as de Certeau points out, this uniformity is only audible and enforceable when one looks or listens to the city at a distance. Up close, it becomes "an innumerable collection of singularities. . . . [whose] intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together."⁴⁷

To see these singularities and explore how they might shape urban dwellers, Coverdale must look beyond the city's façade. Hawthorne comments in his *American Notebooks* on "the greater picturesqueness and reality of back-yards, and everything appertaining to the rear of a house; as compared with the front, which is fitted up for the public eye. There is much to be learnt, always, by getting a glimpse at rears."⁴⁸ This passage is directly echoed in *Blithedale*, when Coverdale asserts that the front of a building "is always artificial; it is meant for the world's eye, and is therefore a veil and a concealment. Realities keep in the rear, and put forward an advance-guard of show and humbug" (BR 138). Coverdale hopes that with its public identifiers effaced, the back of a house will offer a glimpse into the true nature of that house (and therefore its inhabitants). As Henri Lefebvre notes, "spaces made

⁴⁶Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

⁴⁷de Certeau, *Everyday*, 97.

⁴⁸Nathaniel Hawthorne, *American Notebooks*, quoted in *The Blithedale Romance*, 249 fn 7.

(produced) to be read are the most deceptive and tricked-up imaginable."⁴⁹

Like Zenobia, who adopts a stage name to complement her public persona, or Westervelt, with his false teeth and costume-like glasses, houses in *Blithedale* fit themselves up to be seen in particular ways, especially from the front. From the back, identities are less clearly delineated; a waiter must inform Coverdale that the house he is looking at is not a private home but a "a rather stylish boarding house" (BR 139). Yet, even in a novel featuring masques, concealed identities, false teeth, and a veiled lady, the backyards do more than merely reflect the novel's emphasis on concealment; rather, they emphasize a connectivity constructed in part by architecture and in part by the eye.

Urban buildings in *Blithedale* are permeable structures. The "brick-blocks" Coverdale inhabits before and after his time in *Blithedale* are permeable to heat; buildings warm themselves and their neighbors, "each house partaking of the warmth of all the rest, besides the sultriness of its individual furnace" (BR 10). From his hotel perch, Coverdale sees "one long united roof, with its thousands of slates glistening in the rain, extended over the whole" (BR 139). The individual dwellings share a roof, and the roof in turn emphasizes the repetition that characterizes the urban landscape. Other shared spaces include the "grass plots, and here and there an apology for a garden, pertaining severally to these dwellings" (BR 137). And foreshadowing the city-produced permeability of self embodied by Priscilla, who makes an ideal psychic medium because other people's ideas can pass through her, urbanites even share the air they breathe. Upon leaving Boston, Coverdale gratefully inhales "air that had not been breathed, once and again!

⁴⁹Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 143.

Air that had not been spoken into words of falsehood and error, like all the air of the dusky city!"(BR 11).

From slate and dirt to heat and breath, the city is marked by connection and permeability. The architectural determinist in Coverdale assumes that this setting will necessarily shape inhabitants who echo these qualities.

When he looks at the rowhouses, Coverdale concludes that:

It seemed hardly worth while for more than one of those families to be in existence; since they all had the same glimpse of sky, all looked into the same area, all received just their equal share of sunshine through the front windows, and all listened to precisely the same noises of the street on which they bordered. Men are so much alike, in their nature, that they grow intolerable unless varied by their circumstances. (BR 139)

Coverdale believes that the uniform sights and sounds that percolate through the walls and windows of the city's residences will shape a group of uniform people. Just as these individuals are constituted by their settings, the settings register what the city produces; for urban architects "the repetition of simple forms in housing was taken as visible evidence of equality of station in society."⁵⁰ Yet *Blithedale's* city people do not simply reflect their environment, they internalize its characteristics.

The city both marks its inhabitants as urban and rewards them for taking on the architectural qualities—the permeability and mutability—of the built spaces they inhabit. Urban realities cannot be reduced to the mechanized patterns Coverdale's eye and ear construct. Close physical proximity disrupts both the city's repetition and its effect on urban subjects.

⁵⁰Wright, *Building*, 25.

The city does transform people, but far from rendering them uniform, it renders them transformable, a fact that becomes clear in Hawthorne and Fern's descriptions of lower-class boarding houses and their inhabitants.

Moodie's Lodgings: Architectural Determinism and the Lower Class

Because they cannot always choose alternative surroundings or join the class of owners, the lower classes' relationships to their urban surroundings are both more tenuous and more fixed than those enjoyed by the more mobile upper classes. Though constantly threatened by displacement, poorer people lack the resources to choose their settings freely. Accordingly, Hawthorne's treatment of lower-class lodgings, especially his descriptions of the boarding house where Priscilla and Moodie live, involves a more insistent version of architectural determinism than appears elsewhere in *The Blithedale Romance*. As Coverdale explores the shared spaces of Boston's lower classes, he narrates a direct relationship between built structures and the urban subjectivity that develops within them. Like its upper-class counterparts, Moodie's urban boarding house is characterized by permeable spaces. In addition, mutability characterizes the poorer boarding houses, a quality that is passed on to its inhabitants. These chapters depict an urban environment that selects and shapes people who are mobile and changeable, creating and rewarding the unfixed persona of the modern urbanite.⁵¹

⁵¹Later, Robert Park would call this persona the "marginal man," a concept I explore more fully in the conclusion. See Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, Richard Sennett, ed (Englewood Cliffs: N.J.: Prentice Hall 1969), 131-142.

As cities develop, the tides of fashion mark different areas of the city as desirable, and as new construction goes up, poorer people like Moodie and Priscilla move into formerly fashionable quarters that have been physically transformed to meet new needs. After losing his fortune, Fauntleroy, father to Priscilla and Zenobia, changes his name and takes up residence as Moodie in a “squalid street” where he lives “among poverty-stricken wretches, sinners, and forlorn, good people, Irish, and whomsoever else [is] neediest” (*BR* 169). There, he pays “weekly rent for a chamber and a closet,” a lodging situation far removed from Coverdale’s hotel room or Zenobia’s boarding house, but far from the worst of the lodging options even in this fictionalized city—in the same house “twenty Irish bedfellows” share one room (*BR* 169).⁵² Here, public and private spaces function differently as physical structures are transformed according to economic exigency.

Ever-changing physical environments like Priscilla’s childhood home become collages of history, shaping inhabitants who are indelibly marked as urban even as they adapt to fit new surroundings. Moodie’s room, which will eventually become the site of Priscilla’s childhood, has been transformed into its current incarnation from prouder beginnings as a Colonial Governor’s mansion, and the room serves as a palimpsest revealing the different eras and identities that have transformed it.

Tattered hangings, a marble hearth, traversed with many cracks and fissures, a richly-carved oaken mantle-piece, partly hacked-away for kindling-stuff, a stuccoed ceiling, defaced with great, unsightly patches of the naked laths; —such was the chamber’s aspect, as if, with its

⁵²This might seem like a joke at the expense of the Irish, but the phenomenon of many unrelated people sharing a single room was fairly common in U.S. cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Groth, “Forbidden,” Chapter Two.

splinters and rags of dirty splendor, it were a kind of practical gibe at this poor, ruined man of show. (*BR* 169)

While Coverdale announces a straightforward parallel between the room and the man, the room is more than that. Standing as a record of past activities and inhabitants, the house exhibits the ravages of time, neglect, and intentional destruction. More than Moodie's stage set, the room becomes a good example of the ways in which past social and economic relationships reveal themselves through the structures they leave behind. In boarding-house fiction, reminders of these relationships often linger on either as rarely-seen attic lodgers or as ghosts.⁵³ One text describes a stately residence "humiliated to the condition of a Cheap Boarding House . . . [where] many a powdered beauty has [had], in ante-revolutionary days, a red-coated, cocked-hatted officer of King George as escort. If such a couple could, by the pale moonlight peering into the skylight above, and stealing down onto the shabby, cracked, dirty plastered wall, revisit the scene now!"⁵⁴ While memories of the past remain embedded in the building, changing economic demands force its (incomplete) transformation so that only a ghost can gain such an historically totalizing view of the landscape.

Though the colonial economy has given way to a budding mercantilism, its vestiges continue to shape its inhabitants' lives. As David Harvey suggest, landscapes stand as monuments to the economic relationships that have produced them, and in turn they reinforce and help to maintain those relations. An urban landscape constructed under capitalism, then, becomes "the crowning glory of past capitalist

⁵³See Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) on the presence of ghosts in British and French fiction about apartments.

⁵⁴Gunn, *Physiology*, 32-3.

development.”⁵⁵ The Governor’s mansion testifies to the economic relations of the past. But it also bears witness to the struggle Harvey details between economic relationships and the landscapes they produce, in that “capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it. . . at a subsequent point in time.”⁵⁶ Reflecting his Marxist perspective, Harvey presents capitalism as a force that somewhat autonomously engages in building and remaking the urban landscape. But in *The Blithedale Romance*, individual actors, while bound by the relations that position them economically and geographically within the urban setting, act to shape their own environments, remaking them to extract the resources necessary for survival in a different economy.

Yet *Blithedale* actually underscores Harvey’s claim that an urban consciousness is shaped by the physical environment of the city by demonstrating the complexity of that consciousness. Moodie’s room, for example, has exerted a profoundly transformative force on the man: “Into (his) brain each bare spot on the ceiling, every tatter of the paper-hangings, and all the splintered carvings of the mantel-piece, seen wearily through long years, had worn their several prints!” (BR 176) Through a “familiarity with objects,” his psyche is shaped by his immediate surroundings (BR 176). Harvey notes that “To dissect the urban process in all its fullness is to lay bare the roots of consciousness formation in the material realities of daily life.”⁵⁷ The “multi-layered material realities” of the palimpsest-like urban home presented in *Blithedale* point to complex formulations of urban consciousness. Specifically, the physical environment exerts the power to

⁵⁵David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 83.

⁵⁶Harvey, *Experience*, 83.

⁵⁷Harvey, *Experience*, 230.

shape individual consciousnesses that exemplify the transformability and permeability of the city's structures.

In Hawthorne's view, the built urban landscape renders the boundaries of property and self indistinct. The transformable, transparent Priscilla is completely a product of this urban environment, as is made clear from Moodie's story of her early upbringing. To describe Priscilla's initial appearance, Hawthorne draws on a Lamarckian conception of genetics, explaining that Priscilla embodies her parents as they have become. "The younger child, like his elder one [Zenobia], might be considered as the true offspring of both parents, and as the reflection of that state" (*BR* 171). That is, she takes on the characteristics of both parents, at least one of whom, Moodie, has been completely transformed from a prior identity, in part by his actions and in part by the resulting environment. Priscilla inherits different characteristics from her father, the "unseen. . . grey and misty" Moodie, from those Zenobia did in his previous incarnation as the flashy Fauntleroy. Thus, the "tremulous" Priscilla "lack(s) human substance" (*BR* 171). Dubbed "ghost-child," she is described as transparent: "the sun at midday would shine right through her; in the first gray of the twilight she lost all the distinctness of her outline; and if you followed the dim thing into a dark corner, behold! she was not there" (*BR* 172). Born to a man transformed by his surroundings, Priscilla literally changes as the architecture transforms both her father and herself.

Like the structures she inhabits, Priscilla is mutable and permeable. Together, these qualities become more than a device linking her with the Veiled Lady or to render understandable her submission to more powerful personalities like Westervelt, Zenobia and Hollingsworth; in fact, they mark

her as produced by and particularly suited for urban spaces. More than simply transparent, Priscilla becomes a medium through which the architectural features of her surroundings become visible. "[I]t seemed as if, were she to stand up in a sunbeam, it would pass right through her figure, and trace out the cracked and dusty window-panes upon the naked floor" (*BR* 171). As de Certeau puts it, "In this place that is a palimpsest, subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it as existence."⁵⁸ That is, Priscilla embodies and utilizes the caesurae in the changing architecture that surrounds and shapes her. Zenobia is destroyed by a change in her economic status. In contrast, because she is mutable, Priscilla can adapt to new surroundings, transforming herself according to her environment's exigencies.

As half-sisters raised in very different environments, Priscilla and Zenobia exemplify distinct subjectivities; Zenobia mirrors the stability of the past while Priscilla embodies the mutability of the modern. Throughout much of the novel, Priscilla is portrayed as weak, colorless, and cool in contrast to Zenobia's strong, vibrant warmth. Yet it is Priscilla, with "no free will," and none of the advantages of a wealthy upbringing (except eventually the inheritance) that Zenobia has, who survives and "triumphs" in her marriage to Hollingsworth while Zenobia drowns herself, her final appearance as a bloated, grey corpse effacing her vibrant beauty. Priscilla's ability to survive in the urban environment hinges on her transformability, along with her ability to sell herself and her products on the modern market for luxury goods and entertainment. That she eventually ends up settling into a quiet, "retired" existence with Hollingsworth in the "Blithedale

⁵⁸de Certeau, *Practice*, 109.

Pastures" chapter both highlights and ironizes her ability to tear down and reconstruct herself according to the exigencies of the relations that define her (BR 223).

Priscilla is, of course, the novel's most permeable character, a medium both by nature and by profession. Yet Priscilla's penetrability is shared by Coverdale and Moodie, and in Gillian Brown's reading, by most of the characters in the novel, all of whom are "impelled . . . to live in other lives" (BR 179). As Coverdale remarks, "Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla! These three had absorbed my life into themselves" (BR 179). Brown notes that, "In *The Blithedale Romance* . . . Hawthorne pictures individuality as always vulnerable to a self-interested mesmeric control," and that "the mesmerist makes commerce of individual penetrability."⁵⁹ Yet Priscilla is not simply vulnerable to others. Combined with her ability to transform herself, Priscilla's transparency gives her the mobility that the modern city requires for survival.

Attention to the relationship between Priscilla's identity and her surroundings adds a layer of complexity to critical formulations of Priscilla's role in the novel. Richard Brodhead convincingly argues that in her dual identity, Priscilla/the Veiled Lady is a "public-private" figure, a receptacle for anxieties and expectations fueling the rise of public figures who could fulfill the needs of domestic spectators. The term "public-private" usefully describes the novel's representations of space. For although Priscilla may have been "bred in a 'little room,'" her life has not "been circumscribed in such a way that extradomestic space has become terrifyingly alien to her."⁶⁰ The fact that

⁵⁹Brown, *Domestic Individualism*, 123-4.

⁶⁰Richard Brodhead, "Veiled Ladies: Toward a History of Antebellum Entertainment," *ALH* (Summer 1989, 1:2): 274.

"the sense of vast undefined space, pressing in from the outside against the black panes of our uncurtained windows, was fearful to the poor girl, heretofore accustomed to the narrowness of human limits," should not register simply as a "perfect description of the agoraphobia" of the era (*BR* 36).⁶¹ Though she may not relish her role as the Veiled Lady (quite the contrary), Priscilla has several careers, not just on the stage but also as a maker of silk purses which traverse the networks of capital. Further, although her neighbors' "busy tongues spared Priscilla in one way" by not naming her as a prostitute, several critics have done so, illustrating that Priscilla's sphere is not as limited as her "little room" might imply (*BR* 173).⁶²

Priscilla is a product of the city—and in the urban frame her distinguishing transformability becomes visible. As Nina Baym points out, "In Boston, Priscilla comes to life. In the city she is in her element."⁶³ Costumed by Zenobia, Priscilla embodies a persona different from either the Veiled Lady, the sickly slum girl, or the worshipful admirer. She transforms herself in response to changes in setting. For instance, when she imagines Zenobia, "It was as if, in her spiritual visits to her brilliant sister, a portion of the latter's brightness had permeated our dim Priscilla, and still lingered, shedding a faint illumination through the cheerless chamber, after she came back" (*BR* 172). If her transparency makes her vulnerable to Westervelt, frightening the neighbors, who "averred that [Westervelt] had taken advantage of Priscilla's lack of earthly substance to subject her to himself, as his familiar spirit, through whose medium he gained cognizance of whatever

⁶¹Brodhead, "Veiled," 274.

⁶²See, for instance, Barbara F. Lefcovicz and Allan B. Lefcovicz, "Some Rents in the Veil: New Light on Priscilla and Zenobia," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 21(1966): 263-275.

⁶³ Nina Baym, "The Blithedale Romance: A Radical Reading," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 67 (1968): 560.

happened, in regions near or remote," it becomes a decided advantage for the adolescent urbanite (BR 173). Her facility for transformation, combined with her permeability, mark Priscilla as modern and connect her to other city people.

Chance, Connections, and Class in Ruth Hall's Lodgings

In *Ruth Hall*, Fanny Fern echoes Hawthorne's narrative claim that the industrial city produces a mobile, mutable urban subject, yet for Fern the city becomes a place where networks and connections offer women the means to profit from their new-found mobility and flexibility. *Ruth Hall* shows how the melding of private and public spaces that happens in the city allows for the development of a public personality, as well as the means to profit by it (almost) respectably. In this way, she departs from Priscilla. It has been argued, of course, that Priscilla does profit from a public persona through prostitution. *Blithedale's* critics have not emphasized, however, the way in which Priscilla's real threat—her ability to move between classes—is elided in the novel. Though Coverdale may have been, as the novel's last line attests, "In love with—Priscilla!," the novel's class structure is maintained when the tenement girl marries the former laborer. *Ruth Hall*, in contrast, highlights and celebrates that class mobility made available to urban women who embrace mobility, mutability, and display of the self to the public gaze. Fern is, if anything, more graphic than Hawthorne in her descriptions of lower-class life in the city; even so, her narrative reveals that while residence in the slums transforms Ruth, it does not ruin her. Rather, the city elicits from the former boarding-school girl and sheltered wife the drive and market savvy

that will make her a popular and economic success as a writer. Ruth, like many of her sentimental counterparts, moves from prosperity to poverty and back again, but instead of enjoying her success only within the family circle, Ruth's residence in the city ultimately gives her a public voice—and cultural power in a national network of homes.

Like the boarding houses that Hawthorne describes, the boarding and lodging houses in *Ruth Hall* are settings where the boundaries maintaining a discrete subjectivity break down, but *Ruth Hall* more strongly emphasizes how the boarding house allows Ruth to make connections that sustain her agency. Ruth begins her urban life in a boarding house classed closer to Moodie's lodgings than Zenobia's; her boarding house becomes a site from which she can develop a career by selling her handiwork. Destitute and fairly desperate, Ruth and her two daughters take up residence "in a dark narrow street, in one of those heterogeneous boarding-houses abounding in the city" (RH 73). Their neighbors are "clerks, market-boys, apprentices and sewing-girls"—though only "six miles" from their old cottage, Ruth's family has moved worlds away in terms of class distinction (RH 73, 32). Ruth's urban home can support none of the cottage's aesthetics, spatial arrangements, or routines. As Paul Groth notes, historically, for lodging-house tenants, "their home was scattered up and down the street. They slept in one building and ate in another. The surrounding sidewalks and stores functioned as parts of each resident's home."⁶⁴ The breakdown of boundaries separating home from street becomes especially visible through Ruth's daughters, who spend much of their time looking out of their attic windows at the street as Ruth writes. Similarly, the girls go on errands for Ruth, and in these scenes Fern

⁶⁴Groth, *Living*, 126.

effectively conveys the overwhelming quality of the urban street by presenting it through a child's perspective. Finally, the lodging-house is where Ruth's own nuclear family breaks down more completely: Ruth is forced to send her daughter Katie to live with her detested parents-in-law.

Ruth Hall, like other boarding-house fiction, divests the boarding house of the regenerative potential of "home," and presents urban domesticity as a profitable venture. And not just for tenants. In fiction at least, if the boarding-house projects a home-like appearance, this impression merely serves as a thin cover for a shrewd business-woman's practice. The boarding-house proprietress is often described in periodical fiction as "an obliging, motherly kind of a woman, who only [keeps] a few boarders just for company," the boarding house as a place where "'for a consideration' they will be received, as Mrs. Copperas would say, 'into the bosom of the family.'"⁶⁵ Historically, this distinction was probably gendered, for as hotels professionalized, they were increasingly managed by men, whereas women were the primary proprietors of boarding houses.⁶⁶ Yet the "homelike" appearance of these fictional boarding houses only fools the naive boarders from the country, and the boarding house is quickly revealed to be a place of business, which distances it from the idealized cottage home. It is also a place of extra-familial sociability.

One distinctive feature of boarding-house business was the communal dining-room where tenants gathered for meals; *Ruth Hall* and other contemporary boarding-house stories satirize the potential of these rooms' contribution to an elevating, home-like environment. Perhaps hoping to

⁶⁵"Samuel Simpleton," Letter to the Editor, *Rambler's Magazine* 1 (1809): 85; E.B.C., "Mr. Clarence Gower: or, a Peep Into a 'Genteel' Boarding House," *Knickerbocker* 4 (1834): 49.

⁶⁶Wright, *Building*, 39.

capitalize on the potential of home life to improve its adherents, architectural determinist reformers who designed model boarding houses would often include an "eating-room, where meals could be had or provisions purchased ready for eating."⁶⁷ In fiction, however, the dining room rarely serves this purpose. The food always offers an occasion to poke fun at inadequate portions or at the bad quality. For instance, in one story the narrator warns his readers that "if they would rather have a time-honored carpet, and a table fuming with joints and turkeys, than a bright new Brussels and a board whose platters are sparse and delicately tenanted, let them avoid [the boarding house] as sailors would an iceberg."⁶⁸ In "Mrs. Sad's Private Boarding House," breakfast consists of a "tough beefsteak," and the proprietress has "succeeded in reducing her boarders to excellent training" in taking "genteel" portions.⁶⁹ In Ruth's boarding house, far less genteel than these fictional comrades, "one plate suffices for fish, flesh, fowl, and dessert; [and] soiled tablecloths, sticky crockery, oily cookery and bad grammar predominate" (RH 71). Along with marking Ruth's lodgings as lower-class, the mingling of fish, flesh and fowl in this passage introduces the theme of mingling that is so prevalent in fiction about boarding houses.

For their reformers, denigrators, lampooners and other commentators, the mingling among guests that characterized the urban boarding house was clearly loaded with tension. The chance encounters made possible by boarding-house architecture—its dining rooms, parlors, hallways and entrances—became a source of anxiety reformers counteracted with measures such as prayer meetings and architectural reform.⁷⁰ Paul Groth notes that,

⁶⁷Charles E. Norton, "Model Lodging-Houses in Boston," *Atlantic Monthly* 5 (1860): 680.

⁶⁸E.B.C., 49.

⁶⁹Milward, "Mrs. Sad's," 691.

⁷⁰"Prayer Meetings in Boarding-Houses," *Christian Herald* 8 (1822): 732; Norton, 680.

In rooming houses men's and women's lives crossed constantly. Gendered realms were scarcely circumscribed in the way that suburban or rural standards prescribed and the spatial arrangements of polite households reinforced. Single women in rooming houses shared hallways with single men, without familial or community supervision. Unlike the better hotels, there were not even servants or clerks to observe the activity.⁷¹

It was precisely because these lodgings were not "better" that they were seen as spatially disrupting the conventions from which the contained home gained its power.

In fiction, great narrative possibilities were afforded by settings where men and women of different classes mixed. Boarding-house dining rooms become places of courtship, both clandestine and open, where reading the countenance and clothing of the fellow traveler is crucial to success—a financially advantageous marriage. Ruth, for instance, is eyed and her merits as a potential partner discussed by two of her fellow boarders, one of whom plans "to request 'the dragon' [the landlady] to let me sit next her at the table. I'll begin by helping the children, offering to cut up their victuals, and all that sort of thing—that will please the mother, you know; hey?" (*RH* 74) Here, proximity, aided by the proprietress, will allow for courtship to take place. But when Ruth's poverty is revealed, her attractions wane. Interaction, surveillance, and elaborate plans to snare members of the opposite sex become commonplace features of boarding-house fiction, and in most cases these plans ultimately hinge on a desire to rise economically through marriage.

⁷¹Groth, *Living*, 127.

The redemptive features of the home-like dining and sitting rooms lose their force in fiction, where they are revealed to be connected spaces that encourage sociability and reward it with class mobility. Ruth's middle-class sensibilities are offended by the layout of a boarding house that requires the landlady to ask her gentlemen boarders to smoke in their rooms because, as she says, "the parlor is the only place I have to dress in" (RH 74). Because the boarding house is not a cottage, it elicits from Ruth a distinctly urban identity.

The breakdown of cottage domesticity forces Ruth to find alternative means of survival; in tracking Ruth's attempts to navigate urban networks Fern analyzes the development of a model of modern female subjectivity far more positive than those Hawthorne constructs for Zenobia or Priscilla. For as Ruth expands her conception of home to include the networks in which urban homes are enmeshed, the lodging house becomes the site from which she begins to make connections that enable her to succeed as a writer. Importantly, all of these connections happen in networks and among individuals far removed from Ruth's family and domestic sphere. They happen among what Henri Lefebvre calls the "crevices" of the urban.⁷² Ruth emerges from these crevices with rich material for storytelling—and the stories she tells resist and disrupt the status quo. Her writing epitomizes and broadcasts the threat that Ruth's economically mobile body represents for an ideology of domestic containment. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau explores the possibilities for resisting the totalizing urban networks even more fully than Lefebvre does, explaining that "beneath the discourses that idealogize the city, the uses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate."⁷³ One mode of resistance, though not

⁷²Lefebvre, *Right*, 105.

⁷³de Certeau, *Practice*, 95.

necessarily readable, is the story. According to de Certeau, "stories diversify, rumors totalize . . . stories [become] private and sink into the secluded places in neighborhoods, families and individuals."⁷⁴ Privacy is emphasized in *Ruth Hall* by the attic location from which Ruth writes. Yet Ruth takes her stories into the public arena by commodifying them for the popular press, and thus claims the networks of the publishing industry as a means for both economic and personal gain. In the networked domestic spaces of the city, Ruth makes her private life into public property.

In *Ruth Hall*, the urban landscape dissolves the boundaries separating an interior self from a public, commodifiable subjectivity and simultaneously dissolves the structure of extended family. Fern's contemporaries and current critics alike note how stridently the novel condemns the behavior of Ruth's family. In her introduction to the 1986 reprint of *Ruth Hall*, Joyce W. Warren cites an 1885 review: "As we wish no sister of ours, nor no female relative to show toward us, the ferocity she has displayed toward her nearest relatives we take occasion to censure this book that might initiate such a possibility."⁷⁵ In part, this condemnation arose from the fact that Fern's vitriol extended from her fiction into her own family; Fern particularly singled out her brother, influential editor Nathaniel P. Willis (fictionalized as Hyacinth Ellet) for attack. Similarly, Elizabeth Cady Stanton noted that *Ruth Hall* presented "tyrannical parents, husbands and brothers."⁷⁶ Fern's vituperative prose

⁷⁴de Certeau, *Practice*, 108.

⁷⁵Review of *Ruth Hall*, *Crescent City* (New Orleans) January 1885. Cited in Joyce W. Warren, Introduction to *Ruth Hall* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), xvii. The "she" in this quotation could have referred to either Ruth Hall or her creator, for the novel was highly-autobiographical and several of Fern's portraits of Ruth's relatives were easily recognizable as members of Fern's family.

⁷⁶Cited in Linda Grasso, "Anger in the House: Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and the Redrawing of Emotional Boundaries in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1995): 252.

emphasizes Ruth's condemnation of her father, brother, in-laws and other relatives, but even as Fern castigates unfeeling families, her heroine is reconstructing an alternative "family" through the city's networks.

As Ruth makes use of the city networks required to further her career, she demonstrates the market-oriented mentality of the modern individual. The virtues of home, hard work and family, which by the logic of the domestic plot should have offered financial and emotional support to a young widow, break down in *Ruth Hall*, while chance, instinct and interpersonal connections allow her to survive and eventually prosper. Chance operates to help Ruth on several occasions: once, a former friend recognizes daughter Katie on the street and upon learning Ruth's address, gives her some money; later, Ruth is rescued from a fire by the very noble Johnny Galt she once employed as a farmhand in her cottage days. Instinct makes Ruth decide to keep the copyright to her book, a decision that earns her enough money to reclaim her daughter. And connections made in the streets, in the boarding house hallways, and through the modern popular press find her a devoted readership and an astute manager. In this way, she resembles an even better-known urban subject of the nineteenth century, Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick.

If Priscilla's modern identity hinges on her ability to dissolve, Ruth's depends on her ability to connect. The networks of the publishing industry bring her into contact with Mr. Walter, the publisher who writes to Ruth out of a "brotherly interest" far more supportive than the interest demonstrated by Ruth's actual brother, who is also an editor and publisher. Ruth writes "a long letter—a sweet, sisterly letter—pouring out her long pent-up feelings, as though Mr. Walter had indeed been her brother" (*RH* 143-4). The nominal

relationship becomes more meaningful than the biological. Ruth and Mr. Walter maintain and develop their bond through postal networks. Mr. Walter's connections and advice help Ruth to attain financial independence, and he continues to help her through the novel's end. Though there is no indication that they will marry, the connections forged through the networks of the popular press and the postal service afford Ruth economic mobility and self-sufficiency. Ruth does gain a family, but its form does not correspond to the cottage plans of most domestic fiction. Thus, although the shared spaces of the city work to erode the nuclear family, at the same time they offer the potential to reconstitute an urban family more desirable and profitable than Ruth's family of origin.

Importantly, the success of Ruth's writing career does not depend on the familial structure or an "objective" examination process in the ways that her attempts at careers as seamstress and teacher do; modern urban subjectivity revolves around creatively adapting to a changing environment rather than playing established roles. Ruth's successful authorship depends on two related networks, the network of the publishing industry that disseminates her material and the networks of readers who integrate "Floy," as Ruth is known in the press, into their daily lives. Letters from Floy's fans comprise several complete chapters of *Ruth Hall*. Most of these are concerned with personal matters: marriage proposals, family troubles, even the deaths of pets. Among her readers, rampant gossip about Floy's real identity both increases circulation and emphasizes narrative's ability to connect its readers to one another. As Richard Brodhead notes, "Ruth's fan mail makes clear that a home audience consumes her work to help satisfy

cravings domestic life has not allayed."⁷⁷ And yet these connections become another network as readers imagine themselves to be part of Floy's "family" of readers. Just as Mr. Walter becomes Ruth's "brother," Ruth's readers connect to her and to one another through communication conduits. Ruth's phenomenal success, then, depends on her ability to emulate the networks that dominate her urban environment; even as the city annexes its hinterlands, so too does Ruth.

Breaking Down Architectural Determinism: Coverdale's Narration

Ruth Hall's urban identity evokes a great deal more optimism about the prospects of modernity than does Hawthorne's anxious representation of vulnerable, mutable, deceptive, artificial urbanites. Part of the difference resides in the structures of the two narratives. *Ruth Hall* is a narrative pastiche. Successive brief chapters feature different narrative voices including Ruth, her family members, her neighbors, her readers, and an omniscient narrator. Lefebvre sees "plurality, coexistence and simultaneity in the urban patterns, ways of living urban life."⁷⁸ This simultaneity derives from the actions of individuals within what Lefebvre terms the urban fabric. In *Ruth Hall*, simultaneity, expressed in part by Ruth's experiences, is reinforced by the simultaneity of the narrative and the multiplicity of voices that together tell Ruth's story. Together, these voices register resistance to a unitary plotline, which, in clinging to the form of the romance, Hawthorne refuses to abandon. Hawthorne's novel is written through Coverdale's point of view, yet this unreliable narrator emphasizes that any vision is always

⁷⁷Brodhead, "Veiled," 288.

⁷⁸Lefebvre, *Right*, 109.

partial and is itself frequently deceptive.⁷⁹ Coverdale's narration is directly connected to his voyeurism; the narrative highlights his continual peeping and observing, shaped by the architecture and other features of the urban landscape that surrounds him. His partial, incomplete narration emphasizes the possibility for resisting or evading urban totalities.

Coverdale may be a voyeur, but he hardly has the power de Certeau attributes to the urban voyeur of "'seeing the whole,' of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts."⁸⁰ In this novel, sight, however unreliable, is Coverdale's major, if partial, source of information about his environment. In addition, vision operates as an important connector between spaces. Thus, even if Coverdale's vision is partial, Hawthorne's use of this vision within the narrative anticipates cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove's formulation of "the tension between visual and textual truth . . . as a dialectic between representational modes, or metaphors, historically in a constant and intense struggle over meaning."⁸¹ Just as Coverdale's pastoral vision reveals the extent to which the rural landscape of Blithedale serves the economic and aesthetic uses of the urban, Coverdale's urban vision, here exemplified by the view from his hotel window, serves to structure a penetrable, networked urban space.

The stylish boarding house and the hotel's shared backyards allow Coverdale simultaneously to continue the peeping that occupied much of his time at Blithedale and extract himself from the messy, complex urban. He wants to "linger on the brink, or to hover in the air above it" (BR 136). Critics

⁷⁹ See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) for a very positive look at neighborly surveillance.

⁸⁰ de Certeau, *Practice*, 92.

⁸¹ Denis Cosgrove, "Spectacle and Society: Landscape as Theater in Premodern and Postmodern Cities," in Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 101.

have read this hotel room as a “hermitage” where Coverdale enjoys “social isolation and physical separation,” while in fact he remains highly engaged in his urban surroundings.⁸² Unlike de Certeau’s voyeur whose “text . . . lies before [his] eyes,” Coverdale’s view both asserts itself as an unreadable text and draws him back down to the street to tangle once again with the “bewitching world” of the urban.⁸³

Coverdale’s window offers him the opportunity to get around the barriers to vision enforced by streets and sidewalks and gain a more total, if more removed, sense of his surroundings. Yet while his view simplifies what he sees, allowing him to streamline the objects of his gaze into something simultaneously theatrical and silent, Coverdale cannot avoid being drawn back into the very scenes that his detached perspective creates. Coverdale can for example, see Zenobia “like a full-length picture, in the space between the heavy festoons of the window-curtains” (*BR* 143). She is objectified, an image open to his gaze. Viewed, her actions transform themselves into Coverdale’s private drama until she looks back, recognizes him, and lets fall “a white linen curtain between the festoons of the damask ones. . . . like a drop-curtain of a theatre in the interval between the acts” (*BR* 147). The object of his gaze can assert herself to disrupt his formulation of her by using the very props appropriate to the scene he has created. Further, Coverdale cannot confine his urban visions to the objectifying gaze; he is drawn, “in compliance with [a] sudden impulse, [to find himself] actually within the house, the rear of which, for two days past, [he] had been so sedulously watching” (*BR* 149). The combination of voyeurism and participation yields a very different city for Coverdale. He must contend with

⁸²Anhorn, “Vision,” 141.

⁸³de Certeau, *Practice*, 92.

transformed images of Zenobia and Priscilla and reenter his confusion about Westervelt. In short, he must confront the objects of his gaze as acting subjects who can and do disrupt his reading. In de Certeau's terms, "a *migrational*, or metaphorical city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city."⁸⁴ The novel's own readability is partially undermined by an unreliable reader (Coverdale), a fact that emphasizes the presence of a migrational city unfolding on the ground level through the experience of the reader. Through episodes of chance encounters, changing identities and misreadings, all part of Coverdale's urban experience, just as they are of Ruth Hall's, the novel constructs a city that cannot be reduced to the mechanized patterns and repetitions that characterize it on the surface. Through Coverdale's narration architectural determinism is both constructed and broken down.

The "Happy Ending"

The networked spaces of the modern city in *The Blithedale Romance* and *Ruth Hall* shape a set of characters who are enmeshed and implicated in urban networks of communication and exchange. In *Blithedale*, these characters reveal that a landscape can only remake society in its own image. Though a nominally rural landscape is presented in the settlement at Blithedale, that rural landscape is firmly implicated in the urban economy and aesthetic. It is constructed by the hands and eyes of urbanites who are attempting to create an environment for their own urban uses.

⁸⁴de Certeau, *Practice*, 93. I would assert that the city Hawthorne presents is never planned and readable—it can only appear so in the eyes of the very unreliable narrator.

Ruth Hall uses the model of porosity exemplified by the domestic spaces of Hawthorne's urban landscape to construct a model of authorship that resolves private concerns through the public narratives Ruth publishes. Yet by publishing elements of her life—and by writing from the exigencies of her domestic situation—Ruth maintains the agency necessary to attain financial success, and necessary also for her to build an alternative model of family after the dissolution of her own. In short, the novel asserts that individuality is better enabled by the permeable urban spaces Ruth inhabits than by the realities of cottage life. And this assertion troubles the rhetoric of nineteenth-century domesticity just as surely as the novel's substitution of a stock certificate for a marriage certificate in what begins as a sentimental novel.

Thus, *Ruth Hall* can be seen as a direct response to the "happy ending" Hawthorne proposes or satirizes for Priscilla with Coverdale. Though Hawthorne co-opts and questions the happy ending of the sentimental genre by turning it into a scene of subtle horror, Fern betters his ending by transforming it into the beginning of her own heroine's tale. *Ruth Hall* reverses Priscilla's trajectory from urban to Downing-esque cottage and claims the urban's potential as a location offering both peril and profit for the women who can or must inhabit it.

Chapter Two

The City's Drawing-Room: Spatial Practice in *The Bostonians* and Central Park

The number of persons in circulation was enormous—so great that the question of how they had got there, from their distances, and would get away again, in the so formidable public conveyances, loomed, in the background, like a skeleton at the feast; but the general note was thereby, intensely, the “popular,” and the brilliancy of the show proportionately striking.

—Henry James on Central Park¹

If the industrial city destabilized domestic roles and expectations for women, the process was far less threatening to a character like Ruth Hall than it was to her brother, Hyacinth Ellet. Hyacinth is a ridiculous character, a well-dressed, immoral fop of an editor who rejects his inconveniently poor sister and subsequently fails to use his influence to help her break into publishing. Ellet's punishment, of course, is a severe pen-lashing in his sister's writing; as I have noted, Ruth seizes the networks of publicity to further her own career and injure her brother's reputation. Hyacinth's real-life counterpart, Nathaniel P. Willis, was the influential if “snobbish” tastemaker and editor of such nineteenth-century periodicals as the *Home*

¹Henry James, *The American Scene* (1907; New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 133.

Journal.² His views on domestic ideology, and particularly on cottage domesticity, were directly opposed to those that his sister, Sara Payson Willis Parton, published under her pseudonym, Fanny Fern.

Nathaniel Willis used the urban networks of publication and publicity to make money and earn fame, yet he occasionally needed to escape from the pressures of the city.³ Like many members of his social class, Willis chose to leave New York City for the Hudson River Valley, where in 1853 he commissioned a country villa from Andrew Jackson Downing's protégé, British architect Calvert Vaux. The resulting villa, called Idlewild, was spectacular. "High up among the trees, and apparently on the very edge of a precipitous ascent, it seems to peer over the topmost branches of the dark pines and to command the whole valley below."⁴ Overlooking Newburgh Bay, the Hudson River, and four of its tributaries, the house and setting combined the beautiful with the picturesque. The commission, no doubt, was a coup for the young Vaux; of the thirty houses pictured in his book *Villas and Cottages*, Idlewild is the only one displayed with a testimonial letter from its owner. As the city developed further and the pace of urban life quickened, successful New Yorkers like Willis would desire an escape within the city—a place where they could rejuvenate themselves without going out of town. And New York lacked the appropriate facilities for bourgeois relaxation. As Willis put it in 1844, "as a metropolis of wealth and fashion, New York has one great deficiency—that

²Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (1992; New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 28; Ganter, "N. P. Willis," *The Encyclopedia of American Literature* (New York: Continuum Press, 1999), 1244-5.

³Though not always of the kind he wanted. He was "satirized as a scandal-mongering dilettante" by authors such as Thackeray. Granville Ganter, "N. P. Willis," 1244-5.

⁴Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages* (1857; New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 248.

of a driving park.”⁵ Again, it was Calvert Vaux who came to the rescue, this time with his plans for Central Park.

Together with his better-known partner, Frederick Law Olmsted, Vaux designed the Greensward Plan for Central Park in 1858. The park, they hoped, would serve as a space where New Yorkers—and not just those of the growing carriage-driving class—could find a respite from the business of the city. They saw the park as a cure for the city’s ills, a special setting where city-dwellers could heal themselves of urban malaise simply by walking or driving the paths that wound among meadows, ponds, and grottos. Their plan underscored the cultural belief in the environment’s impact on personal and social development. In Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux registered that the environment was the salient force in shaping the subject, and they remade the landscape so that it could produce the types of people they hoped would make the modern city the highest form of civilization. Yet, the development of transportation and communication networks in New York would transform the park in its early decades, inverting Olmsted and Vaux’s configurations of public and private space.

To Henry James, the changes that transformed New York, and with it, Central Park, had profound implications for modern subjectivity. The question of what kind of subject would develop in a networked city recurs throughout James’s work. Characters formed in relation to industrialism appear in much of James’s fiction, from Christopher Newman in *The American* to Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*. Yet, James’s concerns about how the networked city will impact the urban home and the notions of publicity, privacy, and interiority it enforces receive their fullest

⁵Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 217.

treatment in *The Bostonians* and *The American Scene*. In *The Bostonians*, privacy and domesticity themselves must be reconfigured spatially in response to publicity's power.⁶ Basil Ransom's reaction to the rise of the modern print media is to retreat to a time in which the public and private spheres seem to be more separate. Thus, Ransom withdraws from the industrial era to the "earlier" space of Mississippi—and takes Verena with him. Olive Chancellor's strategy, in contrast, is to find opportunities in the interstices that open when spheres that she would like to keep separate begin to mingle. She opens herself to the city's networks and attempts to use them to further Verena's public career.

Though many critics have pointed out that *The Bostonians* is a novel uneasily engaged with the onset of modernity, here I trace the ways in which modern notions of publicity and privacy are spatialized—and limn the version of modernity that results. *The Bostonians* examines the effects of reconfigurations in public and private space, showing how the modern home, permeated by publicity, opens the contained self to urban networks.⁷

⁶Anthony Scott, "Basil, Olive, and Verena: *The Bostonians* and the Problem of Politics," *Arizona Quarterly* 49:1 (Spring 1993): 50.

⁷Several recent articles on *The Bostonians* draw connections between the novel and modern material culture, including: Ian F. A. Bell, "Language, Setting and Self in *The Bostonians*," 49:3 (1988):211-238 and "The Personal, the Private, and the Public in *The Bostonians*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 32:2 (Summer 1990): 240-256; Janet Wolf Bowen, "Architectural Envy: 'A Figure Is Nothing without a Setting,'" *New England Quarterly*, 65:1 (1992): 3-23; Wai Chee Dimock, "Gender, the Market, and the Non-trivial in James," *The Henry James Review* 15 (1994): 24-30; Philip Fisher, "Appearing and Disappearing in Public: Social Space in Late-Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture," *Reconstructing American Literary History*, Sacvan Berkovitch, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986): 155-188; Anthony Scott, "Basil, Olive, and Verena: *The Bostonians* and the Problem of Politics," *Arizona Quarterly* 49:1 (Spring 1993): 49-72; Brook Thomas, "The Construction of Privacy in and around *The Bostonians*," *American Literature* 64:4 (December 1992): 719-747; Lynn Wardley, "Woman's Voice, Democracy's Body, and *The Bostonians*," *ELH* 56:3 (Fall 1989): 639-665; and Chris Walsh, "Stardom Is Born: The Religion and Economy of Publicity in Henry James' *The Bostonians*," *American Literary Realism* 29:3 (1997): 15-25. Ross Posnock's "Henry James, Veblen and Adorno: The Crisis of the Modern Self," is also very helpful in situating James's take on modernity within economic critiques: *Journal of American Studies*, 21 (1987): 32-53.

The phenomenon of private spaces becoming public, a harbinger of modernity, was visible throughout the industrial city, but especially in urban homes. Central Park put theories of environment—and the changing urban landscape—on center stage, not just in New York, but nationally. While for Vaux and Olmsted the urbanization of private space promised an increasingly civilized and democratized American society, James depicts the inversion of interiority with far more ambivalence.

Central Park: Urban Space, Social Function

Like many nineteenth-century urban reform projects, Central Park was designed to improve the city, and with it, the nation. The park was to be part of “an ideal American city where landscape architecture, housing, and urban physical and social planning were intertwined.”⁸ Unlike many later projects, however, the process by which this improvement was to happen was thoroughly theorized. Olmsted and Vaux adhered to the theories of Edmund Burke and the romantic artists who followed him, designing with the understanding that the eye offers the individual access to the outside world and opens a person’s interior to the outside. The process of seeing connects interior and exterior, allowing for transformative influence to occur.⁹ For Vaux, demanding beauty becomes a political act; he argues in *Villas and Cottages* that the eye is not merely the most important physical sense, but that it operates on a metaphysical level as well. “[F]or the light of the body is the eye,” he writes, “and it is to the eye, with the infinite host of progressive ideas, to which it acts as the mysterious portal,

⁸Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 28.

⁹Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 137.

that the design of every building has the opportunity of artistically ministering."¹⁰ Here, the eye becomes a mechanism by which shared visions can be internalized and thus individualized.

And these visions were carefully constructed. Calling themselves "landscape architects," Vaux and Olmsted planned the landforms, selected the plantings, and designed the architectural features that would coalesce into a landscape with an elevating effect. Like landscape painters, they hoped to recreate in Central Park the "civilizing and uplifting function of landscape" that middle-class Americans increasingly applauded.¹¹ For instance, when describing Central Park, Olmsted specifies that the park's transformative power is visual: "adapted to please the eye," the park's "circumstances are all favorable to a pleasurable wakefulness of the mind without stimulating exertion."¹² But later in the same text, Olmsted indicates that influence can extend beyond the eye to spark the imagination. He writes, "a great object of all that is done in a park, of all the art of a park, is to influence the minds of men through their imagination."¹³ Carefully-designed and controlled landscapes like paintings or Central Park, Angela Miller notes, "worked better than actual landscapes in inculcating values."¹⁴ To Olmsted, the park's visual beauty has transformative potential for both the bourgeois businessman and the urban thug. He notes that, "no one. . . can doubt that [Central Park] exercises a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and the most lawless classes of the

¹⁰Calvert Vaux, *Villas*, 51.

¹¹Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 13.

¹²Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," in *Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted's Writings on City Landscapes*, S.B. Sutton, ed. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1971) 77.

¹³Olmsted, "Public," 82.

¹⁴Miller, *Empire*, 13.

city, an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance."¹⁵

And that harmonizing influence would be achieved in part by constructing subtle visual allusions to the home.

Olmsted and Vaux designed Central Park to civilize the urban psyche by incorporating visual and ideological references to the contained home into their plans. Thus, they employ a language of interiors to describe the largest outdoor space in New York City. Vaux "thought of the Terrace as the Park's drawing-room,"¹⁶ while Olmsted hoped that the public park could take on the character of "a parlor" where city dwellers would (figuratively, of course) "spread carpets on the floor to gain in quiet, and hang drapery in their windows and papers on their walls to gain in seclusion and beauty."¹⁷ Evoking cozy domestic scenes, these descriptions imply that Olmsted and Vaux thought of Central Park as a piece of landscape art—"a pictorial expression of social containment"—framed by the city yet impervious to it.¹⁸ But for both designers, as for Henry James a generation later, neither the park nor the home it was designed to evoke was nearly so enclosed.

In its dual identity as shaper of society and healer of individuals, the park echoes both the improving and disciplining functions of the domestic home presented in sentimental fiction. Olmsted extends his metaphor of the park as the city's parlor of the city so far as to call trees "the permanent furniture of the city."¹⁹ As built landscape, the park blurs the boundaries between nature and culture; in a similar blurring, the out-of-doors becomes the city's domestic space. The park begins to resemble:

¹⁵Olmsted, "Public," 96.

¹⁶Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 185.

¹⁷Olmsted, "Public," 70.

¹⁸Miller, *Empire*, 11.

¹⁹Olmsted, "Public," 70, 72.

a familiar domestic gathering, where the prattle of the children mingles with the easy conversation of the more sedate, the bodily requirements satisfied with good cheer, fresh air, agreeable light, moderate temperature, and furniture and decorations adapted to please the eye. . . . The circumstances are all favorable to a pleasurable wakefulness of the mind without stimulating exertion; and the close relation of family life, the association of children, of mothers, of lovers, of those who may be lovers, stimulate and keep alive the more tender sympathies, and give play to faculties such as may be dormant in business or on the promenade; while at the same time the cares of providing in detail for all the wants of the family, guidance, instruction, reproof, and the dutiful reception of guidance, instruction, reproof, are, as matters of conscious exertion, as far as possible laid aside.²⁰

A middle space resembling Leo Marx's pastoral, the park "naturally" evokes the best qualities of the domestic sphere, screening out the evident discipline necessary to make the family function. This mode of discipline has powerful counterparts in domestic ideology. Constructed as havens from the outside world, the park and the "separate" space of the home each allow (or force) individuals to fit themselves to play what the authors of discipline determine to be positive roles in the larger society. The most familiar literary example of this mode of internalized discipline is that instilled by the March parents in *Little Women*. The girls are supposed to "fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves. . . beautifully," even if these conquests and sacrifices are difficult.²¹

²⁰Olmsted, "Public," 77.

²¹Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1869; New York: Modern Library, 1983), 16.

The lack of “conscious exertion” required for transformation within the park’s boundaries also finds corollaries elsewhere in domestic ideology, particularly as it was conceived by Catherine Beecher. Both as a visual construct and as a home-like space, the park becomes profoundly transformative, both for the individual and for the society. In addition, here Olmsted takes up Vaux’s notion of the mind as receptor; in the relaxed setting for the park, as at home, the mind can “unbend” and accept an improving influence. But importantly, this particular image of domestic discipline does not require a particular room for its setting. Olmsted hopes that the “mingling,” “association,” and “close relation” he connects with the domestic scene generally can be extended to the park. This extension is possible because Olmsted’s conceptions of home and park are far more flexible than his “parlor” images imply.

Although the park-as-parlor might seem to signify containment, in fact, both Olmsted and Vaux understood the home not as contained space, but rather as a space organized by internal and external connections. The Central Park Terrace, which Vaux thought of as the park’s drawing-room, with its fountain, wide stairways, and ample gathering-space, encourages sociability instead of the withdrawal the word originally connoted.²² Shortened from “withdrawing room,” the term “drawing room” signified a private sanctum within a home otherwise characterized by sociability.²³ Vaux, however, did not exactly embrace this notion of the drawing-room; certainly, he did not consider it a necessary component of his housing

²²Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 185.

²³See Tamara K. Hareven, “The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective,” for a lucid discussion of the transition from the home defined as a space of sociability to the home as private space. *Home: A Place in the World*, Arien Mack, ed (New York: New York University Press: 1993), 227-259.

designs. In *Villas and Cottages*, for example, he advocates eliminating the private room “called either library or drawing-room” on the grounds of expense, or at least combining it with the dining room.²⁴ He writes, “there is no necessity in any country house that such a room should be restricted to its use in one purpose.”²⁵ Far from limiting a room to a single function, Vaux architecturally combines the solitary, interior space of the library with the highly sociable space of the dining room. Thus, though “fitted up with books, and enlivened by engravings,” the library is also enlivened by the family. The library should thus “be one of the most agreeable [rooms] in the house, so as to heighten the value of this constant and familiar reunion as much as possible, and to encourage in every way, by external influences, a spirit of refinement and liberal hospitality. The fact is, that the art of eating and drinking wisely and well is so important to our social happiness that it deserves to be developed under somewhat more favorable circumstances.”²⁶ In his cottage plans, Vaux designed for multiple purposes, architecturally blending private and public spaces so that the positive qualities of one, in this case the “refinement” of the library, might influence the other.

Beyond changing the spatial arrangements of the detached home, Vaux designed urban dwellings that would radically reshape city living. When he moved to Manhattan in 1857, Vaux “proposed the first design for New York City apartment dwellings, or ‘separate suites of rooms under the same roof’ on the ‘European plan.’ This was a novel idea for New York of the 1850’s where hotels, boarding houses or room rentals, whether for families or individuals, were the norm, except for crowded slum-like

²⁴Vaux, *Villas*, 43.

²⁵Vaux, *Villas*, 44.

²⁶Vaux, *Villas*, 44.

tenement buildings with hall or outside toilets.”²⁷ But Vaux did more than propose designs for apartments; when New York’s first apartment building, the Stuyvesant Apartments, opened in 1869, Vaux and his family moved in immediately.²⁸

In arguing that a blend of contained home and shared space would best suit—and shape—the growing city’s inhabitants, Vaux dramatically revised notions of urban domesticity, offering a middle ground between the contained home and the excessive urban connections that Hawthorne describes in *Blithedale*. Vaux was particularly interested in designing a middle ground for the urban family, for he maintained a belief that domestic spaces did shape their inhabitants. He writes, “a family may live at a hotel or in a boarding-house, but the ceaseless publicity that ensues, the constant change, and the entire absence of all individuality in the everyday domestic arrangements, will always render this method of living distasteful, as a permanent thing, to the heads of families who have any taste for genuine home comforts.”²⁹ The apartment thus becomes a desirable housing choice because the space can be made more private, permanent, and personalized than a tenement, blending “home comforts” with urban convenience. But Vaux clearly understands the Hawthornean fear of connection and designs accordingly. He anticipates that the public staircase in the building’s center could easily cause “a prejudice . . . to be excited against the whole effect” and plans to counteract this prejudice against shared internal spaces by making the stairways “light, airy, and elegant; and, if possible, lighter, airier, and more elegant than any other part of the

²⁷William Alex, *Calvert Vaux, Architect and Planner* (New York: Ink, Inc., 1994), 92.

²⁸Alex, *Calvert Vaux*, 91.

²⁹Calvert Vaux, “Parisian Buildings for the City Residents,” *Harper’s Weekly* (December 19, 1857), 809.

house.”³⁰ His attempts to heighten the appeal of his novel design reveal a clear understanding of his middle-class clientele’s desires for “home comforts,” as well as their conceptions of how and when these comforts might be shared.

In all of his designs, including those for the Parisian Apartments, Vaux consistently advocates taking a building’s particular location into consideration. In *Villas and Cottages*, he urges that “country houses . . . be adapted to the location, and not the location to the design, for it is undesirable, and generally impracticable, to make the natural landscape subservient to the architectural composition.”³¹ Vaux carries this commitment to surroundings into the city, where the cultural landscape takes precedence over the natural. In New York, that means incorporating the peculiarities of an urban blend of public and private into the living spaces. Vaux notes that he is working from European designs for apartments, but is adapting them to suit American needs and preferences. For instance, Vaux explains the lack of an open interior courtyard by noting that in New York: “Every family that owns or rents a house wishes to have the principal parlor command a view of the street; and American ladies, who are in the habit of spending the greater part of their time in their own apartments, think it far more lively and cheerful to look out on a busy thoroughfare than on a monotonous quadrangle, however elegantly it may be decorated.”³² Although the apartments are designed to accommodate American women’s preference to remain at home, a style of living perhaps linked to that encouraged by the detached home, Vaux’s design also

³⁰Vaux, “Parisian,” 810.

³¹Vaux, *Villas*, 55.

³²Vaux, “Parisian,” 810.

incorporates these women's fascination with the outside and the "busy thoroughfares" of the urban scene. In a sense, these thoroughfares, along with streetcars and later, subways, would eventually allow women's participation in the public sphere they could only gaze upon in the mid-1850's. Central Park would help to speed this transition.

Domestic Influence in Urban Space

Though they evoked images of middle- and upper-class domestic arrangements in their designs for Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux made efforts to emphasize that they were designing a park for all of the city's social classes.³³ For both designers, the city was a place of crowds, energy, and economic activity where people of different classes and nationalities mingled on the streets and where civilization reached its peak. Vaux reveled in the urban and spent most of his seventy-one years living in Manhattan. Olmsted was more ambivalent. He saw the potential for the civilized city to turn dangerous, threatening the body, "the mind [,] and moral strength." One possible danger resided in the crowd, where, "to merely avoid collision with those we meet and pass upon the sidewalks, we have constantly to watch, to foresee, and to guard against their movements . . . Every day of their lives," he continues, city dwellers "have seen thousands of their fellow-men, have met them face to face, have brushed against them, and yet have had no experience of anything in common with them."³⁴ One cure for the mental and physical strains imposed by the city

³³This was a commitment to which Vaux adhered throughout his professional career; many of his later architectural commissions were for social service buildings in New York such as hospitals, museums, numerous lodging houses for boys and girls, and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, model tenements for the Improved Dwellings Association. See Alex, *Calvert Vaux*.

³⁴Olmsted, "Public," 65-6.

on its inhabitants could be found in the park, whose foliage could screen out both the city's "confined and vitiated air" and the close physical presence of other bodies on the street."³⁵ The park, Olmsted hopes, will serve as a common experience, one that can transform the crowd into "fellow-men."

Whether domesticated or "natural," the park was presented as the city's opposite; it was deliberately constructed to allow the city-dweller an opportunity to trade grey streets for green grass. To Olmsted, the park's green space only made sense in the context of its urban surroundings—the antidote it offered to the sights and sounds of the city ultimately made its users more fit to participate in urban life. He writes, "the park should, as far as possible, complement the town. . . . Let your buildings be as picturesque as your artists can make them. This is the beauty of the town. Consequently, the beauty of the park should be the other. It should be the beauty of the fields, the meadow, the prairie, of the green pastures, and the still waters."³⁶ Summoning up a litany of images central to the canon of American landscape painting, Olmsted effectively blends in the language of the twenty-third psalm, situating the park and its social function as a simultaneously secular and religious experience.

In order to be "efficiently attractive to the great body of citizens," Olmsted argues, the park must offer city-dwellers a kind of human contact that is directly opposed to the brush of bodies on the streets.³⁷ The park, that is, must be simultaneously close to and far away from the city.

We want a ground to which people may easily go after their day's work is done, and where they may stroll for an hour, seeing, hearing,

³⁵Olmsted, "Public," 70, 73.

³⁶Olmsted, "Public," 81.

³⁷Olmsted, "Public," 70, 73.

and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the streets, where they shall, in effect, find the city put far away from them. . . . We want, especially, the greatest possible contrast with the restraining and confining conditions of the town, those conditions which compel us to walk circumspectly, watchfully, jealously, which compel us to look closely upon others without sympathy.³⁸

The park blurs the temporal and spatial differences between the city's rush and the soothing "greensward," allowing people who live close enough to the park to experience both urban and rural landscapes on a daily basis. In creating, recuperating, and enforcing this visual organization, Central Park distills the disciplinary power of the domestic and broadcasts it on a carefully-constructed screen of nature. As Henry James would later write, "To pass, in New York, from the discipline of the streets to this so different many-smiling presence is to be thrilled at every turn."³⁹ Thus, the park's influence extends to encompass the entire urban landscape.

Though its designers aimed to attract the "great body of citizens," in practice Central Park initially served as a recreation ground for the middle and upper classes. Nathaniel Willis did indeed drive his carriage in the park, a practice Olmsted considered to be psychologically beneficial. He cites testimonials from doctors, one of whom notes, "Where I formerly ordered patients of a certain class to give up their business altogether and go out of town, I now . . . prescribe a ride in the park before going to their offices and again a drive with their families before dinner. By simply adopting this course as a habit, men who have been breaking down frequently recover

³⁸Olmsted, "Public," 80.

³⁹James, *Scene*, 132.

tone rapidly.”⁴⁰ In its early years, the park was mainly enjoyed by people “of a certain class,” those, like this doctor’s patients, with enough money and leisure time to travel to the park and to pursue the types of recreation—especially carriage driving—that dominated the park in the 1850’s and 60’s. Yet despite this initial association with the upper and middle classes, Central Park was increasingly a part of the growing metropolis. Changes in the city would dramatically reshape patterns of park use, and significantly, its function in the national imagination. The relations that developed as the “separate” space of the park became increasingly public and urban had unforeseen—and very public—influences of their own.

The Networked Park

Although Central Park may have been designed to provide “the greatest possible contrast” to the city, the success of its social mission depended on its links to the city. As part of the city, it would be affected by the development of new transportation and communication networks that were transforming New York. Olmsted was certainly aware of this, for he was deeply interested in the possibilities new technologies could offer to the nation. The clearest indication of Olmsted’s interest in new urban technologies comes at the beginning of a speech titled “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns,” which he delivered to the American Social Science Association in 1870, twelve years after the first ice skaters had informally opened the park in 1858.⁴¹ Olmsted opens his talk with a lengthy

⁴⁰Olmsted, “Public,” 93.

⁴¹Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 211.

discussion of the connections between rural and urban spaces. Exploring the impact of new transportation technologies, he notes that, "if we stand, any day before noon, at the railway stations of these cities, we may notice women and girls arriving by the score, who, it will be apparent, have just run in to do a little shopping, intending to return by supper time to farms perhaps a hundred miles away."⁴² Olmsted emphasizes the multiple connections binding city to country, claiming that "the intimacy of [the farmer's] family with the town will constantly appear, in dress, furniture, viands, in all the conversation. If there is a piano, they will be expecting a man from town to tune it. If the baby has outgrown his shoes, the measure has been sent to town. If a tooth is troublesome, an appointment is to be arranged by telegraph with the dentist. The railway timetable hangs with the almanac."⁴³ These intimacies between technology and the family elicit neither surprise nor alarm from Olmsted.

Urban networks, in Olmsted's opinion, are not simply the mark of civilization; they are what makes civilization. "No nation," he points out, "has yet begun to give up schools or newspapers, railroads or telegraphs, to restore feudal rights or advance rates of postage."⁴⁴ To align transportation and communication networks with schools is to claim that such networks are foundational to the formation of an advanced citizenry, one far removed from the feudal system to which both institutions are opposed. Thus, according to Olmsted, every nation, and especially the United States, should acknowledge and plan for a trend "from, not toward, dispersion."⁴⁵ Instead of the expansionism ordinarily associated with the United States,

⁴²Olmsted, "Public," 52.

⁴³Olmsted, "Public," 53.

⁴⁴Olmsted, "Public," 56

⁴⁵Olmsted, "Public," 54.

Olmsted predicts a return to urban centers. What has been far away will be unified through connections to a common space. Olmsted goes on to imagine the increased roles that the telegraph, pneumatic tube, street railways, and communal heat and hot water systems might play in the development of the modern city and suburb. What he does not imagine, however, even in his longest and most detailed defense of public parks, is the effect these networks would have on the park itself.

As New York became increasingly crisscrossed by transportation and communication networks, Central Park became a noticeably urban and public place, a setting where the modern metropolis displayed its evolutions on a vast and highly-publicized stage. By the 1870's, a major class and conveyance transition transformed the city, to the extent that "ordinary New Yorkers, who made their way to the park in growing numbers, transform[ed] the social character of the crowds. In the process, they also introduced new modes of socializing that subverted the genteel decorum of the first decade, making the park more like the rest of the city."⁴⁶ For upper-class women, mobility and display became increasingly acceptable within the supposedly bounded space of Central Park. For them, "Central Park offered contact with [an] intensely urban world, while controlling and limiting its terms."⁴⁷ As early as 1860, women could drive their own carriages, walk unchaperoned, and see and be seen in a public and non-commercial space, a buffer zone that was neither home nor street. Previously, leisure-class women's "movement through the city [had been] tied to a regular series of duties and obligations—churchgoing, charitable work, visiting friends, and tending sick relatives. After 1859 the Central

⁴⁶Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 307.

⁴⁷Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 222.

Park drive offered women a less confined space . . . for recreation, not duty.”⁴⁸ It is easy to imagine women like Vaux’s voyeuristic apartment dwellers seizing the opportunity to alter their domestic routines and venture into the Park’s relative freedom.

Though the park did offer space away from the intense scrutiny of the home, it also became a place where domestic rituals and standings were put on display. As in Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*, carriages were easily recognizable and associated with their owners. Women of the elite class who frequented the park could easily identify the other people who were out driving and take stock of their financial situation by the coaches and teams of horses they displayed. Women—mobile and unchaperoned—thus became part of the park scenery as the enclosed space of Central Park unfolded to display them publicly.

The use of public space for personal pursuits was not limited to the upper classes. For New Yorkers who did not drive carriages, Central Park was made accessible by new transportation technologies: five different horse car lines and three elevated train lines reached the park by 1880. In addition, as the city’s population increased and spread to the north, many more New Yorkers came to live within walking distance of the park. Finally, officials changed some of the rules governing Sundays at the park, which allowed members of the working class to visit the park on their single day off.⁴⁹ As the park became increasingly accessible to families of all classes, many types of domestic relationships were put on display. Equipped with a dairy and children’s shelter, the park became a popular destination for New York’s upper-class children and their caretakers. Central Park also offered working-

⁴⁸Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 221.

⁴⁹Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 308.

class families a gathering place for the camaraderie of concerts and ballgames. Courting couples found the park to be a setting that, while public, offered substantially more privacy for romantic rendez-vous than they could attain elsewhere. Thus, the park became well-known as a trysting site both in the popular press and in more highbrow novels by authors such as Wharton and James. As a contemporary pointed out in the *Herald*, those who “belong to the working classes . . . have no homes in which to make love, so they are compelled to make a public exhibition of themselves.”⁵⁰ In a certain sense, then, the park came to stand in for domestic space, offering privacy and a distance from neighbors and extended family that was otherwise unavailable to members of the working classes. For working-class couples, it was a place to establish a modern relationship outside of the kinship and community bonds that might have structured earlier courtships and marriages.⁵¹

While it provided a setting for New Yorkers’ domestic displays, the park became a tourist destination, a place where the city itself was put on display for the rest of the world. Newspapers took up numerous images of Central Park and disseminated them to a national audience, transforming a city park into a national landmark. “It is ‘fast becoming the chief attraction not only of New-York, but of the whole country,’ the *Tribune* boasted in 1860. Tourists became one of its most important constituencies, and those who did not visit ‘viewed’ the park in the stereographs, lithographs, and illustrated weeklies that advertised it to a national audience.”⁵² By 1890

⁵⁰*New York Herald*, May 31, 1877. Quoted in Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park* 320.

⁵¹Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl* and Charles Chesnutt’s *The Wife of his Youth* provide two fictional accounts of the conflicts between modern, “American” and earlier marriages. See Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵²Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 225.

approximately fifteen million people would visit Central Park each year.⁵³ Through the operations of transportation and publicity networks, the park became a stage of sorts, a setting where personal relations were put on public display, first within its boundaries, then to the city itself, and later, through the networks of the publishing industry, to the nation and beyond.

Olmsted and Vaux did plan for change and for the future. A basic tenet of landscape architecture is to design for change—to anticipate how plants will grow, what will die, what will be removed and what added as the landscape changes over time. But such change requires active maintenance; it is qualitatively different from the changes effected by the unseen hand of the burgeoning capitalist economy. Changes Olmsted and Vaux could not have foreseen meant that if the individual was transformed in the park of the 1870's and 80's, he or she was certainly not transformed by the "familiar domestic gathering" Olmsted had envisioned, but by a networked site implicated in and transformed by the mechanisms of modernity.

By 1905, when Henry James commented on Central Park in *The American Scene*, the Park had been fully integrated into the urban fabric; it seemed to James an urban product that signified "modernity." James describes the park with a series of analogies, and it is telling that all of these analogies reference performance and commerce. James claims, for instance, that because the park is the city's lone aesthetic feature:

To the Park, accordingly, and to the Park only, hitherto, the æsthetic appetite has had to address itself, . . . acting out year after year the character of the cheerful, capable, bustling, even if overworked, hostess of the one inn, somewhere, who has to take all the travel,

⁵³Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *Park*, 308.

who is often at her wits' end to know how to deal with it, but who, none the less, has, for the honour of the house, never once failed of hospitality.⁵⁴

Though the park remains "cheerful," retaining the city's "honour," it is nevertheless portrayed as a commercial proprietress responding to the "clamour of its customers."⁵⁵ As I note in Chapter One, the social status of boardinghouse keepers was a vexed issue. With the park personified as a lady of cheer but not of leisure, the city becomes this lady's inn, a place of transitory stays in temporary lodgings. James continues by comparing the park to an actress, another not-entirely-respectable occupation for women.⁵⁶ Through display, this theatrical figure transforms the "polyglot Hebraic crowd," a crowd from which James elsewhere distances himself, into his "fellow spectators at the theater" through her "vocalizing" and "capering."⁵⁷ Whether cavorting or hostessing, the park remakes the people it touches, changing New Yorkers into travelers, effacing cultural and linguistic difference by becoming a consumable spectacle. The park, like urban boarding houses and hotels, becomes a site where the process of modernity unfolds and where James can witness the modern subject at its inception.

Central Park transformed urban spaces as nothing before had, destabilizing notions of privacy and publicity as urban networks transformed it. For James, the transformation of Central Park from elite playground to urban space registers a broader and more powerful cultural change in the industrial city. As the park became more public, the

⁵⁴James, *Scene*, 131-2.

⁵⁵James, *Scene*, 132.

⁵⁶For extended discussions of the figure of the actress in literature at the turn of the century, see my article "A Taste for Center Stage," in *Exploring Lost Borders: Critical Essays on Mary Austin* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999): 129-149.

⁵⁷James, *Scene*, 133.

personal—property, relationships, social status—entered into public space and became performative. Considering the park together with the city, James has the singular impression that he is witnessing modernity taking shape through display. In a “walk across the Park,” combined with a “consequent desultory stroll” through new neighborhoods, the urban landscape “define[s] itself as intensely rich and intensely modern.”⁵⁸ What then, James wonders, is “locked up in that word ‘modern’?”⁵⁹ What will modernity mean for the urban subject? Though sharply evoked by this New York experience, the question had clearly preoccupied James before; it is at the center of his novel *The Bostonians*.

Attempting Containment in *The Bostonians*

The Bostonians, whose plot concerns the fate of a love triangle comprised of a Boston bluestocking, Olive Chancellor; a chauvinistic Mississippi lawyer, Basil Ransom; and a striking young public speaker, Verena Tarrant; asks just what kind of modern subject the increasingly networked city will shape. The evolution of Olive Chancellor’s drawing room from contained space to an urban space resembling Central Park encapsulates the transition from domestic influence to media influence in the industrial American city. The novel opens onto the Boston drawing-room of Olive Chancellor, a wealthy spinster—although she is actually quite young—dedicated to “the woman question.” At the novel’s opening, Olive’s drawing room exemplifies the feminized privacy originally associated with the word, for it protects her from uninvited contact. The room reflects Olive directly; she owns the property and has filled it with

⁵⁸James, *Scene*, 137.

⁵⁹James, *Scene*, 137.

objects that reflect her taste and personality. When Basil Ransom, Olive's southern cousin, visits her, he muses that, "it seemed . . . he had never seen an interior that was so much an interior as this queer corridor-shaped drawing room of his new-found kinswoman; he had never felt himself in the presence of so much organized privacy."⁶⁰ Like Olive herself, the room is narrow and linear. Further, the house is Olive's private possession, and as private property it protects her from the vicissitudes of the housing market with which renters and boarders must continually contend. It is a haven that allows Olive self-possession.

This "interior that is so much an interior" both reflects and helps to maintain a containment of self that protects Olive from the traffic of the urban world outside. Her economic haven becomes a psychic one. For at first, while Olive enters the urban networks by riding street cars and attending lectures, she keeps her house separate from these ventures. The narrator notes:

Olive had been active enough, for years, in the city-missions; she too had scoured dirty children, and, in squalid lodging houses, had gone into rooms where the domestic situation was strained and the noises made the neighbors turn pale. But she reflected that after such exertions she had the refreshment of a pretty house, a drawing-room full of flowers, a crackling hearth, where she threw in pine cones and made them snap, an imported tea-service, a Chickering piano, and the *Deutsche Rundschau*; whereas Miss Birdseye had only a bare, vulgar room, with a hideous flowered carpet (it looked like a dentist's), a cold furnace, the evening paper, and Doctor Prance. (190)

⁶⁰Henry James, *The Bostonians* (1886; New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 45. Subsequent parenthetical notations refer to this edition of the novel.

Here, the Jamesian obsession with the fate of the waning aristocracy in the face of the rising middle class is written in space. Olive takes real pleasure in her particular possessions and what they say about her. Her imported tea set and Chickering piano mark her as a woman of taste and class; the *Deutsche Rundschau*, a German literary magazine, marks her as a cosmopolitan intellectual. These objects' origins and trademarks allow Olive to possess herself—or at least, to believe she does. Here, there is a correspondence among the enclosed space of Olive's drawing-room, the objects it contains, and the self-possession that Olive desires. But this passage equally underscores Olive's familiarity with the permeable living spaces of the city when she recalls the connections exemplified by the lodging house—the sound passing from room to room, the presence of the ubiquitous (and somehow communal) newspaper, and the proximity of other boarders. Like the Central Park of Olmsted and Vaux's initial vision, Olive's drawing-room operates as a contrast to the urban world outside. It is pretty, the tenements are squalid. She has a piano, they have noises. Even the lodging house shared by Olive's old friends Miss Birdseye, an elderly reformer, and Doctor Prance, a radical physician, is bare and vulgar while her drawing-room is warmly refreshing. For Olive the drawing-room is a place of possession, a place for consumption, not production. The lodging house already embodies an admixture of the worlds Olive would like to keep separate—it looks like a dentist's office (evoking fears about violating the boundaries of self) and is home to a practicing doctor. No withdrawal from the city is possible for lodging-house boarders like Miss Birdseye and Doctor Prance.

As I argue in Chapter One, in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction, urban domestic spaces like those of the lodging house became settings where authors could stage the development of a modern, mobile, transformable subjectivity that reflected—and was reinforced by—the permeable buildings. Historically, most tenants chose lodging houses out of economic necessity; in *The Bostonians* Basil Ransom resorts to a “decayed mansion” he shares with “certain curious persons of both sexes, for the most part not favorites of fortune, who had found asylum there” (196). The eroding building with its ever-changing clientele serves as an unstable setting where James’s “curious persons,” his modern subjects, can develop. Dr. Prance, for instance, can assert her personal politics, see patients, and perform experimental research under the obscurity of her lodging house roof. This lodging house is also the site of Verena Tarrant’s first bewitching performance, a stream of consciousness talk she can only give after her mesmerist father “starts her up” with a laying on of hands. This performance stirs desires in both Basil Ransom and Olive Chancellor that blur divisions of class, region and gender. Their modern desires are fittingly born in the lodging house hall, a space that produces “the similitude of an enormous streetcar”(59). In contrast to this liberating anonymity, a certain publicity emanates from Olive’s personal space, a publicity that only increases as the novel unfolds.

Though her drawing room offers privacy and protection, Olive’s home, after all, is urban. It is connected to the city on all sides: by the street and sidewalk that front it, the view of the Charles River visible through the back windows, and—as a row house—by the walls and roof it shares with

the neighboring buildings on either side.⁶¹ The street is clearly public territory. It is where Olive catches the streetcars she rides in order to associate herself with "the people," and it is where Basil Ransom can gain access to Olive's closely-guarded protégé, Verena, without Olive's knowledge. Even the sidewalk is a space devoid of social obligations and entanglements; for instance, here Ransom can learn of Verena's whereabouts while avoiding contact with the servants or the ladies of Olive's house. Olive's view further cements her home's connection to the modern city. From her rear windows she sees a working harbor, smokestacks, "the chimneys of dirty 'works,'" and an illuminated "row of houses, impressive to Ransom in their extreme modernness" (45). That the row houses impress Ransom as extremely modern is critical here. As an inhabitant of such "extreme modernness," Olive has little hope of maintaining the containment she has constructed for herself. And indeed, with the arrival of Verena Tarrant, Olive's with-drawing room begins to fulfill its modern function as drawing room—a magnetic space that attracts people and creates a public setting in an interior space. It begins to resemble the "city's drawing-room" as conceived by Calvert Vaux and developed through parkgoers' spatial practices. From being merely corridor-shaped, the drawing-room begins to function as a corridor. The text's most intensely private space becomes a hub for developing networks of information and publicity. As Olive's drawing-room changes from a highly-personal inner sanctum of privilege into the "headquarters" for Verena Tarrant's publicity

⁶¹Janet Wolf Bowen notes that Olive's "house, as is evident from its location on Charles Street and from James's descriptions, is a Boston row house, that stalwart monument to mythic American claims to equality, simplicity and order." Bowen, "Architectural Envy," 9.

machine, James marks the loss of privacy and interiority that accompanies the rise of urban networks.

Just as Central Park evolved from a contained space to a networked public space, the drawing-room's private spaces slowly open to the city when Olive invites Verena to live with her. Olive believes that what she calls "home-culture," a version of Catharine Beecher's domestic ideology, can both bind Verena to her and transform the younger woman into an effective public voice for the cause of women's rights. And Olive seems to have an ideal subject for transformation in the modern Verena. From childhood, Verena has been in public: the narrator notes, "she had been nursed in darkened rooms, and suckled in the midst of manifestations; she had begun to 'attend lectures,' as she said, when she was quite an infant, because her mother had no one to leave her with at home" (105). This public upbringing, combined with her father's overwhelming fascination with the press, hotels, streets, and other manifestations of modernity, predisposes Verena toward a selfhood marked by permeability and performance, a subjectivity much like that which Priscilla exhibits in *The Blithedale Romance*. Both women are destined, that is, to become mediums.

James's modern subject is at once susceptible to influence and capable of widely transmitting the influences he or she absorbs. In short, the role of medium is one embodiment of the modern subject. The narrator notes:

Olive had always rated high the native refinement of her country-women, their latent 'adaptability,' their talent for accommodating themselves at a glance to changed conditions; but the way her companion rose with the level of the civilization that surrounded

her, the way she assimilated all delicacies and absorbed all traditions, left this friendly theory halting behind. (184)

Verena's adaptability marks her as the epitome of James's "extreme modernness." Infinitely transformable, she can accommodate to any "changed conditions." Verena assimilates and absorbs, and as a medium she channels. She performs the same function, then, as the communication and publicity networks that will eventually penetrate Olive's home. As Olive notes, "Verena was of many pieces, which had, where they fitted together, little capricious chinks, through which mocking inner lights seemed sometimes to gleam." (160) She is fragmented; even her interior is lit by multiple inner lights. Verena's multivalent and adaptable subjectivity makes her a "natural" for performing in public, for transmitting her messages to a receptive audience. In this way Verena foreshadows other actress figures like Carrie in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. When Carrie performs for the first time, the narrator notes, "All the gentlemen yearned toward her. She was capital."⁶² Figures like Verena, Priscilla and Carrie all reflect and channel the influences of the modern world they inhabit. The modern city rewards these skills with survival, and in some cases, with success. The very qualities that mark Verena as modern mean that she will be transformed by any space she enters, whether it is Olive's drawing room or the city beyond.

But one salient historical development separates Priscilla from Verena and Carrie—the rise of modern media networks that transmit messages nationally instead of restricting them to the individual lyceum. By Verena's day, as Lynn Wardley notes, "to enter urban speech is to find

⁶² Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1907; New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 353.

speech reconstituted within the city's expanding parameters and under such novel forms of production as the advertisements and the daily news."⁶³ Verena's father Selah Tarrant, a mesmeric healer turned media hound, hopes that newspapers will replace the millennial home as the most powerful source of influence shaping the national consciousness. Verena's first suitor, Matthias Pardon, is a journalist whose stories go national via the syndicated press. Indeed, most of James's characters, even Miss Birdseye and Dr. Prance, interact with the networks of publicity in one way or another.⁶⁴

Publicity Networks: Transforming Domestic Influence

That novelists and architects share the language of influence is no coincidence; they are drawing on a strong tradition in American letters, beginning with the "city on a hill," that imbues the environment with the power to influence the development of individuals, and therefore, of society. In the United States the notion of influence is an idea with a national past, and the evolution of its operation is also firmly tied to the networks of modernity. An expansive concept, influence affects spaces and persons far beyond its point of origin.

James introduces Verena Tarrant as a character decidedly under the influence. Like *Blithedale's* Priscilla, she is a performer whose routine revolves around mesmeric influence. In her first appearance, after Verena's father "starts her up" with a laying on of hands, she proceeds to deliver a stream-of-consciousness speech on women's rights, a performance that

⁶³Wardley, "Woman's Voice," 643.

⁶⁴Walsh, "Stardom," 16.

exerts a mesmeric force of its own on Basil Ransom and Olive Chancellor. Afterwards, Basil and Verena banter on the topic of women's power. Ransom remarks, "Do you really take the ground that your sex is without influence? Influence? Why, you have led us all by the nose to where we are now! Wherever we are, it's all you. You are at the bottom of everything" (110). His remark highlights the centrality of influence, or the fear of it, to the text. Here, Verena's conservative southern suitor smilingly gives women's power its chivalrous due while consigning Verena herself to the very sphere her public performances seem designed to avoid. Ransom's use of the word "influence" borders on accusing "forward-thinking" women like Olive and Verena of using political methods no more revolutionary than those used by the republican mothers of earlier generations. Influence is critical to the novel; it is the force that spans public and private, operating equally well within isolated domestic circles and along the urban networks that increasingly penetrate these homes. In *The Bostonians*, influence makes things happen.

If the mind could be transformed by a laying-on of hands, it could be equally be influenced by its physical surroundings through a process Olive Chancellor terms "home-culture." Historically, the ideology of domesticity attempted to solidify women's influence within the home, emphasizing the transformative potential of domestic environments. As American women became increasingly politicized in the early nineteenth century, first around the issue of women's suffrage and then around abolition, the rhetoric of Republican Motherhood both tightened the domestic circle and offered a means by which women could impact the world beyond the walls of their homes. These influential domestic environments were described, and in a

sense, codified, in popular nineteenth-century fiction, particularly works by women who aimed to use their texts to broadcast the home's religious influence. Jane Tompkins argues in *Sensational Designs* that sentimental novels "were written . . . in order to win the belief and to influence the behavior of the widest possible audience."⁶⁵ In this context, influence is emotional, conveyed through the heart and perpetuated by mothers and/in novels. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance, argue that the family (developed, of course, within the home) will "go forth to shine as 'lights of the world' in all the now darkened nations. Thus the 'Christian family' and 'Christian neighborhood' would become the grand ministry, as they were designed to be, in training our great race for heaven."⁶⁶ Gillian Brown points out that though it seems to be firmly and innocuously located within the home, "maternal influence travels with every individual, and in America, where individuals moved often and extensively, socially and geographically, maternal power held sway over a limitless domain."⁶⁷ Brown's key text here is Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where maternal influence is highly politicized, but environmental influence is a key operation in less overtly political texts as well. In *The Lamplighter*, for instance, the rebellious Gertie must learn to produce an ordered coziness in her tenement home before she can begin the religious transformation that eventually allows her to marry Willie, her predestined love. Only the proper domestic environment can ensure that the children

⁶⁵Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xi.

⁶⁶Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (1869; New York: Arno Press, 1971), 459.

⁶⁷Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 21.

Willie and Gertie produce and send out into the world will be appropriately shaped as U.S. citizens.

The Bostonians investigates the transformation of influence from a domestic to a commercial tactic accompanying the rise of networked urban culture in the United States. Verena's highly-publicized movement from Miss Birdseye's boarding house to Boston's Music Hall is one notable trajectory made possible by this change, as is Olive's gradual acceptance—and eventual embracing—of the technologies of publicity that aim, in the words of one of Verena's suitors, to get Verena “in a front seat . . . her name in the biggest kind of bills and her portrait in the windows of the stores” (142). Countering these impulses is Basil Ransom's effort to contain Verena's influence by relegating her to the domestic sphere of his own home. The conflict between Basil and Olive becomes a battle over influence—one of them will get to influence Verena, while the other will mobilize influence on a new and wider scale.

Spatializing Influence: Syndication and the Sitting Room

In *The Bostonians*, a society where “domestic culture is understood to be regenerated by women in the home” must come to terms with the even wider influence made possible by the modern media.⁶⁸ Matthias Pardon, one of Verena's suitors, sums up the possible conflicts between domestic and media influence. When he considers Olive's power over Verena, he mentions the possibility that Olive might channel her influence into the networks of publicity. “He hoped that she wasn't going to exercise any influence that would prevent Miss Tarrant from taking the front rank that

⁶⁸Wardley, “Woman's Voice,” 640.

belonged to her. He thought there was too much hanging back; he wanted to see her in a front seat; he wanted to see her name in the biggest kind of bills and her portrait in the windows of the stores" (142). But the tension Pardon feels between Olive's influence and the media does not materialize as he fears it will. Instead, Olive modernizes domestic influence.

If, as Chris Walsh argues, publicity becomes a religion in *The Bostonians*, offering "a world of transcendence and . . . a unifier of a decidedly non-transcendent, fragmented society," this spirituality begins in the body.⁶⁹ An early form of media influence, for instance, is practiced by Verena's maternal grandparents, the abolitionist Greenstreets, who "had never set much store by manual activity; they believed in the influence of the lips" (96). Her father, Selah Tarrant, exerts a different kind of influence upon his wife, his daughter, and his patients. Mrs. Tarrant is especially susceptible: "She knew that he was very magnetic (that, in fact, was his genius), and she felt that it was his magnetism that held her to him. . . . She hated her husband for having magnetized her so that she consented to certain things, and even did them, the thought of which today would suddenly make her face burn" (94-5). But by Verena's day forms of communications such as daily papers, the penny press, and advertisements emanating from the city have redefined speech.⁷⁰ Urban speech leaves the realm of the body and is amorphously disseminated through new and invisible networks.

Certain characters have especially strong ties to these modern modes of influence: Selah Tarrant, Matthias Pardon, and Basil Ransom all are involved with and fascinated by networks of publicity and journalism that

⁶⁹Walsh, "Stardom," 16.

⁷⁰Wardley, "Woman's Voice," 643.

make personality and influence palpable forces of modernity. Tarrant fantasizes about the mechanisms of publicity, while as a journalist Matthias Pardon transforms a youth spent haunting hotel lobbies into a career as a society reporter. For Basil Ransom, who attempts to distinguish the message from its transmission, media networks prove to be more elusive. For all three men, however, the connections the print media make possible prove to be irresistible. Tarrant, Pardon, and Ransom share an overwhelming desire to be processed by the machinery of journalism, a desire which, while slightly ridiculous, signifies one way of reckoning with the modern changes that will reorganize perceptions and experiences of public and private spaces, especially as those spaces are gendered. Just as every medium is female, those interested in crafting and disseminating the message are male. Except one.

In Tarrant's fantasy, he would dissolve his personal boundaries and embody mobility, traveling spiritually and bodily through journalistic networks.

Nothing less than this would really have satisfied Selah Tarrant; his ideal of bliss was to be as regularly and indispensably a component part of the newspaper as the title and the date, or the list of fires, or the column of Western jokes. His vision of that publicity haunted his dreams, and he would gladly have sacrificed it to the innermost sanctities of home. Human existence to him, indeed, was a huge publicity, in which the only fault was that it was sometimes not effective (121).

For Selah Tarrant the newspapers offer the intriguing possibility of replacing space with information. An alternative to the "innermost

sanctities of home," the regular newspaper features promise to construct and broadcast a new reality in which not content, but repetition matters. Tarrant imagines appearing regularly in a predictable space on the newspaper page, simultaneously bounded and mobile, part of the paper and as such, renewed with each day's issue. Though Tarrant's fascination is exaggerated, it is not heightened simply for comic effect. Rather, Tarrant's newspaper fantasy is some version of the modernity that both fascinates and repels James in *The Bostonians* and elsewhere.⁷¹

Selah yearns to become transmittable material, an essence to be taken up and consumed by a broad public. He dreams of dissolving himself in the streams of media that structure his existence: "He was always trying to find out what was 'going in'; he would have liked to go in himself, bodily, and, failing in this, he hoped to get advertisements inserted gratis" (123). His desire to circulate is an almost holy mission. "The newspapers were his world, the richest expression, in his eyes, of human life; and, for him, if a diviner day was to come upon earth, it would be brought about by copious advertisements in the daily prints"(120). Physically, Tarrant is already in circulation. He spends his days in "multifarious wanderings through the streets and suburbs of the New England capital" (122). While this wandering allows him to gain entrance into his patients' houses to transmit his influence, it pales in comparison to the possibilities for multiple and simultaneous connections made possible by newspapers.

The connection James proposes between the body and publicity emphasizes transmission more than dissolution. Selah's urge to transmit

⁷¹See Posnock, "Henry James." Posnock refers to *The American Scene*, but the dialectic he imagines for James, which "sees a positive moment in commodity fetishism and conspicuous consumption as inevitably entangled with human expressiveness, creativity, and happiness" is clearly present in *The Bostonians* (34).

himself through the medium of the newspaper echoes the transmissions he sends to Verena (and that she pretends to absorb) at the beginning of her career. When he enters the newsrooms physically, he pervades the atmosphere with his conversation and penetrates the text as well: he “edged into the printing rooms when he had been eliminated from the office, talked with the compositors till they set up his remarks by mistake, and to the newsboy when the compositors had turned their backs” (123). Selah’s actions do not simply betray a disinterest in the hierarchical differences between editor, printer, and newsboy. Rather, they reveal his awareness that the newspaper itself is a threefold production: creative, mechanical, and circulating—and that all of these elements are necessary for the newspaper to perform its function in the city’s communication networks.

The novel’s narrator draws a clear parallel between Tarrant’s physical mobility and his fascination with all kinds of modern transmissions.

This effort with him had many forms; it involved, among other things, a perpetual perambulation of the streets, a haunting of horse-cars, railway stations, shops that were “selling off.” But the places that knew him best were the offices of the newspapers and the vestibules of the hotels—the big marble-paved chambers of informal reunion which offer to the streets, through high glass plates, the sight of the American citizen suspended by his heels. . . . He could not have told you, at any particular moment, what he was doing; he only had a general sense that such places were national nerve centers, and that the more one looked in, the more one was “on the spot.” (123)

Selah wants to be where the action of modernity is; all of his haunts are places where public and private mingle, where the street touches the hotel, where the railway trains converge. If Selah went to New York, no doubt he would have haunted the borders of Central Park. James frames these border spaces as “national nerve centers,” offering a bodily image to contain the incorporeal impulses that travel along the ganglia of the city.

The phenomenon of syndication offers Selah another way to imagine himself and his influence multiplying and traveling effortlessly around the nation. “Success was not success so long as his daughter’s physique, the rumour of her engagement, were not included in the ‘Jottings’, with the certainty of being copied” (123). And in this way, Tarrant’s publicity fantasies are clearly bound up in the technologies of modernity, such as the telegraph, that make possible the syndication that removes writing from its original context and transmits it worldwide. Unconcerned with the economics of this transaction, Selah is fascinated with the fact of becoming public by traveling the airwaves. He yearns to transform a bodily influence into a media influence that penetrates and reshapes conceptions of time and space. Selah’s physical wandering and layings-on of hands become both mechanical and spiritual when, in his fantasy, it is transformed into a modern form of influence.

Though the younger character, journalist Matthias Pardon, shares “the faith of Selah Tarrant—that being in the newspapers is a condition of bliss,” he represents a transition both to journalism as a profession and to a more completely modern view of public relations (121). For him, the newspaper plays only one part in an orchestrated publicity campaign. Like Selah Tarrant, Matthias Pardon has risen to a position (if a dubious one) in

Boston society from lowly beginnings. Selah Tarrant “had begun life as an itinerant vendor of lead-pencils,” a career that does nothing to ameliorate the fact that “his birth, in some unheard-of place in Pennsylvania, was quite inexpressibly low” (93, 129). Likewise, Pardon has “sprung from the ‘people’, [has] an acquaintance with poverty, a hand-to-mouth development, and an experience with the seamy side of life” (157). But while Tarrant, with his marriage to the daughter of an early Boston abolitionist, his associations with free love and Cayuga, and his reliance on mesmerism through touch evokes an earlier era, Matthias Pardon embodies the future. “He was only twenty-eight years old, and, with his hoary head, was a thoroughly modern young man; he had no idea of not taking advantage of all the modern conveniences. He regarded the mission of mankind upon earth as a perpetual evolution of telegrams . . . the newest thing was what came nearest to exciting in his mind the sentiment of respect” (140). The fascination with newness that makes Pardon “thoroughly modern” governs his journalistic production of novelty.

Pardon shares with Selah Tarrant an utter fascination with the newspapers, but instead of attempting to penetrate the papers’ mechanical production, Pardon aims to mold content by publicizing private affairs through a telegraph-enabled syndication.

For this ingenuous son of his age all distinction between the person and the artist had ceased to exist; the writer was personal, the person food for newsboys, and everything and everyone were everyone’s business. All things, with him, referred themselves to print, and print meant simply infinite reporting, a promptitude of announcement, abusive when necessary, or even when not, of his

fellow-citizens. He poured contumely on their private life, on their personal appearance, with the best conscience in the world. (139).

To Pardon, who has "condensed into shorthand many of the most celebrated women of his time," personal affairs are the raw material for production; bodies, both his own and those of his subjects, must cross the ever-eroding boundaries between public and private spheres in order for him to produce journalism (139). His methods, his material, and his body then become conduits for connection within the city and beyond its borders.

The mixture of private and public exemplified in Pardon's journalistic production extends to his conception of his own private life. Tarrant hopes that "if Matthias Pardon should seek Verena in marriage, it would be with a view to producing her in public; and the advantage for the girl of having a husband who was at the same time reporter, interviewer, manager, agent, who had the command of the principal 'dailies', would write her up and work her, as it were, scientifically—the attraction of all this was too obvious to be insisted on" (140). To Tarrant, Pardon represents the possibility for a virtual vertical monopoly over Verena, a one-man publicity machine who, through Verena, can fulfill all of Tarrant's transmission fantasies. The institution of marriage, here, is not simply a business proposition; though almost "scientific" in its modern efficiency, it is also modern in that it substitutes the machinery of publicity for the privacy and intimacy of the home as, for instance, Olive Chancellor initially imagines it. Olive's "home-culture" thus becomes popular culture in Tarrant's imagination.

Tarrant's imaginings are not far from Pardon's own. Indeed, Matthias has "a remarkable disposition to share the object of his affection

with the American people" (140). As Verena explains, "He does place things in a very seductive light. . . . he says that if I become his wife I shall be carried straight along by a force of excitement of which at present I have no idea. I shall wake up famous, if I marry him; I have only to give out my feelings, and he will take care of the rest" (159). Marriage here becomes not simply a relationship between performer and manager; Matthias becomes a channeller of sorts, a conduit to carry Verena's energy and emotion and transform it into a profitable spectacle. Verena thinks that the possibility is seductive, an assessment that betrays the modern fascination with celebrity that Verena shares with Pardon. In their imagined marriage, Matthias comes to embody communication networks and Verena the message. Together, he hopes, they can become a modern marvel of syndication.

The effect of these modern networks of communication and publicity is not so much, as Anthony Scott argues, that, "the expansion and retrenchment of the consumer economy—hypostasized by James as 'publicity' . . . threatens to overwhelm an older world of privacy and artistic sensibility," but rather that privacy and domesticity themselves must be reconfigured in order to account for publicity's power.⁷² Marriage is founded on spectacle; fame is equivalent to seduction. Brook Thomas notes that the rise of the modern media and the construction of a legal definition of privacy were powerfully connected in the United States. As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis argued in 1890:

The intensity and complexity of life, attendant upon advancing civilization, have rendered necessary some retreat from the world, and man, under the refining influence of literature and culture, has

⁷²Scott, "Basil, Olive, and Verena," 50.

become more sensitive to publicity, so that solitude and privacy have become more essential to the individual; but modern enterprise and invention have, through invasions upon his privacy, subjected him to mental pain and distress, far greater than could be inflicted by mere bodily injury.⁷³

Here, Brandeis opposes the positive and refining influence of literature and culture to the media industry's alarming mechanics. But more significantly, he links the notion of influence to the need for retrenchment against its extension. Influence makes privacy necessary; the effect of "literature and culture" has been to render people even more vulnerable to the "mental pain and distress" inflicted by the "enterprise and invention" of the publicity networks. Two reactions to this phenomenon are delineated in *The Bostonians*. Justice Brandeis's reaction, personified in the novel by Basil Ransom, is to withdraw to Mississippi and take Verena with him, while Olive Chancellor's strategy is to open herself further to the media and attempt to use it to further Verena's public career. In order to accomplish their aims, both Olive and Basil must enter into the networks of publicity, Olive as producer and Basil as author. In this novel, complete withdrawal from the modern networks of publicity is impossible without essentially going back in time.

Private Spaces Turned Public Stages: The Influence of Verena

⁷³Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis, "The Right to Privacy," *Harvard Law Review* 4 (1908): 196; quoted in Thomas 721.

Central Park's users transformed the park into public space through the cultural desire lines they imprinted on the landscape.⁷⁴ Transformed by the park, they transformed the space as well. In *The Bostonians*, Verena plays the people's role, transforming the settings she inhabits through her actions. She has a penchant for making private spaces and relationships public. Most broadly, Verena accomplishes this publicity in her relationship with Olive by thoroughly recounting all of her exploits, particularly with men, to the older woman. By divesting herself of these events, Verena transforms them into public property, and when they become public they lose their impact. This pattern extends to the spaces Verena inhabits. Through her speech and the very public quality of her private relationships, Verena modernizes the spaces she inhabits, particularly in her relationship with Basil Ransom.

Basil only meets Verena in public during the first third of the novel, and by the time he goes to see her at her home in Monadnoc Place, the character of their relationship is decided. Basil notes that, "If at Mrs. Birdseye's, and afterwards in Charles Street, she might have been a rope dancer, today she made a 'scene' of the little room in Monadnoc Place, such a scene as a prima donna makes of daubed canvas and dusty boards" (230). Verena neutralizes Ransom's potential threat by playing the role of performer to his audience, a relationship with which she is familiar and which, of course, she is interested in pursuing professionally. As he listens, Basil is amused by Verena's predilection for making her conversations into theatrical display: "There was indeed a sweet comicality on seeing this pretty girl sit there and, in answer to a casual, civil inquiry, drop into oratory as a

⁷⁴In the language of landscape architects, "desire lines" are the paths that develop over time as pedestrians inscribe their own chosen routes onto the green spaces of a park.

natural thing. Had she forgotten where she was, and did she take him for a full house? She had the same turns and cadences, almost the same gestures, as if she had been on the platform; and the great queerness of it was that, with such a manner, she should escape from being odious" (232). If Verena herself is not transformed, her presence blurs the workings of private space, making it seem more public to Ransom.

Similarly, Mrs. Burrage's New York mansion, under other circumstances a place where "perfect privacy" can "be best assured" is transformed into semi-public space when Verena speaks there (295). Of Verena's performance at Mrs. Burrage's, Basil notes, "The platform it evidently was to be—private if not public—since one was to be admitted by a ticket given away if not sold" (250-1). The platform's private or public status hinges on whether or not money changes hands. The singular form of publicity for Verena's engagement, hand-addressed cards, further muddies the house's status; it is neither fully public nor completely private. In this way, as Lynn Wardley notes, the Burrage house begins to resemble Boston's Gardner Museum, in that both "enable traffic between private and public space."⁷⁵ For Mrs. Luna, Olive's sociable sister with her own designs on Basil, Verena's performance creates public space within a domestic interior. In Mrs. Luna's eyes, the arrival of Verena, "who looks like a walking advertisement," completely transforms Mrs. Burrage's home into public space (261). In this transformed space, Mrs. Luna chastises Ransom for neglecting his public duties as a gentleman: "You won't speak to me in my own house—that I have almost grown used to; but if you are going to pass me over in public I think you might give me warning first" (257).

⁷⁵Wardley, "Woman's Voice," 658.

Later, when Basil attempts to leave Mrs. Luna in order to go watch Verena's performance, "she only remarked, with light impertinence, that he surely wouldn't be so wanting in gallantry as to leave a lady absolutely alone in a public place—it was so Mrs. Luna was pleased to qualify Mrs. Burrage's drawing-room" (261). Mrs. Luna's emphasis on how public Mrs. Burrage's home has become clearly denigrates Verena's influence; for a proponent of a very conservative view of home culture, the transformation of private space into public moves beyond alarming to laughable, offering the "pleased" Mrs. Luna a smug self-satisfaction.

In this private setting turned public stage, Basil famously formulates his feelings for Verena in terms that allow him simultaneously to acknowledge and undermine her public role: "her apostleship was all nonsense, the most passing of fashions, the veriest of delusions . . . she was meant for something divinely different—for privacy, for him, for love" (269). The privacy to which Basil refers is the privacy of his home, perhaps his home in Mississippi, the secluded setting inhabited only by his mother and sister. Ransom's native Mississippi, not yet firmly embedded in urban networks, represents both a contained space and an earlier time in which containment is possible.⁷⁶ In his conception of a future with Verena, she will have "no place in public. My plan is to keep you at home, and have a better time with you there than ever" (328).⁷⁷ Basil must rescue Verena

⁷⁶By this I mean that entry into modern communication and transportation networks, especially through the presence of a train station (where telegraphs could be sent and received) could effectively move a rural southern community from the feudal to the modern era. Suzanne Lebsock argues that, therefore, different time periods existed in close proximity in the nineteenth-century American South. (Lebsock, unpublished lecture, University of Washington, 1996).

⁷⁷Ransom's impulse to confine Verena's performances to his home has been the object of much critical scrutiny, with critics like Fisher and Tractenberg arguing that Verena's escape from the mechanisms of modern performance will allow a restoration of a "private self" (Fisher 189). Wardley and Thomas counter that, in fact, "we may only imagine an escape, for when

from public space in order for her to inhabit the private space where he believes she belongs. He is thus forced to engage with public spaces in order to escape the commercial and ensure that Verena's "influence becomes really social" (380). In so doing, he reanimates the interpersonal model of influence that has been otherwise overwhelmed by publicity networks.

For Basil Ransom, the answer to the problem of Verena's public influence is to contain her in his own home. The path Ransom takes to achieve Verena's containment leads him to enter and negotiate the uncontained spaces of the networked city. The majority of Basil's meetings with Verena happen in settings that contain elements of both public and private space: Memorial Hall in Cambridge, Central Park, Mrs. Burrage's home-turned-lecture-hall, and the "big, hot, faded parlor of the boarding house in Tenth Street, where there was a rug before the chimney representing a Newfoundland dog saving a child from drowning, and a row of chromolithographs on the walls" (279).⁷⁸ All of these places serve as alternatives to the "intensely personal" space of Olive's still-contained drawing-room and the containment Basil proposes for Verena. Though Ransom may seem to "maintain the schisms of male and female, work and home, personal (private) and public," the modern world he inhabits does not allow for such clear dichotomies.⁷⁹ If Ransom succeeds in his quest to remove Verena from the public sphere, he can only do so by removing her

Basil promises Verena that 'the dining-table itself shall be our platform, and you shall mount on top of that,' (379) we see that she will never not be performing" (Wardley 660). My argument that Verena's modern subjectivity is essentially a performance governed by the influence of her setting aligns me with Wardley and Thomas.

⁷⁸Chromolithographs, more commonly known as "chromos," were inexpensive reproductions of paintings popular in the nineteenth century. See Michael Clapper, "The Chromo and the Art Museum: Popular and Elite Art Institutions in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *Not At Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, Christopher Reed, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 33-47.

⁷⁹Bell, "Language," 214.

from a modern city in which the distinctions between private and public have blurred.

James encapsulates and registers this blurring in his depictions of Central Park. Whereas in *The American Scene*, the park is the city's most important public space, in *The Bostonians* the park becomes a space for privacy. When Verena Tarrant goes to New York, she makes two separate visits to the park. The first, a carriage ride with the wealthy Henry Burrage, is marked by "the swiftness of his horses, the softness of his English cart, the pleasure of rolling at that pace over roads as firm as marble" (284). The second visit is a much more momentous day in the Park with Basil Ransom. In the park, Verena's "submissive" nature surfaces, eliciting "the deepest feeling in Ransom's bosom . . . that she was made for love" (324). Love is inevitably associated with domesticity and motherhood; when a nursery maid passes, Verena is caught "looking with a quickened eye at the children (she adored children)" (325). Basil, in turn, develops a "plan. . .to keep [her] at home," making arguments about women's roles that resound "privately, personally" (328, 332). And yet these "personal" affections develop in distinctly urban space; James emphasizes the park's connections to the city, highlighting that for Verena and Basil, public space provides the best opportunity for interactions that evoke the "private." Verena listens to Basil's "warm, sweet, distinct voice" through the "warm, still air touched with the far-away hum of the immense city" (322). The city reveals itself even more explicitly in the street-cars, advertisements, and the "groups of the unemployed, the children of disappointment from beyond the seas, [who] propped themselves against the low, sunny wall of the Park; [while] on the other side the commercial vista of Sixth Avenue stretched away . . ."

(332). The decidedly urban park stirs deep personal emotions, countering the narrative transition that will occur in the urban home as represented by Olive's drawing-room.

The turning point in Basil and Verena's relationship occurs in this middle space, when Basil announces that one of his reactionary essays will be published in the *Rational Review*. Basil, Verena assumes, has succeeded in attaching himself to the press—he will “go in” in a way that her father has only dreamed about. And through the press, she imagines, his influence will travel farther than even her own. The publishing and postal networks of the nineteenth century reached beyond those established by telegraphs and trains, incorporating rural residents, such as Basil's mother and sister, into urban networks. Having established this authorial foothold, Basil gains the power to extract Verena from the multiple networks of publicity and promotion in which she participates as a public personality—a celebrity in the newly-coined modern lingo—and to restrict her performances to his home.⁸⁰ And Brook Thomas notes that Verena can not “‘assert the full possession of an individual self,’ because the sphere she is about to enter, while decidedly private, does not allow her the space for a self to exist. Indeed, the marriage contract incorporates her into the body of her husband.”⁸¹ This incorporation shows that Verena's modern self is fundamentally permeable; she represents woman as essentially modern and transformable. But even though Ransom claims Verena, both James's unhappy ending and his general sense of subjectivity as decentered argue against seeing this as the only or primary possibility for the modern self.⁸²

⁸⁰Walsh, “Stardom,” 15.

⁸¹Thomas, “Construction,” 733.

⁸²See Posnock, “Henry James.”

Indeed, in transporting Verena back to the South, Basil carries her back in time and space to a place where an Emersonian unitary self may be imaginable. But as James makes clear, the world of the novel is not a world where private lives are contained; indeed, "the city of Boston itself is . . . alarmingly permeable."⁸³ It is a setting where privacy dissolves under the stream of media and publicity generated by and constructing the city, a force that transforms all who experience it.

Even Olive Chancellor is changed by urban spaces where public and private blend. The reticent Olive's entrance into the networks of the modern media happens in New York—a metropolitan environment that will launch her into the world of production and performance. A transition between the very private space of a boudoir and the public domesticity of a park sets Olive's new life in motion. Olive's decision to launch Verena publicly, instead of attempting to contain her, grows from a discussion she has about Verena's future with the wealthy Mrs. Burrage, whose son is yet another suitor of the desired Verena. The interview takes place in a boudoir, ostensibly the most private room in Mrs. Burrage's quasi-public home. When Mrs. Burrage offers to publicize Verena in New York, Olive becomes "deeply agitated. . . excited and dismayed." Her possession has been eroded. Blindly, she makes her way to Washington Square. "Open to the encircling street," the square is a public place where domestic rituals are enacted, where "the infant population fill[s] the vernal air with small sounds that ha[ve] a crude, tender quality, like the leaves and the thin herbage" (310). And here, where domestic activity blends into the urban landscape, Olive realizes that she is "face to face with her destiny" (311). Her

⁸³Wardley, "Woman's Voice," 646.

destiny pushes her into the networked world and modern subjectivity. The public park offers her the anonymity and privacy to make her most private decision. Here, she realizes that she, too, may find a personal profit in integrating her domestic space into the urban world and taking Verena public. Neither she nor her drawing room will ever be the same.

The novel takes a hiatus from the urban at this point. Olive, Verena, and eventually Basil Ransom go to Cape Cod, where the women craft Verena's victorious Music Hall debut. But instead of withdrawing from the urban in this pastoral setting, Olive is laying the groundwork for a modern advertising campaign—a campaign that will emanate from her drawing-room.

The increasingly public function of Olive's drawing-room becomes apparent through the number and type of unsolicited visits she receives and the trajectories these visits take. For instance, there are Matthias Pardon's unexpected visits. When he first enters Olive's house, the narrator notes, "She had never invited him to call upon her. . . . She thought Mr. Pardon's visit a liberty; but, if she expected to convey this idea to him by withholding any suggestion that he should sit down, she was greatly mistaken, inasmuch as he cut the ground from under her feet by offering her a chair" (54). A representative of the journalistic mechanisms that are busily publicizing private relations, Pardon makes an entrance that inverts the power relations inherent in the traditional interactions between hosts and guests. Pardon does not simply disrupt the containment of Olive's home; he, like Verena, turns it into the site of public exchanges. As the scene continues and Pardon conveys his proposals for "running" Verena, the interaction becomes more than a simple clash of classed ideas of public and private.

Rather, it represents an early erosion of the separation between Olive's drawing-room and the world beyond, a development over which Olive eventually takes control.

Pardon's early visit is part of a pattern of surprise appearances that puncture the containment of Olive's home; it also foreshadows the role he will later play when Olive engineers Verena's Music Hall debut. His second visit to Olive's drawing-room, also unbidden, comes at the novel's end. His entrance resembles a melodramatic actor's: "the curtain in the doorway was pushed aside and a visitor crossed the threshold" (408). The transformation of Olive's house from enclosed space to a public stage that was initiated with Verena's arrival is complete. Olive's home has become a staging ground for information that Pardon can transmit through the papers to a national public. He probes for information, badgering Mrs. Luna: "I'm not going to let you off! We want the last news, and it must come from this house" (409). As he exits, he "drop[s] the portiere of the drawing-room," signaling the end of his dramatic scene and ostensibly returning Olive's home to its "contained" state.

But by this point Olive's home has fully unfolded to become a node on the information network, so much so that Pardon's visit seems less an intrusion than a strand of Olive's exhaustive publicity campaign. "With her portrait in half the shopfronts, her advertisement on all the fences," Verena is professionally produced (406). Her Music Hall performance is "immensely advertised," and in the hall "itinerant boys [hawk] 'Photographs of Miss Tarrant—sketch of her life!' or 'Portraits of the Speaker—story of her career!'" (413, 415). These efforts, the reader must assume, have been facilitated by Olive. As part of Olive's "new system of

advertising” she has hired a professional agent to “run the pair, as you might say. He’s in the lecture business” (417, 421). Olive has set the machine of publicity in motion, organizing the print media, photography, and mass plastering of posters and photographs in order to sell Verena and to protect her from Basil.

Olive’s modern advertising methods do not seem to transform Verena; instead, the change is most noticeable in Olive’s home. Mrs. Luna compares Olive’s efforts to a military campaign, remarking, “She can’t sit still for three minutes, she goes out fifteen times a day, and there has been enough arranging and interviewing, and discussing and telegraphing and advertising, enough wire-pulling and rushing about, to put an army in the field. What is it they are always doing to the armies in Europe?—mobilizing them? Well, Verena has been mobilized, and this has been headquarters” (407). The obvious conclusion here is that not Verena, but Olive has been mobilized to defend Verena from Basil Ransom’s offensive campaign. But more important is Mrs. Luna’s image of Olive’s parlor as a nerve center for numerous modern modes of communication. Olive’s drawing-room, in a sense, has been turned inside out. Instead of serving as a refuge from the outside world, the drawing-room has become a transmitter, emitting its vibrations to the world outside. The domestic interior, then, assumes a new position in the urban networks of communication. And in James’s architectural dialectic, as a modern Olive transforms her home, her home changes Olive further.

The fate of Olive’s drawing-room raises the question of how modern influence will be transmitted and asks whether a change in the mode of transmission—in this case a transition from domestic influence to a

commercial influence—will alter the content of the message. In *The Bostonians*, the effect is to transform Verena's message from something to nothing, and thus to silence the feminist speech and victorious "debut" Olive has been crafting. Verena leaves the Music Hall "muffled" in a hood, destined not to perform but to shed tears. Verena's silence and her decision to marry Ransom have parallels with the feminist movement's decline in the 1920's as chronicled by Nancy Cott, when "feminist intents and rhetoric were not ignored but appropriated" by the industries of advertising, mass-marketing, and the glorification of consumption.⁸⁴ The end of Olive Chancellor's women's movement was inevitable in the face of a renewed drive toward marriage and consumption. Perhaps Verena's very modernness—her very adaptability—empties her of the agency to resist Ransom. But the message is not completely silenced. It is Olive, whose home has become fully networked, who begins to embody an alternative version of the modern subject. In the novel's final moments, the heretofore timid Olive decides to speak on the Music Hall stage that Verena has abandoned. This speech takes place outside of the text—the possibility that a woman might be the most successful embodiment of modernity was unwriteable for James.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it is clear that inhabiting networked space has transformed Olive from silent would-be mastermind into public medium.

Thus, James's narrative of the changes to Olive's drawing room emphasizes the profound power that domestic space—especially as it is increasingly connected to the networked urban landscape—exerts in relation to modern subjectivity. In an era that would see the beginnings of

⁸⁴Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 174.

⁸⁵In the Merchant-Ivory film version of *The Bostonians*, we see the beginnings of Olive's performance.

social scientific inquiry about the environment in the new disciplines of sociology, ecology, and human geography, *The Bostonians* anticipates and incisively explores questions these disciplines would raise about the development of a modern subjectivity and its relations to urban space. The urban home—and the urban park—are spaces whose role in the development of modernity has been overlooked. Yet they are the very spaces where individuals can exert agency within urban space, transforming themselves as they transform the physical spaces around them. For James, however, anxiety accompanied the mingling of private and public brought about by the rise of networking technologies. In *The Bostonians* this anxiety is especially visible in the transformation of Olive's drawing-room, which encapsulates a deeper cultural fear for the future of the middle-class home that would eventually be directed against the tenement. As I argue in the next chapter, the tenement—and the urban subjects it might produce—would be pathologized as the very antithesis of the home.

Chapter Three

Tenement Homes: At the Networked City's Limits

That is the one thing that is the matter with the slum—it makes its own heredity.

The sum of the bad environment of to-day and of yesterday becomes the heredity of tomorrow, becomes the citizenship of tomorrow.

—Jacob Riis¹

In Edward Townsend's novel *A Daughter of the Tenements*, a wealthy young teacher ventures into the tenement district to visit one of her immigrant pupils. While she is in the child's home, she is exposed to typhus fever and is ordered into quarantine. But before she leaves the building, she glimpses "a tenant from another floor, who was soon staggering toward a clothing factory, bent beneath the mound of garments which had made the typhus-fever patient's bed; each garment to be offered for sale over some counter the next day; a bargain, verily, for a death warrant would be included free with every garment!"² In Townsend's scenario, disease, contagion, quarantine, and invisible death warrants accompany interpersonal connection across ethnic and class lines. The scene highlights several of the ways in which the promise of the networked city, so evident in Vaux and

¹Jacob Riis, *The Peril and Preservation of the Home* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co, 1903), 79.

²Edward W. Townsend, *A Daughter of the Tenements* (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1895), 70.

Olmsted's hopes for Central Park, becomes dangerous in the tenement setting. 124

Tenement dwellings perplexed and threatened progressives whose reforms relied on tacit assumptions that the home was a bounded space, separate from the marketplace and the street. In earlier chapters, I have examined the connections and networks binding people together in the urbanizing United States, showing how notions of home helped Americans to understand, shape, and inhabit the networked city even as the homes they created in boarding houses and hotels blurred old definitions of public and private space. But at the turn into the twentieth century, tenement housing, particularly as presented in the shocking new forms of naturalistic fiction and the verisimilitude of journalism and photographs, forced the middle class into uneasy proximity with physical conditions and spatial relationships diametrically opposed to their ideas of home. Writers' attempts to wrestle with the changing notion of home reveal that it remained inseparable from ideas about citizenship, morality, and personhood in the United States even as its spatial realities shifted in the tenement. Tenement fiction and photography explore the limits of home; attention to setting and space in attempts to represent and reform the tenements reveals both the instability of "home" and the necessity of protecting it.

The best-known recorder of tenement life for middle-class readers was immigrant journalist Jacob Riis; architectural determinism grounds Riis's efforts to define detached homes as sites where a distinctively American citizenry could develop. Defining separateness alternately as a separation between houses and as privacy within a home, Riis implies that isolation could protect the home environment from outside influences. This

emphasis on separation and the concurrent demonizing of contact is 125 especially evident in Riis's best-known work, *How the Other Half Lives*, which opens by defining the home subjectively and spatially. Arguing that crowding has created "nurseries of crime," he quotes a claim that eighty percent of crimes are "perpetrated by individuals who have either lost connection with home life, or never had any, or whose homes had ceased to be sufficiently separate, decent, and desirable to afford what are regarded as ordinary wholesome influences of home and family."³ (emphasis in text) The idea that a home should be *separate* guides Riis's arguments for housing reform and anchors his theory that without proper homes the urban environment will produce a deviant society.⁴ Like many reformers, Riis attempts to use "the principal symbols of the Victorian age to his purposes, including . . . the home, privacy, and separation of the sexes."⁵ Yet in most of his work, he focuses precisely on the living spaces that confound this requirement for separateness—and which in fact are enmeshed in urban networks.

In his texts and photographs, Riis engages almost obsessively with the city, confronting an environment that demands rational control but resists his efforts to define, map and label it. For reformers like Riis, as well as the fiction writers who focused on the New York slums, the tenement landscape fundamentally challenges efforts at definition, constraint, and control, disrupting attempts to impose boundaries, restrictions, or change upon it. Divisions that reformers considered necessary, such as those between the

³Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890; New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 1. All further references to this volume will be noted parenthetically in the text.

⁴Riis was not alone in this belief; see Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 125-128 for an overview of the impact of the separation ideal on plans for urban housing.

⁵Peter B. Hales, *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 194.

home and work or between the home and the street are eroded as 126
private and public spaces merge. In exploring connections between public
and private spaces, tenement fiction and journalism emphasize the visceral
connection between individuals and classes within the city landscape.
Though these connections spur impulses for reform, they also unleash the
potential to disrupt reform measures by opening the door to other
ambiguities. The fundamental reaction for reformers like Riis is to
pathologize the networks. Connection, communication, and permeability
evoke Riis's anxieties about the contamination and decay of the social order,
leading him to valorize the home as a source of control and containment.

The extreme levels of connection exhibited in crowded tenement
homes elicit conflicting impulses in those who dramatize and narrate
conditions there, as writers both transform the tenement home into a
spectacle and reinforce middle-class notions of privacy and enclosure. This
tension finds generic expression in the blend of a neo-sentimental focus on
the moral values of domesticity and a gritty urban naturalism that
characterizes fictional treatments of the city. A common concern with the
tenement home links immigrant texts like Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* to
Stephen Crane's *Maggie*, *A Girl of the Streets*, and ties them both to texts
ranging from the sentimental love story of Edward Townsend's *A Daughter
of the Tenements* to the touristic voyeurism of Edgar Fawcett's *The Evil
That Men Do*. Their various themes and plotlines all dramatize the fictional
and cultural conflicts—and connections—between the tenement and the
middle-class home. In these novels, the shared living spaces of urban
dwellings, where the boundaries that protect the home as a morally separate
space are threatened by alternative spatial configurations, become the
common setting for the narrative conflict between spectacle and sentiment.

In fiction and "documentary" texts, tenement culture is not a contained threat. Because the tenements' permeability extends beyond the slums to touch upper- and middle-class homes via consumable products and entertainment, tenements come to embody the seamy side of modernity, the dirty double to the carefully-planned Central Park. The textual conflict between the idealized bounded home and its networked reality reflects both the realities of tenement life and anxieties about the fate of the middle-class home as it followed tenement homes into the urban networks of communication, consumption and display. 127

Physical Networks: Streets, Alleys, Passageways

With the rise of the networked city, the tenement becomes a repository for fears about the dangerous power of connection, a danger that heightens the need to sanctify and protect the detached home. Penetrable by all of the senses, tenement buildings are constructed as sites that intermingle and invert the public and private qualities of spaces such as the home, the street, and the workplace. This penetration threatens to subvert bourgeois cultural values: as Keith Gandal summarizes, "Without domestic boundaries, without further separations within the family space, no family life is possible, and without family life moral character is impossible as well."⁶ Tenement narratives and photographs describe a landscape that prevents the tenement home from claiming the necessary separateness to function as a regenerative environment. Riis's reaction, one common to

⁶Keith Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 77.

many tenement narratives, is to pathologize urban connections, emphasizing the distance between tenement and home.

128

In *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis examines and condemns two types of threatening connections within and among the tenements: structural connections, which he addresses with sections devoted to streets, hallways, alleys, and even sewers; and bodily connections, which he describes with the image of contagion and in the language of the senses, particularly vision, smell, and hearing. Reform writers invoke the language of contagion to emphasize the frightening qualities of the tenements, while fiction writers like Crane and Cahan attend to the tenements' sensory permeability and develop a more nuanced picture of the possibilities of the urban networks.

While the alley and the street act as symbols for connection and mobility in numerous urban narratives, for Riis these connectors become more than conduits allowing physical and visual passage; they are constructed as places where people connect to one another both in passing and by participating in economic and social transactions. Street contacts erode distinctions between inside and outside activities. For instance, in *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis describes an Italian neighborhood where the street serves as a living space far more appealing than the crowded tenements: "When the sun shines the entire population seeks the street, carrying on its household work, its bargaining, its love-making on street or sidewalk, or idling there when it has nothing better to do" (50). Activities ordinarily consigned to either home or marketplace merge on the street, transforming the space into a landscape that "might better be the marketplace in some town in Southern Italy than a street in New York" (50).

Bringing marketplace activity to the street alters its physical structures as well. Purveyors of vegetables, fish, and tobacco claim the street's public

space and moveable furnishings to serve as impromptu shops. Riis 129 describes curb women, for whom "ash-barrels serve . . . as counters," and bread-sellers, "camping on the pavement," selling "exaggerated crullers, out of bags of dirty bed-tick . . . they probably are old mattresses mustered into service under the pressure of a rush of trade" (50). Materials from home and street together produce a temporary open-air market that transforms official maps drawn by city and corporate cartographers. "Trucks and ash-barrels have provided four distinct lines of shops that are not down on the insurance maps, to accommodate the crowds. Here have the very hallways been made into shops" (50). The street becomes a gathering-place, a site for commerce as well as for heightened personal interaction that rewrites official spatial narratives.

Summer inspires even more flouting of the boundaries between public and private space. Riis writes, "It is in hot weather, when life indoors is well-nigh unbearable with cooking, sleeping, and working, all crowded into the small rooms together, that the tenement expands, reckless of all restraint. . . . Then every truck in the street, every crowded fire-escape, becomes a bedroom infinitely preferable to any the house affords" (126). Riis presents these potentially subversive activities as almost understandable within the context of the crowding and heat of a New York summer. However, moving one's bed into the street, an act made inevitable by tenement architecture, perforates one of the boundary lines critical to middle-class spatial divisions within the home—the line between the bedroom and the rest of the house.⁷ Blurring the all-important line between

⁷ The line between the bedroom and the rest of the house was critical to the conception of "home"; thus, apartments in which the bedroom was visible were considered to be quite shocking. Catharine Beecher was the exception who advocated multiple uses for the bedroom in both suburban and urban homes. As Charles Loring Brace puts it: "The privacy of a home is undoubtedly one of the most favorable conditions to virtue, especially in a girl. . . . Living,

the private activities of the bedroom and the public realm of the street 130
is just one way in which the city's permeability and connectivity could cause
dangerous erosions of morality, at least in the minds of reformers.

Though his prose emphasizes the dangers of mixing home and street, a certain blend of anxiety and appeal is visible in several of Riis's street images. In a photograph of "The Barracks, Mott Street between Bleecker and Houston Streets," for instance, connections between home and street are visible both in the bodies of the women who sit on the tenement stoops and in the window boxes decorating the homes above (Figure 1). The women act as a potentially frightening embodiment of the home-street connection; they sit conversing on the tenement steps with their feet on the sidewalk and their babies on their laps while older children, their images blurred as a result of the camera's long exposure time, examine the refuse that covers the sidewalk and spills into the gutter. This scene of family recreation has little connection to the green grass, playgrounds, and parks that reformers planned and constructed for urban neighborhoods. The street erodes appropriate roles and relations encoded within and enforced by the contained home and family.

Riis does not emphasize it, but streets can also be sites where familial relations are extended, enlarging the home. Jane Jacobs points out that "instruction [in city living] must come from society itself, and in cities, if it comes, it comes almost entirely during the time children spend at incidental play on the sidewalks."⁸ The window boxes in Riis's photograph of The

sleeping, and doing her work in the same apartment with men and boys of various ages, it is well-nigh impossible for her to retain any feminine reserve, and she passes almost unconsciously the line of purity at a very early age." *The Dangerous Classes of New York* (New York: Wynkoop and Hallenbeck, 1880), 55.

⁸Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 83.

Barracks, for instance, mark this positive extension of family and home, 131 an extension Riis ignores in order to discuss more alarming minglings between home and street. Flowers, plants, and birdcages decorate the building's sills, evidence of the overflowing quality of the tenements, but also public signs of a recognizable homemaking aesthetic that recalls Ruth Hall's treatment of her suburban cottage. The public face of the tenement conforms to the prescriptives of domestic ideology. Totems of the contained home erode the boundaries separating the contained home from the tenement home. Through this aesthetic, the home enters the street.

The possibility that connections between home and street might render the street desirable to tenement dwellers occasionally surfaces through Riis's anxiety. As Riis notes, "The metropolis is to lots of people like the flame to the moth. It attracts them in swarms that come year after year. . . . They come in search of crowds, of 'life'. . ." (69). Some of Riis's subjects want to participate in the excitement of the urban; for instance, in *The Children of the Poor* Riis recounts the story of hosting a city "girl once at our house in the country who left us suddenly after a brief stay and went back to her old tenement life, because 'all the green hurt her eyes so.' . . . It was the slum that had its fatal grip upon her. She longed for its noise, its bustle and its crowds."⁹ Though Riis's negative assessment of the city girl's desire is evident in his description of the slum's "fatal grip," he also renders the physical and emotional attachment to the tenement comprehensible by noting her pain and longing. Another of Riis's alarmist anecdotes reports

⁹Jacob Riis, *The Children of the Poor* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 64.

that for the typical tenement boy, "All the freedom is in the street; all the brightness in the saloon to which he early finds his way."¹⁰ 132

For other writers the street's appeal signals different lures and dangers. Though the lack of separation between home and street is alarming in the opening of *Maggie*, in which "a dozen gruesome doorways [give] up loads of babies to the street and gutter," where "infants [play] or [fight] with other infants or [sit] stupidly in the way of vehicles," the street is also the site where Maggie's doomed romance begins.¹¹ Maggie loves the excitement of the urban that her relationship with Pete makes available. The city's attractiveness is similarly emphasized in *The Evil that Men Do*. Though urban entertainments like balls and parties serve as notable signposts on the beautiful Cora Strang's road from virtue to prostitution to death, Fawcett's narrator nevertheless acknowledges that the balls offer Cora her one source of pleasure.¹² A similar excitement enters Abraham Cahan's affectionate description of the Jewish ghetto, whose "'stoops,' sidewalks, and pavements . . . [are] thronged with panting, chattering, or frisking multitudes."¹³ In *Yekl*, for instance, Cahan offers a glimpse of a local ballroom, where "floating by through the dazzling light within were young women. . . with masculine arms round their waists. As the spectacle caught Jake's eye his heart gave a leap."¹⁴ Though critics term this world a "sleazy" place of mere "glitter," to Jake it represents glamour, excitement, and romance.¹⁵

¹⁰Jacob Riis, *Poor*, 71. Keith Gandal points out that in practical terms the desire for excitement and entertainment helped Riis as well; tenement dwellers flocked to magic lantern slide shows like those Riis produced. Gandal, *Virtues*, 82.

¹¹Crane, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*, in *The Portable Stephen Crane*, ed. Joseph Katz (1893; New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 7.

¹²Edgar Fawcett, *The Evil that Men Do* (New York: Belford Co., 1889).

¹³Abraham Cahan, *Yekl* (1896; New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 14.

¹⁴Cahan, *Yekl*, 15.

¹⁵David M. Fine, "Abraham Cahan, Stephen Crane, and the Romantic Tenement Tale of the Nineties," *American Studies* 14 (1973), 104.

photograph of the Feast of Saint Rocco gives a glimpse of the street's potential for freedom and beauty (Figure 2). The shrine to Saint Rocco transforms the alley into a scene of celebration. Lanterns hang from fire escapes above the alley, while candles, ribbons, white linens, and miniature artificial trees decorate the shrine itself. The cobblestones are swept so thoroughly that a single, unidentifiable piece of debris at the center of the frame becomes quite noticeable. Children seem to be the shrine's primary devotees, their presence reinforcing not only the frightening erosion of the boundaries between street and home but also the potentially innocent attraction—and opportunity to create and display art—that the street offers. If the Italians are considered to be picturesque subjects, "the delight of the artist," the street offers them a place to exhibit their own artistry publicly (33). Riis claims that the "tenement-houses have no aesthetic resources," so the shrine constructed for the Feast has a larger meaning in that it represents an aesthetic opportunity that the tenement homes lack, at least in Riis's view (124).

While streets have multiple meanings, alleys invariably become threatening conduits for tenement transportation and communication. Narrow and twisting, the unmarked alleys operate as an alternative urban network, but only for those who intimately know the landscape. Alleys become sites where connections and mobility can remain free of the gaze of outsiders and the law. Preoccupied with the extra-legal possibilities of the alleys, Riis devotes an entire chapter of *How the Other Half Lives* to a discussion of their function. He writes, "The sway of the excise law is not extended to these back alleys. It would matter little if it were. There are secret by-ways and some it is not held worth while to keep secret, along

which the 'growler' wanders at all hours and all seasons unmolested" 134

(34). Riis's image of "Gotham Court" shows an alley crowded with children, their faces focused intently on Riis and his camera, members, perhaps, of the army of children that travels through the city's secret passageways. He notes, "There is not an open door, a hidden turn or runway which they do not know, with lots of secret passageways and short cuts no one else ever found" (154). Along with their older counterparts, these children use the alleys to gain a mobility framed as inappropriate for people their age, who, Riis implies, should be kept safe and immobile in the impenetrable family home.

Passageways are even more outside the pale for Riis; they comprise more secret, more hidden, and more fascinating networks operating without rational control. One such block on the East Side has a uniquely disorienting effect on the ordinarily unflappable Riis. It has "thirty or forty rear houses in the heart of it, three or four on every lot, set at all sorts of angles, with odd, winding passages, or no passage at all, only 'runways' for the thieves and toughs of the neighborhood." Here, the tourguide admits, "I actually lost my way once" (124). The passageways become all the more disorienting for Riis thanks to the ease with which local residents travel through them. For police (or reporters) on the trail of a young criminal, "pursuit through the winding ways and passages is impossible. The young thieves know them all by heart. They have their own runways over roofs and fences which no one else could find" (176). Because they facilitate illicit mobility, the passageways become an inaccessible and threatening network that emblemizes the threat of modern connectivity.

The best example in *How the Other Half Lives* of a neighborhood transformed by the passageway's connective power is "the Bend," as Riis calls his newspaper beat, the Mulberry Bend neighborhood. To Riis, the Bend is

the "foul core of New York's slums," "a vast human pig-sty," a place 135 where even "incessant raids cannot keep down the crowds that make [the tenements] their home" (49). Riis blames the Bend's architecture for the problems that continually erupt there, claiming that "nothing short of entire demolition will ever prove of radical benefit" (49).¹⁶ The buildings are placed at random angles to one another, creating winding passageways between them that come in for particular scrutiny: "the whole district is a maze of narrow, often unsuspected passage-ways—necessarily, for there is scarce a lot that has not two, three, or four tenements upon it, swarming with unwholesome crowds. What a bird's-eye view of 'the Bend' would be like is a matter of bewildering conjecture" (49). The haphazard organization of space gives rise to a particularly unmanageable population, one that is hyper-connected to one another via networks that are unmarked, unnamed and unmappable, whose patterns confound the rationalizing and reforming eye of Riis's camera.

Alley networks symbolize the risk that any network might be appropriated and transformed by a mobile urban population. To increase their mobility, tenement dwellers creatively use municipal networks of transportation and communication to serve their own needs; Riis is fascinated and frightened by the ways in which structures like sewers and telegraph poles become multiply useful conduits. A major modern improvement in sanitation, "big vaulted sewers" become "a runway for thieves," as well as for workers including one man who "used to go to his work along down Cherry Street that way every morning and come back at

¹⁶In fact, the Bend was razed to create a park. A subplot in *A Daughter of the Tenements* involves a Mulberry Bend resident who welcomes the change and takes the opportunity to purchase his own farm on Long Island, which he names Mulberry Court! This was not a typical fate for residents of Mulberry Bend.

night. . . . Probably 'Jimmy' himself fitted into the landscape" (82). 136

Telegraph poles, another emblem of modernity, have their communication potential expanded by Chinese New Yorkers, who, Riis notes derisively, have "enlisted the telegraph pole for the dissemination of public intelligence, but [have] got hold of the contrivance by the wrong end," posting notices on telegraph poles that become "the real official organ of Chinatown" (82). This form of communication, like almost everything about Chinatown, becomes threatening to Riis: "yellow and red notices are posted upon it by unseen hands . . . [in] a constant stream of plotting and counter-plotting [T]he Chinese consider themselves subject to the laws of the land only when submission is unavoidable . . . they are governed by a code of their own" (82). Like the people who claim the sewers as their personal transportation conduits, the Chinese who use telegraph poles as miniature kiosks undermine the control of public communication networks by connecting to each other in ways that Riis can only code as pathological. Thus transformed, the connections themselves, ordinarily monuments to progress and technological innovation, become invitations to illicit behavior.

Internal Connectivity in the Tenement Hall

In much tenement literature, a focus on the hallway signals that tenement homes are internally connected to a pathological degree. The hallway erodes privacy, which Riis considers fundamental to human development and whose "absence . . . is the chief curse of the tenement"(120). Formative architectural features within tenement buildings, hallways render the tenement structures internally porous. Riis

writes that “the hall that is a highway for all the world is the tenement’s 137 proper badge” (120). Within individual apartments, halls that might have helped to separate different spaces from one another had largely been eliminated in the 1850’s with the rise of the railroad tenement. In this new configuration, “there were no hallways, so people had to walk through every room to cross an apartment, and privacy proved difficult.”¹⁷ As these railroad apartments were subdivided, a greater number of tenants came to share the public hallways that Riis so abhorred. Reform reportage and fiction explicitly link tenement hallways to the development of a permeable and deviant urban subjectivity.

As conduits for sights, sounds, and smells, hallways become sites where spatial and sensory networks merge. Riis emphasizes this conflation by using the idea of physical and metaphorical contagion to pathologize intra-tenement connections. He fears that hallways and other interior connections will render the tenements susceptible to “the dread of advancing cholera” or other contagious diseases such as smallpox, measles, or typhus (13). Other reformers emphasize the hallways’ links to disease outbreaks with “scientific” data. However, it is the connections, not germs, that are the prime culprit for at least one epidemic Riis describes: “The track of the epidemic through these teeming barracks was as clearly defined as the track of a tornado through a forest district,” a problem Riis ascribes primarily “to the inability to check the contagion in those crowds” (129). Beyond physical contagion, Riis claims, the buildings themselves “touch the family life with deadly moral contagion” (2).

Tenement hallways also relay information, laying bare to all the senses the lives of their dwellers. The “common hall with doors opening

¹⁷Wright, *Building*, 118.

softly on every landing as the strange step is heard on the stairs" 138

exposes a tenant's every activity to his or her neighbors (124). Some more recent observers, like Jane Jacobs, might see this kind of scrutiny as offering mutual protection to urban dwellers, but for Riis it becomes the tenement's greatest evil.¹⁸ As Riis turns tourguide, leading his readers through "No. — Cherry Street," the extent of the anxiety produced by hallways becomes clear. Bathed in "utter darkness," the hall "turns and dives" uncontrollably and irrationally (38). Riis guides his followers, instructing them to listen "as we grope our way up the stairs and down from floor to floor. . .to the sounds behind the closed doors—some of quarreling, some of coarse songs, more of profanity" (38). Sound connects Riis's armchair tourists to the people who share the tenement, implying how insupportable such boundary erosion should be to anyone attempting to establish a morally uplifting home. "Close? Yes!" Riis exclaims to his imaginary followers, "All the fresh air that ever enters these stairs comes from the hall-door that is forever slamming," as shared air travels with the sounds to each crowded apartment (38). Hallways spread disease from floor to floor: "the sinks are in the hallway, that all the tenants may be poisoned alike by their summer stench" (38). Further, "the saloon, whose open door you passed in the hall, is always there. The smell has followed you up" (38). Here, the hallway becomes a conduit for disease, deviance, and immorality; as it binds the building and its residents together it exemplifies a networked environment incompatible with the detached home's goals.

For writers with a less fervent reform agenda, however, the ubiquitous hallway acts as a more ambiguous connector. For instance,

¹⁸See Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 119. Keith Gandal offers an extensive analysis of Riis's tenement tourism in *Virtues*; the topic is also treated in Fine, 102.

hallways allow for information gathering and community surveillance 139
in Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* and *George's Mother*. In *Maggie*, hallway scenes function not simply as "an occasion for spectatorship" by voyeuristic readers, but as important opportunities for connection among the inhabitants of Maggie's tenement building, though the impact of these connections ranges widely.¹⁹ Information gleaned from the hallways helps to order social relations within and outside of the tenement walls. For example, when Maggie's younger brother Jimmie escapes a beating in his apartment, he runs to a downstairs neighbor who has heard the ruckus. She opens the door and greets Jimmie with, "Eh Gawd, child, what is it this time? Is yer fadder beatin' yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin' yer fadder?"²⁰ As the evening progresses, Jimmie and the old woman try to make out the battle's progress over the varied nocturnal sounds of the building. "Above the muffled roar of conversation, the dismal wailings of babies at night, the thumping of feet in unseen corridors and rooms, mingled with the sound of varied shouting in the street and the rattling of wheels over cobbles, they heard the screams of the child and the roars of the mother die away to a feeble moaning and a subdued bass muttering."²¹ Interior and exterior sounds, all identifiable, penetrate the building, linking neighbor to neighbor and inside to outside.²²

Sensory messages together transform the hallways into the equivalent of the theaters and music halls where the urban spectacle becomes a performance. Shared smells disrupt the differentiation between home and street, rendering private activities public. For example, Crane opens *Maggie*

¹⁹Gandal, *Virtues*, 82.

²⁰Crane, *Maggie*, 11.

²¹Crane, *Maggie*, 11-12.

²²The practice of listening and attempting to identify a building's sounds echoes Coverdale's hotel reveries in *The Blithedale Romance*.

with an image of a neighborhood where "A thousand odors of cooking 140 food [come] forth to the street."²³ Certain sounds inspire tenement dwellers to look out of their doors at the perpetrators; they in turn use the hallway as a conduit for sharing their impressions of what they see. Jimmie's parents' fights, with their attendant "howls and curses, groans and shrieks," invite the neighbors to watch: "Curious faces appeared in doorways, and whispered comments passed to and fro. 'Ol' Johnson's raisin' hell agin.' Jimmie stood until the noises ceased and the other inhabitants of the tenement had all yawned and shut their doors."²⁴ The neighbors observe all of Mrs. Johnson's drunken comings and goings. On one occasion, as she stumbles inside, "on an upper hall a door was opened and a collection of heads peered curiously out, watching her." When she challenges them to fight, "her cursing trebles [bring] heads from all doors."²⁵ According to the rules of Beecher's domesticity, Mrs. Johnson's disruptive drunken brawls, not to mention her frequent arrests and trips to prison on Blackwell's Island, constitute behavior that should lead to ostracism or at least condemnation from her neighbors.

But in the tenement's networked space, an alternative set of criteria emerges for behavior and community support, criteria that are codified in the tenement neighbors' construction of Maggie's behavior. Maggie's liaison with Pete introduces her to the lures of urban entertainment and sex, a combination that transforms her from an innocent to a prostitute, a progression that, while common, does not conform to a certain code of tenement morality. A much older Jimmie has "an idea that it wasn't

²³Crane, *Maggie*, 7.

²⁴Crane, *Maggie*, 14.

²⁵Crane, *Maggie*, 36.

common courtesy for a friend to come to one's home and ruin one's sister,"²⁶ precisely because of the object lessons taught by other neighbors, such as "dat Sadie MacMallister next door to us [who] was sent teh deh devil by dat feller what worked in deh soap-factory, didn't I tell our Mag dat if she—" ²⁷ Maggie's fall for Pete is a fall from grace within her tenement primarily because the building is so highly networked that none of Maggie's actions can escape her neighbors' notice. Thanks to the building's architecture, the neighbors are familiar with Maggie's "jude fellow" and are privy to her conversations: "An' right out here by me door she asked him did he love her, did he. An' she was a-cryin' as if her heart would break, poor t'ing."²⁸

The structure of the tenement does not simply broadcast Maggie's speech and actions; it forces her behavior to become the occasion for a communal enforcement of morality through a narrative reconstruction of her past. Though the narrator explains that Maggie has not been tainted by her environment— "The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud-puddle. . . . None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins"—her relationship with Pete leads to a transformation of her history in the community's memory.²⁹ The hallway becomes the space where this change occurs, as women describe and condemn Maggie's behavior to other inhabitants of the building: "'She allus was a bold thing,' he heard one of them cry in an eager voice. 'Dere wasn't a feller come teh deh house but she'd teh mash him.' . . . 'Anybody what had eyes could see dat dere was somethin' wrong wid dat girl.

²⁶Crane, *Maggie*, 39.

²⁷Crane, *Maggie*, 41.

²⁸Crane, *Maggie*, 40.

²⁹Crane, *Maggie*, 20.

I didn't like her actions.'"³⁰ And when Maggie returns home via the tenement hallway, the neighbors' conjectures are confirmed. 142

Maggie's return to the tenement transforms her home into a stage and Maggie into a spectacle, emphasizing that "home" in the tenement is essentially a public space. As she stands in her mother's apartment, she becomes an object of fascination and horror for her neighbors, an equivalent to the moralistic melodramas she has seen with Pete. "Through the open doors curious eyes stared in at Maggie. Children ventured into the room and ogled her, as if they formed the front row at a theater. Women, without, bended their heads toward one another and whispered, nodding their heads with airs of profound philosophy."³¹ Maggie's mother acts as mistress of ceremonies, binding the community to her by publicly displaying and rejecting her daughter's fallen status. She paces "to and fro, addressing the doorful of eyes, expounding like a glib showman at a museum. Her voice rang through the building. 'Dere she stands,' she crie[s]."³² As the collective gaze shifts from Mrs. Johnson to Maggie, the neighbors assert their connection to the mother.

In rejecting Maggie's behavior and offering support to a mother who by middle-class standards would qualify as unfit, the tenement community writes its own moral code that recapitulates "mother" as infallible even in a landscape where motherhood is ineffectual and the home is a spectacle. For instance, at Maggie's death, her mother is surrounded by the wailing support of her female neighbors, who use the "vocabulary . . . derived from mission churches" to comfort their friend.³³ Reinventing the experience of

³⁰Crane, *Maggie*, 42.

³¹Crane, *Maggie*, 61.

³²Crane, *Maggie*, 61.

³³Crane, *Maggie*, 73.

mothering, Mrs. Johnson brings forth a sentimental token of Maggie's 143
infancy: "In a moment she emerged with a pair of faded baby shoes held in
the hollow of her hand. 'I kin remember when she used to wear dem,' cried
she. The women burst anew into cries as if they had all been stabbed."³⁴ The
shoes act as a talisman that binds the women together in shared suffering.
Thus, Maggie's mother receives the same kind of unqualified support as the
pious, thrifty, decent and doting mother in another of Crane's stories,
George's Mother. When despite George's mother's efforts, her son "goes to
the bad," "the women of the tenement. . . came to condole with her. They
sat in the kitchen for hours. She told them of his wit, his cleverness, his
tender heart."³⁵ Similarly, Maggie's mother laments, "Wid a home like dis
an' a mudder like me, she went teh deh bad."³⁶ Because the built space has
the force to overcome any individual efforts to fight it, in the tenement even
Mrs. Johnson can claim the otherwise vaunted title of mother. As the
networked space inside the tenement becomes the site for alternative
conceptions of home, motherhood, and morality that threaten middle-class
ideals, connections themselves become increasingly dangerous.

Labor in the Home

As a spectacle, the tenement home is so porous that it threatens the
bounds of the middle-class home. Networks running through tenement
narratives, whether journalistic or fictional, become focal points that both
distinguish and pathologize tenement dwellings as other than the detached
home. Yet the entrance of the middle-class home into consumer culture

³⁴Crane, *Maggie*, 74.

³⁵Crane, *George's Mother*, in *The Portable Stephen Crane* (1896; New York, Penguin Books, 1979), 130.

³⁶Crane, *Maggie*, 50.

renders it permeable, vulnerable to the influence of the rest of the city. 144
Through the marketplace, the detached home opens itself to the tenement threat, and the connections themselves become frightening. However, to pathologize connectivity in a sense is to pathologize modernity itself, a move that progressives, who believe in the ideologies of progress and improvement, cannot easily make without emphasizing the need to further protect the modern middle-class home and its inhabitants.

Although reformers see the connections within tenement homes or between the home and the street as dangerous, their threat pales in comparison to that posed by the eroded boundary between home and work. The anxiety produced by the home-work connection is primarily voiced in two ways: first, work threatens the function of home by transforming it into a site of production rather than a place of consumption; second, because the products of these internally-connected spaces are sold to bourgeois consumers for use in their homes, consumer goods create a physical connection between middle class homes and tenements. Both of these facts frighten reformers enough to animate Riis's metaphors of contagion and disease in order to convey fully the threat that tenement products like clothes and food pose to middle-class consumers. By rendering detached homes permeable to the city's networks, these products demonstrate that the modern home could not remain separate from the city itself.

In keeping with his sentimental persona, Riis claims that work threatens the notion of home primarily because at-home work hinders tenement-dwellers' attempts to approximate middle-class homes in the slums. His text emphasizes that working at home speeds the breakdown of family traditions: "In [the tenement] the child works unchallenged from the day he is old enough to pull a thread. There is no such thing as a dinner-

hour; men and women eat while they work, and the 'day' is lengthened 145
at both ends far into the night" (98). The presence of work in the home
disrupts all of the routines, roles, and even the demarcations of time that
Riis considers critical to maintaining a home. Without a dinner-hour,
without adequate time for leisure or sleep, without childhood, the tenement
simply cannot reproduce the conditions necessary for the home to function.
This is not to say that Riis is trying to impose a middle-class use of time and
space on resistant tenants—certainly it is difficult to imagine a sweater
rejecting a shorter workday on the grounds that it represents bourgeois
oppression. Riis supports his argument that using the private space of the
home for market activities erodes the social and familial relationships inside
with pictures emphasizing the horror of the home turned workplace, raising
the pitch of his claims that the tenement itself is everything the middle-class
home rejects. (Figure 3) It is a site of contagion.

The tenements' threat to the middle class was figured in terms of
contagion; often the most intimate markers of middle-class conspicuous
consumption, such as clothes and food, were considered to be carriers of
disease, symbolizing contact between the middle class consumer's body and
that of the tenement dweller. For instance, reformers argued that macaroni,
manufactured by "Italians [who] not only have large families, but keep
lodgers, [and whose] front shop then becomes a sleeping and living
apartment," were incorporating "the disease germ . . . in the paste of the
macaroni."³⁷ The physical arrangement of the tenement living quarters was
directly associated with the spread of disease; that is, the fact that spaces for
living mingled with those designated for work meant that the products, like

³⁷Mary Sherman, National Consumers' League, "Manufacturing of Foods in the Tenements,"
Charities and the Commons 15 (1906): 670.

the children, would take on and spread the qualities of the

146

environment, in this case, the threat of the tenement. In the production of macaroni, one reformer recounted a physician's story of

a child [who] lay sick of diphtheria in the back room where the physician visited her. The father manufactured macaroni in the front adjoining room, and would go directly from holding the child in his arms to the macaroni machine, pulling the macaroni with his hands and hanging it over racks to dry. The macaroni was then sold up and down Elizabeth Street.³⁸

A carrier of germs, the macaroni moves from sickroom to storefront on the body of the father, crossing boundaries between public and private space, and connecting city dwellers' bodies to one another. Macaroni, however, was not seen as a product that crossed class or ethnic lines; middle-class reformers could be "thankful that we did not have to eat the macaroni on our own tables."³⁹ Other foods traveled farther.

The most dangerous products issuing from the tenements were those that could pass as clean, safe, and hygienic, and thus could cross class lines, promising "the danger of the spread of a contagious disease [not only] among the people who are forced to buy cheap food in small neighborhood stores but to anyone buying in the best and most expensive stores in the city."⁴⁰ While "those who can afford to buy their food in cleaner and better stores feel safe when buying their nuts in glass jars, their peanut butter from a health food bureau, their cakes on Fifth Avenue and their candies wrapped in paper and apparently spotless," reformers point out that these foods, like macaroni, carry hazards directly to middle-class consumers from the bodies

³⁸Sherman, "Manufacturing," 671.

³⁹Sherman, "Manufacturing," 669.

⁴⁰Sherman, "Manufacturing," 673.

of the immigrants who manufactured the products in their homes.⁴¹ 147

Nuts are packed into clean glass jars in homes where workers have "four rooms for nine people, indescribably filthy and crowded," or "in a rear tenement on Oliver Street . . . [where] the rooms are small, and one of his young boys is tubercular."⁴² As people wrest the candies from their apparently spotless wrappers, they ingest the conditions surrounding the candy's production, for "the candy sometimes leaks into the sleeping room," a "dilapidated and dirty" space where "the mother, father, and two small babies live, sleep and cook."⁴³ The candies threaten middle-class consumers not simply because they contain germs, but because they masquerade as "safe" food. Further, the manufacturers appropriate the power of advertising to speed their products' journey into "contained" homes. The nut producers "advertise the purity and cleanliness of their goods," to their consumers, who buy nuts at "all the best retail stores and health-food depots," while the candy company's products "are sold at retail stores in the city."⁴⁴ The products enter the middle-class home through the kitchen, bringing with them all of the conditions surrounding their manufacture.

Clothes, too, are seen as threatening carriers, especially when the clothing is produced in spaces where boundaries between home and work are blurred. "Every garment," wrote one reformer, "is found being manufactured in rooms whose legitimate use is for living purposes," an assertion borne out in Riis's photographs and text as well as in tenement fiction.⁴⁵ Like food, clothing could pass; anything from "the coarsest home-

⁴¹Sherman, "Manufacturing," 669.

⁴²Sherman, "Manufacturing," 671.

⁴³Sherman, "Manufacturing," 672.

⁴⁴Sherman, "Manufacturing," 672.

⁴⁵Annie S. Daniel, "The Wreck of the Home: How Wearing Apparel is Manufactured in the Tenements," *Charities* 14, No. 1 (1 April 1905): 624.

wrappers to the daintiest evening lace gown for a fine evening function 148 are manufactured in these rooms." And like food, clothing was thought to carry diseases directly from the mingled spaces of the tenement to the private life of the unsuspecting middle-class consumer. Ostensibly protected from the city's dangers, middle-class women and children could easily touch the city's slums through intimate contact with clothing.

The adornments of woman's dress, the flowers and feathers for her hats, the hats themselves—these I have seen being made in the presence of small-pox, on the lounge with the patient. In this case the hats belonged to a Broadway firm. All clothing worn by infants and small children—dainty little dresses—I have seen on the same bed with children sick of contagious diseases, and into these little garments is sewed some of the contagion.⁴⁶

Women and children, who should be protected by the walls of the middle-class home, are here seen to be the primary unknowing participants in the network of products binding the urban populace together. Even in a licensed tenement house, "when the sanitary conditions presumably were satisfactory to the Department of Health, the Tenement House Department, and the Department of Labor . . . it was found that for weeks a family . . . had been finishing clothing in the room where the oldest daughter. . . lay dying of tuberculosis."⁴⁷ The very modern agencies of reform are powerless to stop the contagion.

⁴⁶Daniel, "Wreck," 624.

⁴⁷Mary Van Kleeck, "Child Labor in New York City Tenements," *Charities and the Commons* 18 (18 January 1908): 1410.

In the face of contagion scares, Riis's texts can be seen as a series of attempts to use the notion of home to impose order upon the tenements and contain their threat. Through "domestication," Riis hopes to "erect borders between the civilized and the savage . . . regulat[ing] traces of the savage within."⁴⁸ Yet these attempts are not always successful. The city itself resisted Riis. Peter Hales argues in his photographic history *Silver Cities* that Riis constructed a "bumbling persona" precisely to cover the control he exerted over the images he produced, yet Riis's texts clearly display the city's refusal to submit to his hidden hand.⁴⁹ The tenements and their inhabitants confound Riis even when he is at his least bumbling, asserting their unknowability by refusing to conform to his structures of knowledge. This very unknowability shores up Riis's larger argument—that the tenement is networked to a pathological degree.

Legal language and data gathered in the nascent field of sociology offer Riis official sanction for his strategy of textual containment. To show that he is not alone in his belief that the environment made the person, Riis quotes numerous reformers and government officials. After opening with the testimony given "before a legislative committee" by the Secretary of the Prison Association of New York claiming that the tenements "are to-day nurseries of crime and of the vices and disorderly courses which lead to crime," Riis goes on to buttress his own views with other "expert" commentary on the relationship between the environment and its inhabitants (1).⁵⁰ "Official reports, read in the churches in 1879, characterized

⁴⁸ Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70:3 (1998): 582.

⁴⁹ Hales, *Silver*, 195.

⁵⁰ The "nurseries of crime" are mentioned again on page 69 of *How the Other Half Lives*, but this time the language is attributed to Inspector Byrnes, the "chief of the Secret Police."

the younger criminals as victims of low social conditions of life and 150
unhealthy, crowded lodgings, brought up in an 'atmosphere of actual
darkness, moral and physical'" (13). Throughout the text Riis highlights the
status of these experts and the documents they create. In the Progressive Era,
theories of architectural determinism were becoming policy.

Although *How the Other Half Lives* appeared at a moment when
architectural determinism took on a new vogue among the reform-minded
middle and upper classes of the cities, much of Riis's work, especially read in
the light of tenement fiction, positions tenements at the limit of architectural
determinism. Like his fellow reformers, Riis attempts to deploy the
language of home to understand and solve the problems of the tenements,
but his model of home as a contained and separate space can not account for
the physical and social realities he confronts in the networked city. While
reformers like Riis fervently muster their theory to explain and shape the
tenements, they paradoxically describe the environment as singularly
unamenable to the reform practices that accompany their theory. The
tenement is slippery, difficult to grasp. The buildings and their inhabitants
elude expectations, boundary lines, and categories. Indeed, the very
connections that make the tenement dangerous also connect the members of
the "first half" of the city to one another. Urban networks mark the advance
of one class and hasten the other's decline. By pathologizing the urban
networks of the poor and ignoring middle-class and suburban participation
in these networks, Riis sets up a strategy for home-based reform that is
spatially incompatible with modernity's demand for connection.

The need for containment is reinforced by Riis's inability to contain
his subject. An environment out of control creates an uncontrollable
populace. For instance, he notes that in a typical tenement yard

every blade of grass, every stray weed, every speck of green, has 151
been trodden out, as must inevitably be every gentle thought and
aspiration above the mere wants of the body in those whose moral
natures such home surroundings are to nourish. In self-defence, you
know, all life eventually accommodates itself to its environment, and
human life is no exception (124).

In this case, the tenement environment is presented as the anti-pastoral. Riis's readers who imagined "natural" environments, whether parks or wildernesses, to offer healing potential would have found resonance in the comparison between the grass and the individuals grown in the tenements. But at the end of the passage Riis begins to move away from using environment as metaphor and begins to emphasize the environment's shaping force, the view that dominates his writing and political activity. In Riis's model, the environment is the primary influence on the development of "all life." Riis's description of the tenements' paupers is typical: "They are shiftless, destructive, and stupid; in a word, *they are what the tenements have made them*" (214, emphasis mine). Ultimately, Riis's text constructs a causal relationship between people's surroundings and their development: positive or negative changes to the environment will influence inhabitants accordingly; the slum will create a culture of inhabitants who personify its physical conditions. And they do. Echoing the permeable, transformable architecture, tenement dwellers change the structures they inhabit by taking in boarders, subdividing rooms, turning living spaces into workspaces, and pursuing private activities outside. Along with his many photographs of homeless adults and children sleeping in alleys and under bridges, Riis includes a photograph of a smiling, parka-clad woman tenting atop her tenement, a cot clearly visible under the peaked canvas pitched on the snowy

roof. (Figure 4) Her expression hints that revising architectural boundaries could be fun. Though Riis attempts to understand this landscape both objectively and subjectively, the slums and their residents continually position themselves at the borders of knowability and control. 152

The difficulty of controlling the networked city becomes evident when Riis attempts to narrate a map of New York, "colored to designate nationalities" (20). Though Riis begins by assigning colors to different races and separating the city into two easily defined halves, green for the Irish and blue for the Germans, the map's boundaries quickly become "intermingled [with] . . . an odd variety of tints that . . . give the whole the appearance of a crazy quilt" (20). Lines and colors, introduced to simplify the reader's encounter with unfamiliar territory, become living entities: for instance, the "red of the Italian. . . forc[es] its way northward . . .to lose itself and reappear" in another section of the city, while the "black mark. . . overshadow[s] to-day many blocks on the East Side" (20). As Riis draws the map, the colors become animated, acting as substitutes for races and nationalities and challenging Riis's attempt to contain people by assigning them a fixed symbol. The "black of the Negro" becomes the "colored tide" that "engulf[s] uptown Manhattan, and the "Arab tribe," personified by a "dirty stain, spread[s] rapidly like a splash of ink on a sheet of blotting paper"(22). The motion of these races is uncontrolled. Finally, the colors are displaced by the populations they are supposed to represent and rationalize. Riis explains, "Hardly less aggressive than the Italian, the Russian and Polish Jew, having overrun the district between Rivington and Division Streets. . . to the point of suffocation, is filling the tenements of the old Seventh Ward to the riverfront, and disputing with the Italian every foot of available space in the back alleys of Mulberry Street" (22). As each nationality or ethnicity asserts itself it moves

beyond the map's ability to contain and define, rendering the map 153
useless as an instrument of boundary-drawing. Further, the map is narrated
but is never drawn; the decision not to accompany the unruly text with a
more apparently objective image emphasizes the difficulty of rationalizing
the tenement with the tools of cartography.

Like attempts to define spaces by their function, attempts to classify
people by race become futile in the modern networked city. Riis's
architectural determinism is linked to his ethnic determinism in that both
theories need clearly delineated boundaries, whether between spaces or
ethnicities in order to claim that identity can be spatially or racially
determined; these boundaries break down in the networked city.⁵¹ Riis's
rebellious map does not serve to contain populations even narratively;
rather, it emphasizes that containment is impossible in cities increasingly
characterized by a mobile and interconnected population.

Even if people resist boundaries and elude census takers, refusing to be
incorporated into modern mechanisms for scientifically knowing the city,
buildings might seem to be more stable. Riis notes that "of its vast homeless
crowds the census takes no account. It is their instinct to shun the light, and
they cannot be corralled in one place long enough to be counted. But the
houses can" (22). However, at other points the buildings themselves
resist Riis's efforts to set boundaries, becoming unknowable, even
uncountable. For instance, in the chapter titled "The Common Herd," Riis
reprints a "Bird's-eye view of an East Side tenement block," which shows a
solid front of buildings lining the sidewalk of the city block (122). (Figure 5)

⁵¹In his essay "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," Robert Park explores the
phenomena of contact, immigration, and the erosion of racialized difference. *Classic Essays on
the Culture of Cities*, Richard Sennett, ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969): 131-
142.

Though these buildings are of varying heights and styles, they are still 154
comprehensible as a block of buildings, a fundamental component of the grid
system organizing New York's streets. But within the block, buildings seem
to have sprung up randomly. At odd and surprising angles to one another,
their locations disrupt the linear order of the block formation. Further, there
is no apparent way to enter or leave the interior of the block. As Peter Hales
points out in *Silver Cities*, bird's-eye views were a popular mode of urban
photography in the mid-nineteenth century, a way for lithographers and
later photographers, to elicit rational, governable patterns from the
confusion the city often displayed on the street level. Hales notes that "the
virtue of the lithographic bird's-eye view lay in its capacities to enclose and to
order."⁵² In this way, bird's-eyes were similar to the photographic
panoramas that "represented one of the most successful mechanisms
photographers used to civilize the city and make it comprehensible. . . . To
an urban culture characterized by vague, constantly shifting boundaries and a
tenuous unity threatening always to break down, . . . closure and identity
were precious commodities."⁵³ In Riis's image, the passageways so fully
dominate the area that even a bird's-eye view can not assign a rational
pattern to the neighborhood. Hidden from plain sight, visible only through
a bird's-eye view, and accessible only to people with intimate, experiential
knowledge of the site, this group of interior tenements clearly presents a
threat and a challenge to the rational forces of modernity and reform.

Like maps and diagrams, building plans seem to be under rational
control because they are laid out by designers whose structures embody
reform principles, at least on the level of the blueprint. One prominent

⁵²Hales, *Silver*, 29.

⁵³Hales, *Silver*, 73.

Calvert Vaux. Architects like Vaux put into spatial practice the notion that design could solve the architectural problems at the root of urban decay.

Benevolent citizens willing to forego a slumlord's exorbitant income could instead charge modest rents for model tenements and expect an income of "philanthropy and five percent" profit per year.⁵⁴ Riis and other reformers cite examples of citizens whose commitment to such a plan has yielded economic and moral gain. In *How the Other Half Lives* Riis accompanies this narrative with architect William Fields's floor plans and drawings for one of A.T. White's model tenements, the Riverside Buildings in Brooklyn. (Figure 6) Like most urban tenements, the Riverside Buildings fill a whole city block, but the block's interior, visible to every tenant through the back windows of each apartment, looks like an Olmsted park in miniature.

Winding paths meander through trees, leading promenaders to a fountain, a playground, and a music pavilion. A driveway and walkway surround the whole, unifying the space and offering opportunities for healthful recreation within the exterior walls of the complex. A resident wishing to go outside would never need to encounter the street. And in fact, the surrounding streets are not even labeled; the blueprints essentially remove the Riverside Buildings from their specific and potentially chaotic locale. Plans like these reinvent tenements as places of order, light, rationality, and calm, oases in the midst of the city. Though the Riverside Buildings were built, the drawings are far more attractive than the reality. In photographs they appear blocky and stolid, offering little of the inspiration the drawings portend.

(Figure 7)

⁵⁴Wright, *Building*, 123.

and the promise of progress that is visible in his treatment of model tenement buildings like the Riverside. Given that the cost of Manhattan real estate made the construction of single-family homes close to city workplaces impossible, Riis and other reformers acceded that "home" could exist in model tenements, but only if "separate, decent and desirable" modern apartments could stem the tide of increasing connection that accompanied the spread of densely-packed housing units. A model tenement could contain "three hundred real homes, not simply three hundred families," but only if the architecture was designed to keep them from making contact with one another. Thus, Riis's description of the Riverside Buildings reads like a checklist of remedies for the architectural features that broke down boundaries between public and private spaces in tenement homes. "Three tenants, it will be seen, use each entrance hall. Of the rest of the three hundred they may never know, rarely see, one. Each has his private front-door. The common hall, with all that it stands for, has disappeared. The fireproof stairs are outside the house. . . . Each tenant has his own scullery and ash-flue. There are no air shafts, for none are needed" (228-9). Though Riis notes features designed to bring tenants together, such as a park, a playground, and weekly concerts, he is more interested in the architectural structures that will keep them apart from one another. He emphasizes the importance of separation by evoking the unspoken dangers of the "common hall, with all that it stands for" (228). To Riis, the anxiety evoked by the tenement's characteristic permeability can only be assuaged by structures that aim to contain tenement dwellers and reduce the number of connections they make to each other in the networked city. Yet these modern technologies could not be reliably used to contain the tenement.

attempted to organize the lives of those who lived there along a modified version of the contained home's moral and cultural principles. The symmetry, layout, and scale of these buildings were meant to inspire not just architectural but societal improvement. Designers encouraged particular lifestyles with the spaces they designed, but they situated these designs in an urban landscape that encouraged mobility and connection rather than stasis and containment. Thus, this idealized version of tenement homes was attainable only in reformers' minds and in architects' blueprints. The contrast between this rationalized, centrally-planned version of tenement life and the realities of extant tenements became a contest over the values that the spaces conveyed. Critically, the home served as the source for both moral values and physical containment while the threat posed by the unruly city became the reason to heighten protection of the home and what it represented.

Defining the Home

It is not surprising that Riis places the "separate, decent, and desirable" home at the center of his architectural campaign against the tenement's influence. As the presumed primary environment of the child, the home was the site most likely to shape not only children but the adults they would become. In tenement fiction, as critic David Fine notes, "The slum child was both the most pathetic victim and, if he could be reached through schools, settlements and the church, the best hope for an end to the recurring cycle of urban crime, immorality, and disease."⁵⁵ As went the home, so went the

⁵⁵Fine, "Abraham," 101. Note that here Fine assumes that the home is not operating as a sphere of influence in the tenement.

nation. This was especially relevant for Americanized children of immigrants. "For the corruption of children," Riis writes, "there is no restitution. None is possible. It saps the very vitals of society; undermines its strongest defences, and delivers them over to the enemy" (169). Though Riis does not specifically mention national concerns here, his military language conjures up ideas of a nation potentially under siege, a site that can only be protected through proper nurturing of its future inhabitants.⁵⁶ As Amy Kaplan notes, "the cultural work of domesticity" creates a "national domain and . . . generate[s] notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home."⁵⁷ Thus homes are not simply linked to a generic set of morals or ethics but to the development of a citizenry with specifically American values.

But what would this national home look like? In his autobiography, *The Making of an American*, Riis provides an idealized description of his own home as a starting point for imagining what kind of architecture could produce a nation-making influence. First, Riis's home is geographically isolated: "with a ridge of wooded hills, the 'backbone of Long Island,' between New York and us [,] the very lights of the city were shut out. So was the slum, and I could sleep."⁵⁸ Riis, of course, still commutes to the city to take photographs and write articles; he can ride "the trains that carry a hundred thousand people to New York's stores and offices from their homes in the country," daily maintaining his connection to the city.⁵⁹ But to him the

⁵⁶Riis further links environment to national identity in his autobiography, in which he apparently becomes American simply through his experiences in the United States. Because nothing American except his long tenure in American surroundings actively transforms Riis, his autobiography offers anecdotal evidence to support Riis's environmental determinism. *The Making of an American* (1901; New York: MacMillan Company, 1924).

⁵⁷Kaplan, "Manifest," 582.

⁵⁸Riis, *American*, 287.

⁵⁹Riis, *American*, 288.

house is "in the country," and its surroundings make it separate not 159
just from other houses but from the urban landscape as well. Riis's house is
decent and desirable, too; "white and peaceful under the trees," it is filled
with children and presided over by an idealized mother: "the boys are all in
love with their mother; the girls tyrannize and worship her together."⁶⁰
Finally, the house enacts Riis's national identity; the American "flag flies
from it on Sundays," a symbol of nation as religion.⁶¹ Riis's house is thus a
site for and demonstration of personal and national acculturation. The ideal
home then becomes "separate, decent, desirable"—and American.

Some immigrant groups, those we can assume Riis considers more
easily assimilable into the culture of the United States, share the spatial
conception of home that characterizes Riis's morally acceptable architecture.
For example, he notes that Germans are outstanding among immigrant
groups because the German immigrant "makes himself a home independent
of the surroundings, giving the lie to the sayings, unhappily become a
maxim of social truth, that pauperism and drunkenness naturally grow in
the tenements. He makes the most of his tenement." (25). Here, a
transcendent notion of home helps to acculturate an immigrant group.
Although the interesting notion that a home might operate "independent of
the surroundings" never appears again in the text, it echoes claims by
Downing and Beecher that the physical structures of home could express as
well as enforce moral values.

Yet the physical attributes of home are far from permanent. Many of
the buildings that served as tenements at the turn of the century were
originally constructed as the detached homes that Riis idealizes, but the

⁶⁰Riis, *American*, 287, 441.

⁶¹Riis, *American*, 287.

forces of a networked city out of control have transformed them into 160
slums. Echoing the decline visible in Moodie's lodgings or Basil Ransom's
boarding house, Riis notes that in "the domain of the tenement . . . the old
Knickerbocker houses linger like ghosts of a departed day." Some of the
buildings' physical structures remain, but they have been transformed by
time and economic exigencies:

This one, with its shabby front and poorly-patched roof, what glowing
firesides, what happy children may it once have owned? . . . the
broken columns at the door have rotted away at the base. Of the
handsome cornice barely a trace is left. Dirt and desolation reign in
the wide hallway, and danger lurks on the stairs. Rough pine boards
fence off the roomy fireplaces—where coal is bought by the pail at the
rate of twelve dollars a ton these have no place. The arched gateway
no longer leads to a shady bower on the banks of the rushing stream,
inviting to day-dreams with its gentle repose, but to a dark and
nameless alley, shut in by high brick walls, cheerless as the lives of
those they shelter. (27-8)

All of the architectural features that once marked this home as separate,
decent, and desirable—a space that could have produced happy children and
gentle repose—have been transformed, and the vestiges of the past mock
current realities. The fireplace, columns, cornices, and archways have all
decayed, creating a new environment that will shape an entirely different
inhabitant. Like Miss Birdseye's unfashionable lodging house in *The
Bostonians*, these buildings have felt the effects of the elite class's desire for
mobility. And as might be expected, Riis links these physical changes to a
concomitant change in the home's potential for moral influence among
tenement dwellers.

indicated, tenement dwellers actively altered the physical spaces they inhabited for many purposes, making changes that challenged the common middle-class organization of domestic space. In the version of architectural determinism espoused by Riis and his contemporaries, "home" had to conform to specific architectural guidelines as well as a sentimental or affective description in order to inspire a morally acceptable acculturation of its inhabitants. Accordingly, plans for middle-class homes designated rooms as kitchens, parlors, or bedrooms. Using rooms for improper or multiple purposes threatened the home's moral and physical impact.⁶² Like apartments, hotels, and boarding houses, tenements confound these architectural expectations, creating a confusion that stymies writers' attempts to understand tenement living spaces. One reformer writes: "In one room, that which opens on the street or yard, is carried on all the domestic life. This room serves for parlor, dining-room, and kitchen; and in this room is in addition carried on the manufacturing. It is quite obvious that the word *home* was never intended to apply to such an apartment; neither does it give a description of an ideal place in which manufacturing should be done."⁶³ The tenement home crowds multiple uses into one space; in the reformer's mind the parlor should be distinct from the kitchen and both should be separate from the work-room. Even more worrisome, the public functions of work and the more private ones of cooking (kitchen), eating (dining room) and entertaining (parlor) all happen in a room that "opens on the street or yard," a public space that is incompatible with "domestic life" as

⁶²Interestingly, distaste for multiple uses, while emphasized by Downing, was not shared by Beecher, who often advocated the use of a rolling screen to allow a bedroom to serve as a sitting room, dining room, or parlor. Both her designs for model homes and model tenements feature these screens and emphasize the versatility of such transformable spaces.

⁶³Daniel, "Wreck," 624. Emphasis mine.

envisioned by the reformer. The permeability and mingled uses that 162
characterize the rooms of the tenement dwelling disrupt the affective
definition of home.

The emotional and rhetorical force on which Riis, tenement novelists,
and official policy-makers all rely derives from a shared but tacit definition of
home. The uses to which a tenement home might be put often disqualified
it from its sentimental definition:

Some twenty-five years ago the New York Court of Appeals handed
down the following—known as the Jacobs decision: “It cannot be
perceived how the cigarmaker is to be improved in his health or his
morals by forcing him from the home with its hallowed associations
and beneficent influences to ply his trade elsewhere . . .” How these
miserable homework factories with their inmates working from
daylight to six, eight, ten o’clock and even later in the night, can be
defined as “homes” is beyond one’s comprehension, and one must
look through very rosy spectacles indeed to find the “hallowed” and
“beneficent influences of a home” in which fur garments are stored in
every conceivable corner and cranny of the living and cooking rooms,
while all the members of the family toil from early morn to late night
to earn enough to keep body and soul together.⁶⁴

To this reformer, tenements can not be defined as “homes” because their
interior spaces are available for multiple uses; a space that operates as a site of
economic production loses its potential to propagate a home’s more elusive
moral influence. While she rails against the court’s decision to license
certain tenements as workshops, the author does not dispute the dominant
idea of the court’s decision, namely, that the home should operate as a

⁶⁴Elizabeth C. Watson, “Home Work in the Tenements,” *Survey* 25 (4 February 1911): 777.

“beneficent influence.” As Riis notes, “To the child of the tenements, 163 home, the greatest factor of all in the training of the young, means nothing to him but a pigeon-hole in a coop along with so many other human animals. Its influence is scarcely of the elevating kind, if it have any” (138). Impotent as “home,” the buildings have succumbed to the unruly city’s increasingly powerful networks. The resulting slums mark the city’s inability to affect positive change and threaten the reformers’ rationality.

For Riis, fully abandoning the rational would have meant alienating himself from those who could enact legal reform, yet the city forces a breakdown of the rational systems he attempts to impose. This erosion of rationalism is exposed by his attempts to balance scientific and sentimental approaches to his subject. For instance, *How the Other Half Lives*, like many of Riis’s other texts including *Children of the Poor* and *The Making of an American*, begins with a disclaimer in the form of an acknowledgment. Thanking those who have made the text possible, Riis cites “the patient friendship of Dr. Roger S. Tracy, the Registrar of Vital Statistics,” saying he “has done for me what I could never have done for myself; for I know nothing of tables, statistics and percentages” (xv). Even as Riis claims allegiance to “official” approaches to the tenements he attempts to dissociate himself from the world of statistical rationality and situate his project as an affective one. Riis’s final acknowledgment, addressed to “the womanly sympathy and the loving companionship of my dear wife,” likewise aligns him with feeling, sentiment, and the home, implying that his wife’s influence—her sympathy—is foundational to his text (xv).

Tenement literature echoes Riis’s dual invocations of science and sentiment. Much tenement fiction constructs simultaneously emotional and physical encounters with the tenement. For instance, in *Daughter of the*

Tenements, the wealthy young woman must venture into the slums, 164 exposing herself both to typhus and to the personal connection to tenement daughters that the disease represents in order to successfully establish her missionary credentials. Riis's books, along with the tenement fiction of Townsend, Crane, and Fawcett, evoke emotion in various sentimental appeals for their readers to "feel right" and shockingly naturalistic dramatizations that force readers to recoil.⁶⁵ Both methods are dramatic, but the sentimental posits a personal relationship between reader and text, while the drama of naturalism relies on a distance between reader and subject that is ultimately containing.

In tenement fiction, interiors mark "a desire for beauty and tradition" that evokes the sympathy of a bourgeois reader's identification and emphasizes the distance between reader and subject.⁶⁶ But individual desire for beauty does not triumph over the tenement, signaling that other narratives are at work. In *The Evil That Men Do*, for instance, the act of decorating brings classes together, while the specific decorations separate them. One of the novel's characters, Mrs. Slattery, decorates her kitchen bedroom "with colored prints of the crucifixion and the martyred Virgin that might, in their red-and-yellow crudity, have made the bones of Rubens or Raphael rattle oversea."⁶⁷ It follows that Mrs. Slattery is powerless to stop

⁶⁵Jane Tompkins and Claudia Tate offer thorough examinations of the personal and public ramifications of such a feeling. See Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), and Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). On the blend of sentimentalism and another shocking genre, the Gothic, see my "Slave, Master, Mistress, Slave: Genre and Interracial Desire in Louisa May Alcott's Fiction," *ATQ*, 11:2 (June 1997): 115-135.

⁶⁶Wright, *Building*, 131.

⁶⁷Fawcett, *Evil*, 19. Mass-produced chromos, a staple of middle-class decorating in the late nineteenth century, fell out of favor as "art." Michael Clapper notes that "By the early twentieth century museums had gained the power to define "high" art, and art in the home was consigned to other classifications—decoration, crafts, entertainment, kitsch, etc.—and accorded much lower status." "The Chromo and the Art Museum: Popular and Elite Art

the beautiful Cora's decline; the son she offers to Cora as a husband has 165
been morally weakened by the slums outside.

Nowhere are both the aspirations for and the failure of a middle-class aesthetic to transform the tenement more visible than in Stephen Crane's novel *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*. Maggie's efforts to transform "the broken furniture, grimy walls, and general disorder and dirt of her home" into a scene that will meet her beau Pete's approval must be read as attempts, however futile, to connect herself to the consumption and display habits of the contained home.⁶⁸ To this end, she cleans the rooms and ties back the curtains with new blue ribbon. She even makes a lambrequin that differs from those pictured in Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's advice manual *The American Woman's Home* only in its bold pattern. (Figure 8) (Beecher and Stowe recommend a subtle chintz.) But the lambrequin Maggie makes "with infinite care" and displays on "the slightly careening mantel, over the stove, in the kitchen" in the hopes that it would "look well on Sunday night when, perhaps, Jimmie's friend might come," becomes a symbol that prefigures Maggie's crushed hopes and ultimate destruction when, in a drunken frenzy, Maggie's mother destroys it. "She had vented some phase of drunken fury upon the lambrequin. It lay in a bedraggled heap upon the floor. . . . The curtain at the window had been pulled by a heavy hand and hung by one tack, dangling to and fro in the draft through the cracks at the sash. The knots of blue ribbons appeared like violated flowers."⁶⁹ Maggie's effort to create a setting that will appeal to the dapper Pete's taste mingles the pathos of identification with the naturalistic shock of

Institutions in Late-Nineteenth Century America," *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, Christopher Reed, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 33.

⁶⁸Crane, *Maggie*, 23.

⁶⁹Crane, *Maggie*, 26.

distance, for Maggie can never decorate enough to actually transform the tenement. 166

In *George's Mother*, Crane reiterates this futility by demonstrating that even the closest approximation to Beecher and Stowe's homemaking aesthetic is ineffective in the tenements. George's mother's kitchen, for instance, echoes both the immigrant and Americanizing aesthetics, producing a space that resembles Beecher and Stowe's rendition of a model tenement apartment. (Figure 9) "Three blue plates were leaning in a row on the shelf back of the stove. The little old woman had seen it done somewhere. In front of them swaggered the round nickel-plated clock. . . Occasional chromos were tacked upon the yellow walls of the room. There was one in a gilt frame. It was quite an affair, in reds and greens. They all seemed like trophies."⁷⁰ This Beecherian space orders the mother's time just as a reformer might hope. Her days are appropriately spent performing the bourgeois rituals of cleaning, polishing, attending church, cooking nutritious meals, and worrying about her son. Yet while she decorates and maintains her tenement home according to familiar middle-class guidelines, her son George succumbs to the corruptive power of the broader environment, emphasizing that the home is powerless against the slum. Overcoming individual agency, the tenement environment penetrates even this model home.

Though Riis and Crane's narratives argue otherwise, historically, the power of the tenement was not always overwhelming. While the authors and family groups presented in Riis's photographs would have appeared foreign to many of his readers, many of the domestic interiors they produced share the contained home's domestic aesthetic. For instance, in "Room in a

⁷⁰Crane, *George's Mother*, 95.

Tenement, 1910," a family group gathers in a crowded tenement room 167 with the attendant bare floor and single window. But a closer look reveals the particulars of the family's housekeeping efforts. The glass cabinet on the wall holds a display of dishes. Carefully-arranged corners of spotless napkins drape over the shelves. These decorations are echoed on the shelf over the stove where the points of a crocheted border peek out from above the teakettle. (Figure 10) Other photographs reveal similar decorating touches: framed chromos (96, 185, 217), fringed shades (18, 96, 187), mantelpiece clocks (18), and large decorated seashells (185), all of which are specifically recommended as tasteful yet affordable decorations by Beecher and Stowe in *The American Woman's Home*.⁷¹ These decorations are not just physically identical to the decorations described by Beecher and Stowe; they perform the same function of inexpensively transforming living quarters into a home. These similarities simultaneously bring readers closer to the subject and impel them to make aesthetic and geographic moves to protect themselves from such proximity.

Riis's photographic techniques also evoke both identification and distance. Though individual rooms generally appear dingy, Peter Hales points out that this appearance resulted in part from Riis's photographic techniques. In interior shots, Hales notes, "grease and dirt reveal themselves with incredible force, the result of his harsh light source. . . . His photographs make everything seem, if possible, dirtier, more crowded, more chaotic than the reality."⁷² Like Maggie's chaotic tenement home or Cora's final resting place in *The Evil that Men Do*, the homes Riis photographed

⁷¹See Chapter 11 of Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (New York: Arno Press, 1971). Chapter 37, "Homeless, Helpless, and Vicious," features images of tenement rooms filled with decorations.

⁷²Hales, *Silver*, 194.

were settings for physical reactions of shock and revulsion rather than 168
identification and pathos. Yet, glimpses of the "other half's" decorations,
furnishings, and housekeeping efforts, many of which make efforts to
approximate a late nineteenth-century middle-class domestic aesthetic,
might have allowed for the affective identification with tenement dwellers
that Riis's sensationalistic techniques would otherwise preclude. The bond
of identification through setting blends the sentimental and sensational,
producing fear and reinforcing efforts to protect the middle-class home.
With the internal and external boundaries eroded, the homes of the
tenements become enmeshed in urban networks, alarming middle-class
reformers perhaps because they might see their own aesthetics of home
imitated in tenement dwellings.

Visually, especially in Riis's photographs, the similarities between the
tenement aesthetic and Beecher's could have been obscured. Gwendolyn
Wright emphasizes that "what (reformers) disparaged as debris were often
family portraits, religious mementos, and objects the residents had brought
with them from their former homes. Though the rooms were furnished on
very little money, and the circumstances for housewives were demanding
(for instance, many women had to carry water up and down several flights of
stairs), tenement interiors often displayed a carefully conceived aesthetic."⁷³
And indeed the abundance of objects contained in the tenement marked it as
anti-modern—the very opposite of the straight lines and smooth walls that
were the aesthetic vogue at the time.⁷⁴ Just as the modern aesthetic changed
to reject what tenement dwellers imitated, so too did modern building

⁷³Wright, *Building*, 131-2.

⁷⁴For more on the transition from Beecher's aesthetic to the modern domestic aesthetic, see my
"A Taste for Center Stage: Consumption and Feminism in *A Woman of Genius*," in *Exploring
Lost Borders: Critical Essays on Mary Austin* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999): 129-
149.

practices change as the middle and upper classes rejected the density of urban dwellings for the relative isolation of suburban living. 169

The City as Home

Tenements figure as the dangerous physical residue of eroded domestic boundaries. One of Riis's photographs in *How the Other Half Lives* makes this very clear. (Figure 11) Here, a group of children gather around a family table, calmly working on what might pass for a wholesome crafts project in a middle-class homemaker's manual. Paper stars litter the floor, while a growing pile of paper and fabric flowers occupies the center of the table. A young mother holds a baby on her knee while directing the action, the ornate combs in her complicated hairstyle echoed in the children's proper dress, tidy hair, and clean faces. Above a calendar on the wall hangs an image of a courting couple, the woman complete with tiny feet, dainty slippers and numerous crinolines. The success of this household's attempts to emulate a middle-class aesthetic make the photograph initially seem to be an odd companion to the text's more lurid images. However, the children are not creating decorative craft projects but are "Making Artificial Flowers." The caption transforms the children into slaves, the mother into a virtual Simon Legree. Because the home has been opened to trade, it has become a space simultaneously public and private that will send its emissaries forth into the world not as representatives of moral integrity, as Catharine Beecher had promised, but as carriers of moral and physical contagion. For Riis, the tenement home has come to symbolize a dangerous connection, not a benevolent and reassuring containment. Exemplifying numerous threats to the middle-class home's boundaries, Riis's most gentle photograph becomes his most quietly menacing.

high degree of connection and lack of separation that they are coded in texts and photographs as pathologically networked. On the one hand, the tenement is so highly networked both within and outside of it that its spaces are incompatible with the contained ideal of home and thus, according to the tenets of architectural determinism, will produce a threatening population untouched by the acculturating morality of domestic space. More importantly, the tenements are so closely, if invisibly linked to the spaces of the city occupied by the middle-class that they become an active threat to the boundaries of the middle class home—a threat imagined in terms of contagion and disease carriers. But condemning the tenement's connectivity, as Crane does with the disturbing image of "a laugh that seemed to ring through the city and be echoed and re-echoed by countless other laughs," is uncomfortably like condemning the very modernity that allows for separation.⁷⁵

Thus, a deep ambivalence accompanies the tenement narratives' exploration of urban networks' ability to connect tenement dwellers to one another—and to anyone else participating in modern consumerism. The incompatibility between the notions of tenement and home decried by Riis and his peers casts doubts on the compatibility between home and city or between home and modernity. This conceptual problem helped to cause a split in the next phase of urbanization. The move to the suburbs that accompanied the rise of the automobile was complemented by the reclamation of urban homes as modern with the proliferation of apartment buildings in New York and other industrial cities. David Harvey notes that, "The family . . . exists as an island of relative autonomy within a sea of

⁷⁵Crane, *Maggie*, 52.

objective bondage, perpetually adapting to the shifting currents of 171
capitalist urbanization through its relations to individualism, community,
class and the state. It provides a haven to which individuals can withdraw
from the complexities and angers of urban life or from which they can
selectively sample its pleasures and opportunities."⁷⁶ Yet if the family
operates in this way, it only does so because our current definitions of family
and home are based on spatial arrangements inspired by the threat that there
could be neither withdrawal nor selective sampling in a modern world
characterized by tenement-style connection. As Edith Wharton and
Charlotte Perkins Gilman saw it, it was a world where individuals could
shed their pasts, but also a world where the consumer would ultimately be
consumed.

⁷⁶David Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, (1985; Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 238.



Figure 1. The Barracks, Mott Street Between Bleecker and Houston Streets
(Riis 210)

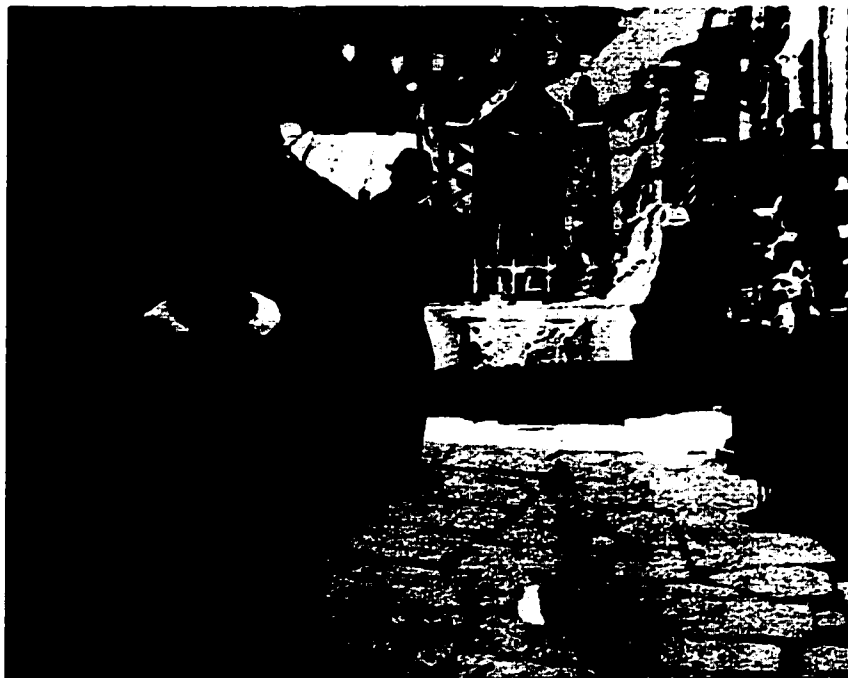


Figure 2. Feast of Saint Rocco, Bandits' Roost, Mulberry Street
(Riis 42)



Figure 3. Bohemian Cigar-Makers at Work in their Tenement
(Riis 108)



Figure 4. Fighting Tuberculosis on the Roof
(Riis 127)

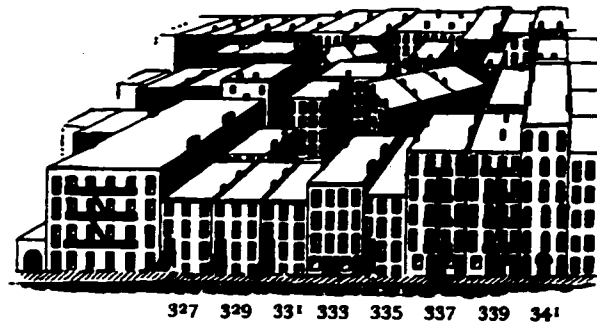


Figure 5. Bird's-eye View of an East Side Tenement Block
(Riis 122)

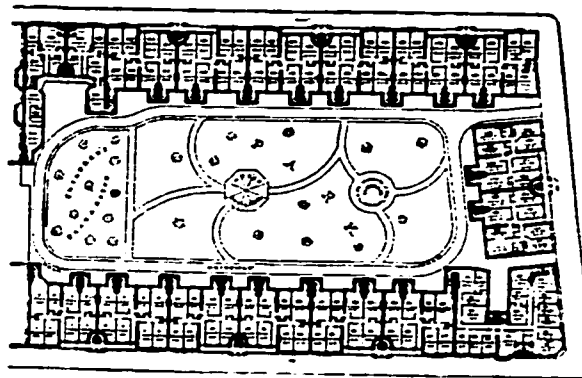


Figure 6. General Plan of the Riverside Buildings
(Riis 227)

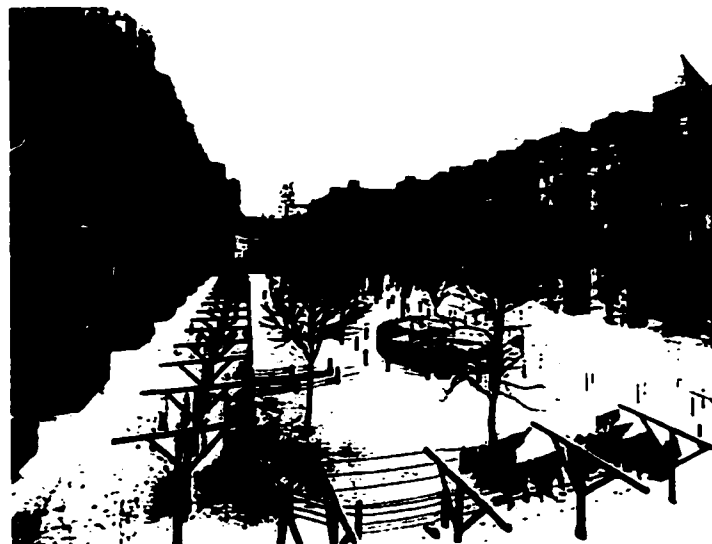


Figure 7. Photograph of the Riverside Buildings
(Wright 126)

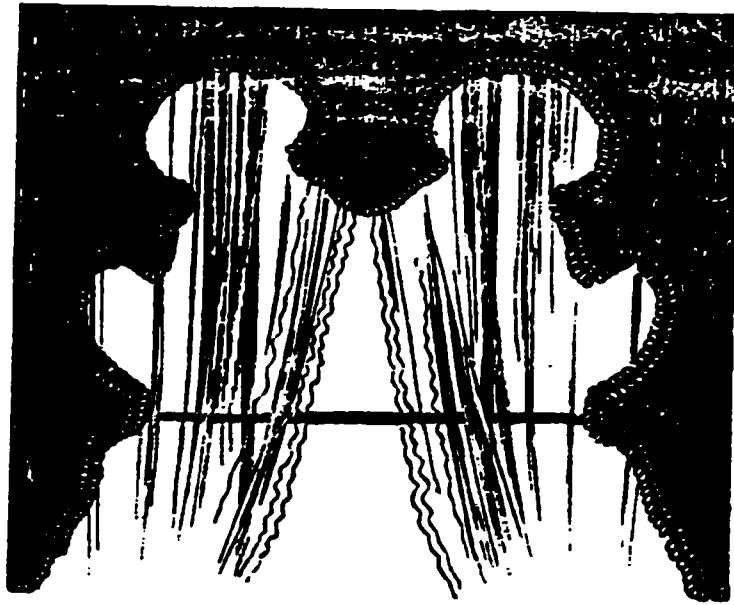


Figure 8. Lambrequins
(Beecher and Stowe 89)

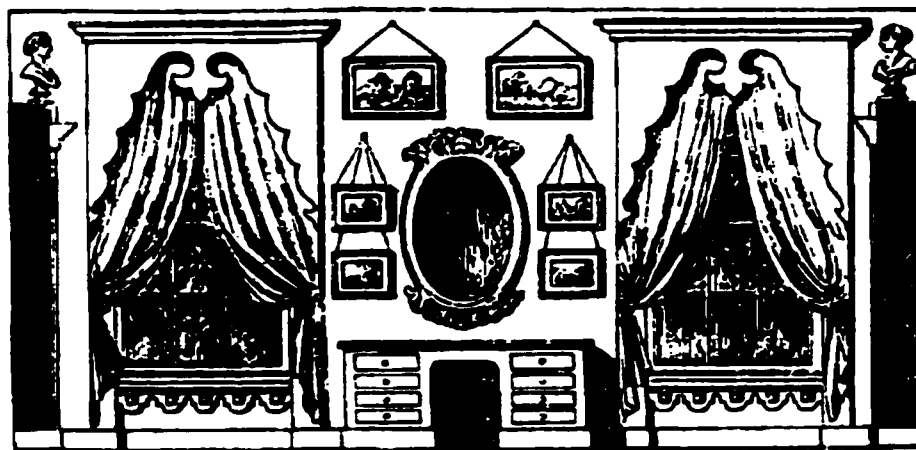


Figure 9. Tenement Decorations
(Beecher and Stowe 444)

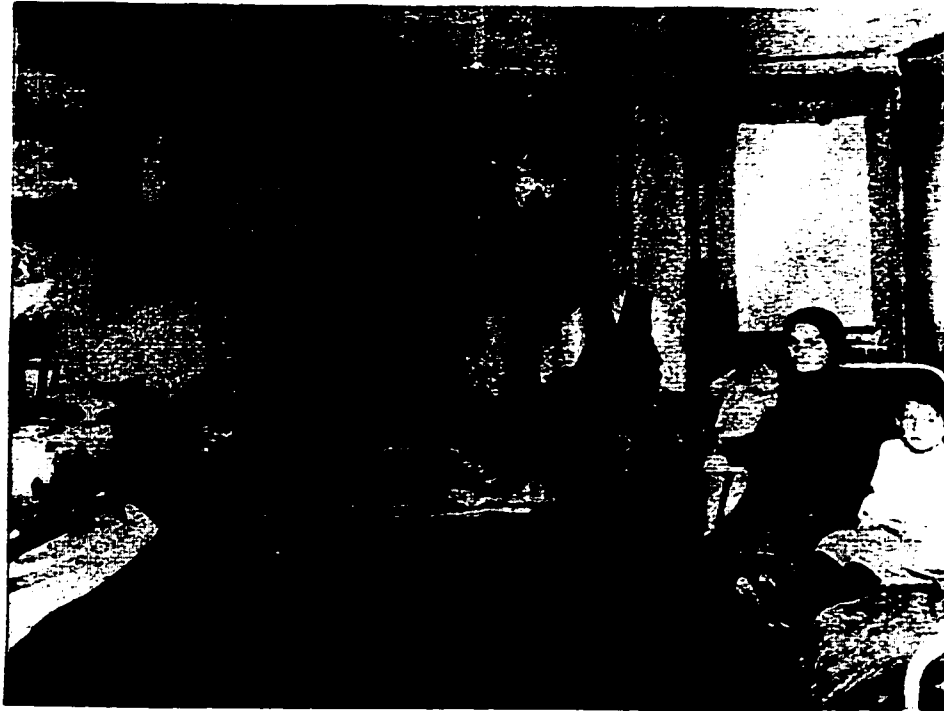


Figure 10. Room in a Tenement, 1910
(Riis 4)



Figure 11. Family Making Artificial Flowers
(Riis 123)

Chapter Four

From Artifact to Investment: Urban Homes and Modern Economies in Wharton and Gilman

... what Popple called society was really just like the houses it lived in: a muddle of misapplied ornament over a thin shell of utility.

—Edith Wharton¹

In 1890, as Jacob Riis was giving the lectures that he would develop into his popular book *How the Other Half Lives*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman published “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the short story that would become her best-known work of fiction. Both texts explore the power of architecture, yet they differ radically on the question of what kinds of environments would be particularly beneficial or dangerous to their inhabitants. As Riis’s work investigates the effects of wretched tenement conditions on the poorest urbanites, Gilman’s story examines architectural oppression in the middle-class home. The protagonist and narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” inhabits a bedroom that exerts a powerful influence on her psyche. The wallpaper, with its “particularly irritating” subpattern of women creeping beneath the “silly and conspicuous front design” increasingly “dwells in

¹Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country* (1913; New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1997), 77. All subsequent references to this text are cited parenthetically.

[her] mind," eventually reducing the narrator to madness.² And yet, the narrator's insanity may offer her an avenue for escaping her oppressive marriage.

Unlike Jacob Riis, Charlotte Perkins Gilman was always eager to acknowledge the possibility that even women, the individuals most constrained and debilitated by actual or symbolic restriction to the home, could gain the agency to liberate themselves by transforming their surroundings. Accordingly, Gilman's protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" rips the paper from the walls, freeing the trapped women—and freeing herself. Changing the environment, as Gilman argues in many of the short stories that followed "The Yellow Wallpaper," offers a way for women to claim control over their lives and participate politically, economically, and socially in a world beyond the home.

Much of Gilman's writing concerns spatial practices; many of her characters attempt to solve personal, social, national, and global problems by remaking the built environment. If for Riis the detached home was the only proper crucible for the production of a moral populace, for Gilman the restrictions placed on women by the detached home deprived the nation of half of its potential contributors. As she argues in *Women and Economics*, "anywhere in lonely farm houses, the women of to-day, confined absolutely to this strangling cradle of the race, go mad by scores and hundreds. . . . In the cities, where there is less 'home life,' people seem to stand it better."³ In Gilman's view, detached homes kept women from participating in a modern culture characterized by the excitement and energy of change, growth, and

²Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1899; New York: Feminist Press, 1983), 18-19.

³Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (1898; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 267.

discovery. If they ignored the modern possibilities for radically remaking the home with amenities like communal kitchens, shared housekeeping, and community child-care, Gilman argued, American women would remain tied to an increasingly meaningless space, missing opportunities to participate in the work of the world beyond the home.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" both offers an early indictment of domestic oppression and begins to examine how women might transform the oppressive spaces of the detached home, a notion Gilman developed further in her later fiction. The short stories Gilman wrote and published in her magazine *The Forerunner* position women as agents for spatial change who wield the potential to transform not only individual women but the world beyond as well.⁴ It was a powerful philosophy at a moment of profound social and architectural change in the American urban landscape. By reconceiving, rearranging, and in extreme cases, rebuilding their domestic spaces, Gilman argued, women could create transformative settings. Their revised homes could transform women and their relationships, opening up possibilities for radical political and economic reform in the process. Many of the domestic arrangements Gilman valorized dispensed with the archaic detached home in favor of a networked domesticity. For instance, mobility, flexibility, and opportunities for connection were built into apartment buildings; Gilman saw in these spaces the opportunity for a fresh start unhampered by historico-spatial oppression.

Gilman believed that architectural reform could give rise to a more advanced civilization. Other observers were more sanguine about the ramifications of these modern revisions to urban domestic spaces. Gilman's

⁴Gilman wrote everything in *The Forerunner*, including personal testimonials for her advertisers' products.

contemporary, Edith Wharton, to name just one, assessed the possibilities of modern American domesticity with a more jaundiced eye. For Wharton, eviscerating history from the home promised nothing less than civilization's doom.

The domestic and economic revolution that would transform American urban society, which is the phenomenon at the heart of Wharton's 1913 novel *The Custom of the Country*, could be read in the development of new, networked homes for New York's middle and upper classes. Most commonly seen as a narrative of the detestable Undine Spragg's social rise through serial marriage, the novel also delineates a transformation of social thought: the fall of history to economics. The novel develops a logic of investment that is most clearly visible in the character of Elmer Moffatt, the Wall Street wunderkind who is also Undine's first (though concealed) husband. Moffatt understands the world in terms of potential. Scheming but patient, he sails through temporary setbacks—financial ruin, personal ridicule, political scandals, and even a divorce from Undine—buoyed by his belief in the future, a belief that is vindicated by his ultimate financial success. This investment logic is paralleled in Undine's rise from Kansas nobody to Fifth Avenue socialite. But unlike Moffatt, who can measure his rise in terms of cash flow, precious objects (including Undine), and eventually, the power to control the values of commodities themselves, Undine's success as an investor can not simply be measured in terms of marriage, class status, money, or sex. As a woman, Undine can not participate in the world of Wall Street. But while she can not trade in stocks, she can trade in settings. Her goal is to find an environment—in this case the ever-elusive Fifth Avenue mansion—that

she can manipulate in order to produce and project the self she wishes to convey. Attaining this setting will come even at the price of selling off her earlier investments in marriage and motherhood, sacrifices Undine, as an investor, is willing to make. While Gilman is interested in an economic transformation that will begin in a revolution of domestic spaces, Wharton conceives of such spatial change as a loss of the past. Wharton's move is not simply to evoke nostalgia for what has been lost, but to claim that the modern subject essentially becomes a person without a past. *The Custom of the Country* charts tradition's losing battle with progress; those who survive the battle are, like Henry James, figurative amputees. Importantly, the struggle between historical and economic values is played out in domestic space.

Although Wharton and Gilman differ in their assessment of how removing history from the home will affect the culture, their major argument is surprisingly similar. For both authors, networked domestic settings, such as the apartment and the luxury hotel, are places where women can exert an economic power that exemplifies the best (for Gilman) and the worst (for Wharton) of the modern economy's possibilities. When the home is seen as an investment, as opposed to a family inheritance, women's power to transform this setting—and to transform themselves in the process—translates into a source of social agency. Though architectural determinism underlies both authors' conceptions of space, the architecture they describe is comprehensible and manipulable. In *The Custom of the Country* and Gilman's apartment stories of the same era, the two authors look in specifically gendered terms at the possible outcomes of women's

manipulations of setting. If for Gilman these outcomes are revolutionary, for Wharton, they are dystopic.

A City of Apartments—A City of Homes?

The two decades spanning the turn into the twentieth century saw major changes in New York City's domestic architecture. While Riis was campaigning for the abolition—or at least, the improvement—of tenement conditions on the Lower East Side, other Manhattanites were profiting from a tremendous rise in real estate values as technology developed that allowed buildings to go up to new heights. High-rise apartments and luxury “apartment hotels” began to appear on New York's skyline, bringing with them an urban domesticity that radically transformed the ways in which New Yorkers conceived of the home.⁵ Manhattan had actually seen construction of its first apartment building (or French flat as it was called) in 1869, and in the years that followed a few other successful experiments in apartment dwellings for the middle class sprang up.⁶ By the 1890's, this trickle had swelled into a bona fide river whose course would alter the ways in which bourgeois New Yorkers inhabited, evaluated, and understood urban space. By 1901, the *Architectural Record* could claim that “To-day New York is a city of apartments.”⁷

⁵“Apartment Hotel” was the term used to describe an apartment building that provided meals and other hotel amenities (telephones, laundry services, etc.) to its customers. Rooms in both luxury hotels and apartment hotels were arranged *en suite*. For a further discussion of the amenities possible in a luxury hotel, see Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁶This first apartment was the Stuyvesant Apartments designed by prominent nineteenth-century architect Richard Morris Hunt. See Elizabeth Hawes, *New York, New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), for a history of early apartments in New York City.

⁷Charles H. Israels, “New York Apartment Houses,” *Architectural Record* 11(1901): 477.

The pace and extent of these changes registered in the actual mobility of middle-class New Yorkers at the turn of the century. Luc Sante notes that New Yorkers' rising fortunes were put on display every year on "Moving Day," which became "ritualized early; for years the first of May was the day all leases expired, and on that day mass migrations would take place, with families lugging eiderdowns and ancestral portraits through the streets . . . The greater the number of moves a family made, the more American they might become. . . ." ⁸ A particularly American mobility was thus linked both to economic gains and the architecture New Yorkers inhabited. The editors of *Architectural Review* noted in 1903, "Such people have generally lived in boarding-houses and family hotels. They are numerous in all American cities. [They are] constantly moving, and have no desire for a residence that is permanent and hampers such freedom of movement."⁹ Urban dwellings, in other words, exact an influence that erodes a desire for permanence or a past.

As they became more mobile, bourgeois Manhattanites also became accustomed to an increased degree of architectural permeability. Virtually every commentator on modern apartments stressed the fact that their inhabitants could see, hear, and smell each other to a greater extent than ever before. In his decision in a New York city court case nicknamed "the baby-carriage case" (the plaintiff sought an injunction to stop the noise produced when his upstairs neighbor pushed a sick child in a baby-carriage while attempting to get the child to sleep), a Judge Van Hoesen noted that "Where a man makes himself one of 100 gathered under one roof . . . he cannot

⁸Luc Sante, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1991), 21.

⁹"Over the Draughting Board: Apartment Hotels in New York City," *Architectural Record* 13 (1903): 88.

expect the immunity from noise and disturbance which he would enjoy in a house occupied by his own family alone."¹⁰ In both density and design, apartments and hotels designed to attract the middle class bore a distinct resemblance to the dreaded tenement.

The tenement, after all, was the form of multi-story dwelling with which a nineteenth-century New Yorker was most likely to be familiar. As Luc Sante points out, tenements had been a part of the New York landscape since the early 1830's, and because the city government was only beginning to inspect and regulate the structures, overcrowding and squalid conditions had become synonymous with the word tenement.¹¹ These crowded, dark buildings had become well-known to the middle classes through Riis's texts and photographs, newspapers, tenement fiction, and even the development of the elevated train. The El's third-story height made possible a new variety of middle-class voyeurism, a pleasure eagerly taken up by Boston transplants Basil and Isabel March in William Dean Howells's 1890 novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes*:

He said it was better than the theater, of which it reminded him, to see those people through their windows: a family party of work-folk at a late tea, some of the men in their shirt sleeves; a woman sewing by a lamp; a mother laying her child in its cradle; a man with his head fallen on his hands upon a table; a girl and her lover leaning over the window-sill together. What suggestion! What drama! What infinite interest!¹²

¹⁰"The Baby Carriage Case," *New York Times*, July 30, 1878.

¹¹Sante, *Low Life*, 29.

¹²William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890; New York, Bantam Books, 1960), 61.

Basil March can only ascribe such drama and suggestion to the domestic scenes he view from the train because the homes are networked; they are visually and architecturally open to the rest of the city. Indeed, their interest is infinite—or seems to be. Even the middle-class Marches decide to live in an apartment when they move to New York.

If the tenement and apartment were similar physically, social and cultural practices worked to distinguish between them. Some observers, of course, felt that apartment buildings were simply another form of tenement; there was no legal difference between the two. But promoters of the apartment trend used newspapers and other print media to distinguish apartments from the tenements that reformers like Jacob Riis so deplored. One commentator, for instance, evoked the etymological difference between the two:

“Tenement” is derived from the Latin verb “tenere” (to hold), and is . . . a building that is designed to hold or to give shelter to the greatest number of persons, at the least possible cost to each tenant.¹³

“Apartment,” however, is an Anglicized derivation of another Latin verb, “parterre” (to divide), and with equal propriety is applied to a dwelling-house, of which the structural and social intent is to separate family from family, and to gratify the desire for privacy that every household naturally feels. . . . Economy, therefore, is the purpose of the tenement—comfort, that of the apartment.¹⁴

Class distinctions become visible when the author rhetorically contrasts economy to comfort. And connected to this class distinction is the spatial

¹³This isn't really true. Luc Sante and Paul Groth point out that tenement dwellers were charged exorbitant rates for even the most undesirable lodgings.

¹⁴Everett N. Blanke, “The Cliff-Dwellers of New York,” *The Cosmopolitan*, 15 (July, 1893): 355.

distinction between crowding and separation. The desire for privacy, here naturalized as an ahistorical, almost instinctual desire, further distinguishes the “natural” upper- or middle-class apartment from the “unnatural” tenement habitations of the lower classes. But the features that made apartments desirable to bourgeois renters were far more technological than “natural.”

To attract middle-class customers like the Marches, who needed reassurance that apartments were *not* tenements, developers cited the cleanliness, convenience and classiness that characterized the gleaming towers. The buildings were given names; they were individual, unique. The opulent Ansonia, for instance, featured “pneumatic tubes, dumb-waiters, push buttons, long-distance telephones, and means of refrigeration as well as heating, so that winter or summer an equable temperature may be maintained.”¹⁵ All of these features, ironically, helped to connect tenants to one another and to the central facilities. These networks, however, simultaneously produced the illusion of separateness among units. Howells’s Isabel March is certainly not immune to the appeal of such amenities; during the couple’s house hunt she reads

the new advertisements aloud with ardor and with faith to believe that the apartments described in them were every one truthfully represented, and that any one of them was richly responsive to their needs. “Elegant, light, large, single and outside flats” were offered with “All improvements—bath, ice box, etc.”—for twenty-five to thirty dollars a month. The cheapness was amazing.¹⁶

¹⁵Albert Bigelow Paine, “The Flat-Dwellers of a Great City,” *World’s Work* 5(April 1903): 3288-3289.

¹⁶Howells, *Hazard*, 40.

Technology and economics together conspired to make the apartment seem to be "in accord with the spirit of the age The modern and up-to-date apartment offers to its tenants a measure of luxury and convenience totally beyond the reach of the man of average income living under his own, 'vine and fig tree.'"¹⁷ The language describing apartment buildings—and constructing for apartments an identity distinct from tenements—blended ideas about privacy, collectivity, separation, and networks. As these qualities mingled, they altered the definition of "home" in the city.

In transforming spatial conceptions of the urban home, apartments changed the ways in which urban domestic spaces were evaluated. Though apartments and luxury hotels often alluded to the past through their names or designs, they stood as architectural symbols of the new. One observer noted nostalgically, "The old New York hotel was a spacious home where people returned year after year, where they knew the proprietor, clerk and the office boy. There was something personal and *gemüthlich* about it. All that is now changed. The modern hotel is a great institution. Its keynote is impersonality."¹⁸ New hotels and apartments erased a sense of the past and the personal, replacing these notions with a modern model of technologically-networked domesticity. As institutions, they reframed the way in which the home was understood economically. Hotels revealed that the urban home was no longer a repository of history; instead it was a real estate investment.

The freedom from tradition exemplified by apartment buildings and hotels both exhilarated and dismayed onlookers. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's mind, such technological and architectural changes could make it

¹⁷Israels, "New York Apartment Houses," 499-500.

¹⁸William Hutchins, "New York Hotels," *The Architectural Record* 12 (1902): 621.

possible for women to transform their living spaces—and thus, their lives—in ways that had never before been possible. Gilman was one of many “idealists [who] saw the era of industrial capitalism, when public space and urban infrastructure were created, as a time when rural isolation gave way to a life in larger human communities.”¹⁹ And yet, observers of the apartment trend, including Gilman, had to ask whether or not the apartment or hotel, lacking history, privacy, and personality, could ever operate as a home. Noted one observer in *The Architectural Record*, “While the apartment hotel is the consummate flower of domestic co-operation, it is also, unfortunately, the consummate flower of domestic irresponsibility. It means the sacrifice of everything implied by the word ‘home.’”²⁰

Moving Walls, Evading History: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Theories of the Home

Yet even at this critical moment in its history, few observers attempted to theorize the notion of home, except in fiction. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a notable exception. She most clearly articulated her assessments of the history and role of the home in two works of non-fiction: *The Home*, published in 1903, develops themes first articulated in her widely-read 1898 volume, *Women and Economics*, in which she explains that while people are shaped by the settings they inhabit, they may in turn have an impact on their surroundings. Environment is constituted, she argues, through human and architectural interaction. Gilman writes: “In spite of the power of the individual will to struggle against conditions, to resist them for a

¹⁹Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981), 11.

²⁰“Over the Draughting Board,” 89.

while, and sometimes to overcome them, it remains true that the human creature is affected by his environment, as is every other living thing.”²¹ By using terms like “affected” instead of “molded,” and by allowing for the possibilities of struggle, resistance, and of overcoming the environment’s force, Gilman sets forth a theory that bridges the notions of architectural determinism and environmental agency. Whatever the setting, in Gilman’s view individuals can strike back at the architecture that so profoundly shapes them. With this spatial agency comes the potential for social change.

Like Riis, Gilman believed the home to be the primary site where architectural and social reform would occur. “Whatever else a human being has to meet and bear,” she writes, “he has always the home as a governing factor in the formation of character and the direction of life.”²² This formative influence, importantly, is not limited to the individual; for Gilman, the notion of home is basic to notions of community. She writes:

Without this blessed background of all our memories and foreground of all our hopes, life seems empty indeed. In homes we were all born. In homes we all die or hope to die. In homes we all live or want to live. For homes we all labor, in them or out of them. The home is the center and circumference, the start and the finish, of most of our lives. We love it with a love older than the human race. We reverence it with the blind obeisance of those crouching centuries when its cult began. We cling to it with the tenacity of every inmost, oldest instinct of our animal natures, and with the enthusiasm of

²¹Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (1898; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1.

²²Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home* (1903; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 4.

every latest word in the unbroken chant of adoration which we have sung to it since we first learned to praise.²³

This primary environment both circumscribes and centers human experience through all of its stages. In terms reminiscent of Darwin and Spencer, Gilman evokes what might be termed race-memory in arguing for the primacy of the home in human society. Both instinctive and acquired, reverence for the home is a primal force. Inspiring love, obeisance, and reverence, it fosters the development of social relations. Establishing the primal quality of attachment to the notion of home is critical to Gilman's central argument about domestic space: that the weight of tradition and history have conspired to contain women in physical and psychic spaces that are relics of a bygone era. Though individual homes may vary, as a shared notion, "home" possesses limitless social power. Because it exerts such an impact within the culture, Gilman sees the home as a site loaded with the potential for vast social reform.

In her fiction and theory, Gilman argues that women have been profoundly shaped by the architecture to which tradition and romance have confined them. Using one of the arresting analogies that pepper her theoretical work, Gilman argues in *Women and Economics* that "The life of the female savage is freedom itself, compared with the increasing constriction of custom closing in upon the woman, as civilization advanced, like the iron torture chamber of romance."²⁴ Restriction to the home, along with the romanticizing of that restriction, has moved women in a direction counter to that of "civilization." But, Gilman notes, no romance can improve these constrained spaces. "Her restricted impression, her

²³Gilman, *Women*, 204.

²⁴Gilman, *Women*, 65.

confinement to the four walls of the home, have done great execution, of course, in limiting her ideas, her information, her thought-processes, and power of judgment. . . ."²⁵ In other words, the domestic architecture that is considered women's primary environment threatens to produce a group of women whose intellectual capability will be as constrained as if it were bounded by the four walls to which Gilman refers. The structures that exemplify past historical conditions cannot help but enforce the outmoded and destructive patterns among their inhabitants. They are particularly destructive to the women confined therein.

In these texts, Gilman's focus on domestic space makes explicit one of her central and recurring concerns, namely, that the home should not be considered separately from public life, and that to do so has a deleterious impact on human society. In "the peculiar and artificial opposition of 'the Home,' and 'the world'," she writes, "we have roughly ascribed all the virtues to the first and all the vices to the second."²⁶ Because home and world are fundamentally connected, Gilman argues, what happens in the home has profound implications for what happens in the world, and vice versa. Women cannot be confined to the home—even figuratively—without causing problems for the broader society.

For Gilman, the solution to the problem of women's physical and psychological confinement is architectural, though the architectural changes Gilman proposes vary greatly. In *The Home*, for instance, she refrains from endorsing any particular type of structure. Instead, she alludes to a type of temporary home that spatializes mobility and change. Like Edward Bellamy, whose novel *Looking Backwards* inspired her, Gilman sees potential for

²⁵Gilman, *Women*, 65-6.

²⁶Gilman, *Home*, 273.

social progress in the very sites decried by other writers, like Wharton and James, as particularly destructive of the social order—apartments, apartment hotels, and professionalized boarding houses. She considers the apartments and hotels of turn-of-the-century cities to be spaces where collective action and radical realignment of family relations can occur, always through a manipulation of setting. Indeed, these networked spaces become models for transforming spatial, and thus social relations. She writes, "From the most primitive caravansary up to the square miles of floor space in our hotels, the public house has met the needs of social evolution as no private house could have done."²⁷ Gilman cites the bachelor apartment as a working model for the modern temporary home and sees this model taken up and transformed for women and families in the family hotel. For her, the critical factor separating hotels from the traditional home is the very thing that aligns them with modernity—their transience. "The family home is more and more yielding to the influence of progress. Once it was stationary and permanent, occupied from generation to generation. Now we move, even in families . . . move we must under the increasing irritation of irreconcilable conditions."²⁸ The "irreconcilable condition" of containment within a generations-old design brings about a mobility requiring a new mode of architecture. As modernity exerts its influence, it is reflected in designs that allow for and express mobility and transience. These new homes are temporary settings for the individuals and families who occupy them. In abandoning the old paradigm, families sacrifice the historical—the family homestead and the weight of generations—for a setting that reflects and produces new economic and social relations.

²⁷Gilman, *Women*, 265.

²⁸Gilman, *Women*, 265.

In hailing the progress and modernity built into urban living spaces as a signal of hope for the nation's women, Gilman built upon a tradition and joined a chorus of her contemporaries who designed and applauded "material solutions [to women's exploitation] involving both economic and spatial change."²⁹ Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward* was certainly the best-known of the fiction that celebrated new forms of urban housing.³⁰ In Bellamy's Boston of the year 2000, apartment dwellers savor meals cooked in communal kitchens, listen to music piped into their apartments, and enjoy a far higher standard of living than their nineteenth-century forbears who were still attached to their detached houses.

While writers like Bellamy enthused about the possibilities of the new architecture, others raised concerns about permeability similar to those voiced about the tenements. Like them, Gilman observes that the home is daily invaded by foreign bodies: germs, insects, servants. But she links these intrusions to the detached home, and not to the modern multi-family dwelling. "Sewer gas invades the home; microbes, destructive insects, all diseases invade it also; so far as civilized life is open to danger, the home is defenceless."³¹ In stark contrast to the apartment alarmists, Gilman proposes to solve the permeability problem by opening the home even further to the possibilities of connection. She argues for the potential of urban networks:

Our houses are threaded like beads on a string, tied, knotted, woven together, and in the cities even built together; one solid house from

²⁹Polly Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 20.

³⁰Bellamy's novel had both intellectual and political appeal; it influenced thinkers like John Dewey and Thorstein Veblen as well as the platform of the Populist Party. Erich Fromm, foreword to Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1888; New York: Signet Classic, 1960), v-vi.

³¹Gilman, *Home*, 32.

block-end to block-end; their boasted individuality maintained by a thin partition wall. The tenement, flat, and apartment house still further group and connect us; and our claim of domestic isolation becomes merely another domestic myth.³²

Gilman offers here a wonderful image of networked domesticity. Our homes are already connected, she argues. The architecture groups and connects, and only the ideology of detachment—the “boasted individuality” to which Gilman refers—remains, but only as a “thin partition” between domestic isolation and the promise of collective action. Contained individuality thus becomes a myth, not simply in the tenement and the flat, but in the single-family home as well. Isolation, the dangerous parallel to individuality, is not simply a myth, but an ideology that is not simply passé but a threat that must be resisted.

Many of Gilman’s contemporary readers have emphasized that for Gilman so-called private spaces were in fact fundamentally implicated in the workings of the “public sphere.” In their introduction to *Women and Economics*, for instance, Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson note that Gilman’s “analysis stresses the connection between work and home, between public and private sectors.”³³ In a similar vein, Polly Wynn Allen, in *Building Domestic Liberty* argues, “By virtue of its practical integration of the realms of domesticity and employment, the feminist architecture she recommended would allow women at last to assume their rightful place as equal citizens and workers in society at large.”³⁴ Gilman, of course, was not alone in this project. Dolores Hayden notes that Gilman was among the

³²Gilman, *Home*, 330.

³³Gilman, *Women*, xi.

³⁴Allen, *Building*, 5.

nineteenth-century urban "activists [who] did not divide private life from public life, domestic programs from public programs."³⁵ While the connections between Gilman's non-fiction and constructions of space have been examined, the literary constructions of space in her fiction, which also develops a continuum between private and public space, have not been adequately explored.

Gilman most pointedly articulates the possibilities for constructive resistance to the environment's force in her short fiction. From 1909 to 1916, Gilman published her journal *The Forerunner*, augmenting her social scientific lectures and articles with numerous short stories. Gilman's narratives present no shortage of blueprints for reinventing domestic spaces and ideologies. Many of these stories are variations on a common plot: a woman dissatisfied with some aspect of her life—her marriage, her house, her children, her economic prospects, or a combination of these factors—gets an opportunity or is forced to change her circumstances. Often in the absence of her husband and children, or as a result of a husband's death, work, maturity, or extended foreign travel, the woman reinvents her surroundings. Among other projects, her heroines sell their homes, take in or eject relatives, design and build new houses for new or reconfigured marriages, develop collective farms, and run guest houses and community centers. In short, they bring to fruition a range of architectural projects that all result in greater happiness for the individual, the family, and the community. Loveless marriages regain their romance. Destitute women become economically successful. Determined artists find creative ways to unite love and career.

³⁵Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 28.

In her narratives of domestic transformation, economic change always precedes the personal. For instance, in "A Surplus Woman" (1916), a group of women develop a collective that allows them to channel domestic talents into profitable enterprise, so that eventually they can achieve the personal goals that have eluded them in traditional economic arrangements. And in "A Partnership" (1914), an unhappy marriage is transformed after the wife parleys her talent for bread-making into a Baking Company that provides healthy, delicious food to the community at a fair price. As Gilman writes in *The Home*, "The change in the position of woman, largely taking place in the home, is lost to general view; and so far as it takes place in public, is only perceived in fractions by most of us."³⁶ Women do attain intellectual fulfillment, happy marriages, positive relationships with children, and standing within the community, but all of this comes about only after economic transformations have taken place.

Gilman's short stories are didactic; most of the stories teach women to see their surroundings as transformable—and as investments. In story after story, she outlines the potential psychological and economic profits that may accrue to women who possess the creative ability to produce a vision of home that extends beyond its four walls. One of her most appealing stories, "Making a Change" (1911), centers around a family who all share a small apartment in an unnamed city. The harried husband, Frank, suddenly notices that his depressed wife, testy mother, and cranky infant have been transformed into a model family. What could have caused such a change? The short answer is transformed domestic space. His mother has taken over the adjacent apartment and the building's roof to start a "children's garden,"

³⁶Gilman, *Home*, 325.

a prototypical day-care center where the son has blossomed, and which has allowed the wife to happily return to her career as a musician in her child-free time. Gilman's fictive representation of this transformed space highlights that the family can choose either to be passively shaped by, or to become active shapers of the urban landscape. That choice allows women a degree of agency that benefits society at large.

The equilibrium achieved in these urban spaces is always beneficial to men as well. "Making a Change," for instance, is written in part from the perspective of the husband, Frank, who is nothing but pleased with the changes that occur, even before he figures out precisely what has happened. And while Frank is initially taken aback by the women's arrangements, the story ends with his acceptance of the new situation. "'If it makes all of you as happy as that,' he said, 'I guess I can stand it.' And in after years he was heard to remark, 'This being married and bringing up children is as easy as can be—when you learn how!'"³⁷ Although there may be initial disappointments, Gilman's manipulation of setting is always about improving the world for both sexes. But crucially, this means abandoning historical notions of space and gender in order to develop and profit from new economic and spatial arrangements.

Women must escape the home as a repository of history if they are to claim agency in a new era characterized by rapid change. Gilman's theoretical and fictional assessments of the home share a critical assumption about subjectivity: that it is relational, and is always formed in relation to environment. The heightened mobility and flexibility that Gilman claims both necessitate and result from the networked city position her characters as

³⁷Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Making a Change," *Herland and Selected Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, Barbara H. Solomon, ed. (1911; New York: Signet Classics, 1992), 275.

inheritors of the modern identity I have traced from the mid-1800's. Many of Gilman's contemporaries shared the idea that a landscape increasingly characterized by connections and mobility would shape a new urban subject. Among them was Wharton, who, like Gilman, associated the modern American woman with architecture and economics. In Wharton's fiction this modern subject finds its clearest expression in what critics have termed Wharton's "money novel," *The Custom of the Country*.³⁸ Like Gilman's short stories, *Custom* explores the ramifications of turning the home as a repository for history into a space where women wield economic power.

Many of Wharton's actual and fictional homes are sites where the past is stored and displayed, and where the objects that constitute individual and family histories are housed. In her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, for instance, Wharton charts her own family history by detailing the settings of origin that are central to the family's identity. Her particular sensitivity to interiors makes domestic spaces critical to Wharton's conceptions of self and culture. She writes, "My photographic memory of rooms and houses—even those seen briefly, or at long intervals—was from my earliest days a source of inarticulate misery."³⁹ Remembering the details of housekeeping is painful to Wharton for two reasons: first, because each object she recalls evokes memories of a departed time and people, and secondly because few of the houses she recalls ever lived up to her fastidious standards for beauty and taste. Wharton recapitulates Gilman's claim that "The home is an incarnate past to us. It is our very oldest thing, and holds the heart more deeply than

³⁸See, for instance, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*, 2nd ed. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995), and John Vernon, *Money and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

³⁹Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (1934; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 28.

all others."⁴⁰ Her novels become the articulation of this memory and its meaning. The idea that a home might be transformed from a site where history, especially family or class history, is preserved, into merely another site for conspicuous display both fascinates and repulses Wharton.⁴¹

Home and History

The conflict between history and economics in the home is central to *The Custom of the Country*; it becomes the device through which Wharton both marks a social sea change and asks what becomes of history itself in the face of a rising tide of consumerism. Wharton's concern echoes the anxiety expressed by Henry James in *The American Scene*. As I have noted, with the demolition of his familial home, James feels "the effect . . . of having been amputated of half my history." As he looks at the site of his childhood home and contemplates the erasure of his built past, James draws a parallel between the fate of his personal history and the fate of history itself in the modern metropolis:

whereas the inner sense had positively erected there for its private contemplation a commemorative mural tablet, the very wall that should have borne this inscription had been smashed as for demonstration that tablets, in New York, are unthinkable. . . . the glory of any such association is denied, in advance to communities tending, as the phrase is, to 'run' preponderantly to the sky-scraper.⁴²

⁴⁰Gilman, *Home*, 29.

⁴¹After all, Wharton was adept at acquiring and constructing new settings for herself throughout her life. See R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography*. (New York: Harper, 1975).

⁴²Henry James, *The American Scene* (1907; New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 71.

The “mural tablets” to which James refers are commemorative plaques noting the past uses of particular sites—common features in European cities. Because New York has become a landscape of flux and change, the only places where permanence can be achieved are in James’s memory and in his fiction. His memory of a past located in a particular space must recede further into his interior as what he earlier termed the “hotel-spirit” comes to dominate New York.

For Wharton the “hotel-spirit” is embodied in Undine Spragg, whose narrative reveals the fate of a society dominated by people molded by structures that have essentially been constructed on the rubble of history. Wharton’s argument about the impact of the hotel-spirit expands James’s analysis. In Wharton’s novel it is not simply exterior space that “runs to the skyscraper” or hotel, or apartment, but interior space—subjectivity itself—as well.

Undine’s marriages dramatize the novel’s warring paradigms of the house as a site of living history and the home as consumable commodity. Undine, a native of Apex, Kansas, comes to New York with her parents, hoping to trade her unusual beauty and some of her father’s wealth for a marriage into New York’s socially elite class. But as the requirements for membership in the elite shift from family associations to simple wealth, Undine divorces and remarries accordingly. Undine’s husbands, Ralph Marvell, Raymond de Chelles, and Elmer Moffatt, in their various relations to home and space, embody these warring cultural impulses. Each of Undine’s husbands represents differing degrees of consciousness toward the role the home plays in constructing “American” culture.

Ralph Marvell, Undine's first husband, offers the clearest parallel to James's persona in *The American Scene*. Like James, Marvell's sense of self revolves around a notion of history that has been constructed in large part by his childhood home. Marvell's relationship to his family home also mirrors Wharton's personal construction of home as repository for history, a space where physical and spiritual pasts merge with—and produce—the present. Before he marries Undine, Ralph lives in the family home in Washington Square, a site that embodies a familial past. "Ralph Marvell, mounting his grandfather's door-step, looked up at the symmetrical old red house-front, with its frugal marble ornament, as he might have looked at a familiar human face" (76-7). Just as the house becomes almost human to Marvell, the people who live there have become one with the house itself. "'They' were his mother and old Mr. Urban Dagonet, both, from Ralph's earliest memories, so closely identified with the old house in Washington Square that they might have passed for its inner consciousness as it might have stood for their outward form" (77). Wharton constructs a bodily connection between home and self that emphasizes rootedness and connection to the past. In this space that blends together past and present, Ralph constructs his life among the "dim portraits of 'Signers' and their females" that dominate the spaces of his old New York home (91). In the process he develops a subjectivity that is itself outmoded. Christopher Gair points out that "Wharton explicitly links the disappearance of the 'old' families with the earlier passing of other American cultures," and Ralph Marvell is a vestige of just such a disappearing past.⁴³ The deep interplay between structure and subjectivity in the Marvell home makes it a living relic.

⁴³Christopher Gair, "The Crumbling Structure of 'Appearances': Representation and

Unlike his modern, mutable contemporaries, Undine and Elmer, Ralph has an inner essence, a fixed interior that links him to a type of subjectivity no longer advantageous in the modern city:

[T]here was a world of wonders within him. As a boy at the seaside, Ralph, between tides, had once come on a cave—a secret inaccessible place with glaucous lights, mysterious murmurs, and a single shaft of communication with the sky. . . . And so with his inner world. Though so coloured by outside impressions, it wove a secret curtain about him, and he came and went in it with the same joy of furtive possession. (80)

Like Henry James in *The American Scene*, Ralph's interior is at odds with the moving, changing, networked city that surrounds him. His sense of detachment from the haze of the outside world is ultimately untenable if Ralph is to enter into relationships with the modern women who people his world. Undine, of course, is indifferent to this kind of detachment. Even Clare Van Degen, the cousin whose "light foot had reached the threshold" of Ralph's interior, is herself entwined in the same networks of economics and consumption that Undine more obviously represents. Maintaining his "world of wonder" in the modern city can only lead to isolation and destruction for Ralph Marvell.

As a vestige of an earlier type of subjectivity, one defined in part by his conception of intact interior space, Ralph cannot acquire the penetrability and transformability necessary to survive in the modern networked city. When his friend Charles Bowen recognizes this, he feels "the pang of the sociologist over the individual havoc wrought by every social readjustment:

it had so long been clear to him that Ralph was a survival, and destined, as such, to go down in any conflict with the rising forces" (249). The rising forces to which Bowen alludes are of course consumption and mobility, the very forces that will eliminate history—and a unified subjectivity—from the American home.

Although Undine will desert him and demand a divorce, Ralph Marvell's eventual decline into suicide is hastened less by her actions than by the penetration of his interior by the publicity networks so central to his wife's perceptions of the world.

. . . as he sat in the Subway on his way down-town, his eye was caught by his own name on the front page of the heavily headlined paper which the unshaved occupant of the next seat held between grimy fists. The blood rushed to Ralph's forehead as he looked over the man's arm and read: "Society Leader Gets Decree," and beneath it the subordinate clause: 'Says Husband Too Absorbed In Business To Make Home Happy.' . . . For the first time in his life the coarse fingering of public curiosity had touched the secret places of his soul, and nothing that had come before seemed as humiliating as this trivial comment on his tragedy. (300)

Here, Wharton signals the repulsion and violation that Ralph experiences with the penetration of the "secret places of his soul" by the media. The griminess of his unshaved neighbor, the proximity and mingling forced by the subway, and the proclivity of media and transportation networks to erode the boundaries that would otherwise separate Marvell from the other passengers all coalesce in Wharton's description of reading as a physical molestation, a "coarse fingering" that is "humiliating." Mingled with this

violation is a potent sign of another equally alarming shift—the transformation of the home from ideal to commodity. The “Happy Home” that Ralph has apparently destroyed becomes a headline that sells his story. “Home” has become a come-on that ensures the narrative’s continued profitability as it makes its way into readers’ letters, editorials, pulpits, and finally the “Family Weekly, as one of the ‘Heart problems’ propounded to subscribers, with a Gramophone, a Straight-front Corset, and a Vanity-box among the prizes offered for its solution” (300). Ralph’s personal history thus becomes fodder for syndication, his dissolving marriage merely one weekly “Heart problem” among countless others. And the dissemination and standardization of Ralph’s narrative goes hand in glove with the dissolution of the notion of home so central to Ralph’s old-fashioned subjectivity. Home has been fully incorporated into the network of the media, revealed as a desirable commodity along the lines of the Corset and Vanity-box the magazine promises to readers who can make the Home Happy again.

Undine Spragg: The Hotel Spirit

In *The Custom of the Country*, the home without history emerges as a distinctly American invention. It indicates that every aspect of the culture may be bought and sold. And significantly, the mobility and rootlessness associated with this commercialization of the home is consistently linked with the hotel. “It was natural that the Americans, who had no homes, who were born and died in hotels, should have contracted nomadic habits,” Wharton’s French characters think (441). Mobility is here figured as a disease “contracted” from the architecture Americans inhabit. Clearly, the modes of

living that accompany certain architectural practices have, at least in the eyes of outsiders, the potential to shape a culture that reflects the structures it builds. This deterministic perspective was voiced by writers from Henry James to journalists in the popular press. As a writer in *The Cosmopolitan* noted, "The children of hotel residents become precocious, wayward, and self-assertive, and learn from strangers many things the knowledge of which should be kept from children."⁴⁴ Children, as I argue in Chapter Three, are consistently described as easily influenced by their surroundings. The notion that children might be imbued with the "hotel-spirit"—that in a single generation a conception of the past could be wiped out—is clearly alarming.⁴⁵

Thus, hotel and apartment culture come to represent what is uniquely and detestably American: a lack of concern for the past, exemplified in and enforced by the ever-changing, always temporary American architecture. The hotel-ness of American life is precisely what is at issue in the scene that marks the disintegration of Undine Spragg's next marriage. Raymond de Chelles, whom Undine marries after Ralph Marvell's death, is a French aristocrat whose title and wealth retain nuances of the past and of history that are entirely foreign to Undine. After Undine suggests selling the Chelles family château, Saint Désert, the shocked Chelles responds:

You [Americans] come among us from a country we don't know, and can't imagine, a country you care for so little that before you've been a day in ours you've forgotten the very house you were born in —if it wasn't torn down before you knew it! . . . you come from hotels as big as towns, and from towns as flimsy as paper, where the streets haven't

⁴⁴Everett Blanke, "Cliff-Dwellers," 356.

⁴⁵Later, Chicago School sociologist Robert Park would refer to the Jew as the "city man, the man who ranges widely, lives preferably in a hotel, in short, a cosmopolite." See Conclusion.

had time to be named, and the buildings are demolished before they're dry, and the people are as proud of changing as we are of holding to what we have . . . (468)

Here, Chelles links an American pride in mutability to the flimsy scrim that passes for permanence in the United States. The "house you were born in" represents the past, which is continually obliterated before it has even had the chance to imprint itself on a child's psyche. It is a far cry from Ralph Marvell's youth. The only home Chelles can imagine producing Undine is a hotel that transforms a house into a town, a flimsy, unnamed structure that exudes only the new and will fade as soon as something newer appears. And of course, he is not far from right—Undine's hotel-influenced subjectivity represents the future of the urban nation.

According to Chelles, history is eviscerated from the modern American home as the nation becomes a setting dominated by investment, where the home is exemplified by the hotel. The American home Chelles deplores, ironically, is the very setting young Undine Spragg has always wanted to inhabit. As a child, Undine yearned for the hotel life presented as the height of social fashion in the New York society columns that were syndicated in the Apex papers. Hotels offer the glamour, albeit gilded, to which her Kansas home could never aspire.

Undine's modern status depends on her relationships to modern surroundings, and her quest to inhabit the perfect setting reveals qualities of mobility, desire, and adaptability that align her with modern characters in earlier texts. Her desire for new environments, her talent for adapting to them, and most importantly, her ability to move from one setting to a more attractive one signal a desire and opportunity for class mobility that is

registered through Undine's ever-changing settings. Another quality that aligns Undine Spragg with other modern fictional urbanites like Ruth Hall and Verena Tarrant is her ability to use the particular logic of her day, in Undine's case, a logic of investment, in order to achieve her goals. She summons up spatial capital in order to participate in an imaginary exchange that transmits itself from the imaginary to the actual. Her marriages operate as investments through which she may attain both the mobility and the settings she desires. Undine shapes her own environments on the assumption that once the setting is established, the reality she desires for herself will develop. In other words, in order to transform herself, Undine must create the setting that makes the transformation possible.

Undine knows what she wants—"the appropriate setting to a pretty woman" (471). Like Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, Undine is highly attuned to environment, but in contrast to Lily, whose most appropriate setting is the immobilizing *tableau vivante*, Undine's favorite settings are dynamic. Undine moves from one place to another on the assumption not only that it should be appropriate to her, but that the appropriate surroundings will in some way transform her. In *The Custom of the Country*, as in Gilman's work, the ability to manipulate environment emerges as the greatest societal power a woman can possess. In the American tradition, this idea harks back at least as far as notions of Republican motherhood and Catharine Beecher. But the way in which Undine mobilizes this tenet of femininity becomes an impulse far removed from Beecher's formulations. For instead of desiring settings appropriate to raising model families or developing "Christian neighborhoods," Undine wants to inhabit settings that will elevate her social and economic standing.

Like her notions of class status, Undine's ideas about what constitutes a desirable setting are shaped in large part by newspaper articles. As an inhabitant of Apex, Kansas, she was introduced to New York society by the Sunday papers. Indeed, the very media representations that prove to be Ralph Marvell's eventual undoing have initiated Undine into the world of Fifth Avenue mansions. Syndication has made available the "lively anecdotes of the Van Degens, the Driscolls, the Chauncy Ellings and other social potentates whose least doings Mrs. Spragg and Undine had followed from afar in the Apex papers" (27). Once in New York, Undine's initiation into the workings of society is furthered in conversations with Mrs. Heeney, a "'society' manicure and masseuse" who tracks her clients' activities from her voluminous bag of newspaper clippings (22). Undine's comprehension of the societal world she wishes to enter becomes a collage of published words and images that leave her with far more sense of where she wants to be than of who she aims to become.

Like Mrs. Heeney's clippings, Undine's impressions of settings are a somewhat random collection of impressions haphazardly gathered. From her wide, if desultory, reading, Undine has learned, for instance, that the private home has ceased to function as an appropriate setting for "fashionable people." In its place has risen the hotel—in the terminology of the day, the apartment hotel—a structure that combined the suites of rooms available in apartments with the modern services of the luxury hotel. Communal kitchens and professional managers helped to "preserve certain aristocratic niceties—structure, service, a semblance of ceremony—that suited the times. While [apartment hotels] offered the luxuries of the hotel

that so captured the social fancy, it did not carry its stigma, its reputation for high and risqué living."⁴⁶

The narrator frames Undine's desire to live in hotels as an outgrowth of her urge to escape the detached home, the "yellow 'frame' cottage" in a "squalid suburb" where she was born (60-61). To supplement her time spent away at boarding school, Undine and her parents enjoy

the comparative gentility of summer vacations at the Mealey House. . . . The tessellated floors, the plush parlours and organ-like radiators of the Mealey House had, aside from their intrinsic elegance, the immense advantage of . . . making it possible for Undine, when she met Indiana in the street or at school, to chill her advances by a careless allusion to the splendours of hotel life. (61)

The tone of Wharton's description makes clear that the Mealey House lacks real status. Yet, the plush interior the narrator disparages is a mark of class distinction for the young Undine. To Undine the significance of the hotel lies in the social standing that is conferred upon her. Her hotel experiences allow her, for instance, to snub her old friend Indiana Frusk. By participating in hotel life, Undine enters the national culture of wealth and consumption heralded in the papers she reads. At the same time, Undine's temporary occupation of the hotel's networked spaces signals both a desire and an opportunity to transform herself, to find settings that have the characteristics she constructs as desirable through her readings of national print culture.

Undine's experiences in American hotels trace the historical development of the luxury hotel, a trajectory that is emphasized by Undine's awareness of housing trends and her desire to follow them. The Mealey

⁴⁶Hawes, *New York*, 45.

house is the Spraggs' first stop on a hotel itinerary that includes summer stays in "a staring hotel on a glaring lake," a Virginia resort featuring "an atmosphere of Christmas-chromo sentimentality that tempered her hard edges a little," and, in Skog Harbor, Maine, a "bare-weather-beaten inn, all shingles without and blueberry pies within . . . exclusive, parochial [and] Bostonian" (62-64). Undine's "pioneer blood" leads her from setting to setting, and in each place she endures a "terrible initiation" that reveals to her that there is "something still better beyond, then—more luxurious, more exciting, more worthy of her" (62). This always-unfulfilled desire becomes a hallmark of Undine's personality, a characteristic that aligns her with Elmer Moffatt and marks both of them as modern. It is reminiscent, too, of Carrie Meeber's eternal desire in *Sister Carrie*. As the narrator admonishes at *Sister Carrie's* conclusion, "In your rocking chair, by your window dreaming. shall you long alone. In your rocking chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel."⁴⁷ Just as Carrie's desire increases amid the displays of the department store and the stage, Undine's desire is heightened by the permeable hotels she inhabits.

The connections that Undine makes with other guests within hotels feed her desire for ever more fashion, luxury, and novelty. When she befriends a woman from Richmond at a midwestern hotel, for instance, "the southern visitor's dismay, her repugnancies, her recoil from the faces, the food, the amusements, the general bareness and stridency of the scene" convince Undine that only an Eastern hotel will do for the following summer's vacation (61). But in the midst of Undine's enjoyment of Virginia, "again everything was spoiled by a peep through another door"

⁴⁷Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1907; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 84.

(62). This “peep” is only made possible by the proximity among guests facilitated by the hotel architecture; Undine can pick up “scraps of Miss Wincher’s conversation. . . [by] straining her ears behind a column of the long veranda, [and obtain] a new glimpse into the unimagined” (63). In allowing apparently private exchanges to enter into publicly accessible space, the hotel facilitates much the same kind of connection that the press does. The hotel’s spatial arrangements offer Undine a glimpse of the world beyond.

This image of peeping is reminiscent of Coverdale’s spying in *The Blithedale Romance*, but here Undine does not simply desire to order reality, as Coverdale does; she wants to acquire the networked setting as a new backdrop for her performance of self. This difference is highlighted by the very accessibility of the settings Undine admires. While in *Blithedale* Zenobia’s boarding house and Coverdale’s hotel were indeed for rent and thus purchasable, at least temporarily, Hawthorne does not present them as consumable products. In *Custom*, however, Undine’s assumption that her surroundings are temporary, attainable, and always changeable is combined with a new faith in consumerism’s ability to fulfill desires, and to provide ever-new settings. Indeed, increasingly desirable settings are all available to Undine—for a price. Significantly, though, they are not simply products. They are investments.

The cost of each new setting is exacted from Undine herself at times, but more frequently she extracts capital from one man or another in order to gain access to the setting she most desires at the moment. Sometimes, these settings are highly public, such as the opera box she extorts from her father in order to display herself to Ralph Marvell. In the investment logic of the

novel, Undine is speculating—but with space, not with a tangible resource such as the hairwavers with which her father began his financial rise. Like Elmer Moffatt with his railroads, political influence, and speculative real estate ventures, Undine must invest in a somewhat intangible resource and endure the vicissitudes of the market in order to achieve material gain. And so Undine moves from setting to setting, gleaning from each a new set of resources and connections to help her contemplate, and eventually to make new investments.

At times, Undine is attracted to settings that will mirror her—or at least reflect the version of herself she wishes to display. In that sense, the Spragg's first New York hotel residence, the Stentorian, is an ideal setting for Undine:

Celeste, before leaving, had drawn down the blinds and turned on the electric light, and the white and gold room, with its blazing wall-brackets, formed a sufficiently brilliant background to carry out the illusion. So untempered a glare would have been destructive to all half-tones and subtleties of modelling, but Undine's beauty was almost as vivid, and almost as crude, as the brightness suffusing it. Her black brows, her reddish-tawny hair, and the pure red and white of her complexion defied the searching decomposing radiance: she might have been some fabled creature whose home was in a beam of light.

(36)

This setting both mirrors and amplifies the crudity and vividness that Undine displays at the novel's opening. The modern backdrop with its electrified glare is appropriate for Undine's particular look and harsh radiance; the "destructive" and "decomposing" effects of the modern electric

brightness cannot be sustained by anything less resilient than Undine's impenetrable, yet pliable beauty.

Yet ironically, though Undine's beauty is amplified by the electric glow, in terms of the trends by which Undine sets such store, vivid and crude are out—and "half-tones and subtleties" are in. Indeed, if she stays in the setting of the Stentorian, she risks amplifying her harsh and crude features to the extent personified by her friend Mabel Lipscomb. A veritable doyenne of the hotel world, Mabel moves easily among "the lofty hotels moored like a fleet of battle-ships along the upper reaches of the West Side: the Olympian, the Incandescent, the Ormolu," as well as "the equally lofty but more romantically-styled apartment houses: the Parthenon, the Tintern Abbey, or the Lido" (40). Mabel has come to embody these settings; as Undine sits with Mabel in the coveted Opera box, she sees "Mabel, monumental and moulded while the fashionable were flexible and diaphanous, Mabel strident and explicit while they were subdued and allusive" (71). "Flexible and diaphanous," the wealthy New Yorkers Undine observes from her opera box exude qualities that she wants to emulate precisely because of who demonstrates them. Though if the fashionable people were strident and explicit, Undine would want to be, too, she is eager, and able, to emulate the qualities prized by those in possession of money and social power.

Conveniently, Undine's desire to embody whatever qualities exemplify the height of fashion dovetails nicely with her long-held fascination with dressing up, creating scenes, and assuming different identities. But Undine does not simply wish to be like the elite, she wants to join the elite group while retaining her distinctiveness. As with the

vaudeville mimics popular in Undine's day, for Undine "to imitate [is] not simply to copy, it [is] also to create something new."⁴⁸ And the mutable, flexible identity she wishes to construct both appropriates and transforms the flexibility and diaphanousness she emulates in the members of the social elite. Because personality is on display, it is available for the mimic's pleasure and profit. Like the vaudeville mimic, the hotel-spirit makes personality public—and in becoming public, personality becomes property.

Undine as Modern

The mimic's mutability both arises from and is sustained by variety in environment. For Undine, role playing comes naturally; in many ways it is the one form of expression open to her. Ironically, this ability to play roles is the one unchanging element in Undine's personality. As a child, she "had cared little for dolls or skipping ropes. . . . Already Undine's chief delight was to 'dress up' in her mother's Sunday skirt and 'play lady' before the wardrobe mirror. This practise had outlasted childhood" (36). Indeed, Undine has become a woman whose desire to play roles has evolved into a sometimes-debilitating habit: "Undine was fiercely independent and yet passionately imitative. She wanted to surprise everyone with her dash and originality, but she could not help modeling herself on the last person she met" (34). Undine's desire for originality is predicated upon imitation; she will attempt to construct an identity that resembles those presented to her as desirable. Significantly, the hotel culture she embraces allows her to do just that.

What, then, can distinguish the imitation from the real? Clearly, this is one of the novel's central concerns. A society that exemplifies "human

⁴⁸Susan Glenn, "'Give an imitation of me': Vaudeville Mimics and the Play of the Self," *American Quarterly* 50 (March 1998): 69.

nature's passion for the factitious, its incorrigible habit of imitating the imitation" becomes a "slavish imitation," demanding "a prompt and reverent faith in the reality of the sham they had created" (243). The nouveau riche society is disparaged within the novel by observer Charles Bowen as "a phantom 'society,' with all the rules, smirks, gestures of its model, but evoked out of promiscuity and incoherence while the other had been the product of continuity and choice" (243). Bowen's observations show that the issue of mimicry is not simply consigned to vaudevillians or performers. Indeed, the process of entering this "new class of world-compellers" becomes a test of a person's imitative powers and ability to believe in the imitation. This concern with imitating the imitation is both a problem of passing convincingly and believing in the "sham" the imitations have produced. The cultural capital gained through class mimicry adds an interesting dimension to the recurring problem in Wharton's fiction of the blurring of class lines and bloodlines epitomized in *The Custom of the Country* by the parallel marriages of the "subtle" Ralph Marvell to the "explicit" Undine, and of Ralph's pale cousin Clare Dagonet to the very explicit Peter Van Degen. Undine's desire to imitate, combined with the sense of setting produced by the papers, has made New York the only stage that will allow her to play the nebulous role of wealthy and privileged woman that she desires. At the same time, however, the hotel culture of New York changes her, emphasizing and rewarding her most urban qualities. Her habitation of networked space, then, is a part of the dialectic that helps to constitute her as particularly modern.

Wharton's descriptions emphasize that Undine embodies the urban. If not completely "a creature without a soul," as Cynthia Griffin Woolf

claims, Undine psychologically mirrors and physically suits the city's spaces of consumption, display, mobility and desire.⁴⁹ Her drive to consume is not limited to the men she seems to devour. In fact, it is founded on a desire for things. In Paris, for example, "Her senses luxuriated in all its material details: the thronging motors, the brilliant shops, the novelty and daring of the women's dresses, the piled-up colours of the ambulant flower carts, the appetizing expanse of the fruiterers' windows, even the chromatic effects of the petit fours behind the plate glass of the pastry-cooks: all the surface-sparkle and variety of the inexhaustible streets of Paris" (250). The sensual appeal of the Paris experience emphasizes Undine's high degree of responsiveness to metropolitan surroundings. She is intoxicated by the physical sense of luxury in the colors, the fabrics, and the foods. But these displays do not simply attract the urban woman in her guise as consumer. Indeed, Undine is not simply consumed with consuming; she is equally preoccupied with the act of displaying herself.

The display in which Undine engages throughout the novel, whether in the New York Opera or the Parisian Grand Luxe Hotel, clearly arises from urban spaces. In her relationships, Ralph Marvell observes, "She wanted to enjoy herself, and her conception of enjoyment was publicity, promiscuity—the band, the banners, the crowd, the close contact of covetous impulses, and the sense of walking among them in cool security. Any personal entanglement might mean 'bother,' and bother was the thing she most abhorred" (202). "Publicity, promiscuity," and "close contact," all experiences of the urban landscape, are the sensations Undine desires. The combination of proximity, security, and promiscuity without bother extracts

⁴⁹Wolff, *Feast*, 225.

the threat from the urban experience and transforms it into an enjoyable publicity. The city allows Undine to construct a personality that is public and consumable, to her a mark of class distinction. After all, she has been raised on newspaper accounts of the rich and famous; from Undine's perspective, publicity helps to solidify one's status. In urban spaces, along with the projection of self comes a cool anonymity that promises to protect whatever interior Undine might possess.

Along with her facility for consumption and display, Undine expresses a modern fascination with mobility. She is always on the move. To Undine "the noise, the crowd, the promiscuity beneath her eyes symbolized the glare and movement of her life" (250). In what she calls her "abundant present," Undine is surrounded by and caught up in movement. Her penchant for mobility both makes her a perfect hotel-dweller and ensures that no one place will ever satisfy. Her drive to move necessitates multiple dwelling places, long wedding journeys, and commutes between city and country in all of her marriages. And eventually, it draws her back to Elmer Moffatt, the charismatic itinerant speculator turned "Railroad King" with whom she first eloped (by train) as a teenager. Though that first marriage was quickly annulled, Undine and Elmer both combine a drive to move with a passion for settings, a combination that marks them both as modern, and destines them eventually to reunite.

Transforming the Setting

But Wharton's novels always come back to questions of space. Her dialectic model of relations between subject and setting echoes the pattern

constructed by James in *The Bostonians*. That is, as Undine transforms her environment, her modern mutability allows her to adapt herself to it. Her business then becomes designing environments that will allow her to develop the kinds of qualities she wishes to project.

This spatial dialectic links many of Wharton's works to one another. *The Age of Innocence*, for example, charts the transformation of a class through the decisions they make about domestic spaces. Ellen Olenska's decision to inhabit a bohemian neighborhood uncharted to the Fifth Avenue "tribe" prefigures her ostracism from that tribal world; Catherine Mingott's move to the wilderness near the nascent Central Park marks her as a maverick and Ellen's lone ally; May and Newland Archer's reconsolidation of their wealth and class position by building a house that replicates and reinforces the spatial arrangements and relations of their own childhood homes cements their position within the family and class. Similarly, in *The House of Mirth*, Lily's ability to adapt to the setting she inhabits is her salient feature. Like Undine, Lily knows which settings will suit her and she blends in accordingly. "There were moments when she longed for anything different, anything strange, remote and untried; but the utmost realm of her imagination did not go beyond picturing her usual life in a new setting. She could not figure herself as anywhere but in a drawing room, diffusing elegance as a flower sheds perfume."⁵⁰ Undine, in contrast, can think beyond her current circumstances. The advantage that allows Undine to avoid a demise like Lily's is her ability to transfer economic skills from Wall Street to Fifth Avenue. She manipulates the settings she inhabits precisely

⁵⁰Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905; New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 79.

because she sees settings not simply as static backgrounds, but as mutable environments that can in turn change her.

Undine's mutability allows her to adapt to the settings she enters, but her insatiable desire leads her to seek out ever-more fashionable milieux within which to move. She both reflects and is shaped by her consumable, transformable environments. Later, having joined the smart expatriate set in Paris, Undine stands out to "sociologist" Charles Bowen as strikingly adaptable: he notices that Undine "isolated herself in a kind of soft abstraction; and he admired the adaptability which enabled her to draw from such surroundings the contrasting graces of reserve" (247). Ever changing, Undine has used her skills as a mimic and her facility for selecting and adapting to environments to embody the "flexible and diaphanous" members of the upper class she admired from her New York opera box. Throughout the text, Wharton emphasizes that this environmental dialectic of selection and adaptation cannot be separated from the economic relations of investment it structures and mirrors.

As she reflects the environments she enters, Undine transforms them. In some cases, the changes Undine effects are mild, even benign, as shown by her habit of transforming her temporary lodgings in hotels and rented houses into appropriate backdrops for her current role. For instance, when the Marvell family rents a country house in upstate New York, Undine creates a setting which will emphasize the qualities she wishes to project. In this case, she wishes to embody "wife" and "mother."

In the low-ceilinged drawing-room. . . Undine had adapted her usual background of cushions, bric-a-brac and flowers—since one must make one's setting 'home-like,' however little one's habits happened

to correspond with that particular effect. Undine was conscious of the intimate charm of her *mise-en-scène*, and of the recovered freshness and bloom which put her in harmony with it. (207)

Undine's home is a set, a *mise-en-scène* that is not a home but that can be sufficiently home-like. Undine needs this kind of setting in order to capitalize on another investment—a flirtation with Peter Van Degen accompanied by a flurry of checks and gifts. She must project "wife" so that she won't have to cross the line between sycophant and mistress. The logic of setting as investment, though, is not lost on Van Degen, who exclaims, "Look here—the installment plan's all right, but ain't you a bit behind even on that? . . . Anyhow, I think I'd rather let the interest accumulate for a while" (207). Van Degen refers here to his affair with Undine, a relationship in which he invests "installments" of jewelry, dresses, and money toward the ultimate payoff of her personal and sexual favors. The world of the novel is a world of investments and returns, and Undine's success in it can only come through entering, inhabiting, and transforming her various settings so that she can profit from them.

Eventually the logic of investment infects all of Undine's homes. When she marries the French nobleman Raymond de Chelles, Undine moves into a house farther from the American urban core, and indeed, deeper into history. Yet, she continues to align her settings with American networks of consumption. The groundwork for these efforts has been laid during Undine's marriage to Ralph Marvell. If the Washington Square house has served as a psychic sanctuary for Ralph, his "old brown room" has become the inner sanctum. And yet, this protected space is dominated by Undine, or at least, by her image. "The walls and tables were covered with

photographs of Undine, effigies of all shapes and sizes, expressing every possible sentiment dear to the photographic tradition" (297). The photograph, that modern, reproducible form of portraiture, has replaced for Ralph the family portraits that dominate the rest of the house. History has been replaced by the multiple images that represent the collage of modernity.

This transformation foreshadows the powerful impact Undine's investment approach to environment will have upon her marriage to Chelles, during which Undine comes to inhabit domestic spaces that enforce far more regimented gender and family roles than those with which she is familiar. Though the clippings-obsessed Mrs. Heeney confuses the Hôtel de Chelles with an American hotel: "oh, they call their houses hotels, do they? That's funny: I suppose it's because they let out part of 'em," of course the French ancestral home is the American hotel's opposite (420). It is steeped in history, structured by tradition, and imbricated only in economic relationships that approach the feudal. At least at first.

In both Saint Désert and their Paris hôtel, the Chelles's family honor and responsibilities structure domestic space in ways that Undine cannot understand. For instance, Undine believes that as the wife of the oldest Chelles son she should wield a powerful influence in determining the uses of the family property. And yet, decisions about who should occupy which apartments of the hôtel become transactions in which "she did not weigh a feather" (436). Even so, into this space dedicated to "the huge voracious fetish they called The Family," Undine finds a way to introduce the forces of the market (442).

The problem with Saint Désert is that as a repository for history—and in particular, family history—it does not register on Undine's internal ledger.

She must convert the home into a consumable product in order to comprehend and thus exert power over it. Undine is practiced at such transactions. During her marriage to Ralph Marvell, for instance, she decides to have the jewels from a pair of family rings reset. Undine gives the ancient stones a more modern appearance, wrests them from the incalculable valuation system of family and history, and returns them to the logic of the market, the hotel-spirit that organizes her perceptions of the world. In the case of the Marvell jewels, Undine also removes the stones from the bodily, human connection they once signified. Out of the physical settings that gave the rings a familial meaning because they were worn by family members, the stones become pure commodity. A similar evisceration of history occurs with the Chelles's tapestries.

Before Undine arrives, the tapestries that decorate Saint Désert's long grey hallways are imbued with three sets of value: familial, historic, and aesthetic. Though the most famous tapestries were gifts from Louis XV, the majority have been produced by the generations of women who have inhabited the chateau: "The innumerable rooms of Saint Désert were furnished with the embroidered hangings and tapestry chairs produced by generations of diligent châtelaines, and the untiring needles of the old Marquise, her daughters and dependents were still steadily increasing the provision" (442). This familial tradition inscribes a history that goes beyond nation, and, it is implied, almost beyond memory. "Dynasties have fallen, institutions changed, manners and morals, alas, deplorably declined; but as far back as memory went, the ladies of the line of Chelles had always sat at their needle-work on the terrace of Saint Désert" (443). Through their intensely physical connection with the women of Chelles, as well as their

centuries-old presence within the château, the tapestries function as living relics of the family history, shaping the current inhabitants' perceptions of the past and present, and reinforcing the home's function as a site of history. Family heirlooms become metonyms for the nostalgic connection to the family home. Together, home and heirloom become history. As Sara Quay points out, "the narrative with which heirlooms are attributed includes the story that the family tells about itself through its possession of the inherited thing."⁵¹ And as aesthetic pieces, the "splendid" tapestries are without peer (423). Containing "the fabulous pinks and blues of the Boucher series," they are the kind of rare work that reduces even a practiced dealer to a series of "Ah—"s (455).

But even though they are imbued with complex value within and outside of the family, by Undine's logic, the tapestries are worthless until they are converted to the monetary value they represent. Unsold, the tapestries are merely trophies signifying a coveted social status. From the moment when Undine first sees them, they become the distinguishing feature of a desirable setting. After her first visit to the château, she reports to a friend: "Chelles said he wanted me to see just how they lived at home, and I did; I saw everything: the tapestries that Louis Quinze gave them, and the family portraits, and the chapel, where their own priest says mass, and they sit by themselves in a balcony with crowns all over it" (256). Clearly, these elements of the Chelles's existence—tapestries, portraits, and chapel—are the very aspects the family considers highly valuable. History, lineage, and religion are central to their identity. But in her report to her friend, Undine transforms the château into a stage set, describing it as a "real

⁵¹Sara Quay, "Edith Wharton's Narrative of Inheritance," *American Literary Realism* 29:3 (1997): 28.

castle, with towers, and water all round it, and a funny kind of bridge they pull up" (256). The tapestries, the portraits, and even the priest become nothing more than set decorations. As with everything in Undine's universe, eventually the value of her choice must come down to its value on the open market. Because the tapestries form a part of the setting she considers to be desirable and appropriate, Undine assumes that they must be worth millions. As she points out to Raymond, "There's a fortune in this one room: you could get anything you chose for those tapestries" (453). The setting Undine considers so appropriate to her beauty slips from the mesh of the multiple meanings that construct it and becomes a site for profiteering. Undine even goes so far as to suggest to Raymond that he sell Saint Désert—or at the very least, the tapestries.

Undine's modern move to eviscerate history from the home at last succeeds when she is reconnected with Elmer Moffatt, the once and future husband she has concealed from everyone except for her parents. Undine's kindred spirit, Moffatt embodies a mutability similar to her own. When Undine sees him she notes that "something in his look seemed to promise the capacity to develop into any character he might care to assume; though it did not seem probable that, for the present, that of a gentleman would be among them" (107). Like Undine, Elmer can reinvent himself in order to profit from new opportunities. He is also highly mobile; his gender and lack of personal history allow him to move from place to place far more rapidly than Undine can. When together, the couple never stay in one place for very long. Both of their weddings are preceded by rapid train rides to new states where marriage is famously temporary. But even more significant than this shared mobility is their shared fascination with settings. Though

Gilman argues that if the home has been the site of women's economic and personal demise it can also be the site for her rejuvenation, Wharton does not particularly gender the ability to remake settings for economic reasons. Both Undine and Elmer are practiced decorators. For Wharton, the transformation of a setting's function from historical truth-telling to consumable advertisement emphasizes that skill in manipulating setting is a quality of modern subjectivity.

To Undine, Elmer represents settings. "While he talked of building up railways she was building up palaces, and picturing all the multiple lives he would lead in them" (461). Highly modern, her vision of success has departed completely from the unifying ideals of family and history and has lighted instead on the multiplicity that plenty of money can buy. In fact, Moffatt's ability to construct settings becomes a large part of his appeal for Undine.

She liked to see such things about her—without any real sense of their meaning she felt them to be the appropriate setting of a pretty woman, to embody something of the rareness and distinction she had always considered she possessed; and she reflected that if she had still been Moffatt's wife he would have given her just such a setting, and the power to live in it as became her. (471)

As she sits in Saint Désert, the setting she has chosen as particularly appropriate for herself, Undine reflects that there is something lacking in her marriage to Raymond de Chelles. She seeks a power that only someone like Moffatt can bestow; his sheer wealth will allow her actively to inhabit the settings she chooses. To live among the chateau's artifacts is one thing, to "live in [a place] as became her" quite another. Undine wants the

opportunity to adapt herself to the beauty and monetary worth of her surroundings.

Like Undine, Elmer is particularly conscious of environment; his rise in the world of Wall Street is legible in the office settings he constructs for himself. In the early days of his success Elmer can only imitate the settings of wealth, power and prestige to which he aspires. But as Moffatt makes money, he redecorates:

Moffatt's office had been transformed since Ralph's last visit. Paint, varnish, and brass railings gave an air of opulence to the outer precincts, and the inner room, with its mahogany bookcases containing morocco-bound "sets" and its wide blue leather arm-chairs, lacked only a palm or two to resemble the lounge of a fashionable hotel. Moffatt himself, as he came forward, gave Ralph the impression of having been done over by the same hand. (389)

Just as Undine attempts to manipulate her settings to create a desirable reality, Elmer must give the impression of material success if he is to achieve it. Wharton's emphasis that these "sets" are copies signals both the presence of wealth and Moffatt's pretensions; his office is nothing more than a "fashionable hotel."⁵² By the novel's end, the super-rich Moffatt has again redecorated, filling his office with unique objects such as "a lapis bowl in a renaissance mounting of enamel . . . a vase of Phenician glass that was like a bit of rainbow caught in cobwebs . . . [and] a little Greek marble." Only the "false colours and crude contours of the hotel furniture" and the "old numbers of *Town Talk* and the *New York Radiator*" remain to mark Moffatt's origins and date his recent acquisition of wealth (487). Further, all

⁵²See Quay, "Inheritance."

of Moffatt's acquisitions are removed from history. "On every side some rare and sensitive object seemed to be shrinking back from the false colours and crude contours of the hotel furniture" (487). As the country's "greatest" collector, Elmer Moffatt repeatedly enacts the modern deracination of objects from their pasts. Every object he collects shares that fate, especially the Saint Désert tapestries, which he wants to remove from their centuries-old resting places and assign to perpetual transit throughout the Continent in his private railroad car.

Moffatt's work as a collector is to transform historic value into something purely monetary. He has the power not simply to purchase objects but to set their value, creating a new matrix of worth to replace historical, familial, and aesthetic measures. Mrs. Heeney's clipping bag attests to Moffatt's power: "It is reported in London that the price paid by Mr. Elmer Moffatt for the celebrated Grey Boy is the largest sum ever given for a Vandyck. Since Mr. Moffatt began to buy extensively it is estimated in art circles that values have gone up at least seventy-five per cent" (500). "The necklace, which was formerly the property of an Austrian Archduchess, is composed of five hundred perfectly matched pearls that took thirty years to collect. It is estimated among dealers in precious stones that since Mr. Moffatt began to buy the price of pearls has gone up over fifty per cent" (501). In creating settings for himself and eventually Undine, Moffatt revalues the objects he chooses. The "Railroad King" uses a fortune gained in mobility in order to make valuable objects portable. No longer historicized, they are thoroughly commodified.

This erasure of historical contexts is so obvious that it is particularly noticeable to Paul Marvell, Ralph and Undine's young son. Paul, like his

father, has grown up in homes that embody history and family. He has been surrounded by familial artifacts throughout his life. In Washington Square, of course, there were the family portraits that mirrored not only the house's ancient inhabitants, but Paul himself. When he moves to Saint Désert to live with Undine and Chelles, he enters "a drawing-room hung with portraits of high-nosed personages in perukes and orders," and meets "a circle of ladies and gentlemen, looking not unlike every-day versions of the official figures above their heads" (413). Attuned to these resemblances, Paul is clearly struck by the differences between these settings and the one Moffatt has constructed. After his mother remarries Elmer Moffatt, Paul wanders Moffatt's new Paris hôtel, "wondering whether the wigged and corseleted heroes on the walls represented Mr. Moffatt's ancestors, and why, if they did, he looked so little like them" (497). The portraits, like the tapestries and objets d'art in Moffatt's office have all been converted from a familial meaning to an economic one. The reconfiguration of the family that accompanies the reconstruction of the urban home is highlighted in these objects. Elmer and Undine display ancient portraits, but of course they are not ancestral; they are trophies that announce the victory of economics over history. But the evisceration of history from the home leaves a wound, an absence marked by desire.

The notion of home as history depends on maintaining a class and family structure antithetical both to the physical and class mobility and to the eternal desire that Undine and Elmer share. While the networked city offers Undine a setting in which she may indulge her passions for consumption, display and mobility, at her core there is another modern quality, a desire that is always unfulfilled. She is composed, in part, of "deep-seated wants for

which her acquired vocabulary had no terms" (460). And this lack of fulfillment is a permanent condition. Like Carrie Meeber in *Sister Carrie*, Undine is condemned to eternal desire, as the last line of *The Custom of the Country* emphasizes: "She could never become an Ambassador's wife; and as she advanced to welcome her first guests she said to herself that it was the one part she was really made for" (509). Though Undine can choose and manipulate her settings to get what she wants at a given moment, what her modern surroundings produce is a self rooted only in desire. And these qualities, while denying her the opportunity to represent the nation as an Ambassador's wife, would align her with the urban subjects that were beginning to be studied by sociologists just as *Custom* was being published. To sociologists like Robert Park, Undine's ability to move between worlds would come to seem uniquely modern and American.

Conclusion

It was so easy and so pleasant to think about freedom and cities. . .

—Nella Larsen¹

In the introduction to his 1916 essay, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment," Robert Park, a leading member of the Chicago School of urban sociology, defines the city as "a state of mind," and claims that, "we are mainly indebted to our writers of fiction for our more intimate knowledge of contemporary urban life." Park continues, "But the life of our cities demands a more searching and disinterested study than even Emile Zola has given us in his 'experimental novels,'" and he calls for the development of a new mode of inquiry into the operations of the urban.² Though Park implies in this ground-breaking essay that social science in general and sociology in particular will provide this "more searching and disinterested study" of the urban, it is clear that the novel's "intimate knowledge" has laid the foundation for Park's holistic study of the city and its inhabitants.

¹Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*, 1928; in *Quicksand and Passing*, ed. Deborah McDowell (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 135. All subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²Robert Park, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 93.

Throughout this project I have argued that nineteenth-century American novelists anticipated the new social scientific approaches to the city that emerged in the early twentieth century. These novelists revised the language, traditions, and forms of European writing about cities by incorporating the American belief in environmental determinism—that spaces shape their inhabitants—into their studies of the urban landscape. The dialectic nature of this relationship between setting and subject is animated by the fantasies of containment and of dissolution that structure ideas about and physical manifestations of home in the city. When the relationships between environment and subjectivity so central to urban novels began to be of significant interest to social scientists, sociologists like Park acknowledged that their work—and perhaps the work of sociology as a discipline—was to extend and quantify the theoretical project urban novelists had begun.

In attempting to get beyond novels, Park called for the development of an approach to urban study that would bring together a variety of approaches to spaces and people: ecology, anthropology, and geography, to name three. He aimed to use the quantitative and qualitative tools of these disciplines in order to “discover how these physical vessels [the built environments of the city] shape the emotional, human experience of city men.”³ That is, Park wanted to use the tools of social science in order to understand the relationships between people and physical structures in the city. Sociology, Park hoped, could lay bare the workings of architectural determinism as well as the possibilities for human agency in the urban environment. Park writes, “We may, if we choose, think of the city, that is to say, the place and

³Richard Sennett, “An Introduction,” *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 13.

the people, with all the machinery and administrative devices that go with them, as organically related; a kind of psychophysical mechanism."⁴ From ecology, Park derives the notion of environment as a system; neither the physical environment nor its inhabitants are comprehensible out of context. Structures and people together construct one another and their environment. This ecological notion of environment parallels Park's dialectic model of urban relations, a model we have seen outlined in nineteenth-century novels about the city. Park writes, "The city possesses a moral and physical organization, and these two mutually interact in characteristic ways to mold and modify one another."⁵ Certainly this dualism surfaces in work by Hawthorne, Fern, James, Wharton and Gilman. If the city and person mutually shape one another, then the systems of the city necessarily effect the ways in which urbanites are constituted both inside and out. Thus, Park aligns his ground-breaking sociological work with a long tradition of urban theory explored in fiction.

In "The City," Park defines a causal relationship between the networked quality of urban space and the erosion of individual ties to geographic or psychic homes. Park writes, "The easy means of communication and of transportation, which enable individuals to distribute their attention and live at the same time in several different worlds, tend to destroy the permanency and intimacy of the neighborhood."⁶ The state of mind that is the city resembles "a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate. This makes it possible for individuals to pass quickly and easily from one moral milieu to another, and encourages

⁴Park, "City," 92.

⁵Park, "City," 93.

⁶Park, "City," 98.

the fascinating but dangerous experiment of living at the same time in contiguous, but otherwise widely separated, worlds."⁷ Like Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians*, who is made of many pieces, the city is many different things simultaneously. City people are defined not by their presence in one world, but, like Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country*, by the ease with which they move from one realm to another. The notion that the city makes possible a liminal life lived between worlds is clearly visible in many of the novels I have analyzed. For urban men and women, as Park noted, the networks of the modern city allow for liberation from the constraint of their particular pasts, and perhaps, liberation from the past in general. Park develops his "City" thesis that the increased mobility facilitated by networks of transportation and communication will help to emancipate urban dwellers from the constraints of past expectations with more force in his 1928 essay "Human Migration and the Marginal Man."

In "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," the liberation Park ascribes to the networked city is personified in an urban subject who is "migrational" and therefore "marginal." In cities, Park claims, the international migrations that have historically taken place through invasion and war have been replaced by individual mobility within the networked modern city. The mobile individual is distinctively urban, liberated and marginal; he or she is "freed for new enterprises and associations" while "striving to live in . . . diverse cultural groups."⁸ Park notes: "The effect is to produce an unstable character This is the 'marginal man.' It is in the mind of the marginal man that the process of civilization is visibly going on,

⁷Park, "City," 126.

⁸Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 131.

and it is in the mind of the marginal man that the process of civilization may best be studied."⁹ Because he is "unstable," the marginal man embodies the possibility of destabilizing the status quo. Yet Park does not question whether such internal instability is psychologically tenable.

Significantly, the "process of civilization" to which Park refers involves rupturing the notion of home. "Migration," he writes, "is not to be identified with mere movement. It involves, at the very least, change of residence and the breaking of home ties."¹⁰ To Park, hotel dwellers and hoboes equally represent this condition of mobility/marginality, for both are "unsettled and mobile."¹¹ That home should play a role in Park's inquiry is unsurprising considering its centrality to the tradition of urban novels Park claims as his predecessors. Here, Park reanimates the definition of home as contained in order to explain the unique freedoms cities offer, contrasting the city's emancipation to the home's constraints:

A very large part of the populations of great cities, including those who make their homes in tenements and apartment houses, live much as people do in some great hotel, meeting but not knowing one another. The effect of this is to substitute fortuitous and casual relationship for the more intimate and permanent associations of the smaller community.¹²

Because it is essentially a hotel, the city and all of its distinctively urban forms of housing cannot operate as homes. Hotels, apartments, tenements—all of the forms of city homes that elicit the powerful dual fantasies of containment and dissolution in urban novels—are here

⁹Park, "Migration," 131.

¹⁰Park, "Migration," 136.

¹¹Park, "Migration," 136.

¹²Park, "City," 125-6.

excluded from the category of home. The intimacy and permanence of home are subsumed for Park by the luck and randomness of the not-home. And with this substitution comes the loss of the ambivalence that complicates and humanizes novelistic inquiries on the fate of home in the city.

If, as Park suggests, novels are ripe to be superseded by another form of inquiry on the urban subject, it makes sense to look at Park's work along with a novel of his historical moment in order to see what makes novelistic constructions of the urban subject retain their potency even after the advent of sociological approaches to the city. For instance, Nella Larsen's 1928 novel *Quicksand* explores the issue of marginality so central to Park's work, yet offers a distinctive mode of conceptualizing this marginality. *Quicksand* and "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" can both be seen as outgrowths of the decades-long focus in fiction on the relationships between urban domesticity and modern subjectivity. Both texts figure the modern urban subject as marginal and mobile. However, Larsen and Park's different approaches yield disparate results. Park's supposedly more "disinterested" study celebrates modern rootlessness, while Larsen's more subjectively nuanced novel is more ambivalent. In *Quicksand*, concerns about homelessness are insistently linked to the possibilities and dangers of nationlessness; thus, the novel helps to clarify why the urban remained a source of national anxiety well into the twentieth century.¹³

Larsen and Park's urban subjects are extreme versions of the city people who precede them in fiction; for both authors, homelessness becomes the salient feature of the urban subject. In these texts, the city becomes something of an international space, a space that both attracts and gives rise

¹³These anxieties would be central to the work of nativist authors of the 1930's. See Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

to what Park calls the "marginal man." Race and nation break down in Park's conception of the city—it becomes a global space populated by and exemplified in the "city man, the man who ranges widely, lives preferably in a hotel, in short, a cosmopolite."¹⁴ The hotel is both an attractive setting for and a salient force in constructing the city man. It is not scandalous but cosmopolitan. To Park, the city represents freedom; it is a site where "the emancipated individual invariably becomes . . . a cosmopolitan. He learns to look upon the world in which he was born and bred with something of the detachment of the stranger."¹⁵ Though the estranged cosmopolitan is often a threatening figure, for Park detachment allows for emancipation and cultural progress. As Richard Sennett notes, "Park saw the city as the medium for the emergence of free men, whose personal development could transcend general societal standards, whose innovations could provide the basis for historical change in urban society itself."¹⁶ Innovation and emancipation both derive from the mobile condition characterizing those who inhabit the networked city.

Quicksand parallels three strands of Park's argument about the spatial nature of urban subjectivity. Like Park, Larsen links mobility and marginality to modernity; she too depicts the modern subject as living between worlds. The figure of the Mulatto, who for Park embodies the "personality type" of marginality, is personified in the novel as the complex half-Danish, half-Negro character Helga Crane. But the mobility along the margins so emancipating in Park's work is more ambivalently conceived by Larsen. Though Larsen presents Helga as a fragmented character, one who

¹⁴Park, "Migration" 141.

¹⁵Park, "Migration," 137.

¹⁶Richard Sennett, "Introduction," 16.

can move between different settings, classes, and occupations, and a character for whom any individual role is ultimately destructive, Helga's overwhelming desire to belong, to ally herself with "her people" without "naturalizing," ultimately undermines her ability to play with the many roles a fragmentary urban setting offers her (7). Through Helga, and through the notion of home, Larsen explores the ramifications of urban life for a subject who embodies Park's marginality. For both authors, the city operates as a space beyond nation; *Quicksand* explores the psychological effects of this mobile expatriate condition. Like Park's work, Helga's narrative resonates with the concerns about the destabilized self, the permeable, the mobile, the public, and the modern so critical to earlier urban novels in the United States. And like these other texts, *Quicksand*'s constructions of urban subjectivity are animated through the spatial operations of the urban home.

Larsen establishes the home as a site of concern in *Quicksand*'s epigraph and first scene. She begins by quoting a verse of Langston Hughes's poem about self-hatred and reconciliation, "Cross." "My old man died in a fine big house,/My Ma died in a shack./I wonder where I'm gonna die,/being neither white nor black." Deborah McDowell notes that the poem, "featuring a speaker of mixed parentage, captures one aspect of Helga Crane's dilemma in *Quicksand*" (243). The issue of racial mixing is of course critical to the novel. But while the whole of Hughes's short poem concerns biraciality, this is the only verse that connects race to setting, and specifically to the types of homes inhabited by the speaker's white father and black mother. The speaker's uncertainty about his own position in the racialized logic of homes associates the state of being mulatto with the condition of homelessness, the novel's central concern.

Further emphasizing the centrality of home and homelessness to the novel is *Quicksand's* first scene, which introduces Helga Crane by describing the setting she has created for herself in the dormitory room she occupies as a teacher at Naxos, a fictional all-black school that combines elements of the Tuskegee Institute and Fisk University.¹⁷ Within this highly-structured institution, Helga has constructed a temporary home. Like Olive Chancellor's drawing room in *The Bostonians*, Helga's room is a place for "intentional isolation," a refuge from the restrictive "educational community of which she [is] an insignificant part at Naxos" (1). Like Olive, Helga has taken great care to select items for her surroundings that will make her room a beautiful haven. "Furnished with rare and personal taste," the room contains vibrant decorations: a blue Chinese carpet, brightly-covered books, a brass bowl "crowded with many-colored nasturtiums," and a stool covered in "oriental silk" (1). Helga has chosen objects that appeal to her and that make her appealing—she is "well fitted to that framing of light and shade" (2). Helga has created a space that defines and protects her.

Though *Quicksand* begins with a scene that echoes the contained domesticity of Olive's drawing room or Ruth Hall's cottage, the stakes of home are clearly higher for Helga. Ruth and Olive enter the urban world of publicity and must learn to exhibit the characteristics associated with a modern subjectivity: mobility, permeability, and publicness, that Helga already exhibits. But whereas Olive retains her drawing room and Ruth reconstructs her family, when Helga leaves Naxos she leaves her only home. Thereafter, she will live in hotels, the homes of friends, employers, and

¹⁷See Deborah McDowell's Introduction to *Quicksand and Passing*, note 23.

relatives, and eventually, a caricature of home's containment in the rural South. Homeless, Helga represents modernity in the extreme.

Throughout the novel, Helga seeks home, but her marginal position between classes and races makes it impossible for her to be contained happily. Modern and rootless, Helga is markedly detached both from her past and from the present. She never knew her father; she has been disowned by her stepfather and disavowed by her uncle. Her mother is dead. At Naxos, whose social structure is organized according to family pedigree, Helga reflects that she has

No Family. That was the crux of the whole matter. . . . You could be queer, or even attractive, or bad, or brilliant, or even love beauty and such nonsense if you were a Rankin or a Leslie, or a Scoville; in other words, if you had a family. But if you were just plain Helga Crane, of whom nobody had ever heard, it was presumptuous of you to be anything but inconspicuous and conformable. (8)

In contrast to Park, for whom home and family promise only a stultifying status quo, for Helga the notion of family brings with it the privilege of rebellion Park only associates with the city. It is through family, Helga believes, that one can detach oneself from the expectations of society and achieve the freedom to be bad or brilliant without sacrificing the safety of one's position within the social order. To Helga the city does offer freedom, but only at the risk of detachment from the organization of home and family that is her comfort.

As Park suggests, the mulatto Helga is split both between two races and cultures; she is additionally torn by conflicting desires for home and for freedom. Even at Naxos, it is clear that Helga "could neither conform, nor

be happy in her unconformity" (7). She wonders "why couldn't she have two lives, or why couldn't she be satisfied in one place" (93). In this way, Helga personifies Park's marginal figure. She understands herself as split—neither white nor black, neither American nor exotic. She is unmoored from home and family; she is the emancipated cosmopolite. And yet, her marginal position leaves Helga psychically empty, always "seeking for something" (50). Though she does seem to be more free than other characters in the novel, Helga is internally wracked by the struggle to appease the two halves of her divided self: "There was something else, some other more ruthless force, a quality within herself, which was frustrating her, had always frustrated her, kept her from getting the things she had wanted. Still wanted" (11). Ultimately she does attain a sense of freedom in the city. But it is always accompanied and eventually overcome by her desire for the containment of home.

In "The City," Park argues that the city is attractive to marginal figures precisely because it offers them many different worlds in which to operate; certainly this freedom draws Helga to cities. Park writes:

The attraction of the metropolis is due in part . . . to the fact that in the long run every individual finds somewhere among the varied manifestations of city life the sort of environment in which he expands and feels at ease; finds, in short, the moral climate in which his peculiar nature obtains the stimulations that bring his innate dispositions to full and free expression.¹⁸

For Park, as I have pointed out, the urban variation that allows people "full and free expression" is predicated on the negation of home. Larsen

¹⁸Park, "City," 126.

implicitly counters that the desire for home is endemic to and perhaps exacerbated by Helga's marginal position. Helga's desire for home leads her to figure the city itself as home. As she looks at the "myriad human beings pressing hurriedly on," Helga is "drawn by an uncontrollable desire to mingle with the crowd." And when she joins "the moving multi-colored crowd, there came to her a queer feeling of enthusiasm, as if she were tasting some agreeable, exotic food—sweetbreads, smothered with truffles and mushrooms—perhaps. And oddly enough, she felt, too, that she had come home. She, Helga Crane, who had no home" (30). And in Harlem, "Again, she had had that strange transforming experience, this time not so fleetingly, that magic sense of having come home. Harlem, teeming black Harlem, had welcomed her and lulled her into something that was, she was certain, peace and contentment" (43). While Park divorces home from city, Larsen claims that home might be constructed from the city's mobility, marginality, and modernity.

Quicksand's urban settings allow Helga to lose herself temporarily in the freedom Park ascribes to the urban. "Seductive, charming, and beckoning," the city stands in contrast to the "cage" of Naxos, where the trees are free but "the human beings. . . [are] prisoners"(16). The "continuously gorgeous panorama of Harlem fascinate[s] her, thrill[s] her"; her experience in a Harlem nightclub allows her to separate from herself and relish the pleasure available to the divided self (45). "She was drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra. . . . when suddenly the music died, she dragged herself back to the present with a conscious effort" (59). The overwhelming sensory experience of the Harlem jazz club allows her to

surrender to the emancipation of the urban. For Helga, then, the city becomes a place where she can, if momentarily, go beyond categories. She can cross all boundaries and occupy all subject positions but in order to do so she must embrace rootlessness. Helga does attain freedom in the urban setting—but ultimately she cannot sustain it, for still she longs for home.

Helga's desire for home is so strong that it ultimately drives her to leave the mobility of the city and attempt to construct homes in contained settings such as Naxos and Alabama where her marginality is effaced. In so doing, she rejects the mobility that allows her to be at home in the city. While traveling to Denmark," Helga enjoys the "returned feeling of happiness and freedom, that blessed sense of belonging to herself alone and not to a race"(64). Helga is most herself, that is, in transit. She is migratory—again reflecting shades of Park. In exchanging her unsustainably mobile identity for marriage to a preacher in rural Alabama, Helga fleetingly experiences "a recurrence of that feeling that now, at last, she had found a place for herself, she was really living" (118). But this feeling rapidly dissolves in the realities of poverty, pregnancy, and motherhood; by the novel's end Helga retreats to fantasies of marginality and mobility. From her sickbed she frequents "that delightful borderland on the edge of unconsciousness, an enchanted and blissful place where peace and incredible quiet awaited her. . ." (128). Her physical mobility totally obliterated, the city becomes Helga's fantasy of escape. From her sickbed, "It was so easy and so pleasant to think about freedom and cities, about clothes and books, about the sweet mingled smell of Houbigant and cigarettes in softly-lighted rooms filled with inconsequential chatter and laughter and sophisticated tuneless music" (135).

Raceless and homeless, Helga transcends the boundaries of nation. The dissolution of Helga's home is accompanied by her detachment from family connections, a phenomenon that cements her status as marginal in Park's sense of the word. The only relatives with whom Helga connects are her Danish relations, from whom she is separated by race, class, and nationality. She is on the margins not just of two races but of multiple foreign cultures. Whatever setting she inhabits, whether Denmark, Naxos, Harlem, or Alabama, Helga is always marginal. Like Park's emblematic figure of marginality/modernity, the Jew, Helga is a nationless cultural hybrid. Park describes the Jew as "a man on the margins of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused."¹⁹ For Helga, as for the "wandering Jew" in Park's work, a persistent homelessness means that she is forever marginal. And, like the Jew, whose ethnic and religious identity seems more important than his nationality, Helga's mixture of race and nationality culminates in her simultaneous transcendence of boundaries of nation and disconnection from any particular national space. For both Park and Larsen, then, the city of the 1920's is the space where the link between home and nation is dissolved. When Louis Wirth took note in 1938 of the "great metropolitan centers of people who cross arbitrary administrative lines of city, county, state, and nation," he understood that the mobility fostered in the networked city was continually penetrating and redrawing the boundaries around supposedly separate units.²⁰ The threat of such instability would be reflected in what Walter Benn Michaels has termed the "nativist modernism" of the late 1920's and

¹⁹Park, "Migration," 141.

²⁰Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 146.

30's, a movement that grows from the dialectic between containment and dissolution, home and freedom that has been my focus here.

In removing "home" from discussions of urbanity and marginality, Park not only diverges from the pattern established by novelists of imagining how the city might become the nation's home, but does not fully imagine what the human ramifications of the homelessness associated with the city might be. In the name of social science, Park removes his inquiry from the realm of affect and sentiment and dilutes the desire for containment elicited so strongly by characters who otherwise experience the divided self Park associates with the emancipated urbanite. For instance, Lily Bart in Wharton's *House of Mirth* who feels that "there were two selves in her," continuously desires and defers the opportunity to inhabit her own home.²¹ Desires for containment and dissolution surface in other novels about characters with racially and ethnically "split selves": Zitkala-Sa, for instance, a Native American woman who has been forcibly "Americanized" at an Indian School, later feels that she has been buried alive, incarcerated in "the small white-walled prison which I then called my room."²² But in Anzia Yezierska's novel *Bread Givers*, the Americanized Jewish protagonist Sara Smolinsky is never so happy as when she is ensconced within the clean white walls of her own apartment. And most famously, Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*, who in a sense achieves Park's fantasy of mobility, is trapped by his desire for the past, drowned in his fantasy of home. While sociologists might have been ready in 1916 to claim novels' urban territory, novelists were not ready to cede to social scientists the work of imagining urban subjectivity in all its complexity.

²¹Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905; New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 117.

²²Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 96.

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